

Golf Shoe Spikes— Who Needs Them?



Professional Wendell Wood and Superintendent John Zoller agree, "Golf spikes damage turf and soils."

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At the risk of knocking down a hornet's nest, I feel it is time to again challenge one of the greatest frustrations in golf today — the spike on the golf shoe. Small and inconspicuous, the spike should also be considered expensive and destructive. It is difficult to understand why the spike has been tolerated so many years, particularly in view of heavy play and ever increasing traffic on the golf course.

In 1970 the National Golf Foundation reported that \$3 billion was spent in golfing activities. If the Foundation's projected increases in the number of players and number of rounds of golf in the future is to be realized, many new courses will be needed and maintenance of present ones must be improved. Anyone who has played a municipal or public course (or a private one with heavy play) is aware of the almost impossible task of maintaining putting green turf of decent quality under the onslaught of spikes.

In the late 1950s the USGA Green Section conducted interesting and revealing research on this subject. Proven beyond any doubt was the fact that today's conventional golf shoe spike is

the most injurious of all footwear to putting green turf *and* soils. By a "conventional spike," I mean the one with a rounded shoulder at its base and not recessed into the sole of the shoe. Surprisingly, some feel the damage this type of spike causes is more serious to soils than to putting green grasses. Grasses will heal over, but the injury to soil structure is obviously quite lasting. In fact, one soil authority commented that it would be difficult to design a more effective compacting device than today's conventional golf shoe spike! The spike and shoulder (there are 12 of them on every golf shoe) have been likened to a miniature sheep's foot roller. In spite of all the facts and the evidence seen by golfers on every green, the spike persists where it should be outlawed.

It is understandable that a satisfactory substitute must be made available to the golfing public if the spike is to disappear. The Green Section Research Project proved that spikes with a flat, recessed shoulder or some other type of designed sole will give solid footing without the high degree of turf wear. Rubber soles formed by a series of many soft ripples



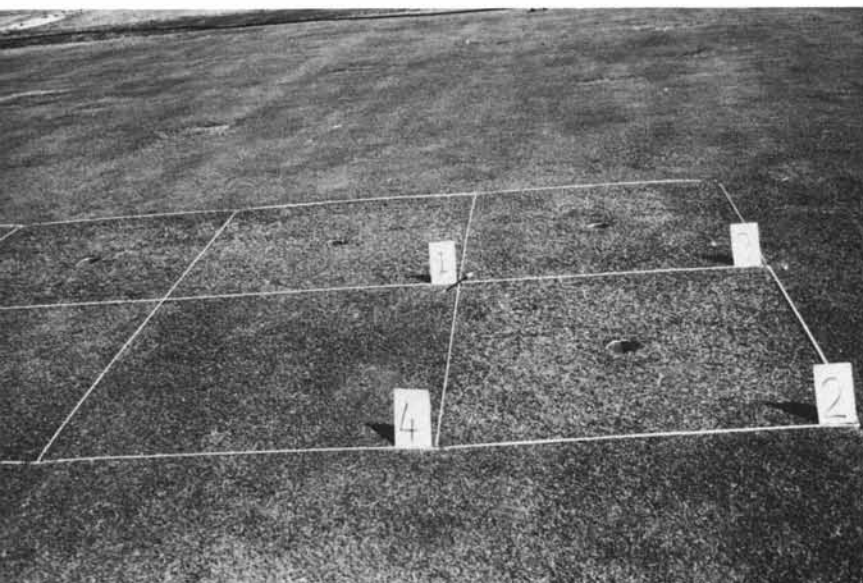
There are many types of modified footwear that will give excellent purchase to the turf.

give excellent purchase to the turf, very similar to a basketball shoe. Rubber soles with inverted cups also afford excellent traction. Efforts are now being made to interest golfers in these shoes. After all, Bobby Jones accomplished his grand slam before the advent of the extra long and replaceable spike. Although there has not been a rush by golfers to the modified spike or rubber sole shoe as yet, our number of advocates grow each year. More and more golfers are becoming disenchanted with bumpy, worn greens and tees. Our numbers are on the increase!

