



TALES AND REFLECTIONS OF A CADDIE 1-3

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FROM 5 YEAR CADDIE
BRENDAN GEDDES

“AN ALRIGHT CADDIE”

TALES AND REFLECTIONS OF A CADDIE 1

“FINDING IT’S WAY BACK TO YOU”

Caddying is something that will always find its way back to you. It may not feel this way for everyone, but it certainly does for me, and it’s certainly complex.

Early mornings at Tuxedo are characterized by many things - damp grass, wispy yet racing clouds often placed against a deeply blue morning sky, empty range stalls, an empty course, and many, many caddies conversing amongst themselves. It doesn’t seem like it at first but our conversations span hours, and with a 6:30 arrival time and no guarantee work will ever come, we need each other’s humor and stories to fight the boredom and nervousness and frustration that multiple hours of waiting can bring. I’ve forged great relationships on the pavement between the cart barn and the caddy shack at the Tuxedo Club - this is no over-exaggeration.

Up until about 7:30 or 8, the biggest heartbeat of the club is us. The maintenance team must be mentioned, however, as well as the courses “dogs,” which is an Orwellian or even Pink Floydian description of the younger gentlemen with ambiguous position titles who serve under the head professional. These “dogs” act as eyes for the preservation of the status quo at the club, and act as another layer of confirmation to the members that they are the ones in power, and if necessary, have a group that is ready and willing to appease them. Some have more depth than others, and in my brief interactions with them, I’ve seen everything from full awareness of what their role really means to completely dead eyes.

I’m often quiet as I go about my days at Tuxedo - it’s forced some internal questioning, especially about how I am perceived and whether my silence is mistaken for a lack of care or even intelligence. I’m not the most fantastic caddie, but I’d argue I’m a good one. I’m not the most well-known caddie, not close.

I’d almost rather describe the silence as an attempt to be a fly on the wall, which makes it much more a question of identity, with a possible underlying of imposter syndrome. What I mean by this is simple - if I place myself in the shoes of my Tuxedo self, and ask that person - do you feel as if you fit in, as if you belong here? My answer would probably be confusing, and it would most likely stray towards no.

The explanations for this could range from personal to societal. I don’t think of it as necessarily helpful to force overarching, theoretical explanations into this situation. For example, the caddie-golfer or caddie-club relationship will always be loosely characterized by the push and pull of power, the well-off man paying a servant. This is obviously a discussion of class, and yes, class is involved. But I am not of a low class, and while certainly wealthier than me and my family monetarily, the members aren’t of the class where work doesn’t exist. In fact many of them came from similar shoes to mine and worked their way up in whatever field, whether finance or real estate, or something else.

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I think this conversation of a “class gap” could also be combatted by a simple fact - some of the best conversations I’ve had on the grounds of Tuxedo have been with other caddies who happen to be the son’s of members themselves. We’re all just young people trying our best to make pocket cash, and no matter how applicable a question of class seems, I have never worked to pay bills or put food on my family. I may never be in this position either, and I don’t want anyone to view these thoughts and assertions as a belief my “struggle” has actually been overly difficult.

But the lack of players who look at me directly with the clear disregard for any usual power structure is frustratingly low - in fact, I think I can count them on one hand. And these guys will always stick out in my memory, and I will always appreciate them for it. There will always be a difference between the classic member, carrying a good reputation, a list of clever responses, and a bright smile that lacks any depth, and the one - through direct or indirect means - that lets me know that they see me as a person, and not simply a caddie.

But, back to the introductory point, and title of this entry - it will always find its way back to you. What I mean by this is that regardless of all of these thoughts of belonging, all of this internal conflict, all of the 40 minute drives and 5 o’clock mornings, I was back this May for my fifth summer.

And when someone asks me what it’s like to be a caddie, and I provide a list of the pros and cons, it’ll sway towards the pros. And when I meet other caddies, and there is a surprising yet undeniable relationship and synergy, I’ll always be thankful for it. No matter how many of my statements could be perceived as the opposite.

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“TO HAVE A BOSS OR TO NOT HAVE A BOSS”

To have a boss or to not have a boss - it was always a complicated thing at Tuxedo, and it has become especially complicated this season, in 2025.

