

SPIKELESS SHOES

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As early as 1982, Inverness Club dabbled with recommending "teaching" style shoes manufactured by Etonic, Footjoy, and others. I had heard about *Softspikes* during the fall and winter of 1993. With great enthusiasm, I brought samples to a Green Committee meeting in March, 1994. Little interest was shown by committee members, so I shelved the idea.

During 1994, Scioto and Muirfield banned the use of conventional metal spikes. Two Inverness members participated in the Ohio Amateur held at Scioto C.C. They returned boasting of how they were the last group during the practice round, and the greens putted as if they were the first group.

Thanks to these two members, the momentum for spikeless shoes began to build. It was decided that we would test the membership's response to spikeless shoes by banning the use of conventional metal spikes for one week-end. This week-end corresponded with our 2 day Derby held each fall.

Membership response was very favorable, and the members essentially decided to ban metal spikes. The Board of Governors outlawed the use of metal spikes effective October 15, 1994. I had been completely passive during the entire campaign. The resolution was brought on by an overwhelming number of requests from the membership.

Once the resolution to ban metal spikes had been made, the Board made no official recommendation for alternative spikes. The club replaced conventional metal spikes on members' shoes with *Softspikes*, if the member requested, but we never mandated the use of *Softspikes*. In reality, however, 95% of the members and their guests use *Softspikes*, with the remainder using teaching style shoes or tennis shoes.

Initially, the changeover was a fairly large task. We have 300 members. Counting spouses, children and intermediates the number quickly climbs to over 500. It is not uncommon for members to have three and four pairs of shoes. In addition, we average around 70 guests per day during the fall. We changed spikes in 2,000 pairs of shoes, at a cost of nearly \$7,000 the first fall.

Inverness Club made a financial commitment and did not pass any of the expenses directly to the membership. We did not feel that it was appropriate to charge the members to change any of their golf shoes. This is perhaps the largest single drawback to our spikeless policy.

In 1995 we used 125,000 *Softspikes* at a cost of \$15,000. In the spring of 1995, we increased non-family guest fees by \$5.00. The thought was that we had changed spikes in all of the members shoes, so the majority of the expense would be a result of guest play. In 1995, the cost of the *softspikes* was more than absorbed by the rate change in non-family greens fees.

By the spring of 1995 our spikeless policy was well known. Most guests arrived with a spikeless alternative or left their shoes at the locker room upon arrival to have *Softspikes* installed, so any inconvenience was minimal. Metal spikes were returned to guests when they picked up their shoes.

Being conservative in nature, we tried to evaluate any potential negatives to spikeless golf shoes. We had heard reports that spikeless shoes were slippery on wet wood. Prior to banning metal spikes we applied a silicone epoxy and sand mixture coating the bridges with a non-slip surface. This material was again applied in August of 1995, and appears to last six to twelve months.

The Green Committee and Board feel that the benefits from our spikeless policy far outweighs the financial commitment. The obvious of course is the reduced wear and tear on the putting surface. I have heard

estimates from a study that claim with 200 rounds of golf, the average green receives over 130,000 spike marks per day.

I feel that spike marks are worse on bent than on Poa annua, and are generally worse during the warmer months than during spring and fall. Bent grass seems to develop a transitional thatch during hot, humid periods that is likely to tuft from metal spikes. We have 62,000 square feet of putting surfaces. In most cases we have three or four good pin spots. If it takes five days for the greens to recover, I'm in trouble. The use of spikeless shoes greatly reduced the damage around the hole, and reduced recovery time to two days. Since no puncture hole is left, desiccation and wilting is far less likely to occur. Also, when a severely spiked green is mowed, a large percentage of certain plants is removed. Repeated day after day, the spike worn areas are thinned. This thinning is virtually eliminated with spikeless shoes.

This summer was extremely stressful for putting surfaces. In my heart I feel that our spikeless policy kept our greens healthier, and in all likelihood the spikeless policy saved our greens this summer. Neighboring club, Highland Meadows, also implemented a spikeless policy. It is my understanding that even under the adverse weather conditions this summer, their greens fared much better than normal.

Perhaps some of the greatest benefits of spikeless shoes are not readily noticed. I feel that there is a tremendous amount of damage done to non-turf areas by metal spikes. Wooden bridge planks are worn off, brick patios are easily worn by golf spikes, even concrete steps eventually yield to the continual traffic of metal spikes. It doesn't take any great imagination to figure the potential savings to carpeting and other floor coverings within the club house. Even things such as asphalt paths and golf cart pedals are subjected to unnecessary wear by metal spikes.

From a safety standpoint there has been some negative press regarding slippage while wearing spikeless shoes. I can think of countless examples of people slipping in bathrooms, patios and stair treads that are a direct result of metal spikes. In my opinion, spikeless shoes are probably safer overall.

I am estimating that at least 90% of the members are very satisfied with the performance of spikeless shoes. I am also convinced that the small percentage of members who feel that metal spikes improve their particular game, still feel that it is an equal advantage not having to putt through spike marks. I have had no one voice any strong discontent regarding our spikeless policy. As far as I am concerned Inverness has been enhanced by spikeless golf shoes.