

Drafting Detroit Pride

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PHOTO | Ian DuVernay



ACHIEVING GOALS | As Detroit has evolved throughout the years, Detroit Sports Commission Deputy Director Marty Dobek notes the vitality of hosting the NFL Draft and other sporting events Downtown to showcase the thriving city. “We’re on a great win streak right now as a city,” Dobek said. “The momentum is strong, and it’s continuing to grow. Through our work, we’re playing a small part by bringing events here and putting Detroit on a platform to tell our new story and showcase our great city that we all know and love.”

As Honolulu Blue flooded the streets of Detroit on April 25-27, one aspect stood out to Detroit Sports Commission Deputy Director Marty Dobek — the sense of community fostered by Lions fans as a result of the 2024 National Football League Draft. The city of Detroit has been a city notorious for its lack of safety and economic decline, however it has recently been experiencing a revitalization. The Lion’s triumph last season and Detroit’s role as host for the draft have brought a diverse group of people together, showcasing our city’s accomplishments.

Working for a nonprofit organization that aims to bring sports fans to Detroit to help businesses flourish, Dobek and the Detroit Sports Commission are partnering with the NFL to host the annual football draft. Through having

the event in the heart of the city, Dobek hopes to uplift the community by bringing visitors to Detroit.

“Everybody working collaboratively towards one goal of using the NFL draft to tell Detroit's story by bringing these visitors and fans to the city, they get to experience the advancements of the city and all the great things that are taking place right now.”

MARTY DOBEK
Detroit Sports Commission Deputy Director

that tune in to watch the Draft every year. It's anywhere between 50 and 60 million people that watch the NFL Draft over the three days.”

Throughout the Draft, sports fanatics make their way downtown including senior varsity football player Ryan Henderson who notes

the significance of fans from all NFL teams converging to celebrate the first-ever Draft in his hometown.

“I think the Draft being held in Detroit is cool as it is something that rarely ever happens and you can see people that like all teams,” Henderson said. “It’ll be very exciting, much like the games because of our [the Lions’] success recently.”

Piloting off the Lions’ success in their 2023 season, head football coach Joe Drouin acknowledges the upbringing in the city surrounding the team’s victories. With both new and returning fans coming together to support Detroit, Drouin believes the pride surrounding Detroit sports teams and the draft will help strengthen the city as a whole.

“I think a lot of it has to do with pride,” Drouin said. “Detroit has been down for a long time in terms of economics, in terms of wanting to go to Detroit. It’s bringing people back into the middle of the city — Comerica Park, Ford Field, LCA [Little Caesars Arena] — all the sports teams are there. It’s a sense of pride in the city, that blue-collar work ethic that people have from Detroit, in the suburbs. They want to be a part of something. People look for a winner, people want to be involved with the winner. The fact that the Lions are doing this great thing with the culture, it’s bringing a Renaissance.”

While the streets will be flowing with traffic, thrilled fans, and local families, Dobek prioritizes making the event accessible to individuals in the community. Through partnering with local groups and striving to meet community needs, the NFL Draft will help bring the community together in unison according to Dobek.

“We want to ensure that we are impacting the community through critical needs of the community,” Dobek said. “We’ve done a great job with this hosting effort and connecting minority, diverse businesses with opportunities with the NFL Draft and other local businesses too. At the end of the day, how is this impacting our people, our residents, our youth? That’s why we wanted to host the Draft. We wanted to ensure that we are touching on everybody and making sure that they feel part of this event. The great thing about the Draft, [is] it’s a free event [and] it’s accessible. We’ve been trying to be inclusive with our intentions and hosting and executing this event.”