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Friday, June 6, 2008

Stores score on Wings win as red-and-white goods fly off shelves

Merry fans flock to retailers for Stanley Cup commemorative gear

Jaclyn Trop / The Detroit News

Mere hours after the Red Wings' Stanley Cup-winning goal, local retailers, T-shirt makers and other memorabilia merchants were enjoying their own big score Thursday as Metro Detroiters clamored for victory souvenirs.

Throughout the day, shoppers at Hockeytown Authentics in Troy lined up around the store and out the door in a rush to buy Wings hats, T-shirts, jerseys and key chains. Many were after gear that proclaimed the 2008 Stanley Cup win -- some of it printed overnight after the Cup was clinched.

A crowd manager employed by an outside security firm stood at the door, telling newcomers whether the item most in demand -- a \$35 white locker-room cap like the ones donned by players right after the winning goal -- was in stock. The store received a new shipment at 12:15 p.m. and sold out of them by 1 p.m.

Advertisement

Sales for Wings merchandise started slowly this season, as fans took a "hold back, wait and see" approach, according to Michael Bernacchi, a marketing professor at University of Detroit -- Mercy. But the suspense and drama of the playoffs and championship now will give a nice boost to the region's economy.

"The best thing that ever happened for sales was the triple overtime loss," he said. "This is the best economic stimulus package Detroit can have."

Financial concerns did not appear to deter shoppers Thursday, as many spent more than \$100 on T-shirts and other souvenirs.

Hana Kashat, an account manager from Troy, paid \$123 for three white caps -- for herself, her husband and her sister.

"I'll probably be back for the locker-room T-shirts," she said, "but right now I'm out of money."

Similar queues ebbed and flowed all day throughout Metro Detroit as fans celebrated by snapping up commemorative gear.

Helen Dornfried of Ferndale planned on spending the day traveling from store to store for hard-to-find Wings merchandise. She spent \$60 at J.C. Penney on three T-shirts before donning one of the shirts and entering Hockeytown Authentics.

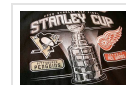
"They're the home team," she said. "You have to like all your home teams."

Wearing a Wings hat covered with 20 pins from the team's previous Stanley Cup wins, Dornfried bought five more pins, a keychain and teddy bear for \$50.



Throughout Thursday, shoppers rush into Hockeytown Authentics in Troy to buy Red Wings memorabilia. The item most in demand was a \$35 white locker-room cap. The store received a new shipment at 12:15 p.m. and sold out of them by 1 p.m. (Charles V. Tines / The Detroit News)

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Hockey heroes

Playoff berths propelled Penguins and Red Wings gear to the top of the charts, analysts say. Here's a look at the Top 10 teams in merchandise sales for the past four months:

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Source: Sports One Source

On the way back to her car, hearing that a fresh supply of caps had arrived, Dornfried doubled back and waited in line for close to half an hour to buy one.

Red Wings officials weren't available to discuss the volume of licensed merchandise sales, but analysts say that the Stanley Cup-fueled boon in merchandise sales could last through the end of the year.

"Generally, the halo effect carries on for some time," said Matt Powell, analyst at Sports One Source, a New Jersey consulting firm. According to Sports One

data, demand for Wings gear has been second only to Penguins merchandise for the past 17 weeks.

Though the 48 hours following the win will be most lucrative, Powell said. "The rest of this week will be massive. The rest of the month will be very good, and the next six months will be fine."

Powell said that online business, including sales from eBay memorabilia such as Game 1 jerseys and pucks that have flown into the stands, can be expected to eclipse in-store sales, given the NHL's estimation that 80 percent of fans do not live in the city of their favorite team.

Merchants without the Stanley Cup items languished.

The Motor City Sports Gallery, which sells autographed sports memorabilia several storefronts over from Hockeytown Authentics, made one sale by lunchtime. Though several customers requested Wings merchandise, owner Joe Morgan turned them away, explaining he does not expect to receive any Stanley Cup products for five to seven days.

Morgan said he thinks that demand for photographs and framed memorabilia, which sell for between \$100 and \$179, will hold steady over the next few months. He also sells Red Wings jerseys for dogs for \$24.99. "People are calling from all over the place to get these," he said.

Tom Wodniak of Macomb spent \$70 and half an hour in line for hats for himself and his family. He would have bought more hats if the store's supply had not run out. "By the time I called everyone to see if they wanted one," he said, "they were gone."

You can reach Jaclyn Trop at (313) 222-2300.

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