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## Red Wings shine bright through Hockeytown struggles

Last Updated: Saturday, May 30, 2009 | 4:35 PM ET [Comments 10](#)[Recommend 23](#)

By Brandon Hicks, [CBC Sports](#)



1997. (Dave Sandford/Getty Images)

The Detroit Red Wings have won four Stanley Cups since

You don't have to look too hard to see what's going in Detroit right now.

A quick glance at any major news outlet will paint a grim picture — abandoned homes, empty storefronts, and darkened skyscrapers dot the landscape, all the result of a crushing financial crisis that has blindsided an already-struggling city.

That's why a Red Wing Stanley Cup parade at the end of the playoffs might mean more now than any of the others before it.

"It means a lot, especially to this city," said Megan Dieringer, manager of Cheli's Chili Bar in downtown Detroit.

"It is Hockeytown."

The bar sees both sides of the city's fortunes. It's in the heart of the Motor City, feeling the full effects of the auto industry's massive decline.

"It's rough in Detroit," Dieringer said. "After the summer was over we went to limited hours, [because] there's not many people out.

"It's hard to get people down here to spend their money. We can't argue with anybody on that because we've cut back our menu, trying to save money."

But at the same time, Cheli's is front and centre when it comes to the Wings — a team that's a bright spot in a city that desperately needs one.

Owned by veteran Red Wings defenceman Chris Chelios (hence the name), it's frequented often by Wings fans, who sometimes catch a glimpse of Cheli and his teammates in the bar celebrating successes and cursing failures.



### Spitfires lift Windsor

Want an example of what a win might mean to the beleaguered city? All you need to do is look across the Detroit River.

Windsor, Ont., has been one of the hardest hit Canadian cities in the financial crisis. Thanks to the auto industry crisis, the city has Canada's highest unemployment rate.

But for a little while at least, Windsor was on its feet, uplifted by the play of its junior hockey outfit, the Spitfires.

In a gritty come-from-behind performance typical of the city, the 'Spits became the first team in the 91-year history of the Memorial Cup to win the trophy after dropping the first two games, defeating Kelowna 4-1 in the final on May 25.

Thousands of residents took to the streets for hours after the team won, and thousands more lined the victory parade route down Lauzon Road a couple days later.

"When you turn on the local news, all you hear is bad news," third-year winger Eric Wellwood, from nearby Oldcastle, told The Canadian Press. "So it's awesome to be a good news story for the people around here."

"The response we have received from not only our fans, but the entire community, has been overwhelming," Bob Boughner, 'Spits head coach and Windsor resident, added.

With the Wings, it's often success. The squad is among the best sporting franchises in North America over the past decade and a half, winning four Stanley Cups in that time (including one last season).

"The Cup's here at least three or four times before it goes out on the road," Dieringer said.

And the longer this playoff run goes, the better business gets for the downtown core.

"With these finals coming up we'll have a tent and both floors open," she said. "There will be people out for at least a week and a half."

With people out and about for the finals, it means money for the downtown core. A fair bit of it, according to Steve Violetta, senior vice-president of business affairs for the Red Wings.

Citing an Anderson Economic Group study done last year, Violetta said that every home game for the Wings in the Stanley Cup final last season was worth \$3 million US. That isn't counting the other home dates in the previous three rounds of post-season play.

"We like to think we are one of the good stories that are coming out of Detroit right now," he said. "It's definitely something people can rally around."

Even though the team's highly successful, it's still not immune to what's going on in the city.

"The interest in the Red Wings has never been higher probably than it is right now. You can just tell by the TV numbers," he said, which saw Game 5 against Chicago become the highest-rated show in the history of the television network Versus.

"But we've realized that not everybody can afford to come to games anymore," he said.

"We're competing with bread and milk now."

### Win would lift city

Which is why he says a Cup win this season, even though the Wings won last year, would do wonders on the Detroit psyche.

"If we were lucky enough to do it again this year, with what's gone on in the last 12 months, I'm sure we will be taking it up two or three notches from last year in terms of emotion and pride for the city," Violetta said.

When contacted, the City of Detroit's finance department said it's too soon to tell how much this Red Wings' playoff run is worth financially. But for captain Nicklas Lidstrom, it isn't about the money made.

"I think we bring a lot of happiness to people that are hitting some tough times, and we even saw that last year, winning the Stanley Cup," he said.

"People that showed up at the parade, for example, supporting us, coming to the Joe [Louis Arena] for the games.

"This [year's] playoffs it's been the same way. People are really showing their support. It's been a hard couple years here in Michigan and it hasn't really been getting any better.... Maybe people can put that aside and enjoy watching the Wings play and we can bring some excitement back for the fans."

When everything's all said and done, it might end with another visit to Cheli's by Lord Stanley himself.

"We're waiting for our boss to bring the Cup hoisted over his head again," said Dieringer.

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**Jackson\_cage** wrote:Posted 2009/06/02

at 10:37 AM ET Tried and true Oilers fan here, but I like both the Pens and the Wings. I like good, well-coached hockey teams that play the game as a team, and both Pittsburg and Detroit fit the bill. To be honest I don't really care who wins as long as we see a long series (so start winning a couple games Pens!). Last year I was happy to see the Wings win so a fellow Newfoundlander would get his name on the Cup (this year I was hoping for a Detroit-Boston final so we'd have a hometown boy on each side). So this year I seem to be rooting a bit more for the Pens, but I will be perfectly happy no matter who wins (provided it's good hockey, and it's been pretty good so far).

One thing though about the Wings, they are definately one of the classiest organizations in professional sports, and that class goes from the ownership and management right down the line to the support staff. If there's a team in the League that "deserves" to be the champ, it is without a doubt the Detroit Red Wings.

I am glad their team's success has been giving Detroit residents something to cheer about, and I hope the economic situation starts to improve. In the meantime, I except to see alot of smiling faces during the Stabnley Cup parade!

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- [0](#)

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**feidbak19** wrote:Posted 2009/05/31

at 5:30 PM ET Go Osgood Go!

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**wapiabi** wrote:Posted 2009/05/31

at 1:37 PM ET I wish the people of Detroit luck and hope their economic struggles end soon.

I can't wish the same for the, over-paid, over-blown, over inflated ego, hockey team, sorry.

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**michiganhockey** wrote:Posted 2009/05/31

at 10:25 AM ET It is amazing to me to ONLY hear how great Sidney Crosby is, when Henrik Zetterberg totally shut him down last night. Z ,totally schooled the young kid on face offs. Please enough with the Crosby is so great crap! It is really getting annoying to those people who know it takes "A Team" to win the cup. Please I paid good money for my Finals Beer & Brats. Don't make me loose my dinner over anymore of this nonsense. Go Wings!!!!!!!!!!!!

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- [7](#)

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**geewally** wrote:Posted 2009/05/31

at 9:58 AM ET Canadians should share in the Red Wings' fun. There is no reason to hate or envy the Red Wings and their fans. Michiganians have done much more to benefit Canada that Pennsylvanians ever did or could. Stop fretting about all our Europeans. We have plenty of Canadians as well.

The Red Wings' all time record in the finals is 11-11. Eight of those losses have come against Toronto (1-6 !) and Montreal (3-2). The Red Wings franchise has paid plenty of dues to the Canadian franchises.

I wish that Toronto or Montreal were in the finals, so that we could work on improving our records against them, but they have had their time in the sun. Unfortunately for their current fans, most were not around way back then.

I hope the Red Wings can finally push their finals record over .500. We haven't been there since 1954.

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