

# Stepping to Spikeless Public Golf

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**A**s we know and have seen over the past few years, many private golf clubs have become spikeless. Though there are many facets to look at when deciding to become spikeless, the real decision lies within the club itself. A private golf club's membership is relatively constant; and, therefore, the option of becoming spikeless is really up to its members. Wynstone Golf Club, St. Charles Country Club, Skokie Country Club, Bryn Mawr Country Club, to name a few, are all spikeless clubs. If you attended any Midwest meeting this year at Skokie or Bryn Mawr, then you have experienced spikeless golf. What a true joy! Once having experienced spikeless golf, there is no choice to ponder, unless, of course, you are the superintendent of a public golf course.

The public realm is a different story. Though a few public golf courses have become spikeless across the country, the thought of spikeless public golf can be a bit overwhelming. Though there are many golfers we term regulars, there is no true membership. Play is open to all. As Lynn Wesson of Phillips Park Golf Course in Aurora states, "I wish I could make my course spikeless; but for now, we are going to remain the same. I have people playing golf in bare feet, sneakers and sometimes combat boots. To tell them they have to wear spikeless shoes would be a joke." Lynn does agree it would be wonderful to get the public to wear spikeless shoes but sees cost as a problem. "There are no spikeless golf shoes in the \$40 to \$50 price range. Spikeless golf

shoes will not catch on until the manufacturers provide affordable products." Though the major golf shoe manufacturers are putting money into their research of spiked alternatives, Lynn would like to see an affordable line of nonspiked golf shoes similar to the teaching shoes that many of the PGA professionals wear.

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As I thought about this and spoke with others on this topic, I came to the belief that the manufacturers of shoes will be a key in helping the spikeless trend to last. It is through their advertising that people make decisions to purchase products. How is there a better way to advertise than to endorse a

touring professional? Gary Hearn, superintendent at Salt Creek Golf Course, says, "The pros on tour need to start wearing spikeless shoes." This is true. Backing from the professionals will help us tremendously in changing the attitude of the public golfer.

Look into the golf bags of your clientele and see what clubs are hot on the tours. As much as the public may deny it, advertising sells. That little box our society has become so accustomed to has become a very powerful tool. Television, used properly, is very profitable in business. Placing advertisements on the tube is a sure way to sell a product, and showing a product used by people in the limelight only guarantees success.

Gary also brought up a good point of whether or not we have the right to tell a golfer what he can or can't wear on our golf course. "Who and what should dictate what a golfer can and can't do?" Gary asked me. This is a very valid question. There will always be people who resist change, and I feel they are not the people we need to waste our time with right now. Change is continuous and never stops. If we are able to educate and lead by example in this spikeless trend, many will follow and see the benefits of spikeless golf.

There are steps that we can take at our own respective golf courses. The number one thing we can do as superintendents is expose our clientele to spikeless conditions. Tony Kalina, superintendent of Prairie Landing, hopes to go spikeless one day a month.

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"I am willing to pay for the spikes and labor out of my own budget for one day a month in order to expose players to spikeless golf." Tony also makes it mandatory for any complimentary-round golfers, including employees, to wear spikeless golf shoes on his course. Tony feels "through contact with spikeless conditions, golfers will become educated in the realm of spikeless golf." Once seeing and playing on the results, Tony hopes to make many converts. Tony has also proposed a reduction in fee to those who show up wearing spikeless golf shoes. This idea has potential, but has been put on a back burner.

Last year Fred Benhke at Mt. Prospect Golf Course encouraged his senior league to wear spikeless shoes by providing the players with complimentary spikeless alternatives and the labor of changing them. Fred felt the condition of his greens after the league had completed play was a spectacular improvement. Much to his delight, Fred's Golf Advisory Committee declared that for the 1997 golf season, the reserved tee times on Saturday and Sunday mornings will now be spikeless. As Fred said, "I was very happy and a little surprised to see them make this decision. They made this decision on their own from their own experiences with spikeless golf." The Annual Club Championship at Mt. Prospect Golf Course will also be a spikeless event in 1997.

Jim McNair of Orchard Valley hopes to use our MAGCS outing in 1997 as an experience for the administration of his golf course. He wants to show to his supervisor what his greens will look like after a spikeless event. "There is no doubt about it. Once he is exposed to the conditions we

could have all the time, he will realize the difference." Jim would like to set up a voluntary exchange program for people who wish to use spikeless alternatives at his course. "I would give part of my budget to cover the cost for the exchange." In order to expose

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some of his clientele to spikeless conditions, Jim hopes to rope off part of his practice green and make it spikeless only.

In this day and age of increased and superinflated liability, who should take the first step in encouraging spikeless golf? We as superintendents. We need to educate by showing what spikeless golf is like. The first step is to wear

spikeless shoes ourselves. Get people talking and involved. Immediately you will see who is willing to change. Target these golfers and use them to help you encourage others to use spikeless alternatives. Show those who make the decisions the difference there really is by taking them to a spikeless event or set one up at your own course. Take the initiative to encourage the use of spikeless shoes in league play. Work with your professional and pro shop staff to urge and educate people. They are the people who come into contact with the public the most. Encourage them to wear spikeless shoes on your course. Give the public every opportunity to see what they are missing by wearing spikes.

Do whatever it takes to make spikes as collectible as hickory shafted clubs and featherie balls. We need to keep the public's interest in spikeless golf so it doesn't become a fad. We need to make spikeless golf a craze and then the norm. Many of public courses already have some type of dress code whether it be a collared shirt, shoes, or proper golf attire required. Perhaps one day, through our encouragement, proper golf attire will include spikeless golf shoes.

When I spoke with Gary Hearn, he asked me if it was proper golf etiquette to wear spikeless shoes. I think it is. After all, golf etiquette is remembering there are other golfers on the course and not just yourself. Golf etiquette encourages people to play the course in a manner that does not disturb the conditions we provide. Our greens should be as pure for the last group as they were for the first. After all, they all pay the same green fee. ■