

## Sports

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(F1C)

## Local Lion

## Miller must prove self to pro club

## Ex-Hawk all-stater signs as free agent

By Dan O'Meara  
staff writer

In his desire to make the Detroit Lions football team, John Miller will spare no sacrifice.

The former Michigan State University and Farmington Hills Harrison star is committed to doing all in his power to impress first-year coach Wayne Fontes and his staff.

"I'll run out on the field and pick up the tee after the kickoff if that's what it takes," he said.

After being passed over in the NFL draft early last week, Miller signed a free-agent contract with Detroit on Wednesday and quickly found himself in a Lions uniform. The two-time, all-Big Ten safety took part in a four-day rookie mini-camp that concluded Saturday at the Pontiac Silverdome.

One reason the Lions signed Miller had to do with his reputation for being a hard-nosed, blue-collar player with plenty of desire.

"I'll GO out and do anything to make this team a winner, and I think they know that," Miller said. "My hustle is a reason I think I have a chance to make this team."

Miller, who starred at Harrison from 1981-1984 and still holds the school's career rushing record, also considered signing with the Houston Oilers. That move would have reunited him with former MSU defensive coordinator Nick Saban, who now coaches the Houston secondary.

Miller flew to Texas last week and talked with Saban before deciding to stay close to home and sign with the Lions.

"He said I'm going to throw my pitch at you, and when you make your decision don't think about my feelings," Miller said. "I took that to heart, and it really helped me make my decision."

"I didn't want to go there for me. I wanted to go there for him, but I had to do what was in my best interest."

Not being selected in the college draft didn't come as a shock to Miller, who considered it a letdown but not necessarily a disappointment. He anticipated having to go the free agent route.

"As things turned out, I think it was better I didn't get picked up in the later rounds," he said. "This way I was able to pick the team that was best suited for me."

MILLER'S LOW expectations for the draft stemmed in part from the results of a pre-draft screening test in Indianapolis. He didn't make a big impression on the scouts with his 4.7 time in the 40-yard dash.

Miller said he thought it had a great bearing on the draft, but he hopes to make good on his second chance and ultimately repay the Lions for giving him the opportunity.

"Being a free agent, I have to prove myself even more than the guys who were drafted," he said. "The Lions had enough interest in me to give me a shot, and I have to prove to them that I am the player I think I am."

"It's been handed to me, and now I have to take it and show them I can play in the NFL. I have to show them I'm the type of player that fits their system."

The 6-foot-2, 195-pound Miller played both strong and free safety as MSU, and he believes his knowledge of the game will enable him to learn both pro positions and thereby increase his value.

If he makes the team, however, Miller knows it will most likely be as a utility player and member of the special teams. But, as he already indicated, that would suit Miller just fine.

"I'M NOT looking to go out there and be an impact player," he said. "I'm not that type of player. I'm the type that grows into a role and gets better as the season goes on. Hopefully, that's the way things will work out here in Detroit."

"I plan to work as hard as I can, and if the coaches feel I can help the team they'll keep me. If they think I can help them in the future, that would be great because I can come along (gradually) and gain confidence."

"If I become a key player down the road that would be fantastic," he said. "I'm just ecstatic they're giving me a chance."



JIM RIDER/staff photographer

John Miller worked out with the Detroit Lions at the National Football League team's mini-camp for rookies last week. The former Harrison and MSU star signed with the Lions as a free agent Wednesday.

Miller knows how much the pros value speed, and he has heard all the talk about him being too slow. But there have been great pro players in the past who didn't have all the natural tools, and Miller believes there's still room for players like that.

"I think (the Lions) think there is, or they wouldn't have given me the shot," Miller said. "One of the coaches said 'If you learn how to position your body, a 4.8 player suddenly becomes a 4.4 player.'"

"Speed doesn't always determine how fast you get to the ball. It's how fast your feet react to the quarterback and react to what's happening."

MILLER ALSO is happy to be getting a tryout with the Lions because of the obvious hometown connection. He and the other rookies will return

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## Hawks keep slate perfect with 7-2 win

## baseball

Farmington Hills Harrison continued its amazing start in the 1989 baseball season Friday, winning its sixth game without a loss in a 7-2 win over visiting Northville.