If I was asked to name who my boss was for my first years of caddying, my answer would be relatively simple. It's Dan, he's the one who gave me the okay to show up on my first day of caddying, he's the one who gave me my bib, the one who upgraded me when I was doing well, lambasted me when I did something he didn't agree with. He was the one that everyone in Tuxedo's yard was attempting to impress, even if it forced us to sacrifice our egos from time to time or even muzzle our mouths when we wanted to respond with anger to something we felt was unfair.

I'll never forget his highly unpredictable moods, and the idea that some days he was your closest ally, and others the one who ruined your day. Dan's unfiltered way of operating the caddying program at Tuxedo and handling his "guys" was something that often carried over to his banter with the members, and if there is something I'll remember him most fondly for, it was his willingness to stand up for us. He wouldn't allow for his caddies to be treated poorly or taken advantage of by anyone at the club, and his inability to allow himself to be walked upon was something that corroded his reputation amongst groups of members sometimes. It differentiated himself from the dogs, and it was something that I and the other caddies respected, and will remember him fondly for.

A DIVERSION - BEING MY OWN BOSS

In many ways though, I taught myself how to caddie. I was recommended the job because I have a golfing past, and a reputation as a good player. I texted Dan on a Saturday morning in the middle of June asking about the possibility of joining the force at Tuxedo, and that Tuesday I was out for a visit. It was a depressingly rainy day, and I was incredibly nervous. The course was empty - this was what I first noticed as I took the turns on the windy road up to the clubhouse. The rain was hitting the roof of the car heavily, and I was fortunate that a couple maintenance guys were standing where the clubhouse and path down to the pro shop and bag-room meet. They knew where Dan would be.

After just ten minutes of conversing, I was asked to come back on Thursday. The biggest tournament of the year started that day - the men's invitational - and in his words, he'd have a role for me. I didn't realize it right then, but I would be on the bag. What was different in this situation was that most caddies follow a progression - they train, then shadow, then handle a loop themselves. Training is exactly the way it sounds, and in many cases, Dan was the person who would play as a group of caddies followed. He would instruct, and not always in the warmest of vocal tones.

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Shadowing simply involves the close watch of a very experienced caddie as they go about a normal loop. It's a massive sign of respect for a caddie to be "shadow-able" - they are not only trusted to do the job correctly, but to be able to teach along the way. Dan and I had a good laugh when he sent me out with a shadow last year, and he and I's words loosely stated that maybe neither of us expected this when I first showed up, and that it was a good thing we'd gotten this far.

Back to the earliest days, though. I'll never forget the looks on the faces of the more experienced guys when I told them my situation. In thirty minutes, I'd be on the course, zero minutes of caddying experience, doing anything I could to stay afloat. hilariously, the other caddie in my group, Tom, was only looping for the second time. "Baptism by fire" was his description, and I don't think I could put it better if I tried.

It was a jarringly hot day that day, with cumulus clouds ranging from cotton white to the ominous stage where color begins to appear. As the day progressed, the heat subsided, and the beauty of Tuxedo presented itself. Long shadows were the products of a falling sun and tall maple and birch trees, the stream water glistened throughout the shaking reeds - for the first time, I breathed. I had the hardest parts done - the job was mine, and I realized that I could largely teach myself.

AN INTERESTING POWER STRUCTURE

But, similar to the dogs and the power structure of the club, the question of a caddie's "boss" usually does not have a simple answer. The main structural reason for this is the idea that we do not work for the club, we work for our golfer, and in that way, we are independent contractors. I've been in situations where I knew Dan may disapprove of my actions, but it was the request of a golfer that set these actions into motion - that should be pretty damning as to who gives me my orders.

I've seen caddies who were despised by Dan, and thus by the club, but were loved by golfers. The latter point was all that mattered. Dan wasn't any higher than a player's request, and he'd have to eat his words sometimes when he sent a caddie out early that he had clearly been displeased with.

On the opposite side of this point, however, a caddie could never take this as an invitation to disrespect Dan, or any of the dogs, or the head professional. And while Dan did obey to the members when it came to their reviews of a caddies performance, I had witnessed him tell guys to never come back again. It wasn't pretty, and it was basically an irreversible severance.

TALES AND REFLECTIONS OF A CADDIE 2

YEAR 5

Now, in year five, and with the polarizing figure that was Dan absent, there is a noticeable vacancy in this previously mentioned power structure.

