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Sports are more than just sports

For years, Detroit has been the prime example of a failed city, synonymous with bankruptcy, poverty, and corruption. Despite all this, the people of Detroit have continued to endure and bounce back from the things that held them down in the past. Abandoned and run-down neighborhoods are beginning to flourish with life; downtown and midtown areas have been rebuilt into some of the best in the country, population growth for two years in a row, and violent crime rates dropping to historic lows in 2025. This change is not only seen in the city but also in the revitalization of the Detroit sports scene on the field, the court, and the ice.

First, let's begin with some background on the city of Detroit and how it went from a symbol of failure to hope and grit. The beginning of Detroit's decline started with the riots of 1967. The riots triggered mass migration to the surrounding suburbs, which started a chain reaction. According to the Economic League, between 1970 and 2010, the population of Detroit dropped by 61.4% and due to the relocation of major automotive companies and plants, employment dropped by about 50%. These major losses, combined with government mismanagement, all came to a head when Detroit became the biggest municipal entity to file for bankruptcy in 2013. Since then, Detroit has continued to rebound from the tragic circumstances that caused it to fail in the first place. Employment and average income are up, while, according to citydata.com, Detroit's crime index is at 732.6, an all-time low since the state has been recorded. Also, according to [state of the city address](http://stateofthecityaddress.com), by former mayor Mike Duggan, 1 billion

dollars has been invested into affordable housing. This bounceback would not have been possible without the incredibly strong and resilient people who live in the city of Detroit. Their tough underdog personality created the very identity of the city, and everyone involved in the city has taken notice and adopted it. As Detroiters continued to fight for their city, it inspired government officials to fight and improve the city for them. This underdog bounceback mentality the city adopted not only affected municipal improvements, but bled into the identity of the sports teams that represent the city.

The first example of this is the Detroit Pistons basketball team. From 2010-2020, the Pistons have been a bottom-five team in the NBA with a total record of 314 wins and 478 losses. Since the 2021 season, though, the Pistons have adopted the tough, gritty attitude of the city. With a promising young core of Cade Cunningham, Jaden Duren, and Ausur Thompson, the Pistons made the playoffs for the first time in six years in the 2024 season, and have started this season as the 2nd best team in the league.

The Detroit Tigers and Red Wings are also doing very promising things in the MLB and NHL, respectively. The Tigers had a very good season and capped it off with a division title. Players like Tarik Skubal have redefined Detroit baseball and given the team hope to make deep playoff runs in the future. The Red Wings have also drastically improved since 2020. Young stars like Lucas Raymond and Moritz Seider have taken their win total from 19 to 40 since the 2021 season and have put them in playoff contention for the first time in years.

Finally, the best example is the Detroit Lions football team. For almost the past two decades, the Lions have been the football embodiment of futility, with the second-worst record in the league between 2000 and 2020 (119-216-1). Over the past 4 years, though, with the hiring of Dan Campbell, the Lions have quickly bounced back and become one of the best teams in the

league. Under Dan Campbell, the team has embraced a Gritty, blue-collar identity, synonymous with the city that it represents. This is apparent in the viral clip of Dan Campbell describing the identity of the team moving forward, where he says, “This team will take on the identity of this city,... It’s been down and found a way to get up and overcome adversity.” The team has fed off the attitude of the city and now serves as a representation of the recovery that Detroit is going through. Their recent success in the playoffs hasn't only affected the team but it has given the city hope for a brighter future, one in which Detroit can win.

This collective sports momentum is not being shown in just the world of sports, though. It represents a broader civil and economic transformation in the City of Detroit. The Sports world is both a mirror and a catalyst for the improvement of Detroit. They reflect the overall improvement of the city through success in sports by using the same underdog mentality that the City used to bring itself back from the brink of failure. The people use the sports teams as pillars of the community, rallying behind their success and taking it as their own, which pushes the community forward even more.

When the Lions take the field, the Pistons tip off, or the Tigers throw the opening pitch, they are not just playing games; they are dramatizing the comeback of Detroit in real time. Every touchdown, every Buzzer-beater, and every strike thrown is a reminder that Detroit is not a lost cause. Although there is more work to be done to fully bring the city back to its glory, the revitalization of the Detroit sports scene has provided a sense of unity and pride, bringing back the culture of the city of Detroit. Now, as the city and population, we have to continue to move forward and improve, just like the teams that represent our city. The cultural shift that the sports world has brought us needs to be used to continue to foster real change.

Works Cited

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