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## Private jet programs allow athletes extra family time during season



### TRAVEL LOG

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**N**omar Garciaparra was a surprise guest at the Women's World Cup soccer match pitting the United States against North Korea in Columbus on Sept. 28. Garciaparra is a huge soccer fan and he is, after all, the fiancé of U.S. star Mia Hamm.

Still, his presence turned a few heads

since his Boston Red Sox teammates, who had clinched a playoff berth three days earlier, were in St. Petersburg, Fla., playing their regular-season finale against the Tampa Bay Devil Rays.

Garciaparra, who led the Red Sox in games played this season with 156, surveyed his teammates about taking a day off before approaching Red Sox officials, who gladly accommodated the request. As unusual as it was for a healthy athlete to be absent for anything short of a family emergency, Garciaparra's mini-vacation represents the growing trend of athletes using private jet travel to squeeze in time with loved ones — even during the season.

Garciaparra is a member of the Marquis Jet Partners Inc. cardholder program, which offers private jet travel in 25-hour blocks without the burdens of full or fractional jet ownership. He flew from St. Petersburg to Columbus aboard a \$10 million Raytheon Hawker 1000 jet at

a cost of \$9,500 rather than deal with the hassles of commercial travel and risk a late arrival at the match.

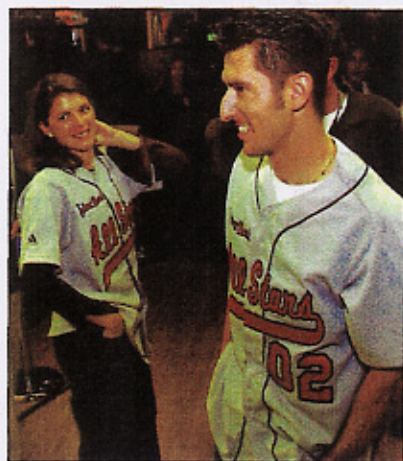
"It's not something you're going to do all the time," said Garciaparra, who flies mostly by commercial carriers, including one for his trip from Columbus to San Francisco to rejoin his teammates for the playoffs against the Oakland A's. "But there are times where if you want to be somewhere, it's the most convenient option."

In 2001, Marquis partnered with Net-Jets, the fractional ownership program of Executive Jet Inc., a Woodbridge, N.J., company owned by Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway, and began offering 25-hour blocks of travel for \$109,000 to \$330,000, depending on aircraft chosen.

Like competitors at Sentient, Bombardier Skyjet and Delta Air Elite, Marquis officials figured the service would attract team sport athletes looking for off-season air travel equivalent to the first-class, charter service they enjoy during the season.

That happened, with more than 100 athletes signing up for Marquis alone. But many pros also use the service to travel during the season. Compared with commercial travel, there's no need for connections and far less risk of delays.

Some baseball players receive permission to leave their teams following Sunday afternoon games to spend Monday off days with family in other cities before rejoining their teams on Tuesday.



Red Sox shortstop Nomar Garciaparra used his private jet membership to see fiancée Mia Hamm play in the Women's World Cup.

Roberto Alomar of the Chicago White Sox has ventured as far as Puerto Rico on an off day. New York Yankees pitcher Andy Pettitte has gone home to Texas to visit his family. In the NFL, Keyshawn Johnson of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers has gone from Tampa to Los Angeles and back, taking advantage of a Tuesday off day and typically short Monday sessions.

Players face stiff fines for arriving late for practices and games, but Marquis eliminates much of that risk by providing, at no extra cost, back-up aircraft.

"If there's something mechanical wrong with the aircraft at the last minute, the player just hops off one

plane and on to another," said Justin Firestone, senior vice president of marketing for Marquis.

Teams generally accommodate player requests, which might seem surprising were it not for a growing number of owners and club officials who subscribe to the program themselves. Marquis cardholders include Arizona Diamondbacks and Phoenix Suns chairman Jerry Colangelo, Boston Red Sox CEO Larry Lucchino and Kevin McClatchy, CEO of the Pittsburgh Pirates.

Some baseball teams benefit from the program when pitchers use the service to fly ahead of the team and get a full night's rest before their next start. Teams encourage pitchers to fly ahead but only reimburse them for the equivalent of a first-class ticket. A growing number of hurlers foot the difference rather than deal with commercial travel.

The New York Yankees, with a \$180 million payroll, lead major pro sports teams in private jet travel, with about a third of the 25-man roster subscribing to some sort of jet membership or fractional ownership program.

"We try to see the big picture and be accommodating," said Yankees general manager Brian Cashman. "It's a long season with few off days, and if we can provide the opportunity for a player to go home, especially for an important family event, we try to do so."

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