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Fan Psychology During a Losing Season

At 0-13, what are Lions fans going through?

That depends on their level of identification with the team. The casual fan may be able to just break off or lose interest, but the fans that strongly identify themselves as "a Lions fan" will experience emotional highs and lows depending on wins and losses. You'll often hear fans say "we won" ... but less identified fans will say "they lost"

If they go 0-16, won't the fans just give up or root for someone else?

The casual fan might, but the die-hard fan typically stays loyal to their team. They also tend to blame the team's failures on officiating or bad luck rather than skill.

Some fans get very intense and emotional ... what is that about?

Research has shown that die-hard fans are more physically aroused during games than casual fans. Men show more than a 25% increase in testosterone levels after a win and more than a 25% drop in testosterone levels after a loss – so those physical feelings related to outcomes are real! Emotionally, a fan's mood will go up and down with their team. After wins, fans tend to be more optimistic about their own lives and after losses the opposite is true.

Why do fans care so much?

There are a couple reasons:

- 1. <u>To belong</u>: By nature, human beings are social and want to be part of a group. Sport teams allow us to relate to each other around the Lions. This desire to belong is stronger than the win-loss record as evidenced by groups such as Cubs fans who loyal despite 100 years without a championship.
- 2. To escape: Times are hard now, and the sport world gives fans an opportunity to escape the financial crisis, their normal life, and personal stressors.

But with all this losing, is being a Lions fan bad for you?

Actually it can still be good for you. Research suggests that people who follow sports tend to generally enjoy higher self-esteem than those uninterested in sports. Intense involvement with a team can buffer people from depression and foster feelings of self-worth and belonging. There is also evidence that such a sense of belonging offers some protection against physical illnesses.

So do you have any advice for Lions fans as we approach 0-16?

Remain a fan, but get some distance. It can be difficult to have so much emotional investment dependent on results that are entirely out of your control. Try not to expect them to win <u>or</u> lose. Expectations create the sense that something has already happened. If we expect them to win, we are bitterly disappointed when they lose. If we expect them to lose, we are already upset before kick-off. Enjoy the process and challenge of competition.

(For more thoughts on the Lions 0-16 season, go to Dr. Eddie's interviews on the Media page!)