

WEMBLEY WAY

Delaware North kicked off in style when it moved back into the UK catering market – the first contract it won was for the new Wembley stadium. As the £757 million, 90,000-seater venue prepares for a much-delayed launch **David Foad** looks at the catering plans



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Beyond the physical attributes of the world's largest and most expensive sports stadium, the story told by the catering numbers is impressive in its own right.

There are restaurant facilities for 15,000 people serviced by 96 kitchens, including a production kitchen in the basement that's half the size of the pitch, and a catering staff requirement that will rise to nearly 3,000 on match days.

More than £1 million has been spent on kitchen equipment, plus £1.6 million on cutlery, glassware and china with a further £2 million outlay on a range of 'miscellaneous' catering items.

As construction company Multiplex puts the finishing touches to its work this month, the new Wembley Stadium building project enters the last few minutes of stoppage time with just the outfitting of the venue, the setting up of the retail and restaurant areas and cleaning to be completed before the final whistle and the long-awaited opening.

It's been a long wait for Delaware North, which secured the 25-year stadium catering deal back in 2002 and has had to wait four years for the first chance to start work on making money from the contract.

It marks a return to the UK scene for the company after it wrapped up its UK catering operations back in the 1980's with the sale of Letheby & Christopher.

But despite the Wembley delay, Delaware North has already gone on to add another prestige stadium contract to its portfolio – the Emirates Stadium at Ashburton Grove, the new home of Arsenal FC.

Managing director of the UK operation Simon Dobson, who joined in 2004 and was formerly with Sodexo Prestige, is aware of the weight of expectation that accompanies an important contract such as a national football venue.

"The catering offer in terms of style and customer service has to be flawless at Wembley. It is absolutely crucial to the success of the project.

"We are offering something fresh and innovative, including an in-house pastry department that will produce

not only desserts but bake bread – providing a customised dimension to large volume catering.

"There are lots of niche operators who do a great job. We are taking that level of quality, improving upon it and delivering it on a grand scale," he says.

The private catering will be badged Club Wembley and range from high quality kiosk-style catering along a private concourse up to the Corinthian Club, which can cater for banquets for 1,800 or a cocktail reception for 3,250.

Delaware North plans to operate a cook-chill, plated service for banquets and a plated, cooked-to-order service in the restaurants.

PANORAMIC VIEWS

The Pitchview Room offers "exclusive" banqueting for 150 plus direct access to dedicated seating outside, while the Great Hall can seat 1,100 for formal dining while guests enjoy the panoramic view of the arrival route Olympic Way through a high glass wall from 26 metres up. It's the highest venue within the stadium.

On the north side there are two signature restaurants called The Venue and Arc which wrap around the exterior of the stadium and offer 2,000 diners at a time sweeping views over London.

In addition Club Wembley has 166 private hospitality boxes for groups of eight to 20, with one kitchen catering for every two boxes.

The public catering includes 68 bars and food outlets scattered around the three concourses round the stadium – each one a kilometer in length.

"It's three times the size of the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff and twice the size of Melbourne's Telstra Stadium," says Dobson. Telstra is catered for by Delaware North, Australia and represents part of the company's impressive set of credentials that helped win it the Wembley contract.

And Wembley will feature two innovations that Delaware North has successfully used in the USA. There's an online food and drink ordering service called Guest Reserve and a guest service programme it calls Guest First.

ABOVE
CORPORATE GUESTS
WILL ENJOY FIRST
CLASS HOSPITALITY:
OPPOSITE
AN AERIAL VIEW OF
THE FINISHED
STADIUM;
AND THREE DISHES
CREATED FOR THE
MENU OF THE NEW
RESTAURANTS