



IRWIN R. DAUGHERTY/TRIBUNE

Picked off: Cardinals cornerback Aeneas Williams (35) is congratulated by teammate Larry Centers (37) after one of his two interceptions against Cowboys QB Troy Aikman. Williams limited Dallas receiver Michael Irvin to just 4 catches for 32 yards.

Cardinals tough at both corners

Chavous, Williams team up to cut Dallas off at pass

BY SCOTT BORDOW
THE TRIBUNE

IRVING, Texas — It was midway through the season when Arizona Cardinals rookie safety Corey Chavous made a promise to Aeneas Williams.

If they ever put me at cornerback, he said to Williams, quarterbacks will start throwing your way.

"Corey, he likes to talk," Williams said. "He could be a preacher. When he tells you something, sometimes you have to laugh."

This time, though, what Chavous said was true, and the Cardinals are laughing all the way to Minnesota.

Arizona's 20-7 domination of Dallas was certainly a team effort, but the stars may have been the tandem of Williams and Chavous.

Williams intercepted two Troy Aikman passes and shut down Michael Irvin to the tune of four harmless catches for 32 yards. Chavous had five passes defended and an interception nullified by a questionable pass interference call.

Their blanket coverage helped Arizona's defensive front, which had not dumped Aikman in the two regular-season games, register four sacks.

"I can't say enough about the job Corey and Aeneas did," defensive coordinator Dave McGinnis said. "We challenged them and they accepted it."

The challenge was to stop Dallas' passing game even while the Cardinals were loading up against the run. Arizona often played a five-man defensive front in an effort to contain Emmitt Smith. That took a

linebacker out of the play and meant more man coverage.

"It felt great to know that our secondary was forcing Aikman to hold the ball longer than he wanted to," said defensive end Andre Wadsworth. . . . "It gives the defensive front a lot of energy knowing that guys behind you are shutting their men down."

Williams' blanket on Irvin wasn't unexpected. The last time the teams met, Williams stopped Irvin's streak of 117 consecutive games without a catch.

"I don't want anybody looking at me like I did a great thing," Williams said. "Corey was just making them throw my way."

That Chavous played so well was a surprise because it was his first playoff experience but not a shock because he had played so well since being inserted into the starting lineup six games ago in place of an injured Tom Knight and ineffective J.B. Brown.

"This is what I expect out of Corey Chavous," McGinnis said. "There are a lot of guys who get paid to play the game and not as many who are professionals. Corey Chavous is a professional."

And a loquacious one. Chavous held court for about 20 minutes in the Cardinals locker room.

"I felt like I was the guy they were going to attack," Chavous said. "I had to step up to the plate."

And he had no doubt he would.

"I'm a confident guy," he said. "It takes a lot for me to lose my confidence."

On Saturday, the Cardinals might have finally found a permanent partner for Williams.