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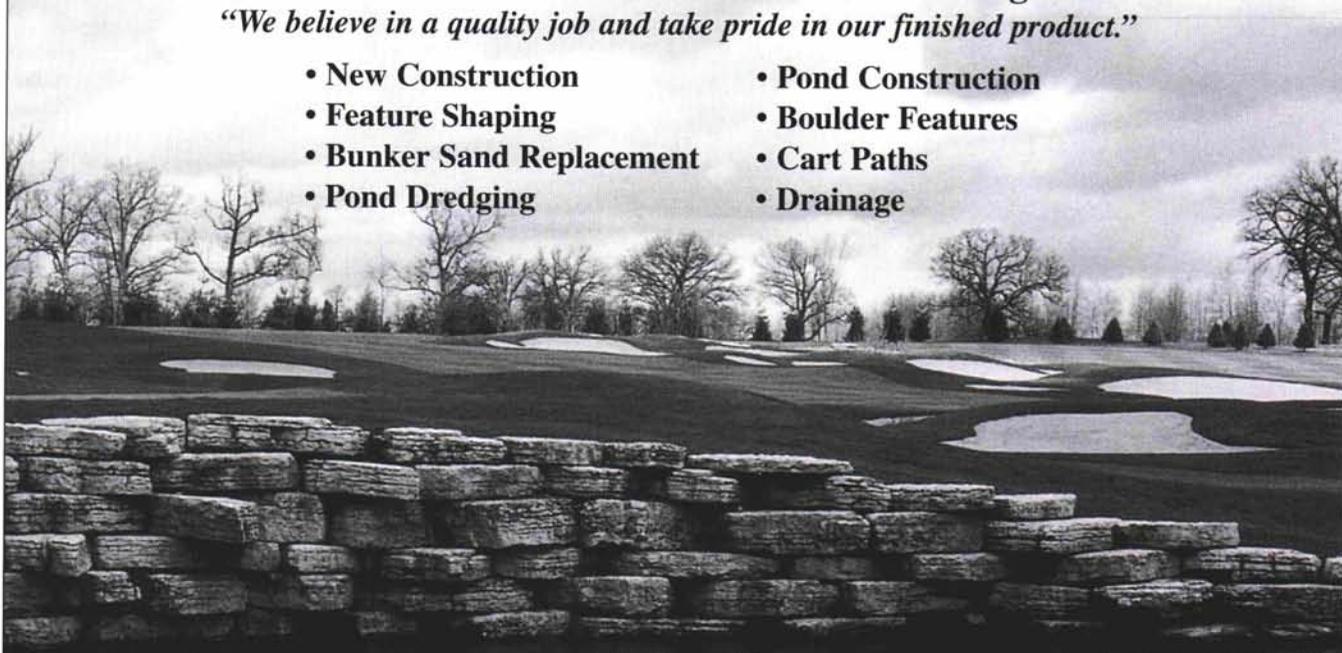


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# Then and Now, The Concern Over Spike Marks on Our Putting Surfaces

Daniel H. Albaugh

Back in the mid-'70s, I worked in the locker room at Westmoreland C.C. My main duty was to polish shoes for members and guests while they were playing golf. When the golfers completed their rounds, we would polish their golf shoes to a fine mirror-quality finish. Upon completion of the shoe shine, we would then replace any worn or missing steel spikes. Yes, back in those days, metal spikes would and did wear down. As I recall, we would replace spikes after every third round played.

As the years passed, I began to notice that the golf spikes were growing longer. The dimple around the spike was increasing in depth and the turf was being mowed closer than ever. At about the same time, some brilliant person discovered that if you made spikes out of tungsten carbide, you would rarely need to replace spikes before you would wear out the shoe itself. These new spikes, combined with increased play, resulted in the wearing down of clubs' front entrances, paths, stairs, carpets, etc. to the point where these items were replaced annually or biannually, rather than the typical every three to five years. Management considered this to be the cost of doing business, and in fact, this continued until the game of golf itself was affected.

As golf's popularity increased and the membership populations grew younger, superintendents began to hear about a phenomenon called "spiking," caused by foot traffic on a green. I do not know if the spikes themselves were at the root of the problem, or if increased play



brought it about, or whether golfers' expectations of what constituted acceptable course conditions had changed. Most likely, the recognition that spiking was a problem arose from a combination of the three.

To combat this greens spiking, many superintendents began to use growth regulators. The idea behind the use of these growth regulators was to produce a finer, tighter turf with a more upright growth pattern. The growth regulators also reduced the number of surface runners (grain) on the greens. This, in turn, decreased the number of runners that would have a chance to pop up and disturb the playing surface during the day. Other superintendents began to mow greens in the morning and again in the afternoon so that later-day players and morning players alike would enjoy putting freshly cut greens.

