

detroit lions quarterbacks history

Detroit Lions quarterbacks history is a tale woven through the fabric of American football, marked by highs and lows, legendary performances, and moments of despair. The Detroit Lions, a storied franchise in the National Football League (NFL), have experienced a myriad of quarterbacks who have donned the Honolulu blue and silver over the decades. From the early days of the franchise to the modern era, the evolution of the quarterback position has played a crucial role in shaping the Lions' identity and fortunes. This article delves into the history of quarterbacks that have made their mark on the Detroit Lions, examining their contributions, achievements, and the broader context of their tenures.

The Early Years: 1930s - 1950s

The Detroit Lions were established in 1930, originally as the Portsmouth Spartans before relocating to Detroit in 1934. In these formative years, the quarterback position was not as prominent as it is today, with teams relying heavily on the running game. However, a few notable quarterbacks emerged during this era.

Key Quarterbacks of the Early Era

1. Dutch Clark (1934-1938): One of the first stars of the franchise, Clark was a dual-threat quarterback who combined passing and running effectively. He led the Lions to their first playoff appearance in 1935 and was a two-time All-Pro.
2. Bob Waterfield (1950-1955): Although he spent only a few seasons with the Lions after joining from the Los Angeles Rams, Waterfield was instrumental in establishing the passing game. His accuracy and leadership helped the Lions secure their first NFL championship in 1952.

The Golden Era: 1950s - 1960s

The Lions enjoyed considerable success in the 1950s, winning multiple championships. This era showcased some of the most influential quarterbacks in the franchise's history.

Legendary Quarterbacks

1. Milt Plum (1956-1963): A steady performer, Plum was known for his consistency and accuracy. He helped lead the Lions to three NFL championships during his tenure.
2. Greg Landry (1968-1978): Landry was a dynamic dual-threat quarterback who redefined the position for the Lions. Known for his strong arm and mobility, he became a fan favorite and set numerous franchise records during his time in Detroit.

The Struggles of the 1970s and 1980s

The 1970s and 1980s were tumultuous decades for the Lions, marked by instability and a revolving door at the quarterback position. While some quarterbacks showed promise, none could bring sustained success.

Quarterback Carousel

1. Bill Munson (1969-1976): Munson had a solid career, but he could not elevate the team to playoff contention consistently. His best season came in 1971 when he threw for over 3,000 yards.
2. Eric Hipple (1981-1989): Hipple became a starter during a difficult period for the franchise. He had a few productive seasons, including a 1986 campaign where he threw for over 3,000 yards and led the team to the playoffs.
3. Scott Mitchell (1994-1997): After a successful stint with the Miami Dolphins, Mitchell brought optimism to Detroit. He posted impressive stats, including a 1995 season in which he threw for over 4,000 yards.

The Barry Sanders Era: 1989 - 1998

The arrival of Hall of Fame running back Barry Sanders in 1989 shifted the focus of the Lions' offense, but it also impacted the quarterback position. The Lions struggled to find a consistent starter during this period.

Key Quarterbacks During Sanders' Tenure

1. Dave Krieg (1991-1994): A veteran presence, Krieg provided stability and experience. He reached the playoffs with the Lions and had a notable 1993 season where he threw for over 3,000 yards.
2. Charlie Batch (1998): Batch showed flashes of potential but was ultimately unable to secure a long-term position as the starter.

The 2000s: A New Century of Challenges

The 2000s were marked by struggles for the Detroit Lions, including the infamous 0-16 season in 2008. The team cycled through numerous quarterbacks, searching for a franchise player.

Prominent Figures of the 2000s

1. Joey Harrington (2002-2006): Drafted third overall in 2002, Harrington was expected to be the franchise quarterback. However, he struggled with consistency and was ultimately released after four seasons.
2. Jon Kitna (2006-2008): Kitna provided a brief resurgence, leading the Lions to a 7-9 record in 2006. Despite his efforts, the team still struggled to achieve significant success.
3. Matthew Stafford (2009-2020): Drafted first overall in 2009, Stafford became the face of the franchise. Known for his strong arm and resilience, he set numerous franchise records, including most career touchdown passes. Stafford led the Lions to the playoffs three times but faced criticism for the team's inability to win a postseason game during his tenure.

The Post-Stafford Era: 2021 and Beyond

The departure of Matthew Stafford to the Los Angeles Rams in 2021 marked a new chapter for the Lions. The franchise began a rebuilding process, searching for a new franchise quarterback to lead the team into the future.

Current Landscape and Future Prospects

1. Jared Goff (2021-Present): Acquired in the Stafford trade, Goff had a rocky start in Detroit. However, he showed signs of improvement in 2022, helping the Lions to a competitive season and establishing himself as a potential long-term solution.
2. Young Talent: The Lions have also focused on developing younger quarterbacks and building a strong supporting cast. With a solid offensive line and emerging talent at the skill positions, the future looks promising for the Lions.

Conclusion

The history of the Detroit Lions quarterbacks is a reflection of the team's overall journey through triumphs and tribulations. From early stars like Dutch Clark to the franchise-altering arrival of Matthew Stafford, the Lions have seen a diverse array of quarterbacks contribute to their legacy. As the team continues to evolve, fans remain hopeful for the next chapter in their quarterback saga, where the Lions can finally break free from the chains of historical disappointment and forge a path to success in the NFL. The evolution of the quarterback position remains central to the Lions' ambitions, making it one of the most intriguing aspects of their ongoing narrative in professional football.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is the all-time leading passer for the Detroit Lions?

Matthew Stafford is the all-time leading passer for the Detroit Lions, holding the franchise records for passing yards and touchdowns.

What year did the Detroit Lions draft Matthew Stafford?

The Detroit Lions drafted Matthew Stafford as the first overall pick in the 2009 NFL Draft.

Which Detroit Lions quarterback is known for their performance in the 1950s and leading the team to three NFL championships?

Bobby Layne is known for his performance in the 1950s and led the Detroit Lions to three NFL championships in 1952, 1953, and 1957.

Who was the first African American starting quarterback for the Detroit Lions?

Andre Ware became the first African American starting quarterback for the Detroit Lions when he started games in the early 1990s.

What notable record did Matthew Stafford set during the 2011 NFL season?

In the 2011 NFL season, Matthew Stafford set a franchise record for passing yards in a single season, throwing for over 5,000 yards.

Which Detroit Lions quarterback famously wore the number 11 and had a strong connection with wide receiver Calvin Johnson?

Matthew Stafford famously wore the number 11 and had a strong connection with wide receiver Calvin Johnson during their time together.

Who was the starting quarterback for the Detroit Lions during their last playoff victory in 1991?

The starting quarterback for the Detroit Lions during their last playoff victory in 1991 was Erik Kramer.

Which Detroit Lions quarterback had a short but impactful career, known for his 'Hail Mary' throw in a 1970 game?

Greg Landry is known for his 'Hail Mary' throw in a 1970 game and had a notable career with the Detroit Lions.

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