

## Precious Metals

By: Nathan Crace    Date: August 22, 2005

Two weekends ago, I finally got around to cleaning out my section of the master bedroom closet—much to the surprise and delight of (to borrow a phrase from David Feherty) “She Who Must Be Obeyed.” We’ve only been living in the house for four years, so what’s the rush? At any rate, selecting what appeared to be the path of least resistance, I chose to begin at the bottom and work my way up. Between the stack of size 32 blue jeans that I’m going to start wearing again as soon as I lose that weight I’ve been planning on losing for the past, oh, nine years and my old Nintendo 64 game system (so that’s where I left that) was a collection of six shoe bags. Judging by their heft, they appeared to contain small anvils. “Odd,” I thought, “I could have sworn I sold all my anvils at the last yard sale.”

To my surprise, they instead contained three pairs of old Foot Joy Classics with some type of strange metallic spines protruding from their underbellies—eleven tiny stilettos per shoe just perfect for screwing up the line of the guy in the group behind me. I racked my brain trying to think back to the last time I wore golf shoes with metal spikes and soon came to the conclusion that it would have been about the same time I last saw a movie in the movie theater that wasn’t produced by Disney or otherwise marketed toward my children. That would have been “Forrest Gump” in 1994—no kidding! I really have to start getting out more....

Anyway, that’s when it occurred to me that the only people you see wearing metal spikes anymore (or should I say *allowed* to wear them) are some of the guys on the PGA Tour. Long gone at the course you and I play is the familiar crunching and grinding of metal against the concrete cart path as you tried not to disrupt the guy in your group who was teeing off while you were trying to slip over to the water cooler unnoticed. It’s one of the many sounds that instantly transport me back to the summer days of my pre-driver’s license youth when my mother would drop my buddies and me off at Wooded View Golf Course (a county park course in Clarksville, Indiana) and we wouldn’t see her again until she came to retrieve us just before sundown. We played so many holes in a day that we stopped actually keeping score and I remember thinking how much more comfortable it would be to wear sneakers to play golf—if not for the loss of traction that would surely sour my game as I lashed my tee ball with my prized Powerbilt Citation driver.

Fast forward some 20+ years and you now have a hard time finding a course without a “No Metal Spikes” policy. Personally, I think it’s a revolution that has come decades too late. Greens are in better shape, your feet don’t ache after walking, and shoes with alternative spikes typically are lighter weight—providing for less strain on your back and less wear and tear on your joints. Of course now just about everyone makes golf shoes that arrive standard without metal spikes and some companies even make golf sandals.

But why are members of the PGA Tour so stubborn about trading in their dinosaur shoes for the comfort of non-metal spikes? Some argue that so much money is at stake, any potential loss of traction could result in thousands of dollars gone on one bad swing from a side hill lie. Perhaps. But then how do you explain that while nearly 30 percent of the PGA Tour players still wear metal spikes, only five (5) percent of the LPGA and Champions Tour players have yet to make the switch? Surely, one could ascertain that the elder members of the Champions Tour would have more to gain from metal spikes if they did in fact minimize the act of slipping more so than alternative spikes.

Recently, a petition was started on the PGA Tour to ask the Player Advisory Council to address the issue of metal spikes on the Tour—especially the utility-man-telephone-pole-climbing-eight-millimeter models worn by Phil Mickelson and others. You know, the ones that started a rift between Lefty and Vijay Singh at this year’s Masters when the big Fijian asked a rules official to inspect Phil’s spikes during a round because he thought the spike marks he was leaving were exceptionally bad? Of course, the easy answer to this problem would be to allow players to tap down spike marks—a USGA prohibition long overdue of being abolished. But why not ban metal spikes on Tour too? Of course, the Tour will never do it. At least not as long as the big names are wearing them. But it seems that a group of guys who fly around in private jets and drive more Buick courtesy cars each year than the guy who drives them off the end of the assembly line in Detroit to the parking lot would get with the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I’m sure they have long abandoned their Beta video cassette players and 8 track tapes. In fact, most of the young guys on Tour today probably wouldn’t know an 8 track tape if Christopher Cross smacked them in the head with one.

So, in lieu of a direct monetary incentive to get these guys to give up their “green graters,” how about a trade-off? Notwithstanding metal shafts and the club heads of their irons, let’s impose a maximum percentage of metal that a player can utilize in the rest of his equipment. If he wants to wear metal spikes, he’ll have to give up something else metallic. For example, if he doesn’t want to wear alternative spikes, he’ll have to play with a persimmon driver. Try that trade and the Tour will be overflowing with the poster children for soft spikes. Of course, you can’t force them to give up their metal spikes—even if they are playing at some of the country’s finest courses where even the members aren’t allowed to wear them at *their* course. That would be like forcing them to abide by a club’s collared short policy and give up their \$100 t-shirts, er, I mean mock turtlenecks.

*Nathan Crace is a golf course architect whose freelance “Lipouts” column is based, at times, on topics submitted to the author by readers like you. If you have a topic you would like to see discussed or wish to read past columns from the archives, log on to [www.lipouts.com](http://www.lipouts.com) and let him know. Copyright 2005.*