**I believe it was 1993 when we first heard the words "soft spike."**

At first, the concept was slow to catch on, but then the movement gained steam. Many of the private clubs began to transition from metal to alternative spikes. To the amazement of many superintendents and golf professionals, even some of the touring pros began to wear soft spikes at Tour events.

In fact, a recent conversation with Brad Sullivan, assistant executive director of the Illinois PGA, brought to my attention that in all IPGA-sanctioned events, players are required to wear soft spikes, or—as Brad stated—"non-metal" spikes. Brad also believes that 90% of all IPGA professionals use soft spikes all the time, tournament setting or not.

As part of my research into this issue, I contacted the PGA Tour office in Florida to find out if any statistics documented how many touring professionals were using the soft spikes while competing in PGA-sanctioned events. Unfortunately, no record exists of how many players, or what percentage of players, were using soft spikes. However, I remember hearing on TV that 55 to 70% of players now wear soft spikes some of the time. And the rate of use of soft spikes is even greater among Senior Tour players.

I provide this extensive history and background to support my main point: I see an alarming trend among several golf shoe manufacturers that must be addressed. Have any of you walked into the golf shop lately and taken notice of the new,

*(continued on page 14)*

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**Then and Now, The Concern . . .**  
(continued from page 12)

molded type of golf shoe being produced by companies such as Nike, Etonic and Reebok? These shoes are nothing more than the football shoes that have been used for decades on fields featuring a synthetic playing surface that goes by the name of "Astroturf."

The advertisement for the Nike Air Zoom soft spike golf shoe states that its 118 points of contact were specifically designed and engineered for maximum grip with minimum damage. Judging from the turf damage I have seen this shoe create, I would change that phrase to a more appropriate statement, such as "these 118 points of contact were specifically designed to grip and rip the turf" so the foursomes behind you as well as the course superintendent can "cry foul all day long."

The Etonic Difference, however, is perhaps the most turf-tearing shoe I have ever seen. It has countless 1/8" diamond-shaped spikelets that scuff and tear up putting surfaces. These tear the turf to the point where we have had to send men out the next day to cup out the denuded areas shredded apart by these shoes. Believe me, they leave a tell-tale pattern behind. The Reebok shoe

is similar, featuring a series a V-shaped grooves that extend out 3/8". These patterns leave inden-

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shoes.*

---

tations in the turf until it grows level with the surrounding turf some two-three days later.

My intent here is not to slam these shoe manufacturers, but to point out the irony here. I believe that the whole concept behind the soft spike movement was to eliminate the damaging effects of metal-spike golf shoes. The goal behind introducing soft spikes was to provide quality putting surfaces in both morning and afternoon.

Not all golfers who wear the above-mentioned shoes are out there disrupting putting surfaces. It is the foot dragger and the person who turns on the balls of his/her feet who cause the majority of turf problems. In my experience, traffic from metal spikes actually causes less damage, and the damage heals much more rapidly, than the damage caused by golfers walking improperly with the new multistudded shoes.

In closing, I urge all shoe manufacturers to reconsider their golf product lines, if for no better reason than their love of and commitment to the game. One of the prominent movements we are seeing in golf right now is the "bigger is better" mentality. We now have oversized irons and oversized drivers; for the good of the game, we do not need oversized and overstudded soft spike shoes! 

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## GCSAA News

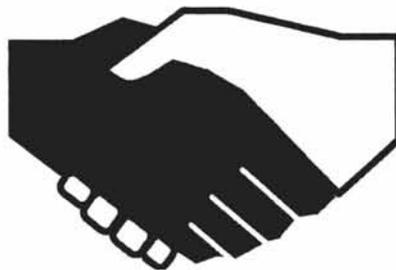
ovartis, Rain Bird, Textron and Purcell Technologies, in partnership with the GCSAA, have announced the call for entries for the 2000 Environmental Steward Awards. The award seeks to recognize the accomplishments of golf course superintendents around the world who have demonstrated a commitment to environmental stewardship efforts on the golf course. Applications

are available through the GCSAA Service Center (800-472-7878) and from each of the sponsors. You can also print out an application from the GCSAA's Web site ([www.gcsaa.org](http://www.gcsaa.org)) and submit your entry electronically. Deadline is October 1, 1999.

