

Faithful fans call the shots at Lions' workouts

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ains, the Lions are forced into the Silverdome, and workouts are closed.

MONDAY AFTERNOON, the Lions, who were driven indoors that morning due to early rainfall, returned to the outdoor facility with the most number of fans looking on.

Win, less or draw, the Lions can be certain of one thing: The Silverdome will be filled to near capacity each Sunday Detroit plays at home. The fans — albeit a testy bunch — will come out in droves to cheer or jeer the home team.

The proof is in the numbers. Since 1975 when the Lions first made the Silverdome their home, they have drawn nearly four million fans in paid attendance. That comes out to a lofty 72,034 average paid attendance crowd. *Not bad for a stadium that holds 80,000. And given the fact the Lions are 45-61 (a winning ratio of 42 percent) during the same time period, the numbers are even more impressive.

While making my way around camp Monday, I asked some of the loyal fans what it would take for the Lions to win the title in the "Black and Blue" NFC Central Division, which also lodges Green Bay, Minnesota, Chicago and Tampa Bay.

The common opinion is the Lions need an improved defensive secondary, and, most importantly, a happy Billy Sims in camp. Sims, the star running

back for the Lions, is, as of Wednesday, engrossed in a contract dispute with the Lions' management. He is currently in the third year of a three-year contract.

"I think they have a reasonably good team," Nick Boersma of Plymouth said. "I just wonder about their depth. They should have a reasonably good year if they stay healthy. They need help from their defensive backs, though."

JIM COWPER of West Bloomfield believes help in the secondary along with better specialty teams could help the Lions improve upon last season's 8-8 record, but his biggest concern is how they perform at home.

"They need help with defensive backs and the special teams; that's where they lost football games last year," he said. "As long as they go 8-0 at home, that's all I care about. I'm a season ticket-holder."

Mark Digiovanna, formerly of Birmingham and now a Waterford resident, is pessimistic as the season draws near.

"They won't win," he said rather bluntly. "They do have the talent and the schedule is too tough."

Bloomfield Township resident Soracis (not to be confused with the Greek philosopher) Stergiou, however, is more optimistic about the Lions' chances.

"I think they'll be as good, if not bet-

ter, than any other team in the Central Division," he said. "I think they helped themselves by picking up some defensive backs in the draft, although it may be a year too late (since San Francisco reeled in the cream of the crop last year). Also, they need a happy Billy Sims."

Meanwhile, four high-school quarterbacks from Muskegon sat on bleachers erected inside the fence and cast watchful eyes on Eric Hipple, Gary Danielson, Jeff Komio, Mike Machurek and John Wangler.

THE GROUP was in town for the annual Brother Rice Quarterback Camp, and they took a keen interest in the signal-callers.

"They need Sims to come back, and they need Hipple starting," Tim Fairfield, from Reeths-Puffer High School in Muskegon, offered.

"Hipple's the best one they got," Dana Olson added.

"I think they have to go with Hipple," Jeff Jordan of North Muskegon High said. "Sure, he needs some experience but give him another year. I think he's the best."

I wondered if attending the Lions' practice session was a requisite for Brother Rice coach Al Fracassa's QB camp. Fairfield said it wasn't. "He sug-

gested it," Fairfield said, "but we were coming to watch anyway."

Dave Severson of Rochester believes he has the answer which could turn around the Lions' fortunes.

"I think it's pretty simple. I think the secondary play has to improve, and I think they need more team enthusiasm. And, of course, they have to stay away from injuries."

"They've got to have that level of intensity, and in order to achieve that, you have to be enthusiastic. You can see that in the Detroit Tigers right now. They don't have that enthusiasm, and as a result, they're failing," he added. "The Lions have to win those close games they lost last year. It's those types of things that helps generate enthusiasm. I still think they're a year away, though."

"I THINK it's all gonna depend on how well Eric Hipple does," Rich Weber of Bloomfield Hills said. "And if we get Billy Sims back."

Dave German of Rochester, along with most other Lions' fans, is concerned about the secondary and the plight of star Billy Sims.

"I think we need someone to fill in Jimmy Allen's (free safety) spot, and we need Sims back, but they shouldn't give him what he wants. He's holding



Jim Hughes

out for too much money. I like Hipple. I've seen him play, and I think he's the more dominant player. He's not afraid to take the short run."

Sisters Lori and Bea Hickey, also of Rochester, are hoping the passing game improves as well as the play of the secondary.

"I hope their defensive backs are better," Hickey said. "Wayne Smith was pretty bad last year. They need better people there."

At this stage of the game, predictions and hopes are the norm. While the Tigers start Division, fans with hopes of watching a local team in the playoffs look toward the Lions. Just like frustrated Red Wing and Piston fans looked to the Tigers to fulfill the fantasy last spring.

My prediction? Billy Sims will be

back. The secondary, with Alvin Hall filling in for the traded Spiderman Allen, and James Hunter at one of the cornerback slots, will be a shade better than last season. But that's only if Wayne Smith has worked on his man-to-man coverage.

Hipple and Danielson are the second best one-two QB combination in all of football (Danny White and Gary Hogeboom from Dallas top the list). The defense against the rush and offense with the rush again will be one of the best in the NFL.

These are all speculations. But I guarantee the Lions will average better than 75,000 fans per home game in 1982. Of course, that's barring a player's strike.

If such is the case, disregard the preceding passages. Or save them for next year.

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