

## Appleby joins long list of compatriots

Nicole Jeffery  
10oct06

AUSTRALIAN OPEN chairman Paul McNamee will have the support of every Australian winner on the USPGA Tour this year as he strives to turn the tournament into an event worthy of "the No.2 golf nation in the world".

McNamee announced yesterday that every Australian player ranked in the world's top 100 would compete at Royal Sydney next month.

Stuart Appleby, who has won twice on the USPGA Tour this year, confirmed his attendance yesterday, joining Greg Norman, world No.4 Adam Scott, US Open champion Geoff Ogilvy and defending champion Robert Allenby in the field. Rod Pampling, Aaron Baddeley and John Senden, all USPGA winners this year, will also start.

The only prominent name missing from the list will be Mark Hensby, who has elected to contest the World Cup in Barbados.

"This is the greatest field of Australian players assembled at a golf tournament in Australia," McNamee said.

But that is the start, rather than the limit, of Golf Australia's ambitions for the tournament. McNamee plans to steadily boost the \$1.5million prizemoney this year (up \$250,000 from last year) into the \$4-5m range over the next several years.

"The long-term aim is to have it at the level of a regular PGA tournament," McNamee said.

"We are the No.2 golf nation but our tournaments are not those of the No.2 nation. If we do that, we will become the biggest tournament in the Asia-Pacific region."

Australia's best players have helped McNamee's plans by excelling on the USPGA Tour this year.

Ogilvy (4), Scott (6) and Appleby (8) are all ranked in the top 10 on the USPGA Tour money list, an unprecedented showing for Australia, and have eight compatriots in the top 100.

Appleby, in Australia briefly before he returns to the US for the last three events of the season, believes their success will help them play "Pied Piper" by luring top-class international players to Australian tournaments in future years, as Greg Norman did in the 1980s.

"The biggest talk on the Tour this year has been about the Australians and the non-Americans dominating," Appleby said.

"I don't know if Australians realise how much we are being noticed in America.

"We do get sly comments like: 'you bloody Australians, you come over here and you marry our women and you take our money' ... We are like Dr Evil, we want to take over the world.

"We have a fantastic field (for the Australian Open) and within three to five years it will get better and better. This is the best depth we have ever had on the Tour. By 2010 we will have a good animal on our hands."

However, to Appleby, the quality of the international field is beside the point. He can compete against the Americans any week of the year. He just wants to get his hands on his country's premier trophy for the second time, after his triumph in 2001, the last time he won in Australia.

"It's been a little time since I won in Australia and I am very hungry to win on local soil," he said.

"I want to get some strong momentum going so I can make the summer something. I've had a good break and I've had my breath of fresh air. I will be really warm and ready to go by the Australian Tour."

He applauded the fresh approach taken to this year's Open, which will include such innovations as twilight golf, "apres-golf" entertainment, and selected holes where spectators can walk on to the fairway behind the players to watch them take their shots.

Last year's USPGA rookie of the year Sean O'Hair will lead the international contingent, with more players to be announced in the next few weeks.