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LOCAL golfer Sasaki Oliver left for Australia yesterday morning to represent the NMI in the prestigious Johnnie Walker Classic, which will be held in Perth from Feb. 9 to 12.

Oliver, who boarded a Northwest flight to Nagoya, Japan at 8 a.m. for a connecting flight to Perth, will be playing in the Pro-Am tournament, which is a side event of Asia's richest tournament. Around AU$3 million is at stake in the annual golfest.

"I am excited about playing in the Johnnie Walker Classic. I am very fortunate to have the opportunity to play in the tournament," said Oliver, who is only the second local golfer to join the annual golfest.

Oliver's mentor, Joe "Kamikaze" Camacho represented the NMI in the JWC last year in Beijing, China. Camacho was paired with Paul Casey of the United Kingdom and shot a 10-over par 82, as he had difficulty adjusting to the freezing weather at the Pine Valley Golf Resort and Country Club.

Oliver, who claimed this year's JWC slot after topping the Championship Flight of the 2005 Saipan Tournament of Champions and having his name picked from a hat when the JWC berth was raffled off among flight winners, hopes to do better that Camacho.

"There's no guarantee that I will win. But I will be at my best to bring good results," Oliver told Variety in a telephone interview Sunday night.

After he nailed the JWC slot in August last year, Oliver participated in several local tournaments to prepare for the Pro-Am event.

He was a regular participant in the Refalawasch Golfers Association and Fil-Taga monthly Ace tournaments. He won RGA's Club Championships. Oliver also joined the Inauguration Golf Tournament last month, the Coral Ocean Point Double Peoria Tournament (December), 10th Anniversary Club at the Hyatt Golf Classic (October) and the 3rd Tinian Mayor's Perpetual Cup (September).

"I have been watching golf tournaments on TV and I saw that the world's best players, who will be at JWC, are playing on long courses so I tried playing on long courses too and worked on my driving," Oliver said. With the long course in Perth, I will be using my long irons."

This year's JWC will be played at the Vines Resort and Country Club, which is Western Australia's premier golf course. The Vines was designed by Graham Marsh and Ross Watson and has two courses, the Ellenbrooke and Lakes, which are both par-72, 7,100-yard courses.

"I received information from the organizer that I'll be paired with one of the top 15 professional golf players in the world and that's great. I'm really excited about playing. It's my first time to go to Australia," Oliver said.

The JWC will feature five of the top 15 world-ranked players. They are world No. 3 Retief Goosen of South Africa, world No. 10 and defending champion Adam Scott of Australia, European No. 1 and world No. 11 Colin Montgomerie of Scotland, world No. 12 and current US Open champion Michael Campbell of New Zealand and, world No. 14 Argentinean Angel Cabrera.

"I'm looking forward to seeing these great players and having fun in the tournament," said Oliver, who will be joined by Noriko Togawa in the Pro-Am tournament.

Togawa, a Japanese who has been residing on Saipan for the past few years, earned a slot in the JWC as she won the Ladies Flight of the Guam Governor's Cup, a JWC qualifier, last December.