

# Texas-size upset

14,000 welcome home heroes

First playoff win since '47

Next stop: Minnesota

**CARDS AT VIKINGS**

By Jennifer Barrett and Richard Ruelas  
The Arizona Republic

**More Cardinals in Football Extra**

Kickoff: 2:15 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 10.  
Television: Channel 10 (KSAZ).  
Radio: KDSU-AM (1060); KSLX-FM (100.7).

"Cardinals! Cardinals! Cardinals!"  
An estimated 14,000 ecstatic fans staged a raucous party at Sky Harbor International Airport on Saturday night to greet the conquering heroes hours after the team's 20-7 trouncing of the Dallas Cowboys.

"We want Jakel! We want Jakel! We want Jakel!" they shrieked as the Arizona Cardinals, fresh from their first playoff victory in 51 years, descended from the plane about 9:45 p.m.

The red birds now go on to face the Minnesota Vikings in Minneapolis on Sunday.

And when quarterback Jake Plummer stepped up to the lectern on the tarmac, he thrilled the crowd.

"This is awesome," Plummer said. "The energy we feel here now we felt in Dallas. Without you guys believing in us we couldn't have gotten it done."

Then, making a reference to a line from the movie *The Waterboys*; he said, "It's been a saying for us for the last few weeks: We can do it!"

That brought more cheers and clapping from the faithful, who came from as far away as Chandler and New River, babies on their daddies' shoulders, college



Rob Schumacher/The Arizona Republic  
Ecstatic fans at Sky Harbor International Airport on Saturday night greet the returning Arizona Cardinals after their upset victory over the Dallas Cowboys. A crowd of thousands waited near the tarmac for the team's 9:45 p.m. arrival.



Paul F. Gonz/The Arizona Republic  
Cardinals quarterback Jake Plummer keeps a tight grip on the game ball as he celebrates the upset victory of

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# Thousands greet Cardinals at airport

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students and retirees. They were hyped up from the amazing upset that naysayers said would never happen.

It was like a block party, with spontaneous cheering, pickup football games, and a band playing rock and roll songs. DeeJay Rich Creeger of KSLX-FM (100.7) revved up the throngs and Cardinals cheerleaders danced around.

"I'll have to find out where the hell is Minnesota," said Linda Zaccchia, 52, of Phoenix, a pediatric nurse, referring to the Cardinals' match next Sunday against the mighty Vikings.

"It's been five years of tough seasons but I've been with them, whatever. I love them," she said.

Rory Rainstorn of Phoenix was dancing with his 4-year-old son, Michael.

"I didn't feel they had it in the bag until about 15 seconds left in the game," he said. "I kept waiting for the other shoe to drop, for Dallas to treat us like they always do, but that never happened."

There was whistling, hooting, clapping and waving flags. Air horns cut the din.

Handmade signs proclaimed, "You've got to believe," and "We knew." A band played Cardinals parody songs, like *Jake Don't be a Hero*, and *Nowhere Team*, referring to the Cowboys.

All eyes peered skyward as the vigil continued, and when the plane flew into view, an illuminated cardinal on its tail, people went wild.

"We just hope that when the team falls on hard times again, all these



Rob Schumacher/The Arizona Republic  
Cardinals wide receiver Frank Sanders beams as the team lands at Sky Harbor to be greeted by a wild party thrown by thousands of happy fans.

fans will come out," said Jeff Grachus, 27, of Phoenix, wearing a Plummer jersey.

Throughout the Valley, fans cheered from their living rooms, automobiles, parties and bars as the Cardinals surprised the nation.

At Player's All-American Sports Bar, it sounded like New Year's Eve all over again. The rowdy crowd gathered around a big-screen television on the patio and counted down the final seconds in unison, "10 — 9 — 8 — 7 . . ."

But fans erupted early into applause, knocking empty beer pitchers to the ground and high-fiving and hugging total strangers — well, as long as they were wearing red.

Meanwhile, those in the silver and blue tried to slip out quietly from the eatery in Phoenix's Arizona Center. Not all were so lucky.

"Today I'm a loser," admitted Dallas fan Aaron Carillo, 38, who lost a six-pack to some Cardinals fans, but kept his faith in the Cowboys. "I've always been a fan, although I'm playing it a little low-key today."

Carillo, who had driven to Phoenix from his home in Santa Fe, N.M., to welcome in the new year and watch the game with his Phoenix friends, counts among his Cowboys gear: a logo leather jacket and travel bag, six pairs of shorts, and at least 20 T-shirts — the most inconspicuous of which he wore Saturday. The grey T-shirt showed a football ripping apart the words "Dallas Cowboys."

That's what the Cardinals did to the team on the field as well.

Don Cruz, a security guard at AMC Arizona Center movie theater, watched the television screen from the atrium of the Arizona Center. When the Cowboys scored, he whipped out a hand-held radio and dutifully reported the score to other staff members at the theater.

"We're slow over there," he said. "Everyone's watching the ball game."

Ticket taker Albert Orta, 16, said the theater's staff kept the breakroom radio tuned to the game as well, sneaking in for periodic updates.

"But we managed to do our jobs as well," he said.

Next weekend, he has taken off so he can watch the game uninterrupted. The Cardinals will face the Minnesota Vikings on Sunday.

Amy Cruz, 25, was reporting the score to friends as well via cellular phone, but she wasn't smiling.

"I was about ready to kill those guys behind us," she said, tugging at her Cowboys game shirt.

"I've been a Cowboys fan for as long as I can remember," added Cruz, a native Texan and Phoenix resident. "The Cardinals have been here for 10 years and no one cared and now suddenly, they have two sold out games, and they're like, 'The Cowboys suck.'"

Friend and fellow Cowboys fan, Jennifer Thomasson, 24, said she was willing to wager that at least half the red-shirted fans had Dallas Cowboys shirts in their closets.

"You could still see the creases in some of their (Cardinals) shirts. I bet it's the first time they've worn them."

She has had her blue, numbered shirt for years.

"I remember when Danny White played for them," she said proudly. "The Cowboys haven't been doing well lately, but I'm still going to wear my shirt."

Jennifer Ems, 21, said she is going to wear her Cardinals shirt proudly as well — her Cardinals shirt, that is. She admits it's been awhile since she wore it out in public.

"It's been embarrassing," she said. "Every time the Cowboys came here, they beat us, but to see them (Cardinals) totally slaughter the Cowboys — well, we don't have to be embarrassed anymore to be Cardinals fans."

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