

Nathan Crace's

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Gentlemen, Start Your...Shirts?

By: Nathan Crace Date: February 26, 2004

First things first. Kudos to the PGA Tour for their recent "These Guys Are Good" campaign commercials over the past couple of seasons. Of course it's entertaining to see David Toms ricocheting high flop shots from his backyard, off his DirecTV dish, down his roof, and through the gutter downspout or Brad Faxon mowing a green in his living room carpet to squeeze in a little extra practice time on a rainy day. But take a closer look and you'll notice that the Tour allowed the pros to wear their "work" hats and shirts prominently displaying the logos of the sponsors who pay big bucks for the ad space. I have no idea if there was any legal wrangling between attorneys from both sides to work out the details, but I'm sure the Tour realizes that a great portion of income for these guys comes from sponsorships. And from Kraft to Pillsbury, those sponsorships cost the sponsors a lot of dough. Sorry. I couldn't resist.

But lately, these guys are more than good. Some are becoming overexposed. It's becoming more and more difficult to differentiate between a professional golfer's closet and the hood of a NASCAR champion. If they walked faster and played only dogleg "lefts," you wouldn't be able to tell the difference between Mark O'Meara and Mark Martin. And it's not just the PGA Tour. The other Tours are closing fast. Plenty of Champions Tour and LPGA Tour players are following along in the land of the larger-than-life logos. Seen Julie Inkster lately? The logo on her shirt must have been too big to fit on her bag. And some logos are so big they look as though they might interfere with the player's backswing. Try stapling a half dozen index cards to your chest and taking a swing! No wonder these players are so good. They have to be to overcome their apparel handicap!

Don't get me wrong. If I were shelling out \$200,000 per year to paste my logo on John Daly's shirt, I would want one as big as his Trim Spa logo too. And if the sponsor's player wins even once, the theoretical payoff can be exponentially gratifying. Make that a Major or some multiple wins and you may find yourself on the short end of the renegotiation stick by season's end. On the flip side, the players like the idea of having the steady income that doesn't come from playing a sport where you can't ride the bench and "earn" \$1,000,000 a year. So it's a win-win for the sponsor and the player. But over the past couple of seasons you have to start asking, "How much is too much?"

Some players such as Woods, Singh and Love must have more bargaining power when dealing with their sponsors who have been relegated to using much more discreet logos. Then again, this may be fodder for the argument that overly visible advertising is more beneficial for the sponsor than is a more tasteful and discreet logo. Case in point: we all know Nike and American Express are two of Tiger's sponsors, but can you name Singh's or Love's without doing a Google search? Me either. In fact, try to name the sponsors found in the following high profile locations: Mickelson's visor? Els' left chest? Singh's visor? Watson's shirt? Can't do it? Don't kill yourself...unless you are Bearing Point, SAP, Cleveland Golf, or Cadillac, respectively.

Sponsorships are a big part of a professional Tour player's annual income. In fact, it can very well be the vast majority of income. It costs money to travel the world for a living and it's become nearly impossible to do so without some steady and reliable sponsors supporting you. Considering that most of the players on Tour do not win a title in any given year (especially when Els, Tiger, Love, et al get on a roll and win multiple events), the exposure they garner from top ten finishes can easily be worth more in potential sponsorship contracts than the dollars that move them up the money list. How many players make it through the grueling stages of Tour School en route to their card and thumb their noses at potential sponsors so they can "go it alone?" None. It can't be done in today's world unless you are the fortunate heir of a multi-millionaire who wants to see his offspring give the professional circuit a shot without being tied down to corporate America.

And so the circle-of-corporate-life goes 'round. Advertising dollars pay for everything from radio to television to the golf tournaments that the walking billboards make their living playing. Who did you think paid for it all? Companies pay for advertising that pays for things we enjoy in whole or in part for free. And whether we realize it or not, we are inundated with advertising everyday and react to it accordingly. In fact, the magazine you are reading right now is made possible by advertising dollars from sponsors—and let me be the first to say you should patronize each one of them. By the way, if you want to pay me \$200,000 a year to wear your company's logo while I type my column, just give me a call. Come to think of it, I'll do it for only \$100,000. And that's a great bargain when you consider that I've only won one less Major title than Phil Mickelson, Mike Weir and Stuart Appleby combined!

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 and let him know. Copyright 2004.