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Please apply in writing with full C.V. to:
The Secretary/Manager, Mid Kent Golf Club, Singlewell Road, Gravesend, Kent DA11 7RB

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Please apply in writing with a full C V to:
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The Secretary, Burnham & Berrow Golf Club Ltd., St. Christopher's Way, Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset, TA8 2PE

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The General Manager, Saffron Walden Golf Club, Windmill Hill, Saffron Walden, CB10 1BX.

(Tel: 01799 522786)
Wear and tear
A study in California in 1960 found that an average golfer walks 52 paces on the green while approaching the ball, putting it into the hole and then leaving the putting green. A 1984 study at the University of California found that putting green turf being recorded. Conventional metal-spiked golf shoes were used and there was greater true-ball roll distances were greater when soft spikes were used. The authors also observed that turf damage was less with soft spikes and they were used and there was greater truth of ball roll.

More recent work from Penn State University was published in 1998. This study included an all-sand and a slightly modified (74% sand) rootzone and one more featured creeping bentgrass. The three footwear types were conventional 8 mm metal spikes, soft plastic spikes (Soft Spikes) and a spikeless design. The work indicated that "the metal spikes usually caused more wear than the other two footwear types. The effect that tread types have on ball roll distance and wear appear to be directly related to the amount of sand in the rootzone and traffic intensity."

These studies seem to be supported by observations from STRI agronomists who have recently visited the USA as part of an exchange scheme with USGA Green Section staff. Many golf courses with a spikeless policy appear to have benefited considerably in terms of the quality of their greens. It has to be recognised, however, that the benefits are likely to be greatest on courses receiving heavy use, or with greens with a restricted number of hole locations, or where the green is under environmental stress, for example because of the effects of shade.

Most of the research that has been carried out in the USA has been on creeping bentgrass. Most greens in the UK on the other hand tend to be a combination of browntop bent, Highland bent and annual meadowgrass, and when walking around the greens. This may be important as creeping bent, because of its above-ground, lateral stolons, may be more susceptible to the plucking effect of metal studs. Research is therefore needed on the effects of shoe design on grass types more widely found on UK golf courses.

Other benefits of spikeless policies

From the greenkeeper's point of view, any factor that reduces turf damage is an advantage. This may be reflected in a reduction in the costs of maintenance for example because of reductions in the frequency of top dressing, aeration, weed control and cup changing. Further, if turf that is weakened by heavy use is more susceptible to disease. As a consequence, fungicides may be needed less often if turfgrass wear can be reduced.

Furthermore, it is not only the greens that may benefit from changes in footwear design - metal spikes certainly contribute to other forms of damage around the course, for example to wooden steps, bridges, artificial tee mats, golf carts and flooring materials in the clubhouse.

Traction properties

The main reason that players started using spiked footwear in the first place was they wanted to improve their amount of grip. This is relevant to both stable footing during the golf swing and when walking around the course, especially on slopes and banks. Although there is considerable evidence that alternative spikes may reduce the amount of wear the issue of traction is equally important. This may be especially true in a country such as the United Kingdom where golf continues throughout the winter months at a time when rainfall greatly exceeds evaporation. Also, in our cool climate there are long periods with little active growth.

Consequently, heavy use leaves slippery areas of mud, which may also accumulate on the soles reducing the effectiveness of some shoe types.

Future research

Research is needed on alternative spikes that is relevant to the main grass types used for golf in the United Kingdom. Often there is a need to consider other issues concerned with their use, particularly through the winter months when wet ground conditions make traction a major issue. There is also a need to look at how any progressive shortening of the spikes, as they become more worn, might affect traction properties.

Accordingly, the STRI has been working with SATRA, the research organisation concerned with footwear technology, to develop a research programme on alternative spikes. This has the main objectives of:

- Understanding the mechanisms by which different golf shoe sole designs cause turfgrass damage, particularly on greens but also elsewhere on courses and in the clubhouse.
- Determining the player's traction requirements of golf shoes and to define specific traction performance criteria both on and off the course.
- Quantifying the effects of key sole or spike design factors on performance, including number, length and sharpness of spike or cleat protruberances.
- Devising a design or specification for golf shoe soles incorporating spikes or other traction devices to maximise player performance and safety while minimising course damage.

The performance of alternative spikes is of major importance to golf greenkeepers and BIGGA have already established that they are willing to contribute to the costs of the research.

Other organisations have also been approached and we are hoping that a detailed programme of work will be starting later in the year.
Critical analysis

If only we could teach the golfers to have a better understanding of the factors that affect course conditions, I am sure they would realise that the grass is not always greener on the other side.

Most golfers play other courses apart from their home course. When he does he tends to see only the big picture around him, the scenery and the layout of individual holes. Back on his own course his head drops, he has already seen the sights and now he only sees the flaws such as an occasional weed or a small disfigurement on a green so he becomes more critical. He does not understand the circumstances. Every golf course is unique and it is difficult, if not impossible, to make like for like comparisons. The amount of play and the age of the course should always be considered before making comparisons about conditions. We, the greenkeepers know, but does the average golfer?

Golfers will continue to compare one course against another, but it needs to be stressed that each course is different in so many ways. The vast majority of Course Managers/Greenkeepers consider the condition of their course a very personal issue and when unfair comparisons are made, it hurts. The golfer is far from unique. Like most of us, he or she rarely blames themselves for playing badly. If they hit a shot out-of-bounds it shows the players that they have all said and heard similar comments, but by the very nature of our jobs the greenkeepers will always be in the firing line.

It may take a long time but I believe the only way to get more understanding is through education. Educating golfers at club level is a must. I am not sure how this can be achieved, but if everyone who played knew a little more about the cost and expertise required to care for their own course, then compare the resources available, they may begin to be more tolerant.

Gordon Child

This month I would like to change track and talk about what I believe is one of the worst problems facing many greenkeepers today, that is, course comparisons by golfers who have little understanding of turf maintenance. I have lost count of the times someone has commented about this course "is better than that" - condition wise that is - or "these greens are faster than those." These comments are fine when discussed by greenkeepers who understand the reasons and conditions, but when it is the golfer, it usually has a totally different meaning. If only we could teach the golfers to have a better understanding of the factors that affect course conditions, I am sure they would realise that the grass is not always greener on the other side.

One of the most common comparisons made is to the professional tournament courses seen on television. There has been much talk about the Augusta syndrome and I don't wish to go over old ground, but television paints an unrealistic picture to the real world. Many factors come into play, such as staffing levels, equipment, finance, but most of all the soil structure and the grasses which we have to work with.


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