

BERINIO	LUCTON
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AADI/ M. OWIDE	CABABAN COC

MARK McGWIRE SAMMY SOSA Didn't homer; went The Cardinals did not 0-for-4 at San Diego. play Thursday. Games 63 Homers Homers 67 Pace Pace * Played suspended game this season; will play total of 163.

63

66

Detroit Free Press



Ray knew the rules, but agents don't play that way

arcus Ray knows better. He's a senior, he's a captain, he had all last year to hang with his buddy Charles Woodson and witness, up close, the vultures that come swirling when you have NFL potential. He's seen fast talkers. He's seen the jewelry and the nice suits and the fast cars.

Marcus knows the rules. He knows that, as long as you are a college player, you can't associate with agents. Period. Can't let them buy you lunch. Can't take a "tiny token of their appreciation." Can't look the other way when they pay for a hotel room, which is one of the things he is now being accused of doing. The simple formula is this: If you're a college football star, you see an agent coming, you head the other way.

Marcus allegedly didn't, at least in one incident in Ohio over the summer. This was not a case of him hanging too closely with Woodson or Woodson's agents. Woodson wasn't involved. No, this is about Marcus Ray, a good kid, a leader. And Michigan fans stunned by his suspension from the football team Thursday should prepare for the worst: If the current accusations prove true, Ray might have played his last game for the Wolverines.

Now, that's harsh, I know. And I hate even writing the sentence, because I have a real problem with the NCAA and its archaic set of rules. They govern under an outdated, dictatorial and often hypocritical system considering how they cluck their tongues at money for athletes, yet gobble it up themselves.

But the issue is not whether I like the rules. The issue is whether Marcus Ray broke them. Ray, a strong safety who is arguably the team's best defensive player, is insisting he is innocent. I hope he is.

I also hope he can prove it, with documentation. Otherwise, a lapse in judgment could cost him the rest of his college career.

Innocent till proven guilty

Now, let's get a few things straight here. 1) Ray must be given the chance to prove his innocence: Remember, we're talking about a studentathlete, not a criminal. Even if he did what he is accused of doing, it is against the rules, not against the law. If Marcus claims this is a case of mistaken identity, or a set-up, or someone's vendetta, well, let's check it out. In the high stakes, envy-filled world of college athletics, stranger things have happened.

2) Just because U-M suspended Ray does not necessarily mean he's guilty. Michigan has learned, through recent sad experience, that the best way to handle even a whiff of impropriety is to take immediate action yourself, rather than wait for the NCAA to crack its whip. Thus, by suspending Ray for Saturday's game against Eastern Michigan, they fire a preemptive strike against NCAA action.

3) Suspending Ray is actually protecting the team. Should he be found guilty of any infractions later on, any game he played in would have to be forfeited.

4) This incident — if there indeed was an incident does not mean that Michigan is running a "dirty" program. Nor does it mean that Lloyd Carr can't control his team. Year after year, the U-M players are lectured about the NCAA rules. I know. I have been there for some of the lectures. Carr has law-enforcement people come in. He has FBI people come in. He does the best a coach can do: He makes sure his players know the rules and where he stands on them. He cannot live with them 24 hours a day — especially over the summer, when Ray's infraction allegedly took place.

"Every year, I talk to every one of our players who has NFL potential," Carr said Thursday. "I tell them, if you want to go to the pros, you can go. But if you stay here, you have to abide by the rules. I tell them. I tell

You can tell them until you're blue in the face. Sometimes it doesn't make a difference.

It's happened before

Ask Bo Schembechler. The man who symbolizes coaching discipline was duped by two of his players back in the '80s, Garland Rivers and Rob Perryman. Despite at least five conversations about the dangers of agents, despite posting a sign in the locker room with photos of agents Lloyd Bloom and Norby Walters under the caption "STAY AWAY FROM THESE MEN" — despite all that, Rivers and Perryman signed contracts with them while still playing for Michigan.

Schembechler blew a gasket when he found out, and severed all ties. But he couldn't prevent the damage.

Nor could Penn State's exalted Joe Paterno, whose star running back, Curtis Enis, took gifts last year from an agent, but lied about it to Paterno. Enis was suspended, and immediately jumped to the pros. Same problem befell the celebrated John Calipari while he was coaching the Massachusetts basketball team. Marcus Camby, a star player, accepted gifts from an agent, but never told Calipari. Ultimately, UMass had to forfeit its 1996 NCAA semifinal title.

It happens all the time. And the agents keep coming. They know the trouble they can cause a kid just by showing up. They keep coming. There are few things more pathetic than watching some of these bloodsuckers cuddling next to young talent, complimenting them, laughing too hard at their jokes, acting as if they're a big brother, when all they see are dollar signs.

