

Spike Swings for Laughs With Golf Comedy

Back Nine could join new slate of sports-related series

By Alex Weprin – Broadcasting & Cable, 3/23/2009 12:00:00 AM MT

Spike TV is making a bigger play for its target 18-49 male audience with an increased output of original scripted comedies, focusing on shows with sports themes.

This week, the network will begin filming the pilot presentation for *Back Nine*, which follows a washed-up former golfing champ who travels the country, drinking booze and hustling players in small-time tournaments with his estranged son and longtime caddy. The show comes from writers Mark Perez (*Accepted*, *Herbie: Fully Loaded*) and Jason Filardi (*Bringing Down the House*).

"We thought, it is sports-related, we know our guys love golf, and hey, what is funnier than *Caddyshack*?" says Spike TV President Kevin Kay, citing the memorable 1980 comedy. "When you are talking to guys about movies they love, *Caddyshack* is right up there on the sports movie list, on the all-time comedy list."

Spike has already given the green light to two sports-themed comedies this year: *Players*, about two brothers who own a sports bar, and *Blue Mountain State*, about a college football team. The network is also bringing back Bob Einstein's hapless daredevil character, Super Dave Osborne, for a four-part series this summer.

Players, which was developed as part of the network's attempt to generate low-cost presentation pilots, kick-started the move toward the genre. After viewing the pilot presentation, the network decided it could use its existing sports and sports-related properties to promote its original series.

"Whether it is UFC or TNA wrestling or *Pros vs. Joes*, and now as we evolve into Michael Irvin's [upcoming series] *4th and Long* with the Cowboys, it is sports entertainment anyway," Kay says. "You have a platform to promote to guys, in these sports entertainment and sports vehicles, and likeminded programming would be scripted sports comedies."

Sports comedies also serve as a way to differentiate Spike from sister network Comedy Central.

"I'm not saying they will never do sports comedies—that's up to them—but it is a point of differentiation, certainly for now," Kay says.

Spike may have a tough road to hoe with the new series. While scripted sports-themed shows have long appeared on the broadcast and cable networks, few have found mainstream success. Among the more famous flops are *Sports Night* from *West Wing* creator Aaron Sorkin and the ESPN series *Playmakers*.

The network also fills some of its primetime with off-net reruns of *CSI* and *CSI: NY*, which draw a slightly older crowd.

"Because of *CSI* being older and making up a big part of our schedule, our audience tends to be a little older than Comedy Central's, which I think in some ways gives us a license to be a little broader," Kay says. "When you look at shows like *Blue Mountain State* and *Players*, I think there is a little more physical comedy, and the sports angle makes it a little broader and appealing to young guys and older guys."