

# TURFGRASS MATTERS

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## Spikeless Shoes

By R. Jim Moore, USGA

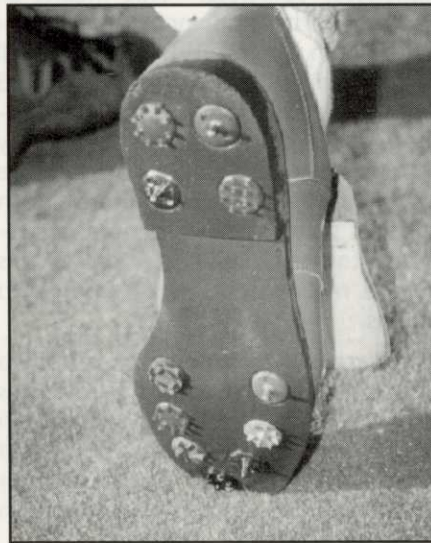
**F**ew issues have stirred as much debate as the issue of spikeless shoes. As an agronomist for the USGA, I am frequently asked my opinion on the issue, and predictably it is met with varying acceptance by both golfers and golf course superintendents. Perhaps the best way to help those who are involved in this debate make a rational decision about the use of spikeless shoes is to evaluate the pros and cons of this issue. Please keep in mind that the following observations are based on my professional opinion and not necessarily the position of the USGA.

### Impact on putting quality

With the exception of a few years in the military spent fixing broken B-52's, I have spent most of my life trying to provide better putting quality for golfers. An often quoted proverb in the golf course superintendent's world is "Your greens are your resume." As a result, anything that improves putting quality will be quickly accepted by those whose livelihood depends on the golfer's evaluation of the putting surface. Make no mistake - when a club switches to spikeless shoes they enjoy a tremendous improvement in putting quality. In fact, not in all my career have I seen any new maintenance tool or practice bring about a greater positive change in the way the ball rolls across the green. Predictably, golf course superintendents have almost unanimously accepted and promoted the change to spikeless shoes.

### Impact on the health of the grass

Although some work has been done in this area, indicating it is actually better for the health of the turf not to wear spikes, it is doubtful that the degree of improvement justifies eliminating all spikes from greens. As to the argument



that getting rid of the spikes will help eliminate *Poa annua*, there definitely needs to be more research on this issue before such claims can be substantiated. We can expect scientific research to shed light on both of these issues over the coming year.

### Impact on newly planted greens

Spikeless shoes have a very positive impact on newly planted greens. Both bermudagrass and bentgrass grow laterally when first planted (they don't call it creeping bentgrass for nothing). Only after the newly planted green is completely covered with mature turf (the maturing process normally takes 8 to 10 growing weeks for bermudagrass and 12 to 14 growing weeks for bentgrass) will it start to assume the upright growth habit that is necessary for good putting quality. Predictably, while the turf is in a spreading mode, it is easily snagged by spiked shoes. Going spikeless while the new greens are maturing will reduce injury to the turf and make for much better putting quality.

There is another very important point to make regarding the tendency of turf to spread laterally.

Bentgrass and bermudagrass will assume this growth habit whenever it needs to cover a worn or thin area, as well as after planting. In other words, if a green is very heavily played to the point that the surface is worn thin, the turf will revert to the lateral and spreading growth habit necessary to achieve complete coverage. For this reason, spikeless shoes have a much greater impact on heavily played greens than on those that receive very little use.

### Comfort

Many people have told me how much more comfortable they find spikeless shoes to walk in, compared to spiked shoes. Many members of our staff wear them because of the comfort factor, and because you can wear them into the club house after being on the golf course.

### Are spikeless shoes dangerous?

There seems to be little doubt that traction is reduced by eliminating spikes. There have been numerous accounts of players injured when they slipped on a steep grassy slope or wet wooden walkway. Injuries have been recorded from golfers wearing spiked shoes as well. Although it is important

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