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Saturday, June 7, 2008

Fans parade to street vendors

Heat boosts water sales, bursts balloons

Santiago Esparza and Catherine Jun / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Karen Kaffel scored the Father's Day gift to beat all others -- an official Red Wings locker room T-shirt.

She bought it for \$25 on Friday at Hart Plaza for her husband, Edward Jr., a Wings nut who could not make it downtown.

"My husband is a huge fan, but he had to work," said Kaffel of Macomb Township. "He will love his shirt."

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Food and souvenir vendors along the parade route and in Hart Plaza raked in the dollars Friday, selling carnival eats, commemorative clothing and even varieties of octopi to charged up Wings fans.

And in the oppressive record heat, cold water rated as a top seller.

"Sales are awesome right now," said Lin Parker, operations manager of Olympia Entertainment, which had four trailers selling shirts and hats along Woodward.

Parker said Friday it was too early to gauge how sales compared to the three other times the Wings brought home the Cup over the last 11 years. But she said their store in Troy was experiencing record sales.

"We are definitely selling out," she said. "Interest is about the same" as in the other years the Wings won the Cup.

Food vendors reported brisk sales, with \$6 sausages and \$3 bottles of "ice cold" water being snatched up like hotcakes at a senior breakfast, some for as much as \$3.

"We got a little competition, but we're not worried," said Arthur Haynes, 25, who said he sold more than 700 chilled bottles within a few hours.

But the record heat did hurt some commercial ventures.

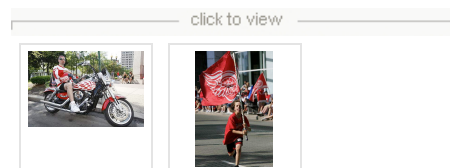
Red-and-white feathered boas, for example, did not get a big draw, as temperatures stayed in the upper 80s.

The heat also threatened Jack Mittig's one-man business.

The balloon artist bent and twisted hundreds of red, white and purple balloons into octopi at the corner of Larned and Woodward on Friday morning, selling them as headgear for \$3 each. But as the temperatures rose, tentacles started to burst in his hands.



Steve Hunter of Royal Oak waits for the parade on his Red Wings motorcycle in the heat, which hurt some sales and helped others. (John T. Greilick / The Detroit News)



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"It's getting warm and I'm going too fast," said Mittig, 68, of Flat Rock. "Once they get soft, they break faster."

But as expected in this chaotic competition for street sales, some lost and some gained.

Russ Mousa was struggling to sell \$10 Red Wings flags that affix to car windows, though they were \$5 less than those other vendors were peddling.

"This is not the way it was last time the Wings won the Cup," he said as a steady stream of people looked at his box of flags at the mouth of Hart Plaza and kept walking by. "It was a lot better. Hopefully, more people are coming."

Mike Whitty, adjunct professor in University of Detroit Mercy's College of Business Administration, said the impact of the Red Wings' win cannot be measured in just dollars and cents.

"There certainly is a boost, and you can see it today," Whitty said. "If a community's spirit is good, investors are reassured about their money. Everybody got a shot in the arm."

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