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Ticket sales swinging freely for 2015 Chambers Bay U.S. Open

Ticket sales for the U.S. Open at Chambers Bay are so ahead of schedule that sponsors fear some large businesses might find themselves shut out of top-level packages before the June 2015 tournament even registers on their radar.

By Geoff Baker

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Organizers of next year's U.S. Open at Chambers Bay have a bit of a welcome "problem" on their hands: they're selling corporate tickets far too quickly.

They smiled when the event's local popularity helped them land more volunteer applicants in 36 hours than they normally see in three or four months. They clicked their heels when securing a deal for a light-rail train to whisk fans from downtown Seattle to the course at University Place in Pierce County in less than an hour.

But now, things are so ahead of schedule on the corporate ticket sales front they fear some large businesses might find themselves shut out of top-level packages before the June 2015 tournament even registers on their radar.

"They've never had to jump on something this early, but they might have to here," said Mimi Griffin, head of corporate sales for the event. "Our inventory is getting a lot lower than it usually is this far out."

Griffin said corporate sales usually take off immediately after the previous year's U.S. Open ends. But with this year's event in

Pinehurst, N.C., still more than three months away, Griffin this week said she is down to single digits in the number of remaining platinum, gold and Puget Sound packages for premium tents and suites at Chambers Bay.

Pooling resources

Danny Sink, championship director for the U.S. Open, said the Seattle-area sales have been unique in the way small and midsize companies have pooled resources to purchase packages that are typically the domain of larger companies. Sink said that in one case, five smaller companies agreed to go in on one premium tent together.

“I’ve told my staff they have to throw away the normal how-to,” Sink said of monitoring their remaining inventory. “It’s obvious this is a very tight-knit community and people do things together all the time. There are a lot of people thinking very creatively here, which we normally don’t see.”

To the point where Sink and Griffin worry they might not be able to accommodate some of the larger corporate buyers who expect to purchase the same type of experience every year. Sink said the U.S. Open no longer has to worry about selling enough tickets to the high-demand event, with sales expected to easily reach the targeted 35,000 per day and 235,000 for the week of June 9-15, 2015.

They’ve had to limit single-ticket sales to four per day and made those available to about 700,000 United States Golf Association members via a mailed offer that started Friday at 9 p.m. The general public will have access to single tickets starting this June 9.

“This event sells itself,” Sink said. “When the national championship of golf comes around, golfers know these are the best players in the world.”

The corporate sales have been under way for a while now and there are only so many tents and suites that can be put up. There’s a reason the more premium packages have traditionally been snatched up mainly by large corporations: a platinum package for use of a 40-by-40 tent requires companies to purchase at least 100 tickets per day with an initial deposit of \$58,750 and total cost of \$235,000.

A gold package requires a purchase of at least 50 tickets daily for use of a 30-by-30 tent, a deposit of \$32,500 and total cost of \$130,000. The Puget Sound suite packages — featuring “double-decker” suites built on two levels overlooking the course — require a purchase of 30 daily tickets, a \$23,750 deposit and \$118,000 total outlay.

There are also a variety of smaller-scale suite packages and VIP accommodations available — including the purchase of individual tables inside a premium pavilion — for a total cost of anywhere from \$11,500 to \$61,500.

Sink said the cost might seem high to some, but it actually averages out quite well on an individual basis compared to major sporting events like the Super Bowl. The average per-person ticket cost for a company buying a platinum package, he said, comes out to \$336 before catering fees.

At this year’s Super Bowl, most tickets sold at a face value of more than \$1,000.

Corporate comfort

Griffin said the U.S. Open can also offer a better business setting for corporate clients than a Super Bowl or World Series.

“It’s more about just a really nice, comfortable corporate environment,” she said. “You do have the ability for one-on-one chats and conversations instead of the crowds and the screaming you get at a game. At those, you see more people following every single play. Here, you don’t have to do that. It’s more relaxed.”

Organizers typically need about 4,500 volunteers at each event. Sink said it can take up to four months to get that many applicants, but this time, there were nearly 6,000 responses within 36 hours earlier this month and a waiting list was started. That number was up to 7,307 on Friday.

He said the event has a tentative deal with Puget Sound Transit to supply a light-rail link that will get fans from King Street Station in Seattle to within 100 yards of the 18th tee at Chambers Bay in about 53 minutes. "All they have to do is jump in a cab, get down to King Street and you'll be at the U.S. Open in less than an hour," he said.

For now, he said, the bigger concern is the type of accommodation some corporate fans will have once they arrive at the site.

"We're trying to make sure everybody is forewarned," he said. "If you want the best stuff that's out there, you might not want to wait that much longer."

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