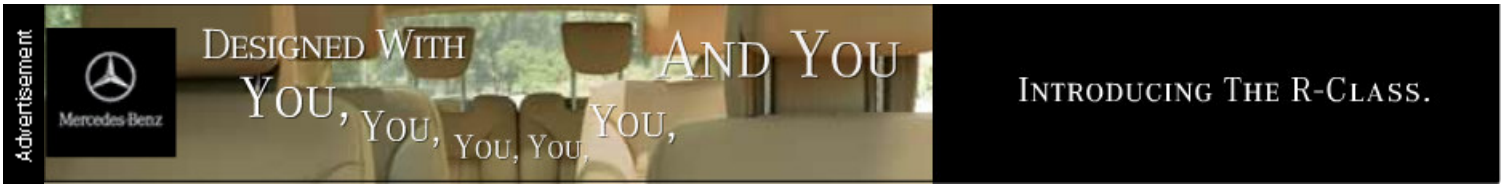

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NBA hopes unique publicity idea will fly

By Michael McCarthy
USA TODAY

Come fly with the NBA.

The NBA is teaming with Southwest Airlines to create a league-themed airplane called the “Slam Dunk One.”

The specialty plane will be announced today at the airline's headquarters in Dallas, according to Southwest spokeswoman Brandy King.

The plane's fuselage will be adorned with a customized paint job showing an NBA ball going through a basketball hoop. The moniker “Slam Dunk One” is written on the nose. Inside, passengers will see a customized interior featuring all 30 NBA team logos.

The new plane will be used as part of the league's “NBA Cares” outreach program that aims to generate $100 million for charity over the next five years. After that, it's slated to go into regular rotation among Southwest's fleet of 429 jets. The airline makes 3,000 flights a day to 60 cities in 30 states across the USA.

Slam Dunk One marks Southwest's first specialty plane in nearly 20 years. The airline launched a plane called “Shamu One” in 1986, dedicated to Shamu of SeaWorld, that is still flying.

The deal is part of a large publicity push by the NBA to hype the tip-off of the 2005-06 season. The deal shows the NBA is looking for new ways to get its brand in front of fans, according to David Carter, executive director of the University of Southern California Sports Business Institute.

“It used to be the airlines trying to get in front of sports fans. Now sports (leagues) are trying to get in front of travelers,” Carter says.

Southwest previously turned one of its aircraft into a “Finals” plane to publicize the NBA Finals in 2004.

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