Jason Lichtman earned the win for the Hawks, who are 4-0 in the Western Division of the Western Lakes Activities Association.

Lichtman scattered four hits in six innings, and Gary Devine relieved in the seventh. Lichtman struck out six and walked three.

Rob MacDonald had a two-run homer in the first inning for Harrison and singled in the fifth. Harrison stole six bases, with two belonging to Mill Coleman, who scored twice.

In a game played Wednesday, Harrison had 20 hits and bombarded Livonia Churchill 10-1.

"The hits are falling in," Harrison coach John Herrington said. "We're getting the key hits, and the pitching has been outstanding."

"The kids practice real hard and have real tenacity. They like to battle."

The team's earned run average is under 1.00, and ace Craig Murray has struck out 31 of the 46 batters he has faced, Herrington said.

"We haven't had to make a lot of defensive plays, because the pitching has been so good."

Starting pitcher Steve Miller, who went six innings, and Devine, combined on a four-hit Wednesday.

Jeff Skinner had three hits and three RBI, and Dan Justice was 3-for-3 with two RBI to lead Harrison's attack.

Sean Murray also hit safely three times, while Lichtman, Tim Horton and Rob MacDonald recorded two hits apiece. Lichtman also walked three times and scored four runs.

JOHN GLENN 12, FARMINGTON 4: Mark Johnston gave up nine hits Friday for Westland John Glenn's baseball team, but it was good enough to lead the Rockets to a 12-4 win over visiting Farmington.

The Rockets scored nine runs in the third inning to propel them to their fourth win in five Lakes Division (Western Lakes) encounters. Glenn is 4-1 overall, while Farmington fell to 2-3 in the Lakes, 5-3 overall.

Johnston, who moved to 3-0, walked just two and struck out none in going the distance. Bryan Vichito suffered the loss, and lasted just two innings and gave up six runs for Farmington. Scott Lakatos relieved.

Bryant Satterlee was 3-for-3 with an RBI and scored two runs for Glenn. Bob Lawrence had two hits, two RBI and scored two runs, and Eric Biever also drove in a pair on two hits.

Kevin Van Ord led Farmington's batters with three hits. P.J. Green had two hits and scored twice.

Farmington defeated North Farmington, 8-3 Wednesday at home, getting a strong seven-inning, eight-hit performance from Norm Celnake. Jeff Reje was

handed the loss, pitching 5 1/2 innings in a starting role. Just three of the seven runs Reje allowed were earned.

Green was 3-for-3 and scored three runs and knocked in two, while Van Ord and Chris Adams had two hits apiece. Joe Sturtz was 3-for-3 and scored two runs for North.

N. FARMINGTON 6, W.L. CENTRAL 5: Joe Sturtz, who is hitting over 500 for the Raiders, hit a three-run homer, and Roy Otani hit a two-run shot to lead North Farmington past the Vikings Friday at Waller Lakes.

Sturtz was 3-for-3 and had four RBI. Otani was 2-for-4. Sturtz and Chris White scored two runs each.

North, 4-7 overall, split the pitching duties between starter Paul Anders and Tim McEvilly. Anders lasted 3 1/2 innings and surrendered all six runs, three earned. McEvilly gave up three hits in 3 1/2 innings.

Farmington posted North 8-3 Wednesday as Norm Celnake went the distance for the winners, scattering eight hits.

P.J. Green had three hits, three runs and two RBI. Keith VanOrd was 2-for-4 with three RBI, and Chris Adams was 2-for-3 and scored two runs. Sturtz collected three hits for North and scored two runs.

CRANBROOK 10, CLARENCEVILLE 4: Rob Mendish stopped the Trojans Friday on a four-hitter, leading Bloomfield Hills Cranbrook to the Metro Conference win.

Clarenceville slipped to 3-4 overall, 5-3 in the league.

Don Giernan suffered the loss for the Trojans, as he left after four innings and surrendering seven hits and 10 runs. Four of the 10 runs were earned. Jeff Guzik pitched the final two innings for Clarenceville, striking out the side in both innings.

Andy Weighill was the hitting star for Clarenceville, belting two triples and driving in one run. Chris Foss had a hit in two trips to the plate for the Trojans.

Clarenceville routed Hamtramck, 15-5 Wednesday, getting a complete game from pitcher Dave Pettie, who scattered four hits.