But they keep coming. And Marcus Ray knew what they looked like. He says he didn't do anything. I have my fingers crossed for him. Last January, in an interview, Ray beamed as he told me, "I want next year to be my coming-out party."

This wasn't what he had in mind.

To leave a message for Mitch Albom, call 1-313-223-4581.

Yzerman sets a new goal — 20 years

By Jason La Canfora Free Press Sports Writer

TRAVERSE CITY — Steve Yzerman, the longest-serving captain in NHL history, wants to finish his career with 20 seasons in a Red Wings uniform.

If he does, he would play five more seasons.

Within 12 months, Yzerman will meet with general manager Ken Holland to discuss how to finish his career in Detroit. Negotiations on a three-year contract extension likely will begin by next summer. Yzerman has two years remaining on his current deal worth about \$5 million a season.

"Twenty seasons would be a good number, and hopefully I can reach that, and it's going to be five more effective ye ars," said Yzerman, 33. "If they're not ef fective years, then it won't be 20 years. For now, that's what I'd like to set my signits on.

"I've been very fortunate that it's worked out this well in Detroit and our teraim has been very strong the last couple of years. Hopefully, we'll continue to do that, and I'll be here until I retire."

Yzerman has played longer in Detroit than any Red Wing other than Gordie Howe (25 years) and Alex Delvecchio (24). Only Boston's Ray Bourque (19

years) has a longer current tenure with a

Yzerman, the Wings' first draft pick in 1983, has grown up with the organization, suffered through lean years and playoff failures, adapted his game to fit coach Scotty Bowman's defensive nature, battled personal and team criticism, and emerged as an unprecedented leader and Conn Smythe winner as playoff MVP.

The Red Wings think Yzerman

Please see WINGS.



U-M's Ray

suspended;

contact with

agent alleged

BY NICHOLAS J. COTSONIKA

Months after Michigan won

its first national football champi-

onship in nearly 50 years, the

Wolverines' fortunes have gone

from bad to worse. They lost

back-to-back games to begin the

fall, and Thursday they lost one

Safety Marcus Ray, a fifth-

year senior and captain who was

All-Big Ten last season, has

been suspended indefinitely

while U-M investigates allega-

tions that he had improper con-

tact this summer with a sports

nor athletic director Tom Goss

would comment specifically on

the allegations, which the

NCAA, acting on a tip, brought

tions center around an incident

that involved possible payment

for lodging or entertainment.

day, and Goss said U-M de-

clared Ray ineligible as a pre-

caution. Had Ray continued to

play, and later been found to

have broken NCAA rules, U-M

would have forfeited any vic-

NCAA) gets information from

different sources," Goss said. "A

source could be anyone. But

you can't take sources lightly,

because you can't play games

will not discuss cases. But Jane

Jankowski, an NCAA spokes-

woman, said "it's customary for

the institution to review the in-

formation in a case such as this

one and then send it to the

Carr said he expected a "fair-

The NCAA enforcement staff

with ineligible players."

"From time to time, (the

tories in which he appeared.

Ray did not practice Wednes-

Ray denies any wrongdoing.

Sources indicated the allega-

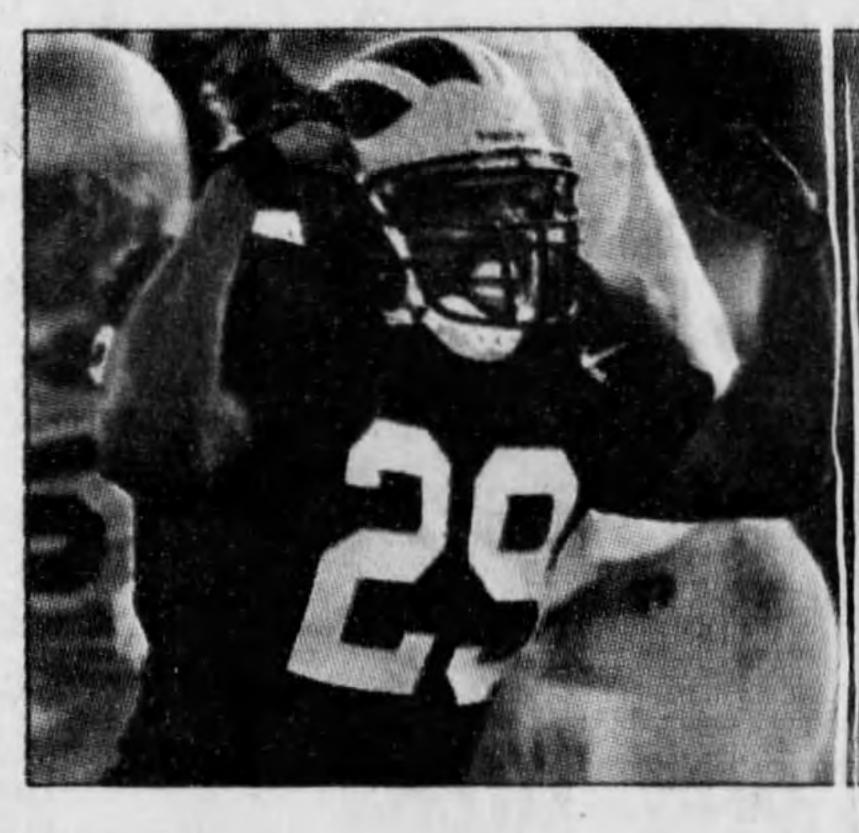
to U-M's attention Tuesday.

