

Spikeless Golf Shoes — Avoiding A Slip-Up

Ideas for improving the traction of spikeless golf shoes.

by PATRICK GROSS

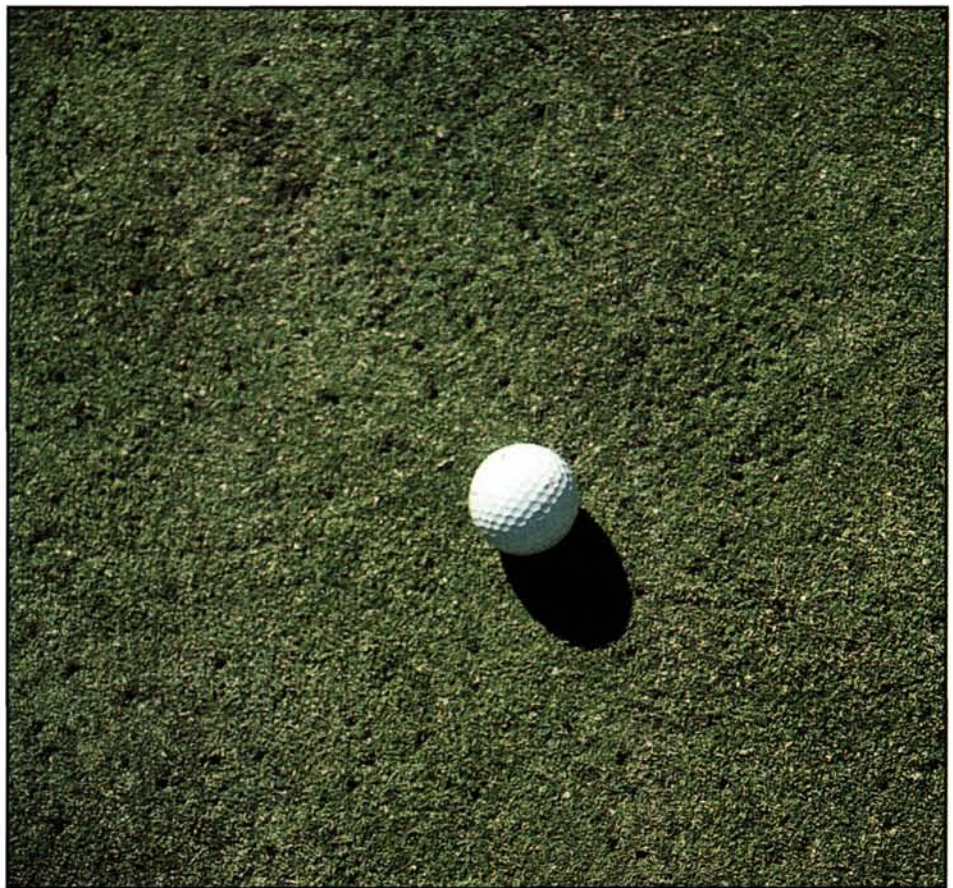
SPIKE MARKS on greens? It has been a long time since golfers moaned about spike marks now that spikeless golf shoes are commonplace at many golf courses. The move to spikeless golf shoes was one of the most beneficial and controversial changes for golf courses during the 1990s. This move away from steel spikes has improved golf in many ways, including:

- Smoother greens.
- Less wear on clubhouse carpets and golf cart flooring.
- Improved golfer comfort.
- Better traction and safety on concrete surfaces.

As with any new concept, it often takes a few years to understand the lasting benefits and get a better handle on the negatives. For spikeless golf shoes, some of the major concerns include:

- Grass accumulation on the bottom of the shoes, which contributes to slipping.
- Slipping on wood surfaces.
- Less traction on steep, wet slopes.
- For a small percentage of golf courses, the spikeless shoes leave indentations that detract from putting quality and surface smoothness.

No matter what kind of golf shoes you wear, there is the potential to slip and fall. At this time, no shoe companies are willing to give a 100% guarantee that you will not slip anywhere on the golf course because there is such a wide variety of terrain and conditions. To avoid liability, superintendents and course officials must take a close look at their golf course and



Approximately 5% to 10% of golf courses experience damage or pronounced indentations as a result of spikeless shoes. Since there are dozens of different types of spikeless shoes, it is unfair to assume that all models are automatically better for the turf.





Spike brushes mounted on a ball washer stand or placed directly on the ground next to tee markers is a popular idea to allow golfers to remove accumulated grass clippings for better traction.



One drawback of spikeless golf shoes is the lack of traction on wood surfaces such as railroad tie steps and bridges. Various types of coverings can be used, such as rubber mats, to improve traction.

implement appropriate safety precautions to avoid slip-and-fall accidents. Here are a few good ideas to avoid slip-ups with spikeless golf shoes:

Brushes: Spike brushes are very popular, especially on tees, to remove grass from the bottom of shoes. The spike brushes can be placed on ball washer stands or directly on the ground next to the movable tee markers.

Rubber Mats: Various styles of rubber mats can be placed on top of concrete or wood surfaces to improve traction. The main concern is railroad tie steps or paths next to tees and greens. Some superintendents have had success contacting local manufacturing plants and purchasing used conveyor belts that can be cut up and used on top of railroad tie steps or wood bridges. There also are composite rubber paving squares and many other styles of rubber mats that can be used effectively.

Alternate Paving Materials: A number of different materials can be used for walkways or paths where traction is a concern, including crushed rock, decomposed granite, or other locally available road base materials.

Compressed-Air Cleaning Stations: An air compressor with a retractable

hose and pressure nozzle is another popular idea to clean shoes, especially near the clubhouse and at the entrance to the locker rooms. Be sure to adjust the air pressure so that grass clippings do not rebound and hit someone in the face.

Finally, there are some negatives about spikeless shoes regarding playing quality. Approximately 5% to 10% of golf courses experience damage or pronounced indentations on greens as a result of spikeless shoes. The damage seems to be worse on wet, thatchy greens, but much of the problem stems from the fact that there are dozens of different types of spikeless shoes. It is not fair to assume that all spikeless shoes are automatically better for turf. Research on this topic is just beginning, and hopefully there will be more to come. In the meantime, superintendents and course officials should take a careful look at their golf courses and implement some of these tips or some of their own creative solutions to avoid any slip-ups with spikeless golf shoes.

PAT GROSS helps golf course superintendents avoid slipping as the Director of the USGA Green Section Southwest Region.