

USGA RESEARCHES THE SPIKELESS GOLF SHOE

Today there certainly is a tremendous amount of interest in the new "spikeless" golf shoe. As far as I can tell there are some 12 brands of these shoes available today and I am sure there will be more in a very short period of time. When you look at these shoes you can quickly see that they are not all the same. The tread design and even hardness of the rubber soles are different. Much has been said pro and con about these shoes but unfortunately no one knows for sure whether or not they will have more or less effect on the grass and soil than our standard metal spike golf shoe or what! In fact, a few courses in the Chicago district have outright banned the shoes. Also, I can't tell you just how many telephone calls I get from people inquiring whether or not these shoes are any good or whether or not they do damage to the grass, soil as well as the line of putt. **Right now** I just can't say for sure what these shoes can and will do under varying conditions of heat, humidity, grass growth rate, type of soil, moisture, etc. For this reason the USGA Green Section is studying the effect of these shoes on golf greens. The preliminary study determining how best to set up the program and what criterias to look at has been completed. The final study where these shoes are actually walked over a bentgrass putting green is, at this writing, underway. Obviously, the results won't be known for a few weeks because there just is no way to compress hours, days or even weeks of walking into less time than it actually takes. The USGA wanted to duplicate as closely as possible how golfers will use the shoes and still have a study that is scientifically valid. The tests are being performed at Industry Hills Country Club, in the City of Industry, California, the home course of Mr. William Bengeyfield, National Director of the USGA Green Section. The research project has been planned and developed by Dr. Vic Youngner and Dr. Victor Gibeault, both from the University of California at Riverside.

Not all of the shoes available to the industry have been included in this study. There just wasn't time, area or space to replicate all of the tests. We literally would have had to have had acres of grass and an army of people walking over the turf, so we have condensed the program to include two representative shoes having the most "knobby" tread pattern on the sole, one shoe with the much smaller and less obtrusive projections on their sole and finally comparing all of these to the traditional metal spike golf shoe commonly worn today.

The purpose of this study is to determine which shoe does or doesn't cause a problem with the grass or the soils. The USGA is in a position to present the results of the findings to the industry so the individual clubs will have some information and guidance on how they want to handle this situation. The USGA itself will **not** outlaw or ban these shoes. It just isn't our charge in the industry. We are attempting to provide solid, factual information so that we all know what effects can be expected from these spikeless shoes and under what conditions. Needless to say, with so much interest the outcome of these tests will have great interest. When they become available I will certainly let you know so the readers of the **Bull Sheet** will have the most current and up to date information available on the effects of this new innovation in the golf shoe. It should certainly prove to be interesting information!

Hope this information clears up some of the questions the readers may have. At least you know someone is working on it and as soon as any results are known they will be immediately released to the industry. **Stanley J. Zontek**
USGA North-Central Director

SAND TOPDRESSING OF PUTTING GREENS MAY BE BEST TO BEWARE

Golf Course Superintendent, Warren Bidwell (Olympia Fields Country Club) states that caution should be used for those considering or already on sand topdressing of greens. Working more than 53 years in the turfgrass industry, Warren has made it a point to discuss topdressing mixes with many turfgrass advisors at the PhD level. Research information through work completed a various experimental turf plots has shown that sand topdressing is not all sunrise.

Dr. Elliot Roberts, formerly of Iowa State University, proved in the laboratory and in the field that a healthy and strong roof system is directly related to top growth development which can be accomplished without sand topdressing. At the Canadian Conference, Dr. Roy Goss, from the University of Washington told me that we haven't seen the end results of this sand topdressing work. When you overlay a sand, soil, and peat mixture (which we all have done going back to the 1920's) with 100% sand could have ending results on our putting greens 20 to 25 years from now.

While on a sand topdressing program you are not to aerify because you do not want to mix the sand topdressing with the soil underneath. You are stuck topdressing right over already compacted soil and then you expect excellent results. Sand topdressing originated with the touring Golf Professionals. They are never satisfied with the speed of the greens unless they're as fast as a bullet passing a train. The Golf Pro's want pool table surfaces. When superintendents are preparing for a tournament the putting green cut is lowered to 9/64" in order to increase the speed on the greens. When the tournament is over, the height of cut is back to 3/16" for plant protection and stability. During the tournament the members get used to those faster than normal greens. So when you walk through the men's grill you are likely to hear "when the hell are you going to cut those greens". Top growth and root growth are directly related. I find it very difficult to accept lower and lower cutting heights. The younger generation, who I do respect, must please its members. For a superintendent to survive at a club for any given tenure, he must follow the directives of the locker room agronomic experts. This is the way of life around our many private and publicly owned golf courses.

Working as a superintendent at two golf clubs where major golf Championships were played the putting greens were never topdressed with 100% sand. The putting speed and turf quality remained excellent.

"The Driving Should Be Left To Us". The Golf Course Superintendent has the expertise, good judgment, research data, and education that allows him to make professional decisions in manicuring turfgrass. Club members have to start confiding in their Golf Course Superintendents and not other neighboring clubs. Soil modification is a solution but 100% sand could only be a quick fix.

Warren Bidwell, C.D.G.A.
Greens Seminar - April 5, 1983



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