

Spikeless Revolution Update

The Decline of Metal Spikes Accelerates

Statistics describing the rise of alternative spikes abound. For example:

- There are more than 3,500 golf courses that have banned metal spikes.
- According to Softspikes, Inc., 60 per cent of PGA, LPGA and Senior PGA players wear the company's XP cleats.
- In Canada, three courses banned metal spikes by April 1996; 30 courses banned them by April 1997; and 188 banned them by April 1998.
- Thirty-seven major American Tour victories were logged in 1997 by competitors who used alternative spikes; nine more wins have come for 1998 at the time of this writing.

Testimonials from Canadian superintendents are also streaming in:

Daren Holt, The Riverside Country Club, Saint John, NB

In 1997, The Riverside Country Club started a alternative spikes program. Head Pro Jim Connolly took this task on while working with club officials and the course superintendent. After many alternative spike discussions, we decided that over three years a alternative spikes program would benefit Riverside. In 1997 our membership had gone one-third alternative spikes and we're hoping for two-thirds this season. In 1999 it will be mandatory to golf Riverside with alternative spikes.

By 1999 alternative spikes should improve our course and clubhouse conditions, since we all know lots of money is spent every year to repair decks, carpet and golf car damage. The list goes on. Two new courses are being built in New Brunswick this year. When these courses open, they will be 100 per cent alternative spikes. Their example will encourage many other courses to change to alternative spikes in the near future.

Doug Meyer, Cedarbrook Golf & Country Club, Ste-Sophie, QC

Three years ago, when Cedarbrook hosted the Quebec Turfgrass Tournament, we asked all 150 participants to wear alternative spikes. My members were very impressed with the excellent condition of the greens at the end of the day. Two years later, we adopted a alternative spikes-only policy at Cedarbrook. The change has greatly reduced daily wear and tear on our greens, asphalt paths and wooden bridges. In the clubhouse, years have been added to the life of our carpeting. Rubber mats in the electric carts are no longer shredded after a season, and when players rest their feet on dashes or fenders, they no longer scratch them.

From a maintenance standpoint, it's great not to ruin mower blades with lost metal spikes. Personally, I find playing golf with alternative spikes easier on

legs and feet. Overall, as a turf manager and a golfer, I'm delighted with the results of the change from metal to alternative spikes at Cedarbrook.

William Fach, Rosedale Golf Club, Toronto, ON

This year Rosedale Golf Club has decided to go completely spikeless after two years of promoting the spikeless issue. During those two years, members were given a free set of rubber spikes so they could adjust to the new feel. A few Rosedale members were concerned about slipping on rubber matting we have on some steep cart paths, especially after a few falls by players. With this concern in mind, we removed the matting. We also told the membership in our newsletter to use caution when wearing alternative spikes.

Another issue late last fall was the wood curbing installed to stop wear at the edge of cart paths. When wet, and where knots of the wood were walked on, slippage occurred quite easily. To overcome this problem, I will apply a varnish and sand mixture on the surface to roughen up the exposed edges.

Ian Martinusen, Breezy Bend Country Club, Headingley, MB

In Manitoba there are a few clubs that have made non-metal spikes mandatory for 1998. More clubs are recommending non-metal spikes for 1998, with the intention of making them mandatory in 1999. However, club managers are wondering, "How are we going to institute this ruling for outside tournaments? Can we police this ruling?" The answers are up to the rules committees.

From the turf management perspective, Manitoba golf course superintendents are almost unanimous — non-metal spikes are beneficial for putting green quality. Q

The Alternative Spike Debate

Some swear by alternative spikes — others swear at them

By Mike DeYoung

With an estimated 30 per cent of North American golf courses adopting "alternative" or non-metal spikes, the issue now is whether the spikeless movement will continue to gain momentum or go the way of coloured golf balls and aluminum shafts.

As the professionals responsible for the maintenance of

golf courses, superintendents certainly have a vested interest in the spikeless shoe debate. From a purely agronomic perspective, they are nearly unanimous in their conclusion that alternative spikes cause less damage and stress on turf than metal spikes. Clubhouse managers have similarly found that non-metal spikes reduce wear and tear on facilities.

So if alternative spikes are so good, why the big debate? Why is there an apparent lack of support from some top players? Walter Hagen popularized metal spiked shoes as early as 1914. He wanted to maintain traction on slopes and wet surfaces. Steel spikes do indeed provide better traction than non-metal alternatives. Traction is the chief complaint against alternative spikes among tour players like David Duval, Greg Norman and Ual Sutton. All three have sworn they will never wear a non-metal alternative.

Meanwhile, two other professional competitors — Davis Love and Ernie Els — have won two major American championships without the advantage of metal spikes. Currently 75 per cent of senior tour players wear non-metal spikes. They like the added comfort that non-metal spikes provide.