

# TALKING

This month, Greenkeeper International's bi-monthly series featuring Course Managers and Head Greenkeepers from every Region, looks at alternative spikes.

## Alternative Spikes

Compiled by Malcolm Huntington MBE



**Name:** Elliott Small  
**Course:** Tulliallan GC  
**Region:** Scotland  
**Course Type:** Parkland and some heathland  
**Staff:** Head Greenkeeper, plus five



**Name:** John Huntington  
**Course:** Ilkley GC  
**Region:** Northern  
**Course Type:** Parkland  
**Staff:** Head Greenkeeper, plus five



**Name:** Richard Barker  
**Course:** Kirby Muxloe GC  
**Region:** Midland  
**Course Type:** Parkland  
**Number of Holes:**  
**Staff:** Head Greenkeeper, plus five and a part-time gardener



**Name:** Richard Whyman  
**Course:** Bude and North Cornwall GC  
**Region:** South West and South Wales  
**Course Type:** Links  
**Staff:** Head Greenkeeper, plus two, plus part-time assistant



**Name:** Ian Semple  
**Course:** Old Fold Manor GC  
**Region:** South East  
**Course Type:** Heathland  
**Staff:** Course Manager, plus four

1. What was your initial reaction when you heard about a new alternative to metal spikes?

That it would be interesting to see the experiment but that I couldn't see soft spikes taking over from metal spikes.

Soft spikes could be better for greens as there is less spiking up and so obviously this will be a help to greenkeepers.

It was no great surprise. I have worn soft spikes for about 18 months and find them comfortable to walk on, particularly on concrete paths and round clubhouse areas.

Sceptical. I felt it could be a gimmick.

Because of the problems with wear and tear, I welcomed the introduction of soft spikes and I have certainly seen an improvement on the course.

# HEADS

2. To what extent have your views changed since then?

Probably 100%. I have four pairs of shoes three with soft spikes which I now use all the time. I find them comfortable and they don't mark the greens.

I have only worn them in good golfing conditions so far and the greens remain good and as true as ever. They don't mark the greens.

My views haven't changed. I find no appreciable difference on our greens which are basically annual meadow grass but I appreciate they might have an effect on bent grass greens.

Since using them I have found them very comfortable. Our fairways have been very firm and with soft spikes you get a bit more spring and comfort. They also have a good grip.

Not at all. My feelings have remained the same and I am very happy with the condition of the course.

3. What is your feeling on alternative spikes and their agronomic benefits or otherwise?

The main advantage is that greens now don't get spiked up as much as they did with only metal spikes.

Metal spikes give you slight aeration of greens and soft spikes don't. I did notice when playing in Tenerife earlier this year that the very heavily watered greens did mark with soft spikes. The agronomic benefit generally speaking on our course would be less marking.

I am happy with metal or soft spikes, whatever the weather. Having studied the situation I haven't found a scrap of difference.

The jury is still out on this issue. They don't spike up the greens as much as metal, so to that extent it has a agronomic benefit.

Soft spikes don't give you any aeration and metal spikes do give you a little. Because we've got such good results I would say that the advantages of soft spikes outweigh the disadvantages of loss of aeration.

4. Having worn the recently introduced Black Widow spikes, how do you rate a) their traction and b) their effect on the putting surface?

I find the traction every bit as good as with metal. I haven't slipped at any time. We have no problems with the putting surfaces and I am happy with the soft spikes.

Black Widow spikes give you a very good grip, but again I have only used them in good firm conditions. I have not seen any marking on our greens at Ilkley from the use of soft spikes, but the greens have been firm during the trial period.

The traction is fine - spot on. I haven't slipped. The Black Widow spikes have no different effect on the greens.

Excellent traction, but I have mixed views on their effect on the putting surface.

I have three pairs of shoes, each with a different soft spike, but the Black Widow is easily the best. They don't scuff the greens. The traction is excellent and the putting surface remains good.

5. Does your club have, or is it thinking of introducing, an alternative spike (soft spike) policy?

We don't have a soft spike policy and have no plans to introduce one.

Ilkley doesn't have an alternative spike policy at the moment and I understand there are no plans to bring one in.

No, and I not aware of any policy to bring one in. I can see the benefits for some clubs with high quality greens but I haven't seen enough benefit for me to recommend then to our greens committee. As I said, I am happy with either type of spike.

Not at present. The subject has not been discussed by our green committee.

Our members have been asked to change and many have done so, but we don't insist. If someone slipped wearing soft spikes they may take legal action. We are a members club but the public can play there two days a week and some of them may not like having to pay £6 or £7 to change from metal to soft.