



A group of public golf course operators in the greater Tulsa, Oklahoma, area got together to promote the idea of public golf courses adopting a spikeless policy at area courses. A promotional day was held at Forest Ridge Golf Club to help inform area media.

# Taking Spikeless Shoes Public

*Why not for the public player?*

by SAM MEREDITH

**M**ANY CONVERSATIONS have occurred in recent months regarding the spikeless golf shoe issue. In my opinion, there really isn't any legitimate argument for the continued use of metal spikes in and on our golf facilities. Even so, there are still those who are resistant to moving forward with a spikeless program.

Today, many private golf clubs all over the country have spikeless policies, and members and their guests are beginning to see the benefits of using spikeless shoes. The most obvious benefits are the increased quality in the appearance and playability of the putting surfaces and greater comfort to the golfer.

Most golfers, however, fail to recognize the enormous costs attributable directly to metal spike damage. The damage occurs in all areas of the golf course operation. For example, when a piece of mowing equipment hits a loose metal spike on the course, the cutting unit must be taken out of service and repaired or replaced. In addition to the cost involved (a single reel can exceed \$500, not including labor costs), the downtime can have

an immediate impact on the quality of golf course conditioning.

Golf cart fleets sustain considerable amounts of damage as a result of steel spikes. Worn and scratched floor mats, brake pedals, dash areas, fenders, and windshields are the result of spike wear. For facilities that own golf cart fleets, this damage translates into lost value at the time of trade-in. According to Chip Cutler, president of Justice Golf Car (the Oklahoma distributor for Club Car), trade-in value could be increased by \$50 to \$100 per cart for vehicles without spike damage. Since many public operations have 100 carts or more, the savings are significant, to say the least.

The areas in and around the clubhouse also are victims of spike wear. Carpeting, tile, and other floor coverings take a beating from spikes. Also consider the damage done to dining and locker room furniture as a result of steel spikes. The rationale for *spikeless* is apparent!

Nonetheless, the idea of public golf courses adopting a spikeless policy might seem highly unlikely. To mandate and enforce a spikeless policy in the

public arena can be much more difficult than at private clubs. Despite the fact that most public facilities receive far more play, and therefore suffer much greater damage from steel spikes, the common response is, "You can't mandate a spikeless policy at a public course!"

It would seem that the challenges confronting the operators of public facilities to adopt a spikeless policy would be insurmountable. As a result, public golf operators and public course golfers would be unable to enjoy the many benefits being realized by their private club counterparts. Surely no operators could implement a spikeless policy at public facilities, could they?

Recently, a group of public golf course operators in the greater Tulsa, Oklahoma, area got together and said, "Why not?!" The movement started to unfold this way: After many weeks of telephone conversations and meetings of the golf course operators concerning spikeless golf at the public facilities, it was agreed that if all the area public facilities worked together in this common effort, the spikeless campaign could be successful. A wide variety of

information and support materials were presented at these meetings. Reports, including agronomic impact studies that showed the effects of spike damage to the plant, cost analysis that indicated real dollars spent each year on repairs to course property and equipment, and the fact that all of the private clubs in the area have already implemented mandatory spikeless policies, would be used in support of the city-wide ban of steel spikes.

This information would also be used to convince the owners, parks commissioners, boards of directors, and the management personnel of these public facilities that a spikeless policy could be placed into effect without adversely affecting the number of rounds played and, ultimately, revenues.

The next step was to address the debatable issues surrounding a mandatory metal spike ban. What about cost? The cost to convert the players from steel spikes to a spike replacement alternative could be justified by savings in facility repairs. Also, local golf tournaments would be conducted, not only to generate funds to offset expenses for the purchase of steel spike substitutes and to change them out, but also to create greater public awareness and acceptance.

Would a course be at risk from a liability standpoint by mandating a spikeless policy? Common sense dictates that any steep slopes or uneven terrain might foster insecure footing. Under certain turf conditions the potential exists to lose traction, no matter what type of spike or spikeless system is used. Therefore, it was recommended that all courses post warnings, regardless of the footwear policy that is in place. It just might be that the element of risk is higher by allowing steel spikes

to be worn while walking on slick tile floors and concrete walkways than by disallowing the use of metal spikes on the turf.

The next question addressed during the planning meetings was whether or not it would be possible to implement and successfully administer a spikeless program, given the perceived image of the public golf course consumer. After the discussions, the general consensus was that it could be done through a well-planned educational effort.

By the end of the meetings, those present felt that the idea of a city-wide spikeless shoe policy was feasible and worth pursuing. This coalition of public course operators would now seek the approval of their respective leaderships to go forward with the adoption of a spikeless referendum.

Next, a plan was developed for an extensive education and awareness program, leading up to a target date when steel spikes would no longer be accepted. This cutoff date would be set far enough in advance to facilitate the completion of the education process. How much lead time would be necessary to make the transition and be effective in getting this information to the golfing public? After several discussions with a university professor of sociology, it was determined that nearly a year would be needed to accomplish these goals, depending on the size and scope of the education process and public awareness campaign.

We are currently in the midst of the education phase. During the period prior to the cutoff date, each facility will take advantage of every opportunity to get the word out. By dividing the practice putting area and allowing only spikeless traffic on one half, the players have been able to see the

difference between the putting green surface exposed to metal spikes and the surface used by spikeless golfers. The automated tee-time system at the various golf courses will automatically notify those requesting tee times of the upcoming cutoff date. Also, by utilizing various vehicles of exposure, such as local print and broadcast media, on-site signage, press releases, newsletter articles, men's and women's golf association involvement, and videos and posters provided by the manufacturers of alternative spikes, the objectives of this phase of the plan will be met.

The announcement of the city-wide ban on metal spikes, beginning May 1, 1997, was made at a press conference and was followed by a spike-free day of golf on August 28, 1996, at Forest Ridge Golf Club in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The promotional day was attended by the area's golf course superintendents, golf professionals, and a number of media representatives. The result was a number of positive news stories in print, radio, and on television news. Having seen the positive effects of spikeless golf at the local country clubs, most players in this area of the country are excited about the idea of spikeless golf going public. As a result of the cooperation between the public golf operators in our community, we will soon provide better putting quality to our players, while at the same time reduce repair costs to our facilities. These efforts result in a positive benefit for all of us.

---

SAM MEREDITH is director of golf for Forest Ridge Golf Club in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He has served in this capacity since 1989, when this privately owned, public course was opened.



*The sight of golf course personnel changing shoe spikes is becoming a more frequent occurrence as the spikeless golf issue becomes more prevalent around the country.*



*Metal spikes can cause significant damage to non-turf areas. The counter-sunk bolts on this bridge have been exposed as metal spikes have worn away the wood on the trafficked portion of the bridge.*