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Activists want Skechers ad pulled

by **Bruce Horovitz** - Jan. 12, 2012 10:26 AM
USA TODAY

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Even without Kim Kardashian starring in its next Super Bowl spot, Skechers continues to raise a super ruckus.

Today, a greyhound protection group will announce that it's collected almost 50,000 signatures from folks who want Skechers to dump its new Super Bowl spot -- before it airs -- because it was shot at a racetrack in Arizona that the group claims mistreats greyhounds.

The group, Grey2K USA, is organizing boycotts at some of Skechers' 300 U.S. stores, including a rally on Saturday outside a Skechers store in Tucson. "We are hopeful that the company will hear our concerns, realize its mistake and withdraw this misguided promotion of dog racing," says Grey2K President Christine Dorchak.


While it's not unusual for advocacy groups to demand Super Bowl ads be nixed after they are broadcast, it's rather unusual for those demands to be raised even before the commercial is aired. That may be 2012's trend. Never mind that it's a tiny, non-profit group vs. a \$2 billion juggernaut that's one of the nation's biggest sneaker makers.

Skechers marketing chief Leonard Armato insists there are no plans to pull the ad before it's scheduled to air on Feb. 5. Because the protesters haven't seen the spot, he says, they don't know what they're protesting.


"That the ad is running during the most heavily watched

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sporting event of the year suggests that greyhound racing is a sport. It is not. It is greyhound cruelty," says Dorchak.

The real star of the new ad isn't a greyhound but a feisty French bulldog -- a far cry from reality TV star Kardashian, who was featured in Skechers' racy Super Bowl spot last year.

The new ad also features a cameo by Mark Cuban, the billionaire owner of the Dallas Mavericks. Cuban is being criticized by some activists, even though he appears in the Skechers spot for only a moment.

Cuban, who confirms receiving e-mails from some of the protesters, insists that neither he nor the ad condones mistreating animals. Armato says the spot is uplifting. "It's about the beautiful spirit of a French bulldog, Mr. Quiggly."

The 6-year-old Mr. Quiggly, who has appeared in films and TV shows including Cats & Dogs 2 and Underdog, is getting other bookings, including a February gig at the Magic apparel show in Las Vegas. Cuban also is planning a press tour with the dog.

Mr. Quiggly joins a roster of past Skechers stars including Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Carrie Underwood and, of course, Kardashian.

"We thought it would be a piece a cake dealing with him," jokes Armato. Until, he says, a "double" showed up on the set. "Then, we knew he wanted to be treated like every other celebrity."

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