

# Luke Donald is helping design a practice area at Waveland for youth golfers: ‘This is an opportunity to do something amazing’

By **TEDDY GREENSTEIN**

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In creating a new space for young golfers, the First Tee of Greater Chicago chose one of the sweetest spots in the Midwest — right along Lake Michigan. And in constructing a new practice area, the organization summoned a pro whose short game propelled him to No. 1 in the world — Luke Donald. So you can understand the excitement organizers have for the \$1.5 million “Waveland Capital Project.”

The plan will transform an abandoned section of the century-old building that also houses the clubhouse for the Sydney R. Marovitz Golf Course east of Lake Shore Drive.



A clock tower looms over the ninth green at the Sydney R. Marovitz Golf Course. (PHIL VELASQUEZ / CHICAGO TRIBUNE)

It will contain a golf simulator and carpeted putting green plus a lounge for kids to access computers and receive year-round mentoring.

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“This will be a safe haven for kids to do their homework and work on their games,” said Lea Jesse, CEO of First Tee of Greater Chicago.

A lightly-used area currently known as the Waveland Picnic Field will be turned into a short-game area for putting, chipping and bunker play designed by Donald — plus netting for full swings.

“It’s a spectacular piece of land,” said Donald, the Northwestern alumnus who helped configure a practice area used by the Wildcats at the Glen Club in Glenview. “I’ll help with pointers and thoughts on the design.”

Donald met with kids ages 7 to 18 at Waveland in July for a clinic. He played several holes and answered questions, such as: How do you deal with nerves? Donald, 42, has helped raise more than \$2 million over the last 10 years for The First Tee of Greater Chicago by hosting wine tastings and other events. He began playing as a 7-year-old in his native England and spent 56 weeks atop the World Golf Rankings from 2011-12.

He has missed the cut in two recent PGA Tour events, saying: “The eternal search (for improvement) continues.”

In the meantime, he’s proud to be involved in a project that will help The First Tee with its mission to promote nine core values, including honesty, integrity, sportsmanship and perseverance.

Organizers hope to complete the project by spring 2021, spending about \$500,000 on the building, \$750,000 for the exterior and another \$250,000 for contingency and operating costs.

“This is an opportunity,” Donald said, “to do something amazing.”



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Teddy Greenstein writes columns and stories mainly on college football and hoops, baseball and golf. The Northwestern alum and poker enthusiast lives within walking distance of Wrigley Field.