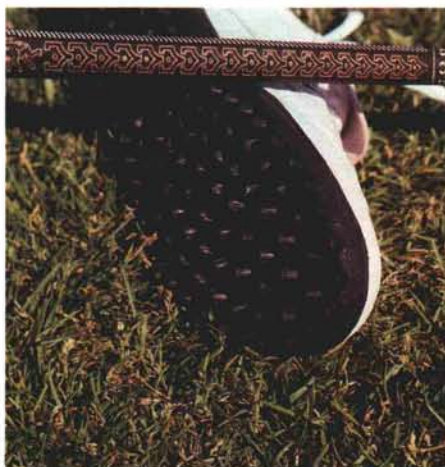


Golf Shoes and Turf Wear — A Story that Won't Go Away!

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IT WAS EXACTLY two years ago at Industry Hills Golf Club, California, that the extensive USGA Green Section's Golf Shoe II Study was conducted. The results were published in the September/October, 1983, issue of the USGA GREEN SECTION RECORD to the gratification of some and the chagrin of others. Since then, it has been a story that will not go away! In brief review, the study touched on the history of spiked shoes in golf and compared present-day metal spiked golf shoes with the new rubber nubs or stud "spikeless shoes" and modern spikeless teaching shoes that are almost flat. Of the three shoe types tested, the metal spike golf shoe caused the greatest damage to bentgrass putting green turf. The rubber studded shoes were next and the teaching shoe produced the least amount of wear. The tests were conducted under both good weather and wet weather conditions. The relative ratings remained the same throughout both tests, although the rubber studded shoes seemed to cause a greater degree of surface disturbance and damage under wet conditions than on dry surfaces. Overall, the conclusion was, "spikes are detrimental to putting green turf and the putting quality of greens."

Since the study, even greater numbers and varieties of rubber-soled studded athletic shoes have appeared on the market. They have followed the trend created by more and more joggers, runners, walkers, coaches, and soccer enthusiasts. The lugs or studs have become more pronounced, deeper, and in various patterns. Their manufacturers do not claim them to be "golf shoes." Nevertheless, they have found their way, in increasing numbers, mostly on the feet of public-course golfers. After all, golf is a form of athletics and these are "athletic shoes." Unfortunately, that reasoning is not good for our putting green grasses. Observations and field



experience with these shoes, i.e., with longer, deeper, more pointed studs and especially under wet conditions, indicate that they do harm to our putting green turf and the putting quality of our greens. As concluded in the Golf Shoe Study II, "spikes are detrimental to turf." Apparently, the longer and more pronounced a spike, the more the damage.

WILL THIS STATEMENT put an end to the golf shoe controversy? I doubt it. For example, here is a notice from the golf committee of a prominent eastern club to its membership:

To Golfing Members: In a letter this summer, your attention was called to the injury that is done to the putting greens by certain types of golf shoes, and your committee believes the time has come when golfers should discontinue the use of shoes with nails. This is not only for the sake of the greens and tees, but because players are finding to their great satisfaction that their game is improved by the various forms of rubber soles. Injury

to the clubhouse floor is also obviated. We assume that it is understood that spikes are prohibited.

We, therefore, suggest that when buying new shoes, or having your present ones repaired, you get some one of the various makes of vacuum treads or rubber soles.

Golf Committee
January 21, 1921

Obviously, the controversy has been raging for at least 65 years.

As to the first reference of spikes worn on golf shoes, Janet Seagle, USGA Librarian and Curator of the Golf Museum, in Far Hills, New Jersey, came up with this 1857 passage from "The Golfer's Manual," a publication from Scotland:

Let the novice invest in a pair of stout shoes (boots constrain the ankles too much), roughed with small nails or sprigs, and he will march comfortably and safely over the most slippery ground that can be turned out by the meridian sun in the dog days.

And so it goes. The story will not go away. Indications are that the PGA Tour does not permit any of its players to wear the rubber studded so-called "spikeless shoes" during their events, even though several of their players are endorsing certain types of these shoes.

It is not possible to run a new series of wear tests every time a new spikeless shoe comes on the market, but it does seem safe and necessary to say that not all athletic shoes should be permitted on golf greens. The Green Section has always had a driving interest in quality putting green turf maintained at the lowest possible cost. Eliminating all spiked or studded shoes from golf would be a giant step forward in reducing maintenance costs and improving putting qualities. Since this does not seem possible, minimizing the effect of spikes on turf is the best available second choice.