Now available on the GCSAA Web site: articles to post at your facility or publish in your facility's newsletter! The topics

range from golf course etiquette and turf management terminology to pesticide application and lightning safety. Download articles from the GCSAA Web site at [www.gcsaa.org/golfers/for-golfer\\_fr.html](http://www.gcsaa.org/golfers/for-golfer_fr.html) or call the GCSAA Service Center at 800-472-7878 for assistance. If you submit an article for publication in your facility newsletter, please give credit to the GCSAA. 

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# An Overview of Management Companies



Mill Creek Golf Club is managed by American Golf Corp.

Dave Braasch

**M**anagement companies are a growing presence within the golf course industry. They either offer to run grounds maintenance or the entire operation. You may wonder, what prompted me to write this article? Previously, I worked for a management company and was questioned by several colleagues as to how management companies' courses function as compared to privately owned and operated golf facilities. These questions became the foundation for a survey that I sent out to golf course superintendents nationwide who currently work for management companies that run public, private and municipal golf courses. The first half of this article includes their responses.

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*At present, the United States is home base to more than 90 management companies. These companies combined manage more than 1,300 golf facilities worldwide, with the majority of them located in the U.S.*

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I also asked superintendents from public, private and municipal golf courses that are not currently run by management companies to come up with a list of questions that they would have if management companies were to come to their facilities. Those questions were then sent out to three different management companies, Club Corp being the only one to respond. The second half of this article consists of information provided by Jim Faubion of Club Corp. (Thank you, Jim.) It is my hope that this article will educate and clarify any misconceptions superintendents may have about management companies.

## **Superintendents share their experiences**

At present, the United States

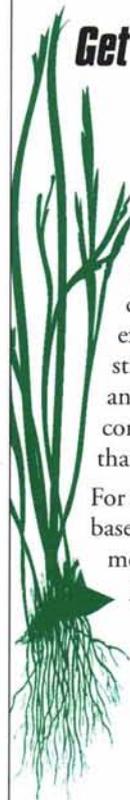
*(continued on page 18)*

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**An Overview of Management . . .**  
(continued from page 16)

is home base to more than 90 management companies. These companies combined manage more than 1,300 golf facilities worldwide, with the majority of them located in the U.S. According to Jim Faubion, Club Corp was established more than 40 years ago, in 1958. It is evident that this trend toward golf management firms is not new, just increasing in popularity.

Follow closely, because this may get a little confusing. Fifteen superintendents, representing an equal mix of public, private, and municipal courses, responded to my survey. Among the 15 courses, six different management companies were involved. Situations included lease, purchase and contract deals. Survey results were as follows.

- The majority of superintendents

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*The company appoints an area superintendent to interact with the site superintendents and perform duties such as budgeting, course projects and recommendations. The area superintendent oversees an average of five courses besides his/her own.*

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(with one exception) responded that the management company runs the entire operation.

- The general chain of command in each situation is as follows: president, vice president, regional director, director of golf or general manager, and then the superintendent. The company appoints an area superintendent to interact with the site superintendents and perform duties such as budgeting, course projects and recommendations. The area superintendent oversees an average of five courses besides his/her own.
- Although termination and/or decrease in salary may occur in some situations when a management company comes in, not one such incident was reported in the responses I received. The benefits packages offered

(continued on page 22)

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# Do You Care About the Future?

Chuck Anfield

*This is the first in a series of articles by members of the MAGCS Environmental Committee.*

If you care about the future and want to share your love of the outdoors, the GCSAA and Audubon International (AI) encourage you to participate in a program they are cosponsoring called Adopt-A-School.

This program is an opportunity to use the unique talents we possess as golf course superintendents and to share our creativity, ingenuity, stewardship and teaching skills to make a positive impact on a community, school or individual. The level of personal satisfaction that comes from being a leader in a "hands-on" environmental program and watching children grow and

mature is absolutely incredible. To be an environmentalist, you must be an activist.

Audubon International will provide all of the materials, support and guidance you require. Here is how you can become involved.

1. Contact a school or schools in your area that you think might be interested in this type of program; I recommend either junior high or elementary schools. AI has a form letter you can send to the principal of each school you contact. Schools want to be involved in programs of this nature, since this can add a new dimension to environmental education. Some schools have existing environmental clubs or integrate environmental issues throughout the curriculum. Perhaps the

school has faculty members who might be interested in participating. The key here is to find a person within the school you can work with; all it takes is one.

2. After sending the letter, follow up with a phone call. Send out the information packet and introductory video from AI. This packet explains in detail what the program is all about.

3. Arrange a visit with the principal to discuss the program. Offer to pay the \$100 fee or offer to split the cost. Once a school invests money in a program, it is more likely to be involved.

4. Once you have "adopted" your school, the sky is the limit as far as what you can do. Some examples include: introducing

*(continued on page 38)*



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