



On the Soapbox

A new vehicle for people within the industry to express their viewpoint

It is my firm belief that soft spikes are not as safe as traditional metal spikes on a 'typical' British golf course, particularly during the winter months.

I also have regularly seen the accumulation of frozen mud and ice on the soles of soft spikes create a damaging imprint on soft or icy greens similar to that created by a football boot.

This poses the question, "Why are soft spikes so popular and why have traditional metal spikes taken such a back seat in the market place?"

The inception of soft spikes was American led, based on the ease of use of soft spikes on cart paths, pro shops, spike bars and changing facilities, making them 'customer friendly'. The second reason being the wear problems associated with metal spikes - particularly on creeping bent grass greens.

Golf shoe and spike manufacturers confirm this in the following statements:

"Plastic cleats reduce damage to greens, golf cars and clubhouse walkways, which save course owners money and provides golfers superior playing conditions. Plus, our plastic cleats are far more comfortable than metal spikes -- no more aching feet or legs."

"Many clubs introduced a 'soft spike only' or 'soft spike preferred' policy - such had been the volume of complaints from players following a golfer wearing metal spikes on to a green, and leaving a tell-tale trail of torn grass shoots."

It is interesting to read the same spike manufacturer go on to say the following on a (smaller) section of the website selling metal spikes:

"However, a key downside in soft spikes is that in damp conditions, they tend to clog with grass and mud - reducing their traction in the golf swing and often proving hazardous when walking on downslopes."

Metal spikes are not without their problems for the greenkeeper, and I am sure not many miss the sound and subsequent damage caused by metal spikes going through a mower cylinder, but can personally not say that damage from metal spikes to putting surfaces has caused a problem greater than those created by soft spikes during the winter.

Golf shoes are sold with soft spikes these days, and I read with interest that spike makers recommend changing soft spikes every 9-10 rounds! Nice work if you can get it. No wonder pro shops aren't quite so

keen to ban or restrict the use of soft spikes when an original set of metal spikes were effectively outlasting their shoes

Most professional golfers wear a traditional metal spike, or a combination, as they know that this gives them the best performance on the course, and proponents of metal spikes argue that soft spikes simply do not have enough grip, especially for a golfer with a high-power, high-torque swing or in wet weather. Another common reason for the golf pros dislike of soft spikes, is that with steel spikes, you can see any marks left, but with soft spikes although the damage is still there, you can't always see it. This type of problem is exacerbated by Black Widow type models with 7-9 cleat points per spike, multiplied by 9 per shoe, causing extra wear and tear.

At my own club, we have recognised the problems caused by soft spikes in the winter for several years now, and have in the past

be the golfers and the golf clubs that dictate their needs to equipment manufacturers and not the other way around, as has clearly happened. Although a shift to 'seasonal shoes' is only going to benefit the shoe and spike makers (again) call me a cynic!

Having reviewed safety records and carried out a Risk Assessment, I think it would be a brave or foolish golf club that continued to allow, and indeed encourage over a recognised safer option, the use of a piece of golfing equipment which further increases a danger to the user during 'winter' ground conditions.

The golf club and Course Managers duty of care lies with protecting both the golf course and the golfer. I would suggest a revision of existing, or the implementation of a new spikes policy, which endorses the use of steel spikes during the winter, will tick both of these boxes.

How about re-naming soft spikes as 'summer spikes' and metal spikes as 'winter spikes'?

put up advisory notices in which we recommend the use of traditional metal spikes during the winter months. We have this year, taken this one step further and banned soft spikes on the course from November to March each year. The decision is based on safety grounds as well as to protect the greens.

I would say at this point that metal spikes can also accumulate a certain amount of ice, but nothing like we see on a soft spike, and in defence of soft spikes, when ground conditions are good, they create no problems.

So what does the future hold; will there be a reversal in the trend of soft spike usage during the winter? I feel that golf clubs, led by a combination of safety considerations and a sensible view on the actual damage caused by metal spikes when compared to that caused by soft spike imprints, will have to make a decision that will eventually influence the reintroduction of metal spikes to some extent. This may mean golfers having to carry two sets of spikes or even two sets of shoes - winter and summer. How about re-naming soft spikes as 'summer spikes' and metal spikes as 'winter spikes'? It should



Andy Boyce
Course Manager
Bath Golf Club.

Andy Boyce

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