

Detroit Lions Quarterback History



Detroit Lions quarterback history is a fascinating journey through the annals of the NFL, characterized by a mix of star performances, frustrating seasons, and a fan base that has endured the highs and lows of professional football. The Detroit Lions, established in 1930, have seen a myriad of quarterbacks under center over the decades, each leaving their mark on the franchise in unique ways. From Hall of Famers to promising prospects, the story of Lions quarterbacks is one of resilience, talent, and, at times, heartbreak.

Early Years: The Formation of a Franchise

The Detroit Lions were originally founded as the Portsmouth Spartans in 1930, before relocating to Detroit in 1934. The early years of the franchise saw a number of quarterbacks, but the position did not become a focal point until the introduction of more advanced offensive strategies.

The 1930s and 1940s: The Struggle for Stability

In the early years of the franchise, the Lions faced considerable challenges in establishing a consistent quarterback. Notable names included:

1. Dutch Clark (1934-1938): One of the first stars of the Lions, Clark was a versatile athlete who played multiple positions, including quarterback. He was known for his passing ability and leadership on the field.
2. Bob Dedeaux (1940-1941): Dedeaux had a brief stint but was notable for being part of the team during its formative years.

The Lions did not find significant success until the late 1950s, but these early quarterbacks laid the groundwork for the future.

The Glory Years: 1950s to 1960s

The 1950s and 1960s marked a golden era for the Detroit Lions, highlighted by championship victories and standout performances from their quarterbacks.

Leading the Charge

1. Bobby Layne (1950-1958): Perhaps the most iconic quarterback in Lions history, Layne led the team to three NFL championships (1952, 1953, 1957). Known for his toughness and charisma, Layne's leadership on and off the field made him a beloved figure in Detroit.
2. Milt Plum (1957-1960): After Layne's departure, Plum took over as the starting quarterback and helped lead the Lions to several competitive seasons, although they struggled to replicate Layne's success.

During this period, the Lions established themselves as a dominant force in the NFL, thanks in large part to their quarterback play.

The 1970s and 1980s: A New Era of Challenges

Following the glory days of the 1950s, the Lions entered a challenging period characterized by inconsistency at the quarterback position.

Key Quarterbacks of the 70s and 80s

1. Greg Landry (1968-1978): Landry brought a new dynamic to the quarterback position, known for his ability to run and pass effectively. He was a Pro Bowl selection in 1971 and remains one of the more respected figures in Lions history.
2. Gary Danielson (1976-1984): A solid performer who provided stability during a tumultuous time for the franchise, Danielson was known for his strong arm and competitive spirit.
3. Eric Hipple (1980-1989): Hipple took over as a starter during a time of transition for the team. He led the Lions to the playoffs in 1982 and 1983, showcasing the potential for success.

Despite the individual talents, the Lions struggled to find consistent success in the playoffs during this time.

The Barry Sanders Era: 1989-1998

The arrival of Hall of Fame running back Barry Sanders transformed the Detroit Lions franchise, and the quarterback position became crucial to maximizing Sanders' talents.

Quarterbacks in the Sanders Era

1. Scott Mitchell (1994-1997): Mitchell took over as the starting quarterback after a successful stint with the Miami Dolphins. He had a Pro Bowl season in 1995, leading the Lions to the playoffs and becoming a key player during Sanders' prime.
2. Dave Krieg (1996-1997): A veteran presence, Krieg provided stability in his later years and helped mentor younger players during his time with the Lions.

While the Lions enjoyed some playoff success in the 1990s, they were unable to reach the Super Bowl, which continued to be a source of frustration for fans.

The 2000s: A Decade of Transition and Turmoil

The 2000s were a tumultuous time for the Lions, marked by coaching changes and struggles to find a franchise quarterback.

