

Nathan Crace's

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It's Miller Time...or not.

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There are always two sides to every story. And in some cases, more than two. In the course of normal human nature, we are drawn to conflict (even if we don't admit to it publicly) because the two sides of the conflict don't correspond and the ensuing conflict is more interesting than our everyday lives. We find things that are different than the everyday occurrence interesting simply because they are different. It doesn't mean that these things are necessarily better or worse than the everyday events—just different. Perhaps this is why some ancient instinct deep down makes some people slow down and contort the vertebrae in their necks in an effort to survey a traffic accident on the highway as they pass by. It's also the reason for the recent surge in reality television. Some, such as the original "Survivor" and the current hit "The Apprentice" are interesting and perhaps worthy of spending thirty minutes of your evening watching if you are seeking out entertainment. Others, such as "The Bachelor" and "The Bachelorette" are too much on the inside of a person's personal relationship and are more akin to voyeurism than television. Still others like "Fear Factor" are two parts entertaining (watching normal people test their physical and psychological limits performing stunts) and one part disgusting (the obligatory eating of bovine intestines, even worse, parts of the animal form further down). In fact, "Fear Factor" would be a great 18-minute show, but I digress.

This brings us to the original and still best "reality" programs on television—sports. Save a few historical acts of point-shaving and despicable acts by some professional athletes, what you see is what you get. And the PGA Tour is no different. At Doral, Australian Craig Parry finished what almost began as a week in his hotel watching the tournament on television with the most spectacular finish of the season—so far. In case you haven't heard, he nearly missed his Thursday morning tee time due to aftereffects of jet lag, but found himself in a two-way tie come Sunday afternoon. By now you know the story of Parry's eagle that clinched the title; but as deflating as the "shot heard 'round Doral" may have been for sudden death competitor Scott Verplank when Parry holed out on the first playoff hole, a much more interesting and peculiar conflict seemingly began after the check was cut and Parry walked away with the trophy.

During NBC's coverage of the event, former-Tour-player-turned-current-Tour-commentator Johnny Miller remarked that Parry's swing was more akin to that of a 15-handicapper and would make Ben Hogan "puke." Those of us who watch a lot of golf on television have come to expect this sort of thing from someone like Miller. Parry, apparently, has not. He and his agent then proceeded to make a few phone calls to the management types at NBC and the Tour, trying to get a muzzle put on Miller. Are you kidding me? Parry and his agent must not catch much of NBC's golf coverage. The golf crew at NBC at times reminds me more of a group of guys you might find playing poker in one of their cigar smoke-filled garages on a Friday evening under a solitary light dangling from the ceiling. Not that NBC's coverage is necessarily bad, it's just not to my liking and I would guess there are others like me in America. At least they were smart enough to lock Bryant Gumbel out of the booth after a few unsuccessful tries. Then you have ABC, which has an asset in Mike Tirico. He balances well with Curtis Strange and the two seem to handle themselves well. However, it has always been CBS's golf staff that has continued to impress me year after year. Is it because we have come to assimilate CBS with their annual coverage of The Masters? Perhaps. But I think it is more to do with who is in the tower on 18 and following the players on the course. Let me first say that I miss Ken Venturi. He made his share of remarks and near the end of his career said some things that may not have made a lot of sense, but he was always a professional and a gentleman. Jim Nance is also a consummate professional and rightful heir apparent while Lanny Wadkins seems to be finding his place in the mix. David Feherty's dry wit is just enough to take the edge off without being ridiculous. If only Gary McCord could get more airtime.

But one thing that stands out in my mind about Johnny Miller is the way he talks about the players who are in the tournaments. Even McCord's remark from years ago that the greens at Augusta about bikini waxing the greens was not directly at any one individual. Miller comes across to the average viewer as condescending and pompous. But that is who he is. A few months ago, *Golf Magazine* went so far as to rate him the best golf commentator on television! I'm sure that has nothing to do with the fact that he also writes a column for the magazine. The best? That's ridiculous.

To be fair, it is just as ridiculous for Craig Parry to request that the Tour quiet Miller or expect NBC to do the same. The only thing that would surprise me more than Parry's request would be if NBC actually caved in to it. Remember the old adage about the man who picks up the snake and then is surprised when it bites him? The moral was, he knew it was a snake when he picked it up. Likewise, NBC knew years ago that Miller has an attitude and a quick mouth to accompany it. If they wanted to get rid of him, they would have done so years ago. Although I think Miller goes overboard at times with his personal comments about players, the best way to not let it bother you if you are a Tour player is to joke about it, shrug it off, and walk away to play another day. Not go running to the Tour that your feelings are hurt. Besides, the television deals are part of what makes the checks so much bigger these days. If you are a viewer, you can simply not watch tournaments broadcast on Miller's network if he offends you. Or if you are like me, just turn off the volume so you don't have to hear him.

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.