

GOLF COURSE NEWS

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The Cutting Edge

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GCN HONORS BUILDERS OF THE YEAR

MacCurrach Golf Construction, whose principal Allan MacCurrach is seen here with client Arnold Palmer, has been named the Golf Course News Small Builder of the Year for 1996. SAJO Construction earned top honors in the large builder category. For stories, see pages 56-57.

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Openings top 400 mark

A Matter of Course:
1996 Openings

Daily-fee	337
(18-hole equivalent...)	233.5)
Municipal	53
(18-hole equivalent...)	40.5)
Private	52
(18-hole equivalent...)	39.5)

Projects currently
in construction: **850**

Openings scheduled
for 1997: **657**

Promising project pipeline makes '97 slowdown unlikely

By HAL PHILLIPS

File this one under "Business cycle be damned."

The golf course industry witnessed the arrival of another 442 facilities during 1996, fending off the downswing predicted by optimists and skeptics alike. Openings have climbed a steady parabola since 1990. Despite a slight decline from the record 1995 figure of 468 openings, observers view last year's formidable production with a combination of glee and disbelief.

"I continue to be amazed by the boom



The Class of '96: Nicklaus-designed Hualalai Golf Club on Hawaii's Big Island was among 442 new openings last year.

in new course construction," said Lansing, Mich.-based architect Jerry Matthews. "I suppose I say that because I've been in this business for 30 years. It goes in cycles, as other businesses do. History tells us there is going to be a downswing; it's just a question of when."

Not any time soon, it would appear. According to the National Golf Foundation (NGF), more than 800 projects are in the construction phase, meaning any downswing almost certainly will not take

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Alternative spikes gain acceptance

By MARK LESLIE

NORTH BARRINGTON, Ill. — In April 1994 when Wynstone Golf Club here banned metal-spiked golf shoes, superintendents nationwide held their breath, anticipating who-knows-what reaction from golfers. Three years later, and 45 years after the United States Golf Association (USGA) first called on golfers to forsake their metal spikes for more turf-friendly footwear, the revolution is on.

"The latest estimate I've heard is that 1,500 courses have switched to alternative spikes of one sort or another," said USGA Green Section National Director Jim Snow. "I think it's certainly a very popular trend that will have a big impact."

Snow pointed out that the number of courses

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SPECIAL GCSAA VEGAS COVERAGE

Bally's Casino Resort Hotel — whose Grand Ballroom will host the Opening Session — and Hoover Dam are just two of the Las Vegas-area attractions awaiting attendees of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America International Conference and Show, scheduled for Feb. 6-12. For complete show coverage, including an easy-to-read conference and events schedule, see pages 45-55.



Ski managers: Golf key to year-round revenues

By PETER BLAIS

Skiing provides the monetary speed, but golf helps smooth out the financial bumps for American Skiing Co. (ASC), a major Northern New England ski operator that is fast becoming one of the region's major golf course owners and operators.

Although it represents just 10 percent of ASC's total revenues, golf helps even out the company's cash flow throughout the year, according to ASC Chief Financial Officer Tom Richardson.

"Golf has been very important at

Sugarloaf [USA]," noted Peter Webber, the Carrabassett Valley, Maine, resort's golf director and a member of the committee that coordinates ASC's four golf course operations. "The additional cash flow helps us through the summer. It lets us employ some of our best people on a year-round basis. It keeps the hotel rooms occupied and pulls in other summer business."

ASC operates eight ski areas — Sunday River and Sugarloaf/USA in Maine; Attitash Bear Peak in New Hampshire;

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No suits — yet — and plenty of pluses for alternative spikes

Continued from page 1

mandating alternative spikes could jump dramatically this month. "This is when a lot of clubs vote on issues like this," he said.

And the driving force behind this trend? Not superintendents as much as the golfers themselves.

"I'd like to say the Green Section has the influence to accomplish this. But we tried in the '40s, saying spikes were terrible on the turf, and that did nothing," Snow said. "No, the impetus for going 'spikeless' is the golfers. It has nothing to do with research, or the USGA touting alternative spikes, or anything else."

He explained that golfers have become accustomed to faster, smoother putting services since Stimpmeter use became prominent in the mid-1970s, and spike marks "are more annoying to golfers than they were 20 years ago."

"The members are the ones most apt to be in favor of the soft spikes because of what they're seeing in the putting quality — particularly in the course of the day," said superintendent Bill Webster of Pumpkin Ridge Golf Course in Cornelius, Ore. "Play in the afternoon on a course with spikes isn't as good, while on a soft-spike course you're basically putting on the same quality as in the morning."

Meanwhile, more and more golf course superintendents' associations are mandating alternative spikes in their chapter competitions. And PGA members may follow the lead of the Michigan Section which voted 284-2 to require the use of plastic cleats in all its sponsored events this year.

When Wynstone pioneered the spikeless revolution, the membership made the choice and 10 or 12 people objected, according to superintendent Tommy Witt. "But a month later, no problem... It's working very, very well, even for the guys who swing hard. There is no issue as far as playability."

Webster, who in February was featured in a Nike film educating its sales force about spikeless shoes, said: "They've found if you're slipping in soft spikes you should be visiting your professional, because you're either swinging too hard or have poor balance."

Tell that to a number of people who, according to Snow, dropped their USGA membership because of the organization's support of alternative spikes.

Meanwhile, the feared well-spring of suits against plastic-spike golf courses has not mate-

rialized. Various clubs as well as the USGA and other organizations anticipated a slew of court actions from golfers injured in falls because they were wearing the plastic cleats.

"We've heard of threats, but no suits yet," Snow said. "There are suits concerning metal spikes where people tripped and

fell, but nothing without spikes."