Notable Names of the 2000s

1. Joey Harrington (2002-2005): A highly touted draft pick, Harrington struggled to live up to expectations. Despite showing flashes of potential, he was unable to lead the Lions to consistent success and became a polarizing figure among fans.
2. Jon Kitna (2006-2008): Kitna brought a competitive edge to the quarterback position but ultimately could not reverse the team's fortunes. His leadership was appreciated, yet the Lions continued to struggle as a franchise.

The 2000s were marked by a lack of stability, leading to a growing sense of frustration among Lions fans.

The Matthew Stafford Era: 2009-2020

The selection of Matthew Stafford as the first overall pick in the 2009 NFL Draft marked a turning point for the Detroit Lions. Stafford's arrival brought renewed hope and excitement to the franchise.

Stafford's Impact

1. Record-Setting Performances: Stafford quickly established himself as one of the league's most talented quarterbacks, breaking multiple franchise and NFL records, including the fastest player to reach 20,000 passing yards.
2. Playoff Appearances: Under Stafford's leadership, the Lions made the playoffs in 2011, 2014, and 2016. While they struggled to advance past the first round, Stafford's performances provided optimism for the future.
3. Leadership and Resilience: Stafford's toughness and commitment to the team endeared him to

fans. He played through injuries and consistently put the team on his back during difficult seasons.

Though the Lions never reached the Super Bowl during Stafford's tenure, he remains a significant figure in the franchise's history.

The Post-Stafford Era: 2021 and Beyond

In 2021, the Lions traded Stafford to the Los Angeles Rams, marking the end of an era and the beginning of a new chapter for the franchise.

New Faces and Future Prospects

1. Jared Goff (2021-Present): Acquired in the Stafford trade, Goff has brought a different dynamic to the quarterback position. While he faced challenges during his initial season, he has shown signs of growth and potential under head coach Dan Campbell's leadership.
2. Quarterback Development: The Lions have focused on developing young talent and establishing a strong team culture, aiming to return to competitiveness in the NFC North.

The future remains uncertain, but the Lions appear to be building a foundation for sustained success.

Conclusion: A Legacy of Resilience

The Detroit Lions quarterback history is a testament to the resilience of the franchise and its fans. From early struggles to moments of glory and the hope for future success, the journey through various quarterbacks reflects the complexities of professional football. As the Lions continue to evolve, the legacy of the quarterbacks who have donned the blue and silver will forever be woven into the fabric of the franchise. The hope for a Super Bowl appearance remains a compelling narrative, one that fans dream will soon become a reality.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who was the first starting quarterback for the Detroit Lions?

The first starting quarterback for the Detroit Lions was Dutch Clark, who played from 1934 to 1938.

Which Detroit Lions quarterback is known for throwing the most touchdown passes in a single season?

Matthew Stafford holds the record for the most touchdown passes in a single season for the Detroit Lions, with 41 touchdowns in 2011.

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.

Who was the starting quarterback for the Lions during their last NFL Championship win in 1957?

Milt Plum was the starting quarterback for the Detroit Lions during their last NFL Championship win in 1957.

Which Detroit Lions quarterback famously wore the number 20?

Eric Hipple famously wore the number 20 as the quarterback for the Detroit Lions during the 1980s.

How many Pro Bowl selections did Matthew Stafford earn during his time with the Lions?

Matthew Stafford earned three Pro Bowl selections during his tenure with the Detroit Lions.

Who were the Lions' quarterbacks during the 2000s?

The Lions had several quarterbacks during the 2000s, including Joey Harrington, Jon Kitna, and Matthew Stafford.

Who is the Detroit Lions' all-time leader in passing yards?

Matthew Stafford is the Detroit Lions' all-time leader in passing yards.

Which quarterback led the Lions to their only playoff victory since 1991?

Scott Mitchell led the Lions to their only playoff victory since 1991, which occurred in the 1991 season.

What notable record did Bobby Layne set during his time with the Lions?

Bobby Layne set the record for the most consecutive games with a touchdown pass, a record that stood for many years during his time with the Lions.

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