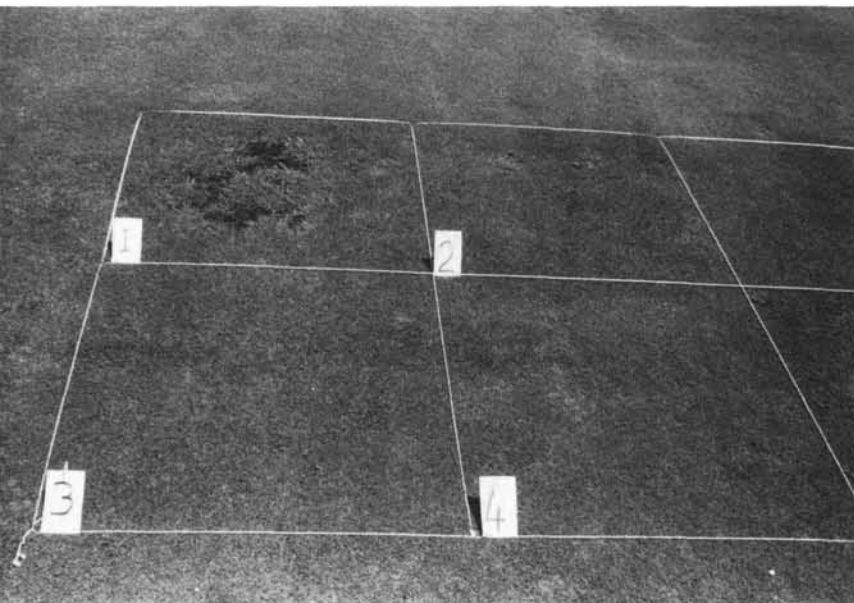
From the standpoint of playability alone, the number of putts missed due to spike marks

confronts every golfer on every golf course. John Zoller, our golf course superintendent, believes that the quality of course condition, the potential great financial savings in course maintenance from compaction, and general wear and tear are sufficient reasons for abolishing the golf spike. Indeed, it might even be feasible to design greens of smaller size with fewer hole locations if the wear problem from spike shoe traffic were eliminated. Consequently, golf course construction and maintenance costs would be cut by millions of dollars.

We will find support for our anti spike stand from every club manager as well. "No spikes please" signs are seen in many clubs. They are



The Green Section experiment in 1959 illustrates the effect of shoe soles on turf. This picture shows a test plot of Seaside bentgrass after five weeks of putting 10 minutes daily in each square: #1 regular golf shoe spikes; #2 modified spikes (i.e., spike shoulder flat and recessed into shoe sole); #3 rubber soles; #4 check plot.



A duplicate plot of the experiment area six weeks after the end of putting traffic. Plot # 1, where the conventional spike was used in this case, has not recovered. Soil damage seems longer lasting than grass damage.

there to save floors, carpets and even concrete entryways. Think of the annual savings possible by reduced wear and tear in clubhouses, locker rooms, golf shops, furniture, on walking bridges, electric carts, etc., if the golf shoe spike were no more.

But what can anyone do about the problem? It may be possible that players on the professional tour would welcome the absence of golf spikes when a satisfactory substitute is found. Clubs capable of entertaining major golf tournaments may be more inclined to welcome them if abuse to the course from players and gallery alike could be reduced.

To get the "No Spike Campaign" off the

ground, an approach on a regional basis seems necessary. A state or regional golf association, with all members and all clubs unanimously participating, would be a great beginning! Given reasonable support by influential golf interests and a reasonable time for transition, all 10,000 courses throughout the land could bring an end to the golf shoe spike as we know it today. With golfers and clubs concerned with reducing costs and yet maintaining the very best in playing conditions, those of us who believe in the demise of the spike may find added support. Think of it; with the spike's departure, we will not only have better golf, we will have it for less money.

In another experiment, different shoes were worn in walking over the same path (Seaside bentgrass) daily for a month. After a total of 630 traverses, these are the results (left to right); Path #1, conventional golf shoe spikes; Path #2, lug soles; Path #3, rubber soles.