Neither coach Lloyd Carr

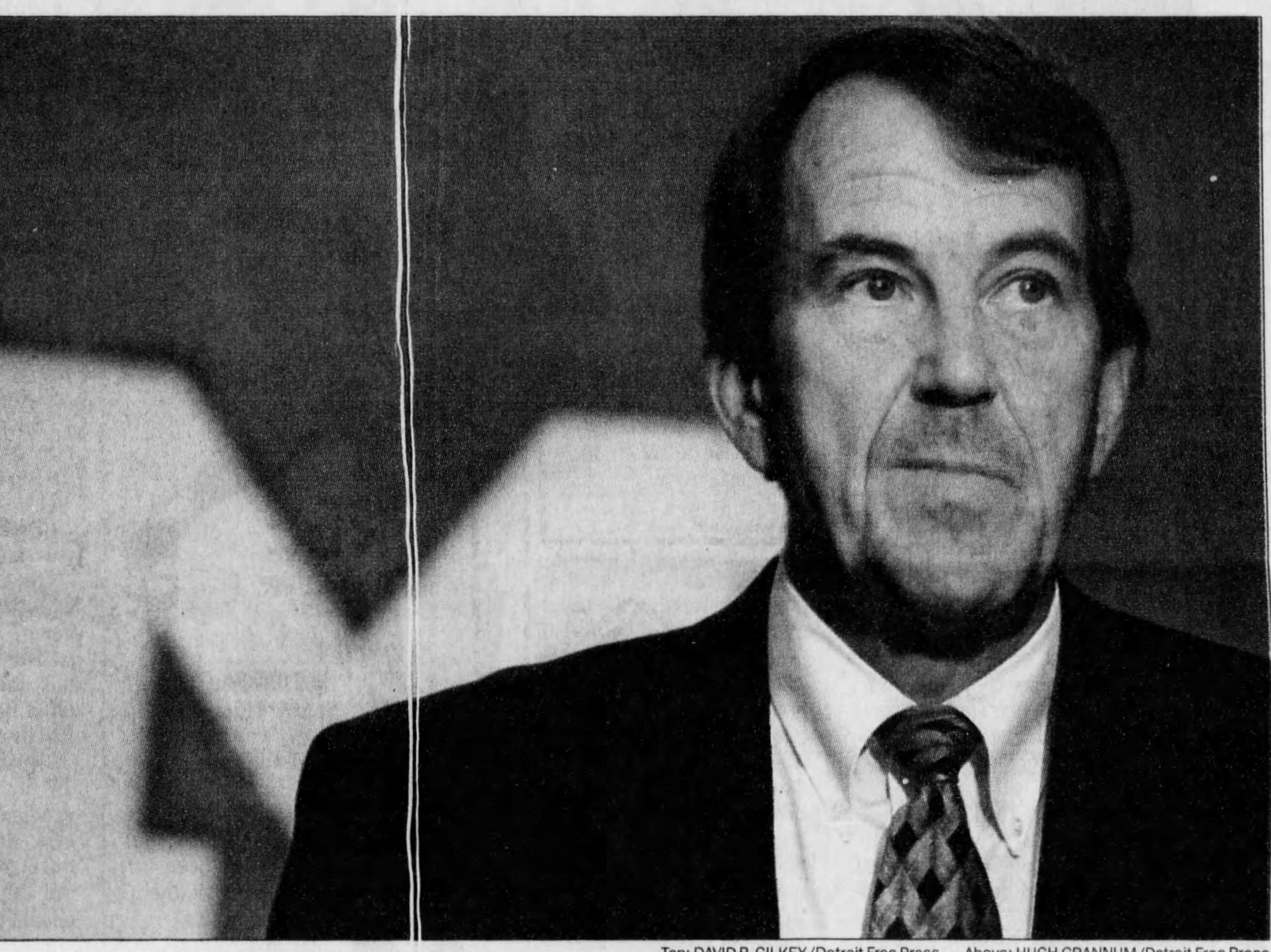
Free Press Sports Writer

of their top players.

agent.