If anything, it sways more towards the members now, and the assignment of loops is much more mechanical, much more systematic. It is now in the hands of the head pro - he isn't aware of the small differences that define us and differentiate us as caddies, and in a lot of ways, still bows to the bib structure currently in place, the one Dan almost singlehandedly shaped. I progressed from yellow, an inexperienced caddie, to white, a caddie with growing knowledge and ability, to green, a respected caddie with years at the club, in a pretty normal fashion.

With the members doing the judging and Dan making any decisions, it seems now that I and many others are floating in an interesting space - what I mean by this is simple - with Dan around, there was always a constant that backed up the status of a caddie. There was a figure where a caddie's perceived ability could be confirmed, something it could be measured against. Now, there is very little that holds us up aside from this the very symbolic color of our bib. It almost feels as if we must prove ourselves again.

CONCLUSIONS

The idea of a bib system was something that was always debated between caddies and still is conversed about to this day.

With wide eyes, many caddies unknowingly turn into communists with their thoughts about the three tiered system - should we not have a club that is free of a caddie class structure? On the other side of this same coin, however, the thoughts can be perceived as very capitalist - let's get rid of the bib system, and have caddies be paid for what they are worth, paid for the quality of work they are actually doing. Members will be forced to take off the glasses of preconceived opinions about a caddie because of the color of their bib, and actually assess the service they are receiving. With this climate of competition, and no guarantee of falling back on a bib status that a caddie may have earned with the work they did years should the incentive to work hard and do quality work not be at it's highest?

In this world, power is ever-moving and ever-changing. It's in the hands of the players to judge with every round, the club to funnel through caddies regardless of their service time, and the caddies themselves to uphold a status that is supported by less than ever before. In many ways, while opinions on him differ, a Dan-less Tuxedo is a Tuxedo that ranges closer to this recent description. With a new caddie master, this could change, but for the time being, the power floats. From club to member to caddie like I've never experienced before.

TALES AND REFLECTIONS OF A CADDIE 3

“HERE WE LAY BEFORE THE JUDGEMENT OF WISER EYES”

The single most common question or conversation topic a young caddie will get is of their current studies and their career plans. It's not hard to see why, nor is it hard to blame the men whose bags we carry for asking. It's a natural question - many of these men have risen to the peaks of their fields, often in finance, real estate, law, medical, anything. They didn't always come from a place where a life like this was guaranteed, and they feel as if their advice is valuable and needed, and it often is.

There are plenty of tales when it comes to a caddie being helped out immensely by caddying - it's not just the pay, or the scheduling flexibility, or the physical activity. The benefits extend beyond the patience developed, or the mental fortitude that comes from being out in the field under the summer sun with heavy bags on the shoulders.

These are certainly valuable, but one thing looms largest - the network.

In many ways, the fundamentals of caddying are just a display of valuable career tools - the ability to work hard, provide service to people, build conversation effectively, think on the spot and be constantly plotting the most efficient move after your next, and the move after that, and so on. You must be watching the rest of the hole fold out in front of you in order to always be in the correct position - good caddies do this and great ones have mastered it. To a great caddie, every player is predictable. After only a few holes, they have picked up on their basic tendencies, thought about which clubs they will prefer from which tees, which wedges they chip with and from where. They have tinkered with where and where they shouldn't stand, when they should talk and when they should hold their tongue.

Members often notice this, and many are aware when a caddie is thinking quickly. Many aren't, but the point still stands. Jobs have been tendered on the basis of this knowledge, and this is no mistake. It would be foolish to say this isn't the highest peak of caddying in many ways - parlaying the days on the course into days in a cushy office, whether directly or through a network.

VERY UNFORTUNATE

The most unfortunate thing about the questions of the future is the somewhat masked yet commonly present disdain for the liberal arts that is carried by many members. They know that many caddies are entering, experiencing, or have recently left college. They would like to hear about it, and sometimes they would like to help, but there's no guarantee they will respect the humanities. I would even posit that this percentage of discontent is higher than many would think. I'll concede this - it is often true that more money is made in the fields of business, law, higher end real estate, or medical than those of a liberal arts stripe.

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Yes, I am aware that a degree in history or english or political science may not have a high return on investment monetarily. That is exactly where I find trouble with the points that many of these men make - I am not interested in doing something that I am not interested in doing. I won't be a business suit and carry a veiled disgust for my 9 to 5 life simply because a man I caddied for told me that it was unwise to study something academic.

