

Were voters impressed?

If you have kids, you can relate to what happened Sunday at Sun Devil Stadium.

Remember how the kids act on Christmas Eve? No name-calling, fussing or fighting with siblings. No whining or complaining when asked to perform simple household tasks. Lots of kisses and hugs and displays of affection for mom and dad. They are cheerful and pleasant and filled with excitement.

And all the while, we know that behind those cheerful little faces, there

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SMITH: Cards' victory may be too little, too late for stadium

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are minds that are plotting, conniving, working all the angles. They are posturing for presents, hoping that a sudden improvement in behavior will be remembered on Christmas morning in the form of really good gifts.

There is something else we know. Within a few hours after the gift-wrap has been scattered across the family room our little angels revert to the same ungrateful little brats they had been for the previous 363 days.

Sunday wasn't Christmas Eve. And the Cardinals aren't our offspring. Even so, the parallels were obvious.

Tuesday, Maricopa County voters go to the polls to decide whether or not to pass Proposition 302, a tax on hotel rooms and rental cars that will fund a new stadium for the Cardinals.

Mindful of that vote, the Cardinals were on their best behav-

ior Sunday. Somehow, they managed to beat the Washington Redskins, 16-15. The Cardinals weren't necessarily good. They were outgained 431 yards to 178, they turned the ball over twice inside the Redskins' 20 and had no scoring drives longer than 20 yards. But like a toddler spilling his milk at the kitchen table, we have come to expect these kinds of lapses.

So let's give the Cards credit for persevering, for not rejecting the largesse of their opponents. For allowing the registered voters among the crowd of 52,224 to leave the stadium in good spirits and giving hearts.

We know, of course, that the Cardinals will revert to form, that they will soon resume their stumble along in the deep-rutted path of mediocrity they have followed since their arrival in the Valley.

But, geez, they would really love to get a new stadium. A nice

shiny one. With a roof, even. Oh, and don't forget lots of revenue streams.

And if they get it, they promise they'll be good.

Sunday's crowd really wanted to believe in the sincerity of those pledges.

"One of the most exciting things in the entire game was how our fans backed us," said receiver Frank Sanders. "They were rowdy, they were raunchy. They were there for us."

On an afternoon that had the look and feel of a political rally — the giant screen at the stadium featured an endless series of "Yes of 302" advertisements and gobs of fans could be seen bearing signs backing the proposition — the Cardinals stopped a few steps short of saying they felt the pending vote was a motivational force. This, too, is consistent with the Kids at Christmas analogy. The tykes will never admit their conduct is

linked to the impending holiday. They are being good for goodness' sake.

"The main thing was to get the win," said nickel back Corey Chavous. "We hadn't won in a while. The feeling you have when you win. That's what it's all about, what you work all week for."

Don't be fooled.

Sunday's win prompted emotions that went far beyond a hard-fought victory for a team that has never been spoiled in that department. When was the last time you saw 32-year-old Aeneas Williams, a 10-year veteran, doing cartwheels on the field after a win? Never.

When was the last time you saw Cardinals coach Dave McGinnis pumping his fists and convulsing in a slobbering fit of enthusiasm? OK, so he does that pretty much every day. The point is the Cardinals' display of emotion didn't quite match the

importance of the game. A loss Sunday and the Cardinals would have been 2-7 and out of the playoffs. But a win? A win puts the Cardinals at 3-6. . . And still out of the playoffs.

Not that it matters to McGinnis. In his postgame press conference, which was piped into the stadium and displayed on the aforementioned screen, McGinnis stopped to address the fans.

"The fans out there today, we felt you!" he said a voice dripping with evangelical zeal. "Fans, we need you one more time. We need you on Tuesday. This can happen!"

Christmas comes Tuesday for the Cardinals. They were good Sunday.

Too little, too late?

The voters must decide.

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