

## Top JDC golfers will fly first class

When 22 pro golfers from the John Deere Classic wing their way across the pond tonight for the upcoming British Open, there will be no cramped, cattle call, packets-of-pretzels plane ride for them.

Even the tallest of them will get to stretch out in comfort in leather seats with plenty of leg room as they dine on grilled steak, chicken breasts, salmon or veggie lasagna.

Where the wide-bodied Boeing 767 originally came with 240 seats for normal commercial operations, there are now a mere 100 seats — all first class — on the Pace Airlines plane that caters to a rarified clientele when it is not shuttling the National Basketball Association's Dallas Mavericks from game to game.

"Last week, we had the prime minister of England on board," said Neil Sparkman, maintenance manager for the Dallas-based carrier. "We were taking him to and from the G-8 conference. We just got back from Japan last night."

Use of the jet is a new twist for the JDC, designed to allow it to attract more of the marquee-name golfers who might otherwise bypass the tournament as they get ready for the more prestigious British Open that starts July 17, said Barry Cronin, spokesman for the tournament held at TPC Deere Run in Silvis, Ill.

Tournament officials will pay \$300,000 for the one-way, non-stop, 3,419-mile, eight-hour flight to Manchester, England, Cronin said. Each golfer who comes aboard is entitled to three seats for which they pay \$1,000 apiece. That money goes to Birdies for Charity, a program sponsored by the JDC.

The idea for the flight was simple, Cronin said. The money could have either gone into a larger purse for the tournament, a move that would have had minimal impact, or it could be used to charter the plane and offer golfers a hassle free way to get to the British Open.

"A big thing for them is flying non-stop and making sure all their luggage is there when they get there," Cronin said. "In the past, when we've had players who have gone there and found their luggage was lost when they got there. One year, Zach Johnson (who now serves on the board of the JDC) didn't have his clubs available to him for a few days."

The results of chartering the plane have been almost immediate, Cronin said. Where at last year's JDC only seven golfers played who were also qualified a shot in the British Open, this year that number has tripled to 21.

"Some players think we are in a transportationally challenged area and, if we can do something to make it easier for the big-name golfers that everyone knows and wants to come and see, we can add that much more value to the tournament for the fans," Cronin said.

And the golfers get to fly in style. The plane is thought to be one of only two in the world of that size that have been tricked out to offer luxury accommodations and amenities, Sparkman said.

Other appointments include nine 15-inch television screens located throughout the cabin that offer streaming news, sports scores, weather information, financial news and other information, Sparkman said.

Not interested in any of that? There is also an iPod-based personal entertainment system that offers a choice of dozens of current movies or about any kind of music a listener may be interested in, Sparkman said. A crew of six flight attendants is on hand to cater to the needs of passengers and "two first class galleys can provide you with anything you desire.

"We've carried princes, presidents and prime ministers," Sparkman said. "The aircraft is designed to be the ultimate Boeing 767 putting a premium on luxury

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