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America has empowered the Research Committee to investigate the spikeless issue, said Witt, a national director. "Speaking for Wynstone, the board of directors made a decision, reasoning that if someone is going to sue

us, they'll sue regardless of the type of spikes they wear."

Pumpkin Ridge addressed the possibility of suits by mandating alternative shoes only on its private course and not during the rainy season, which starts in November and carries through the winter months.

"Currently they [alternative-

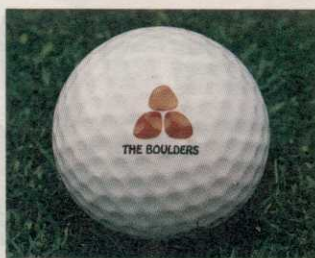
shoe manufacturers] haven't come up with a good solution that gives you the traction of metal spikes and the reduced turf penetration of soft spikes," Webster said.

"The discussion in the golf world," he added, "is that there is the possibility of falling with either spike. It's a question of what surface you're on. Soft spikes can slip on steep slopes

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Grand National
Auburn/Opelika, AL



The Boulders Resort
Carefree, AZ



Grayhawk Golf Club
Scottsdale, AZ



Four Seasons Resort Aviara
Carlsbad, CA



Keystone Ranch Golf Course
Keystone Resort, CO



Jupiter Hills Club
Jupiter, FL



Lake Nona Club
Orlando, FL



Pine Tree Golf Club
Boynton Beach, FL

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Reynolds Plantation
Greensboro, GA



Ivanhoe Club
Ivanhoe, IL



Bryn Mawr Country Club
Lincolnwood, IL



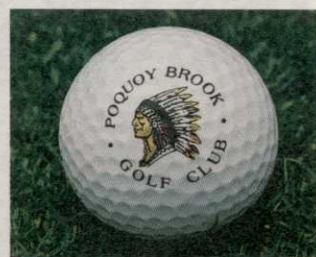
Glen Oaks Country Club
West Des Moines, IA



Lassing Pointe Golf Course
Union, KY



Bethesda Country Club
Bethesda, MD



Poquoy Brook Golf Club
Lakeville, MA



High Pointe Golf Club
Williamsburg, MI

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Irishman Brennan named PGA European Greenkeeper of the Year

DUBLIN, Ireland—The Toro/PGA European Tour Greenkeeper of the Year Award has been won by Irishman Fintan Brennan, who is deputy head greenkeeper at the new Bernhard Langer-designed PGA European Tour Course here at Portmarnock.

Brennan, who was a block-release student at Elmwood College in Cupar,

Fife, clinched the title from seven other students at the National Final at Aldwark Manor, near York, home of the British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association.

The 32-year-old former metal fabricator won a 10-week trip this month to the United States where he will undertake a turf management course at the University of Mas-

sachusetts and visit the Toro Co.'s headquarters in Minneapolis, Riverside, Calif. and the Golf Course Superintendents of America Association Show in Las Vegas.

Joint runners-up and winners of a trip to the PGA European Tour Greenkeepers Conference in Penina, Portugal, last December, and the opportunity to work in the preparation of two venues of PGA

European Tour events next season, were Noel Greene of Gay Hill Golf Club and Warwickshire College and John Bachelor of Mendip Spring Golf Club and Cannington College.

"I'm absolutely delighted and I hope that I can do the other seven finalists proud when I go to the States," said Brennan.



The Wilds Golf Club
Prior Lake, MN



Interlachen Country Club
Edina, MN



Carmel Country Club
Charlotte, NC



Newton Country Club
Newton, NJ



Monroe Golf Club
Pittsford, NY



Bent Creek Country Club
Lancaster, PA



The Dunes Golf & Beach Club
Myrtle Beach, SC



Long Cove Club
Hilton Head Island, SC

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Stonebriar Country Club
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McKinney, TX



Mount Snow Golf Course
West Dover, VT



The Greenbrier
White Sulphur Springs, WV



Geneva National Golf Club
Lake Geneva, WI

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Alternative spikes

Continued from previous page

and places like wet wooden bridges or slick surfaces. The convention steel spike can be equally as dangerous on the concrete surfaces... It's a question of relearning how to walk."

For its part, the PGA Tour's Tournament Players Clubs have adopted a wait-and-see attitude.

Director of Golf Course Maintenance Operations Cal Roth said: "We have not required alternative spikes on any of our courses. We're monitoring their use to see how they perform. Depending on their success, we'll make a determination at some point in time as to where we will go."

...

Discussion of the agronomic implications of plastic spikes versus metal spikes continues one-sided.

Although saying, "No question, there is a huge improvement" on putting surfaces with plastic spikes, the USGA's Snow said the association is "trying to be a little bit cautious about coming out and promoting them." Its closest move so far has been to announce that on courses serving as 1997 USGA championship qualifying sites, the association will enforce the banning of metal spikes if those facilities have non-spike policies.

"There's no question that the conventional healing time for turf under metal spikes is four to six weeks, but with soft spikes it's a matter of days," said Webster. "The reason is, you're not damaging parts of the plant that are required for recovering. Soft spikes cause more of a foliar damage, while metal spikes get into the crown of the plant where cell division goes on and you destroy or damage the plants' ability to recover."

Webster pointed to a major difference between bentgrass and poa annua greens over a period of time. Since bentgrasses recover vegetatively and poa re-seeds itself, "there is a big difference on the bent greens, and the newer clubs are more apt to encourage soft spikes," he said.

"I just know there are no spike marks at the end of the day. Any agronomic benefits are gravy," said Witt. "It's [the ban] taken a very, very sour subject [spike marks] ... and has eliminated that problem."