

**T**he National Golf Course Owners Association is comprised of good people and stages a solid annual show. But I think the NGCOA shanked one big time by recruiting Chris Zimmerman, Nike Golf's general manager, to be one of its top speakers at the association's annual conference and trade show in Phoenix earlier this year.

Zimmerman was a walking, talking Nike Golf commercial. The only good thing about his "speech" was that the expansive Regency Room at the city's downtown Hyatt Hotel was half empty (maybe more) for his 8 a.m. appearance. I envy those who slept in or opted for a long breakfast while brooding over the sports page.

In all fairness, Zimmerman's presentation was billed as a "Company Focus." You knew he was going to talk about Nike Golf, but ...

"I wanted to talk to *this* group," the tanned Zimmerman said at the top of his marketing rant. (I swear he was licking his chops.) Then he launched into the history of Nike Golf. Here's my Cliff's Notes version of Zimmerman's talk:

*We started selling golf products in 1985, but were unsuccessful. We knew we had to differentiate Nike Golf from Nike, so we created a separate identity for Nike Golf with a different logo and branding. When we entered the ball market in 1999, nobody took us seriously. Then we threw a lot of money at Tiger to use the ball, Tiger won a bunch of tournaments and people began to take us seriously. Then we threw more money at Duval, and even more people began to take us even more seriously. We're entering the golf club market, we have innovative TV commercials to market our products, and we're going to kick the competition's arse. Any questions?*

I raised my hand. "What are you doing to promote *affordable* golf, assuming that your high-falutin' clubs and balls are going to cost so much that I'll have to drink Old Milwaukee in the clubhouse for the rest of my life?" I asked.

Zimmerman gave an answer, but it was one of those "we're-looking-into-it" replies.

"What are the things we can do with equipment to make the game more enjoyable for entry-level players of less ability?" Zimmerman asked out loud, repeating my question. "We have that very much in our plans."

## Nike Speaker's Talk – Just Boo It

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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His answer should have been the subject of his speech. He should have been talking about Nike's plan to create inexpensive equipment for the people who like golf but can't afford to play it. He should have asked owners for their opinions.

We'd all love to use Nike equipment, but it's too costly for many of us. What the golf world needs now is new golfers, and it can only help if Nike and other big-name companies lure new blood to the game by offering affordable equipment along with their respected names.

I've been to three NGCOA conferences now, and "the game is too expensive" has been a constant refrain. After you've walked around a few days and everybody's talking about how the game needs to be more affordable, the last thing you want to hear is somebody from a well-to-do company talking about how great its upscale products are.

What's worse is Zimmerman came off kind of haughty. He actually said Nike quit selling its golf shoes in the same orange boxes as its other shoes because its marketers recognized that their golf customers didn't want to feel like they were getting the same products their sons were getting from Foot Locker. Puuhlease!

Zimmerman acknowledged that Nike is viewed by its peers and the public as a great marketing company. No doubt.

"But we like to think of ourselves more as a product company," he added. "Having Tiger and David is like having Batman and Robin. They are a valuable piece of our marketing plan. But none of this means anything unless your products are right."

Right for whom? I just wonder how much Nike products would cost if Tiger and David weren't part of the plan.

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