

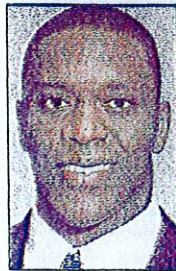
Organizers schedule next football classic for 2008

By Bill Shea

CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

Robert Porcher is working to get multiyear deals in place for teams to play in the **Detroit Football Classic** and expects to announce details for the 2008 game by the end of summer.

The former **Detroit Lions** defensive lineman, who co-founded the classic in 2002, said earlier this month the game at **Ford Field** between teams from historically black colleges is taking a one-year hiatus because a financial



Porcher

agreement with **Alabama State University** and **Grambling State University** couldn't be reached in time for this season.

This would have been the fifth classic, but would have been played in November because of scheduling conflicts with the schools. The first four were played on Labor Day weekend.

Porcher declined to say what it costs to stage the game, or what financial issues kept the schools from reaching a deal. He did say the event costs more than \$1 million to hold and promote.

"We just could not get the numbers worked out between the schools and it didn't make sense to prolong it any longer," he said.

Now, he's going to pursue a three- to four-year deal for teams to play starting in 2008, preferably on Labor Day weekend. Porcher also is beginning to seek a broadcast deal.

He said Grambling and Alabama State won't be candidates in 2008, but could be in the future. He said he has a short list of the most popular historically black college football powerhouses, but declined to name teams.

Boosting attendance is another goal. Last year, **Delaware State University** beat **Florida A&M University** 34-14 in front of 29,713 fans. The first Detroit Football Classic, between Florida A&M and Alabama State, was played in front of

more than 54,000.

Andy Appleby, chairman and CEO of **General Sports and Entertainment L.L.C.** in Rochester, said an attendance decline wasn't surprising.

"(The game is) a little bit of a victim of its own success," he said.

Appleby doesn't believe a year off will hurt the event.

"It's the type of event that you can take a year off with," he said. "It's sort of a cultural event, a new event each year," he said.

Mike Dietz, president and director of **Dietz Trott Sports & Entertainment** in Bingham Farms, disagrees.

"It's not a good idea to take a year off because you lose continuity," he said. "People that are used to going and are looking for it, it's suddenly not there."

That's not the only worry, Dietz said.

"The organizers also risk losing an awesome weekend date to another event. That could be a prime date for another organizer," he said. Next year's game will be up against the second year of the revived **Detroit Belle Isle Grand Prix**.

The classic is one of the best-attended football games at the venue after the Lions, said Risa Balayem, director of communications at Ford Field. The stadium also hosts an annual **Eastern Michigan University** game, the **Mid-American Conference** championship game and the **Motor City Bowl**.

"We'll definitely hold the Labor Day date for (the game)," she said.

Porcher said he has assurances from his major sponsors, which include **Ford Motor Co.**, **Comerica Inc.**, **Fifth Third Bank** and **Pepsi**, that they'll be back in 2008.

Porcher, who retired from the Lions in 2004 and is chairman of the **Detroit Metro Sports Commission**, is a graduate of **South Carolina State University**, a historically black school. He is president of **Detroit Football Classic L.L.C.**, which he co-founded with local restaurateur Frank Taylor in 2002. Porcher is vice president of Taylor's Detroit-based **Southern Hospitality Restaurant Group L.L.C.**

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