

After missing half of Detroit's Sept. 16 game with a mild concussion, Kitna returned in the fourth quarter to gut out a 20-17 win. Then he fell to his knees on top of the Lions' midfield logo and linked hands with teammates and foes in a postgame prayer circle.

As reported by David Fleming
ESPN The Magazine

Detroit Demolishes New York in Playoff

Detroit - Dex Mantigo, New York's newly minted Director of Special Player Acquisitions was shaking his head after Detroit dismantled his team 67-12 on Sunday.

"There'll be changes made," he growled in the dressing room afterwards while pockets of his players were kneeling in prayer and one, Howard Stemple, was being baptized in the shower.

Despite a porous O-line that allowed Detroit to harass New York quarterback Tim Lego all afternoon sacking him an unprecedented eleven times, a suspect secondary that continually lost track of receivers for big gains and touch-downs and puzzling coaching decisions like the fake field goal on first and goal in the second quarter that led to a turnover, Mantigo put his finger on an entirely different problem.

"They outprayed us," he said simply.

Certainly the number of Detroit demonstrations of faith – highlighted by quarterback Hinton Sores being lifted by team mates to the crossbar of the upright and assuming the position of the savior on the cross – had to be some kind of record for a playoff game.

Not to be outdone New York tried to fight back with their own show of religious fervor but try as they might they never came off right. Most conspicuous was Tim Lego's attempt to go down on one knee for an unexpected moment of prayer on second and long. His head was still down when the ball went sailing over his head into the end zone where it was recovered by Detroit for a major.

"We'll be beating the bushes and revival tents for players who can kneel down in a timely fashion and be counted," promised Mantigo. "We're talking football fundamentals and nothing says fundamentals like fundamentalists."

First on his list was a locker room Deacon who can also play right guard. Abdul Mohammed, the Islamic incumbent is due to become a free agent and has clashed with management in the past.

After the game he took some responsibility for the loss but also took a jibe at the people running the club.

"They dissed me again," he complained. "During the third quarter I had to come out for prayers and they couldn't or wouldn't point me in the direction of Mecca. I had to guess. After the game a Detroit player told me I was facing General Motors. No wonder we lost."

The unhappiest man in the locker room was unquestionably kicker Bill Kemper. An admitted atheist he accounted for all the New York scoring and went 4 for 5. His lone miss - a fifty-seven yarder that bounced off the crossbar when the score was almost close at 42-6 - was most often mentioned (off the record) by team mates as the straw that broke the camel's back.

"Oh, yeah," said one, "Up to that point I thought Jesus was going to lead us on a comeback but when the heathen missed I pretty much knew it was over. We all did. Jesus doesn't help guys like him."

Kemper's future is in doubt. Next year is an option year and despite leading the league in field goal percentage, punting yards and average hang-time his career may be in jeopardy.

Mantigo won't say if Kemper's on his hit list but he doesn't sound optimistic either.

"Nobody's job is safe right now. We've been scouring the southern states for Baptists and Pentecostals with speed, size and good hands and we've got our sights on several holy prospects."

Even with that next season won't be without its challenges.

"We may have to consider some Lutherans," he admitted, "For the skill positions."