



Golf Channel's 'Feherty' program wrestles with how to use its host

If you're like me, you watch a lot of Golf Channel. Disturbing amounts. As a veteran viewer, I've seen a lot of programs come and go, but I've missed none more than the old chat show, "Golf Talk Live." Don't get me wrong, I always thought the host, Peter Kessler, was sort of long-winded, but the formula: knowledgeable host, simple setting and an interesting, talkative golf personality, was television gold. So I was eager to take in David Feherty's new show, aptly named "Feherty."

I'd been curious about the show for weeks. The promotional spots and the publicity materials told us what we already knew: Feherty is very funny and an unpredictable free spirit. But the goofy promos, like the bumper material leading in and out of the show's commercials, reduce to a caricature a man who is already one of the game's great characters. David Feherty doesn't need to muss up his hair like Bozo to be the game's clown prince. Methinks they're trying too hard.

Show One began with Feherty entering a sterile set carefully designed to look like a home study. He sat behind the desk and proceeded to look awkward, over-scripted and over-propped. I'm not sure who was more uncomfortable: him or me, especially when the props started talking. Feherty describes the show as a reflection of his harried mind, and while the constant set changes and tone changes in the show did reflect his busy brain, the content itself couldn't keep pace. It all ended up being too much. Too many set-ups, too many set changes and Feherty himself just talks too much. He's brilliant, but even Ernest Hemingway needed an editor. There are times in the show when we can't tell if Feherty is the host or the guest. Worse, the taped, scripted format dulls the reactive, creative edge for which Feherty is so well known. He seems trapped in video like an ant in amber. Golf's answer to Robin Williams would be much better off live.

Within the premiere itself were several references by Feherty to his struggles with addiction and mental illness. These, too, were overdone. Montel Williams has that base covered. Golf Channel will be making a mistake if they let this show become Feherty's personal confessional. That said, the producers took a huge step toward authenticity when they slated Lee Trevino for the premiere. There are bigger names in golf. There are

hotter names, but by playing the Trevino card, the producers seem to be reassuring us that despite all the extra-curriculars this will be about ... golf.

Frankly, the only disappointment with the Trevino interview was that it was too short. The hour had been consumed by superfluous "bits." There was a modestly funny "On The Street" segment in which Feherty comically assaulted ordinary folks about bad-hair days and such, but then (out of left field) there were a few ethereal clips of Feherty himself being interviewed, and a quasi-stand up routine in front of a studio audience redolent of old Seinfeld intros. In this particular bit—a good-if-much-too-long story about a verbose first-tee announcer—the



Trevino (right), Feherty's Dallas neighbor, was the ideal guest for the first episode of the analyst's new show.

punchline missed low side, and it occurred to this viewer that all the indulgence, the cheap facsimile of Leno and all the overproduction robbed us of our time with Trevino.

The very conflicts within this inaugural episode—is it by Feherty or about Feherty?—represent the greatest challenge for this show. Can he and his producers achieve the delicate balance of using his celebrity and cleverness to draw guests and viewers, while at the same time backing Feherty to the edge of the spotlight and allowing the guests to hold the stage? I think they can. Feherty himself has overcome much greater hurdles. **GW**