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## State Farm Steals a Touchdown Dance, Scores Free Advertising

By Ira Boudway (BloomBerg Businessweek)



When Steve Novak, a little-known sharpshooter off the New York Knicks bench, made five three-pointers during the second half of a win over the Cleveland Cavaliers last week at Madison Square Garden, he twice celebrated by strapping an imaginary belt across his waist as he ran back down the floor. While his giddy teammates on the bench joined in the dance, three words popped into the heads of just about everybody watching: Discount Double Check. “He did a little Aaron Rodgers Discount Double Check,” said the MSG network’s play-by-play announcer, Mike Breen. “The Knicks were Cavalier wrecking and Discount Double Checking,” said Michael Wilbon the next day on ESPN’s *Pardon the Interruption*. “Steve Novak lighting up the Garden with the Discount Double check!” tweeted one Jesse Oliveri, aka @JBreezy220. And like that, an exultant display by the Knicks’ sixth-year journeyman forward also became a moment of triumph for State Farm—which since 2010 has used the Discount Double Check phrase to describe its routine process of checking a customer’s auto insurance coverage to make sure he or she received all applicable discounts.

How did State Farm so deeply ingrain itself into the dialect of the sporting world? The story begins in 2005 in Green Bay, Wis. Aaron Rodgers, then the rookie backup to Packers quarterback Brett Favre, was looking for a way to liven up practices. Since the job of the second team is to mechanically reproduce the offense of that week’s opponent, he was not allowed to play fast and free. So Rodgers devoted his energies to touchdown dances. When the scout team would score, he did the “championship belt dance”—a move that has its roots in professional wrestling and is meant, as the name implies, to mimic strapping on a championship belt.

Fast-forward to early 2011. Rodgers is now the Packers’ starter and marquee player on the brink of a Super Bowl victory. Throughout the season, he has punctuated the team’s touchdowns with the dance, which has become his signature move. Around that time, Rodgers’s business manager, H Koal, contacted Tim Van Hoof, assistant vice president of marketing at State Farm, to see if the company would be interested in working with his client. “We felt like maybe there was something there, but we didn’t really have an idea,” says Van Hoof, a Packers fan. During the off-season he mentioned Rodgers to the company’s ad agency, DDB. “We just immediately started writing stuff,” says DDB’s co-creative director Barry Burdiak. “One of our teams, Chad Broude and Kristin Witt, came in with this script where State Farm actually steals the championship belt move.” Burdiak loved the idea immediately. “It stood out because it’s got physical humor to it,” he says. In the original 30-second spot first aired last fall, Rodgers runs into a young couple at a State Farm branch. While thanking their agent for “doing that Discount Double Check,” the man does the belt move. Rodgers begins asking questions and it becomes apparent that nobody knows who he is. “[It’s] almost like a *Twilight Zone* episode,” says Burdiak, “where the guy in the world who is most famous for this thing is the only guy in the commercial who is not known for it.” With the help of high-profile national ads, the gesture Rodgers had made famous among gridiron fans gained a new association.

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Then, in a Madison Avenue dream scenario, the move took on a life of its own. Other athletes adopted the gesture, sometimes to taunt Rodgers. Fans adopted it to celebrate everything from acing a French test to eating a box of Girl Scout cookies. And they did it all under the label Discount Double Check. Burdiak says his 10-year-old son sees other kids doing the move in the hallway at school. “What I love about that,” he says, “is they call it the Discount Double Check move. They don’t call it the Aaron Rodgers move. The theft is complete now.” The Knicks’ Novak, a Marquette grad whose recent rise has been the minor-key accompaniment to Jeremy Lin’s, borrowed the dance as a tribute to Rodgers, who tweeted his approval.

Advertising slogans have become catchphrases plenty of times, including “Where’s the Beef?” from Wendy’s and Budweiser’s “Whassup!” But it’s hard to think of other occasions when the name of a product or service—let alone something as mundane as a review of a customer’s auto insurance coverage—has crossed over this way. “It’s pretty insane what’s happened with it,” says Bob Dorfman, creative director at Baker Street Advertising. Last month, the ad won AdWeek’s readers poll for “Best Sports Spot.” Dorfman says State Farm did three things well: First, “they got the hottest quarterback.” Second, “they advertised the hell out of it.” (State Farm won’t say what it spent placing the ads, but Dorfman estimates it was at least \$10 million.) And third, the company inserted itself into the football world without paying to be an on-field sponsor: “Every time Aaron Rodgers scores a touchdown, in effect, it’s this touchdown is brought to you by State Farm’s Discount Double Check.”

The downside for State Farm, if there is one, is that the phrase seems to have broken free from its original association. “That’s certainly something we have our eye on,” says Van Hoof. “We’ll want to make sure that we continue to associate the brand and what [the Discount Double Check] actually is.” He says the company is happy to have its coinage float around in pop culture, but is also working to “keep some definition around it” in branch offices and online, where people are actually shopping for insurance. Still, it’s a good problem to have. “It’s certainly better to have your product name out there divorced from the company than to not have it out there at all,” says Dorfman.

State Farm plans to keep the phrase circulating as long as possible. It is bringing new people onto the campaign and plans to revisit Rodgers in the fall. And Steve Novak? Stay by the phone. Says Van Hoof: “You never know what might happen.”

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Using a highlighter, colored pen, or marker; identify any and all marketing terminology, company names, or products that are discussed in this article.

*(Be sure to think about everything that goes in to marketing)*