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Local News

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Painting the town red

Fans salute Wings; players return thanks

By **Norb Franz**
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Thank you!

No. Thank you!

By the hundreds of thousands, Red Wings fans flocked to downtown Detroit on Friday, standing more than a dozen deep in some places, to cheer and honor their Hockeytown heroes.

The gratitude was reciprocal, as the Stanley Cup champions thanked and applauded the jubilant throng that basked in happiness, heat, humidity and sunshine in a sea of red.

Attendance at the victory celebration was estimated at high as 1.4 million.

"This is an unbelievable experience. What a thrill!" said Dan Lawson of Warren, attending his first Cup parade and rally with his son Jamin, 27.

Lawson, new car sales manager at Heidebreicht Chevrolet, a Washington Township dealership that provided a Chevy Silverado that carried one of the players during the parade along Woodward and Jefferson avenues, said he tried to touch the Stanley Cup as it was carried past him before the start of the rally at Hart Plaza. But security knocked his arm away.



Macomb Daily staff photo by David Posavetz Nicklas Lidstrom raises the Stanley Cup to the delight of fans during the parade.

 
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The parade kicked off at Hockeytown Cafe where the team ate breakfast.

Loredana Dandu, 22, of Troy, sat on the curb in the first row of fans along Woodward, about a block north of Jefferson, finishing a posterboard sign she made for her favorite player for the past 10 years, goalie Chris Osgood. She said she admired the passion and determination on his face after allowing a goal on a long shot in the 1998 playoffs but rebounding with a win in the next game.

Very few in the crowd might have been able to read the sign shown by her friend Rebecca Pestenariu, 21, of Rochester Hills. She wrote "We love you" in Swedish, hoping it would catch the eyes of the Red Wings' Swedes. With generations of Wings fans around her, the girls' friend, 19-year-old Mihaela Iosif of Troy, admitted with a laugh, "I'm a newbie."

Diehard or bandwagon, smiles were as abundant as sunshine on this fourth Stanley Cup parade/rally in the past 11 years.

Former Novi resident Dan Trainor of Orange County, Calif., attended the 2002 Cup parade with his family. Five minutes after the Red Wings defeated the Pittsburgh Penguins 3-2 Wednesday night to clinch the Final four games to two, he booked a flight to see Friday's parade.

"No brainer," said Trainor, 20. His parents couldn't accompany him because of their jobs, and his mother waited until he left before telling his brother Brian, a high school senior, that he left to attend the celebration.

"He'd be too upset," Trainor said.

Tauna Parks of Clinton Township stood near Campus Martius Park, ready to capture the memories of the celebration on her video camera. It was her first Red Wings parade, accompanied by friends Lisa Lewis and Cindy Halas. Halas and her daughter, Sarah, both said their favorite player is Henrik Zetterberg, the Conn Smythe Trophy winner. Her daughter Jackie, an employee of Blue Cross, walked with a contingent of health insurance company employees and a corporate banner in the early part of the parade.

"They deserve to be here," Halas said of the Red Wings.

"How good is it?" said Tom Karolski, 61, of Royal Oak as assistant coach Todd McLellan passed by.

"It's awesome," McLellan replied.

Players including Osgood described the admiration from fans as unbelievable.

"This is why we win, for these fans," he told reporters minutes before the rally at Hart Plaza. "I'll play for these people forever."

Osgood said the champion "feeling" hadn't really sunk in yet - until he headed south on Woodward.

He said he had no idea what he will do with the Cup when it's his player turn to celebrate with it, and was among the last players still signing autographs for excited fans.

"Words can't describe it," defenseman Niklas Kronwall said of the public celebration and fan support. "It's kind of like being in a dream."

The last player in the caravan was captain Nicklas Lidstrom, who hoisted the Stanley Cup trophy to the delight of onlookers and amid loud cheers.

Dozens of fans swarmed behind the vehicle he rode in, sometimes cutting off the Henry Ford II High School marching band from Sterling Heights at the tail end of the procession.

Teenage fans exchanged high-fives as Lidstrom passed by with the Cup along Jefferson,

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and fans held cameras and cellular phones high to capture the image.

A four-time Stanley Cup champion who this week became the first European-born captain of a Cup-winning team, Lidstrom later said: "Players who haven't been through (these parades) don't know what to expect."

"It's an unbelievable thrill today to come down Woodward Avenue and see the passion of Hockeytown," coach Mike Babcock said from the rally stage. He applauded team owners Mike and Marian Ilitch and then the players.

Listening in the front row of fans along a barricade at Hart Plaza was Chris Brock, 23, of Holland, and his girlfriend, Emily Sharpe of Plymouth. They grabbed the prime spot at approximately 7:45 a.m., and waited patiently while watching the parade portion on a huge television.

"It was worth it," said Sharpe of her first Red Wings championship celebration. "It's great for the city of Detroit."

Not so great for Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick,

Thousands of fans booed loudly throughout his 30 seconds of remarks in which he praised individual players and joked that "the beer's on me" for the celebration. He may have seen red if he spotted at least a few vulgar gestures directed his way.

A few fans showed their political preferences in other ways. One held an "Ozzie for President" sign. A large, red and white "Henrik Zetterberg for President" banner was attached to a building above the parade route along Woodward.

Meanwhile, a stuffed penguin in Red Wings attire hanged from an open window on the sixth floor of the Honigman Building.

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