Defense takes another hit



Marcus Ray, top, could miss anywhere from one game to the rest of the season. U-M coach Lloyd Carr, above, said: "There are people out there who prey on intercollegiate athletes, and I can't tell you in a public forum what I think of them."

Eastern, playing for pride, can't lose

efore his plans for this weekend suddenly and drastically changed, Charlie Batch thought he would do just about anything if he could turn back the clock for one game. Or even for one snap.

"You know that Charlie would love to have this opportunity," said Walt Church, Batch's successor as Eastern Michigan's quarterback. "He never backed down from a bigtime challenge, and he could have shown over 100,000 fans at Michigan what those of us

who had seen him for years here had already known." They do play football at Eastern Michi-

gan, producing an occasional NFL-caliber player. And there will never be a more pride-swelling, chest-thumping moment of alumni than this weekend.

Not only will they meet Michigan for Please see DREW SHARP, Page 3C

the first time in 67 years (0-5 DREW since 1896), Batch will become the first EMU quarterback to take a snap in an NFL game, let alone start.



Around the popular student hangouts you see people advertising their allegiance with more conviction than usual, looking forward to this weekend with a rather masochistic

Eastern is about to be sacrificed on the football altar Saturday in Ann Arbor. And Batch, making his NFL debut with the

Lions, must contend with salivating defensive linemen and linebackers drawin to the scent of fresh quarterback

The chances of dual embarrassments are great, but few seem to care around the cluaint, unassuming campus in Ypsifor these 23,000 students and their scores lanti. All that matters is that they're

ON THE DECLINE

Michigan's defense, No.1 in the country last season, was riding high until:

E CORNERBACK CHARLES WOODSON, the Heisman Trophy winner, announced in January that

he would skip his senior season for the NFL draft. ■ THE SECOND HALF against Notre Dame, when the Wolverines gave up 30 points after holding a 13-6 lead.

INJURIES HIT THE linebackers, especially Sam Sword, Clint Copenhaver and Ian Gold.

■ THE WOLVERINES FACED Syracuse guarterback Donovan McNabb, who staked the

Orangemen to a 38-7 lead after three quarters. ■ NCAA STATISTICS REVEALED Michigan ranked 84th in total defense, 96th in rushing and scoring defense, and 107th in pass-

efficiency defense. ■ SENIOR CORNERBACK Marcus Ray - the defense's emotional leader - was suspended Thursday.

Just the facts

■ MATCHUP: Michigan 0-2, Eastern Michigan 1-1.

■ WHEN: Noon Saturday.

WHERE: Michigan Stadium, Ann Arbor.

■ TV: Channel 7 in Detroit. LINE: Michigan by 35.

ly quick" resolution to U-M's investigation, which Goss said is being conducted mainly by com-

NCAA for review."

Please see U-M, Page 3C



Kevin

Abrams

Free Press Sports Writer

By midweek, Lions corn erback Kevin Abrams was back to his old self again.

That's what they were say ing. At practice the other clay, as Abrams covered his received, Lions secondary coach Richard Selcer was encouraging him in a drill, yelling, "Squeeze the ball! Squeeze

the ball! Good! Very good!" Later, coach Bobby Ross chatted 28 overtime loss. with Abrams on the practice field. In

were asking about him, just to make sure he was OK.

All this extra attention was not without reason, of course.

It is never a good thing when a defensive player commits a critical error that leads to a touchdown for the other team. That was what happened Sunday, when Abrams was burned on a 70-yard pass for Cincinnati's opening score in the Lions' 34-

In light of everything that has

dome - Scott Mitchell's demotion from starting quarterback to third string — Abrams' situation was one the coaches were determined not to let get out of hand.

Meaning this: The Lions will not head to Minnesota for Sunday's game at the Metrodome with a cornerback controversy.

"If he was the Titanic, he would never sink," Selcer said of Abrams. in his second year from Syracuse. "He has the perspective to handle Please see LIONS, Page 6C

the ups and the downs. He felt very responsible, and he should.

"But what he's got to do is bounce back. But that comes from within. He has to have a personal feeling that he can recover from those things."

While he was benched for a few plays in the fourth quarter against the Bengals — "He was struggling a bit," Selcer said — Abrams didn't deliver such a grave performance

Abrams, with encouragement, puts blown plays behind him happened this week at the Silver-By Jo-Ann Barnas the locker room, a few teammates