

Pros retiring their metal spikes

By JAY FINEGAN

NEW ORLEANS – The shift from metal spikes to plastic cleats, a virtual fait accompli among amateur golfers, has taken hold big-time among players on the PGA Tour. At one recent Tour event, the Compaq Classic, played here, only 57 of the 155 opening-round players sported metal spikes.

“These figures show that, at the very highest levels of golf, there is definitely a movement away from metal spikes,” said Kelly Elbin, vice president of communications for Softspikes Inc., in Gaithersburg, Md. “The movement that started at the grassroots level seven years ago is very much in vogue on the Tour.”

The Compaq Classic numbers were reported by the independent Darrell Survey Company, based in Atlanta, which provides weekly tracking data on four major tours. “They are the authority on the official counts each week,” Elbin said. “They literally stand on the first tee on the first round of the event, and they go through each player’s bag and write down what they’re wearing and hitting. We’ve paid them to do the report on cleats and spikes since 1996.

“Six of the last seven winners on the PGA Tour were wearing our brand, including Veejay Singh at the Masters,” Elbin added. “They’re going to plastic cleats from a performance standpoint. It’s all about traction.”

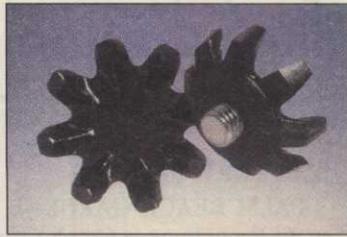
Privately held Softspikes, which introduced the first plastic cleats in 1993, is credited with touching off the mass shift away from metal. It remains the market leader. Its Black Widow polyurethane cleat, which debuted last year, is now the top-selling cleat in the United States, according to the company.

Although an estimated 8,000 courses worldwide have banned metal spikes, Tour players have the latitude to wear whatever they want. The conversion of so many Tour professionals marks the fall of one of the last major bastions of metal spikes, and golf course superintendents seem pleased to see the revolution nearly complete.

“I think the pros were a little hesitant,” said Dave Fearis, superintendent of Blue Hills Country Club, in Kansas City, Mo. “Their concern – and obviously their livelihood is dependent on it – is slippage while they are swinging. Once they broke that perception, and realized that some of these new plastic cleats offer great traction, it started going completely the other way.

“The plastic cleats are a god-send for us,” added Fearis, who is last year’s president of the Golf Course Superintendents Asso-

ciation of America. The maintenance benefits of plastic cleats, he noted, extend beyond turf protection. “They don’t tear up the carpet in the clubhouse, which saves a lot of money,” he said. “They don’t rip up the mats in the carts, and they don’t tear up the benches that we’ve got around the tees. And of course



Softspikes' Black Widow.

they’re a lot more comfortable. Your feet aren’t tired after playing a round.”

Proper fluid disposal means safety

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ter; used parts washer cleaner/solvent that is composed of mineral spirits; used chlorinated cleaners, such as carburetor cleaner and brake cleaner, that cannot be mixed with other wastes; and used paint waste, such as paint and paint thinner.

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Meanwhile, Fowkes also posts a conspicuous sign in the employee lunch room that lists the days without a time-loss accident. It’s a good incentive for employees. ▶

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