

YOU DON'T SAY

What others wrote about the Cardinals making the playoffs

ANDY NEWBERRY,
Scripps-Howard News Service:

For the Cowboys to have any hope in the playoffs, the Troy Aikman, Emmitt Smith, Michael Irvin, Billy Davis and Eric Bjornson who played the second period last Sunday better show up this Saturday afternoon to take on the red-hot Arizona Cardinals.

If they do, the Cowboys can dream a scenario where they beat the Cardinals, upset 14-2 but playoff sibling Atlanta and return to Texas Stadium to play San Francisco or Green Bay.

It does seem like a far-fetched idea. But sweeping the NFC East would have seemed ridiculous in July, and predicting a 17-point quarter by this offense would have been totally crazy Sunday.

I'm still not ready to proclaim Dallas a contender, but Sunday's execution level should make them a favorite against Arizona.

T.J. SIMERS, Los Angeles Times:

On the bright side, there's still a chance Paul Tagliabue will wake up, use his power as commissioner and declare the Arizona Cardinals out of the playoffs to protect the integrity of the National Football League.

If the officials — now there's a group that should be dumped in the best interests of football — do not make a Vinny Testaverde-short-of-the-goal-line-like ruling and award the Cardinals their only touchdown, they lose to the San Diego Chargers and miss the playoffs.

... Yet the playoff-bound Cardinals had to kick a 52-yard field goal on the final play of the game to beat San Diego, 16-13, in Sun Devil Stadium, the site for next week's Fiesta Bowl. If matched against the Whelihan-directed Chargers (5-11), the winner of Tennessee-Florida State would be 10-point favorites.

DAVID MOORE, Dallas Morning News:

... It's difficult to imagine that Dallas has any doubts about its ability to beat Arizona. This is, after all, a franchise that went more than six years in the 1990s without a victory over the Cowboys. Dallas has put the Cardinals in their losing place 16 of the past 17 times they have met.

Strong safety Darren Woodson concedes the Cowboys should "feel like we have the upper hand going into this game" before quickly retreating behind the company line.

THOMAS GEORGE, New York Times:

The Cardinals are in the playoffs for the first time in 16 years. That is nearly surprise enough for them. But why not more? They can win at Dallas.

Arizona quarterback Jake Plummer is playing with style and pizzazz. The Cardinals know the Cowboys. The teams are division rivals who play twice a year every year, so Dallas is not a team that scares the Cardinals.

If Arizona beats Dallas, it will have to play at Minnesota in a game that at first glance will be way over its head. But first things first: just winning that first playoff game. The Cardinals have not won a playoff game since 1947.

LISA OLSON, New York Daily News:

Chris Jacke's 52-yard field goal sailed cleanly through the uprights, and for the first time since forever, the Arizona Cardinals were going to the playoffs. Somehow you knew it would end like this, with :03 left on the clock and the final NFC wild card spot at stake. The Cardinals never make it easy.

This time, at least they made it.

A sold-out Sun Devil Stadium, as rare in the desert as snow, stood en masse for the final quarter, waiting for one last holiday gift. Finally, Jacke's field goal dislodged 71,670 hearts from 71,670 throats and it was the Cardinals — not the Giants, not Tampa Bay — heading to Dallas for Saturday's playoff game.

Cardinals 16, Chargers 13.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus.

... No, the most amazing scene was the Cards, NFL deadbeats since relocating from St. Louis in 1988, pulling off their third straight down-to-the-wire win. Each time it was Jacke's foot edging Arizona closer to what quarterback Jake Plummer calls "the promised land," first in Philadelphia with a field goal in OT, then last week against the Saints, and now this.

TODD HARMONSON,
Orange County Register:

Arizona might not do much in the playoffs, but it certainly will be enjoyable to watch. The Cardinals are making a habit of pulling out exciting victories, although they made Sunday's much more interesting than it needed to be with the NFL's final playoff spot on the line.

No self-respecting defense should have allowed the Chargers offense to march down the field for a tying touchdown in the final minute of the game. After all, Craig Whelihan's favorite receiver all day had been Cardinals safety Kwamie Lassiter, who had four interceptions.

Still, the Cardinals rallied and gave Chris Jacke a chance to redeem himself after he missed two earlier field-goal attempts that could've put the game away. But, of course, that would've taken away all the excitement.