

You know how image-conscious GCSAA can be. So it's no surprise the association complained that superintendents are portrayed negatively in a spate of recent advertisements.

But don't worry: The association's honchos aren't set to colorize somebody's blue jeans again.

As laughable as last year's GCSAA's action was (you remember the infamous ad in *Golf Course Management* that starred a superintendent in his "brown" jeans), the association has good reason to be peeved about recent television and print ads featuring Maxfli golf balls and Callaway Golf's Odyssey putters. GCSAA sometimes goes overboard on the image issue, but not this time.

Tommy Witt, GCSAA president and certified superintendent of Kiawah Island Club in Kiawah Island Club, S.C., is especially perturbed about a 30-second Maxfli spot that features a disturbed-looking man — presumably a superintendent or maintenance worker — walking on a par 3 green carrying a hole cutter. Standing on the tee waiting for the man to cut the cup is pro golfer Fred Couples. (Who would cut a cup while a golfer waits on the tee?)

Witt says the man looks like a "dirty, grungy guy that you wouldn't employ as a window washer or a janitor." (No offense to window washers and janitors.) There's a voice-over while the man walks to the front left corner of the green — the area for the most-outrageous pin placement — and cuts the cup.

"He had a baaaaad night," the voice says in reference to the man. "His little sweetie left him. Now he's going to take it out on you, Freddie."

The man, who is unshaven with long hair, sports a creepy look while he cuts the cup. You can almost smell his stench. You wouldn't want your dog near him, let alone have your profession compared to him.

The ad isn't funny, but it is lighthearted — and for that we must test GCSAA for thin skin. Let's remember that most every profession has stereotypes, which we love to joke about. Bankers are boring, lawyers are money grubbers and sports writers dress in clothes that were the rage 20 years ago. But there's a fine line between poking fun at one's profession and demeaning it.

GCSAA Has Right to Gripe About Ads

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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The Maxfli ad demeans superintendents.

"The ad is disgraceful," maintains Witt, who says it sends the wrong message to golfers. Witt says superintendents want to be known as friends, not foes, of golfers. "GCSAA has been proactive in presenting the fact that superintendents are very involved in providing a positive golfing experience for those who play the game," he adds.

Witt's point is that superintendents and equipment suppliers are in the same boat — the golf business — and neither should rock it. If there weren't educated superintendents to groom golf courses, the game wouldn't be this popular and Maxfli wouldn't have the cash to purchase 30-second TV spots.

While the Callaway Golf ad may be less insulting, it also riled superintendents. The company's print and TV ads also focus on superintendents, or "greenkeepers," who cut cups to make putts difficult. The ad depicts a superintendent as evil and sinister, says GCSAA CEO Steve Mona.

Mona contacted leaders from both companies and expressed concern about the ads. "Both said they weren't trying to demean superintendents," Mona says.

The damage has been done, but something good has come from the situation. Callaway agreed to scale back distribution of the offensive ads. It also pledged \$250,000 to help fund GCSAA's superintendent leadership series. Maxfli also said its ad will probably appear less often. Both companies agreed to let GCSAA act as a technical advisor for upcoming ads.

Credit Callaway and Maxfli for listening and acting. Credit GCSAA for taking a stand on an issue that needed to be addressed.

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