These men have almost always achieved the life they have achieved by being driven by the accretion of money, and I am not here to tell anyone that this is incorrect. It's actually fantastic in a lot of ways - money often buys time, and time well used is the single greatest resource that any human has access to.

But what I also think is that a human should know their interests, and not waste time in college and then in the working world doing something that they don't love. They shouldn't do something where they feel as if they aren't contributing, anything where they don't feel a direct connection to the spinning earth, almost a "this is why I was created in the first place." And if studying the liberal arts and shooting film and postponing my so called "future" will help me feel like I am serving my worldly purpose, that is what I will choose to do, 100 out of 100 times.

And I find that often times this aforementioned "future" is just a rush to join the depressed working world, and then a rush to die, and I'd rather not rush to die.

IN AN ENGLISH CLASS

I've always found contrast to be a main driver of beauty, and I don't think it's different when it comes to the character of a person. I think we get the most from life when we constantly dip and dive between communities, hiding in microcosms of society, surprising people when we are well versed in many areas.

The line between caddying and golf more generally and many liberal communities is a great, thick one. It can even get as extreme where one all-together rejects the other.

Liberal communities often reject golf for environmental reasons or because it directly reflects a patriarchal society - I'd be foolish to say these are not rooted in truth. The maintenance of courses is an awful waste of water and over use of pesticides, as well as a waste of land in many cases. I'll plead hypocrisy in this case, though, and say that a golf course is never a waste of land. It is likewise true that the optics of the rich man playing golf and making business deals is a bad one - and the fact that I can count on one hand the amount of women I have caddied for is similarly jarring.

For many of the points from earlier, the golfing community rejects anything that can be perceived as "liberal."

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I've held my tongue many times during conversations on the course, but this is another exaggeration - I'm not a confrontational person, and I find it immensely stupid and immature to argue about politics in many settings. Maybe this is a privilege speaking, and yes, there are very few issues that really affect me personally. I try to look out for the ones who are bothered. I can't say I don't understand where many of the conservatives I caddie for root their politics. I don't mean this ideologically, I mean it on an even more fundamental level. If I came from a bloodline of money, I too would be a libertarian. And if I made it, like some of the men I've mentioned, I would probably want to protect it. We've built a system of consumption where it's applauded to take advantage of others for profit and where it's vilified to provide "handouts." The bottom line is this - being conservatively libertarian is natural for these men, and it's probably the systems fault. They don't want a democrat to come and take what they've "earned."

Back to the initial point, however. I sometimes say that it is hard to be impressive across communities, and I think that point applies here. This sentence basically means what it says - many members of society stick to niche communities, and it leads to the deterioration of their curiosity and eventually their character. They become boring. They work and live with likeminded people, and they don't create, and it becomes more and more difficult to climb out of their echo chamber.

The more diverse of communities one puts himself in, the more of life he sees. It's necessary, but it is also hard to do - we're all driven by ego, we're all looking to be impressive, and the more someones time is chopped up, the harder it becomes to actually be "the man" in any one space. I'd posit that it's better to be good in many areas, however, than great in one.

As it pertains to the main idea, my basic point is this - be interesting rather than rich, if you must choose.

LEMARC AND CLOSING

There are exceptions to every trend, to every borderline stereotypical attitude that I think exists amongst the men that I caddie for. I've had many experiences where I've lied about my lives intentions because I am afraid of the slight confusion and disapproval a member may give me. Lying is an awful thing and I've improved greatly about being honest about my intentions. The more you know what you want, the less you'll care about what others are doing.

At the conclusion a round where I had caddied for three former college buddies who were now working in law and finance, I was up front and honest about my beliefs about my life and what I wanted to do with it. I told a successful lawyer that I really wanted to be a photographer - he had probably consumed 8 or so beers by that point - he looked at me, stern yet forgiving, and told me that I should do that if I want to do that.

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If that was where my heart was, that was what I should do. It made a difference to me.

I don't know if that man remembers that interaction - he most probably doesn't. He might not even recognize me if he saw me at Tuxedo again. It's hard for me to not view this as a disappointment, even a sign of weakness on my part. To him, I was probably just another caddie. I'm inclined to say this, however - it's not a sign of weakness on my part if you don't remember me. Making a big impression on someone doesn't imply a contract of mutual recognition.