Tim Berg had three hits — including two doubles — and drove in three runs for the Trojans.

REDFORD CC 3, COUNTRY DAY 0: Redford Catholic Central won the non-conference game behind the one-hit pitching of Mark Sanford.

CC improved to 10-5 overall, while the Yellow Jackets slumped to 6-4.

Mike Kelley was 3-for-4 with one RBI, scoring Tom Hill, who had doubled, in the fifth inning. Paul Pirocalle had CC's other RBI, knocking in a run with a sacrifice fly.

CC lost a double-header to Warren DeLaSalle Wednesday, 7-3 and 6-3.

Wenson's wish  
Big leagues next stop for pitcherBy Larry O'Connor  
staff writer

He's so close he can smell Sparky Anderson's pipe tobacco.

Only an hour's stretch of I-75 separates Paul Wenson from Detroit, Tiger Stadium and the team he followed as a child growing up in Farmington Hills.

He knows it but doesn't show it.

Otherwise, Wenson would be fretting. In only a couple appearances this season for the Toledo Mud Hens, the normally consistent right-handed relief pitcher has been shelved.

In the first three innings he pitched, Wenson gave up eight hits, four walks and sported an earned-run average of 16.22. The latter has since dropped to around 11.

NOT EXACTLY stuff that will lead anyone on the corner of Michigan and Trumbull.

But if there is any worry, concern or outright panic attacks, Wenson is keeping them under his Mud Hens cap.

After a stellar season with the Glens Falls, N.Y., Tigers in AA, the latest events are "quite uncharacteristic of the hard-working relief man."

"Let's hope they stay uncharac-



teristic," said Wenson with a slight laugh.

Therein, perhaps, lies Wenson's ultimate trump card.

Sure, he possesses a nasty slider and wicked cut fastball. He's reliable and has good control.

But his low-key demeanor is the best asset for a relief pitcher. Those qualities have led him to the front porch of the major leagues.

"A lot of guys get frustrated out there," said Toledo manager John Wockenfuss, who played with the Detroit Tigers from 1975 to 1984. "Paul stays on an even keel. Nothing riles him."

Wockenfuss should know. He's managed Wenson from A ball in Lakeland, Fla., through AAA in Toledo.

WITH GLENS Falls last season in double-A, Wockenfuss saw the biggest change. Wenson picked up a cut fastball from pitching coach Jeff Jones to go along with an already biting slider.

Wenson was 8-5 with an ERA of 2.04 as Glens Falls won the Eastern League's regular season championship.

Perhaps more impressive than his won-loss record was his strikeout-to-walk ratio. He struck out 95 while walking only 34 in 115 innings pitched.

So this season's slow start doesn't have either Wenson or Wockenfuss looking for open windows.

"I'm not worried about it," Wockenfuss said. "It's probably the cold weather. Nobody's breaking ball in the cold weather is really that good."

Like last season, Wenson appears to be geared for a season of middle relief. The role is not exactly bright lights and glamour, but appears to be the surest route to the major leagues.

Just ask guys like Paul Gibson or Don Heckel.

"Right now, that's not part of my goal," said Wenson, who received his bachelor's degree in management from the University of Michigan last

December. "I just want to pitch well on the AAA level, and further down the line that might be a goal: to pitch in the major leagues."

Wenson at least got a glimpse during spring training. He pitched in a couple of B games for the Detroit Tigers and pitched one inning of an exhibition game televised back home.

A GREEN Tigers cap from St. Patrick's Day sits in his locker as a souvenir from the experience.

With the same attitude that doesn't allow him to get frustrated by a rocky start, he's not giddy about being a hurdle away from the Tigers.

Wenson's climb in professional baseball couldn't have been faster if he took an elevator. He started at Bristol, Va., in the rookie league during the 1985 season after signing with the Tigers as a free agent out of U-M. Each year, he's graduated to the next level of professional baseball.

"It has surprised me," he said. "People usually don't move this fast. I'm not saying I'm better than anybody else. I've just been fortunate there has been an opening at each level, and they've given me a chance."



Paul Wenson of Farmington Hills began the 1988 season in Toledo, playing for the Tigers top farm team, the Mud Hens. The former U-M star was at Glens Falls, N.Y., last year.