

Plethora of camps keeps OU hopping

By Jim Hughes
staff writer

FORGET ABOUT those lazy, hazy days of summer. At Oakland University, it's crazy. While some colleges have a laid-back atmosphere with the main thrust of activity supplied by students in summer terms, the Rochester-based university is a hotbed for athletic action.

It's not unusual to see local television news crews and daily newspaper reporters gathered near the Lepley Sports Arena focusing in on such cele-

brated athletes as Billy Sims, Isiah Thomas, Magic Johnson, Eddie Murray, and, yes, even a fellow named Jimmie Carter.

Oakland University, which for the past 10 years has been the site of the Detroit Lions preseason training camp, also hosted Detroit Pistons all-star Isiah Thomas' basketball camp.

Thus, the media flocks to talk to Lions like Sims and Murray — and Carter, a rookie linebacker from New Mexico who bears the name of former president Jimmy Carter.

LAST WEEK, Isiah's camp had a

special guest in Magic Johnson, who turned his basketball tricks into a national championship at Michigan State and an NBA crown with the Los Angeles Lakers.

Although the media and fan attention is directed toward the professional athletes, it represents a positive image at OU.

"We get a lot of publicity from this," OU sports information director Stan Blackford pointed out. "Anytime there's a major article from the Lions camp, we're in the headlines or mentioned in the article. The publicity we get from that is unbelievable. That's one of the big benefits we get from it. It keeps Oakland University visible to the public."

The Lions camp is a welcomed attraction. Since workouts are open to the public, fans who come out can't help but get a look at the scenic and well-kept campus.

The athletic complex alone suggests the university offers more outdoor sports than just soccer, golf, cross country and tennis. In one consolidated area east of Lepley sits a fenced baseball diamond, tennis courts, a softball diamond, a golf driving range and the football field put in by the Lions.

"I was at a sports information director's convention in St. Louis, and one guy came up to me and said, 'How's that football program doing that you have there?'" Blackford recalled as he displayed a perplexed facial expression. "He said, 'You've got the Lions there, you must have a real nice facility.'"

WELL, OU DOES not offer a football program, but if that ever came about, the Pioneers would have one of the best facilities around.

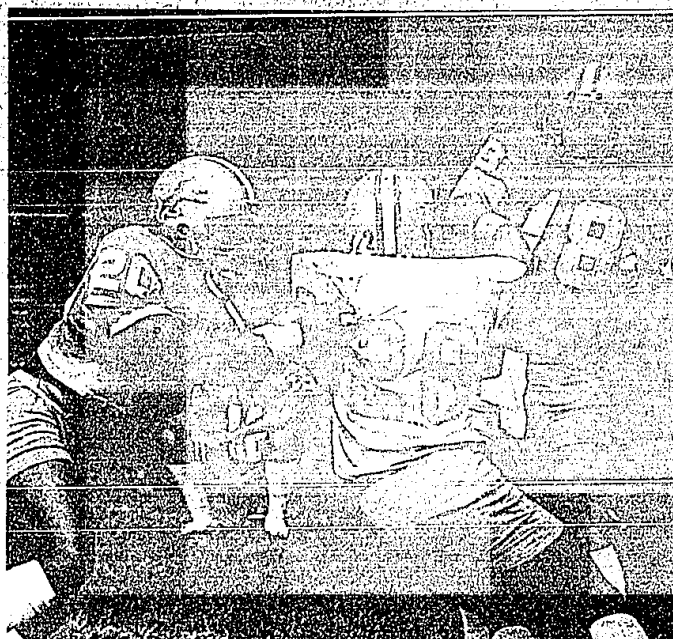
"The football field the Lions gave us is what they call a Class A field," Blackford said. "It's one of the top types of fields around, and if the Lions ever leave, OU keeps the field."

"If there ever came a time OU would offer football, the facility is there," said Blackford, who, ironically, recently returned from the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference football meeting. "All they'd have to do is put up stands. I don't know if it's in the thoughts or plans, but the facility is there."

Another benefit of having defending NFL Central Division champs on campus is the number of jobs it creates to take care of the coaches and players, which totals approximately 110 Lions personnel.

"Having them here also helps in terms of employment, through catering and equipment people," Blackford said. "It keeps about 20-25 people in jobs every year for the summer. It's 25 additional jobs for people who probably would have been laid off."

In return for the benefits OU receives, it provides housing, maintains the fields, building service and food service, all paid for by the Lions organization. By offering the facilities, the



photos by DAVID FRANK/staff photographer

Lion quarterback John Witkowski gets a pose off during a recent workout at Oakland University —

one of the many activities going on there this summer.

Lions can come in and set up shop. THE OPEN-CAGED lockers and weights were transported from the Lions home base — the Foxhills Silverdome — and portable trailer-type rooms, which the Lions use for team meetings, were donated.

"They take over a downstairs area (at Lepley)," Blackford said. "They bring in their own lockers and weight equipment."

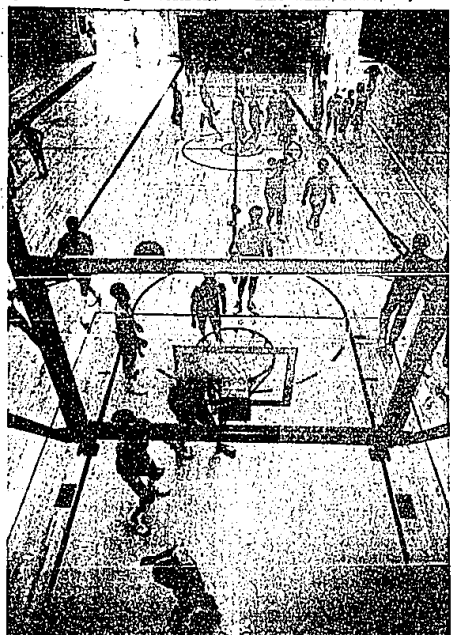
The Lions switched training camps in 1975 when they moved from Cranbrook.

"It's much closer and they have more modern facilities," said Lions public relations director Don Kremer of Oakland. "They've been very cooperative with us. That's not to say Cranbrook wasn't, it was just a matter of the proximity of the school and the facilities."

In addition to the fans the Lions camp attracts, Isiah's basketball camp drew more than 220 participants. During the early months of the season,

Oakland University staged its own camps in golf, tennis, boys and girls basketball, volleyball, soccer, swimming, motor development, strength and nutrition and an all-sports camp. Although the final numbers are not complete, Blackford estimated more than

700 attended the various camps. And the pace doesn't slacken. Beginning Tuesday, the Detroit Pistons will conduct a two-week rookie/free agent camp at the OU gymnasium. So much for a summer vacation at Oakland University.



The court at OU is also crowded as the Isiah Thomas Basketball Camp holds forth. With the activities comes publicity and OU doesn't mind that at all.

hockey

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