

Cards stun Redskins

Washington errors help give McGinnis his first victory as head coach

BY DARRIN URBAN
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He threw a stool through a blackboard at halftime, angry his team was beating itself.

After Sunday's game, Arizona Cardinals coach Dave McGinnis was feeling considerably different emotions.

The Cards' interim boss danced off the Sun Devil Stadium

field gesturing to the fans, celebrating an improbable 16-15 win over the Washington Redskins.

For a guy preaching to his team passion and emotion, he had the perfect example, because the Cardinals didn't have much of anything else.

"I told our guys today, 'I don't want to come out and just be breathing, I want to be living,'" said McGinnis, sporting a game ball at his post-game press conference. "This is what living is all about."

Oh, the Cards' defense did not
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Big win: Arizona's Rob Fredrickson and Pat Tillman, right, celebrate after Washington's Albert Connell, left, fails to catch Jeff George's fourth-down pass.

CARDS: Get unlikely win against Redskins

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give up touchdowns but the Redskins moved up and down the field, piling up 431 yards and never had to punt. The Cardinals' offense did little, with just 178 yards and two crucial red zone turnovers while running their fewest plays in a game since 1995.

Yet it doesn't get any more emotional than a near-record-setting 103-yard fumble return for a touchdown, pulled off by Cardinals cornerback Aeneas Williams to start the game and set up the rollercoaster of feelings for both sides all game.

"When you're getting out-gained like that," linebacker Sékou Sanyika said, "you're always try and find the intangibles to win."

Twice, the Redskins (6-4) had fourth-quarter field goal attempts to take the lead. Twice, Kris Heppner — Washington's third kicker this year — put it wide of the uprights. A bad snap cost Washington an extra point after its only TD. The Cardinals (3-6) were also forced to give the ball back to Washington with just over two minutes left, giving quarterback Jeff George a chance to pull it out in his first Redskins start.

Washington traveled 14 yards before losing the ball on downs and losing a game they didn't expect to.

"We needed a victory, and we needed it in the worst way," said Williams, who did cartwheels on the field after George threw his final incompletion. "You don't

know what it's like to play like we did last week (against the Saints) and not get a victory. You go through the whole week thinking about it. And the pain motivates you to go after that victory."

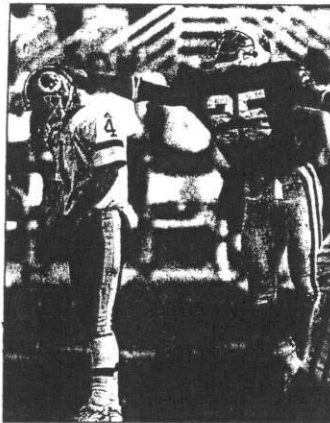
It was a result that never should have been. Washington opened the game by driving behind running back Stephen Davis (124 yards rushing) all the way down to the Arizona 1. But as Davis tried to bull into the end zone, linebacker Mark Maddox stripped the ball and Williams scooped it up and sprinted 103 yards down the left sideline to shock the announced 52,244 on hand.

"It's our job," Maddox said. "We have to make those plays."

Better yet, Williams picked off a George pass on the Redskins' next possession, giving the Cardinals the ball on the Washington 19. It was the perfect scenario, except that — in a precursor to a maddening day for the Cards — the offense couldn't do a thing except settle for a field goal.

The Cardinals also managed to fumble the ball away at the Washington 9 and quarterback Jake Plummer threw an ill-advised interception with Arizona on the Washington 18, blowing two great scoring chances.

Plummer ended up becoming the fastest Cardinal ever to 10,000 passing yards — he has 10,039, getting there in 47 games — but other than a 42-yard bomb to David Boston (which was negated moments



IRWIN R. DAUGHERTY/TRIBUNE

Rubbing it in: Arizona's Corey Chavous pats Washington kicker Kris Heppner on the head after Heppner missed a 33-yard field goal Sunday in the fourth quarter at Sun Devil Stadium.

later by the interception) he was a non-factor. The rushing game produced just 45 yards and less than two yards a carry.

"I'm happy about the win, but disappointed in our performance," receiver Frank Sanders said.

At least that was felt on both sidelines.

"We scored 15 points," a disgusted George said. "Come on, that's ridiculous. You can't expect to be a Super Bowl-caliber team and kick field goals all the time."

Or not kick them. Heppner did boot three, but the two misses — one from 51 yards, the second from 33 — immediately made everyone assume hot-tempered owner Daniel Snyder would be calling for Heppner's replacement today.

"Their kicker choked," Sanyika said, "and that helped us a lot."

What also helped was special teams play, led by kick returner MarTay Jenkins. Jenkins' 71-yard return to start the second

half set up what turned out to be the winning score, Michael Pittman's 7-yard touchdown run, and he averaged 36.6 yards a return. Punter Scott Player was forced into action twice at the end of the game (the first punt was negated with a penalty) and came up with a booming 51-yarder that, with a holding penalty thrown in, pinned the Redskins at their 10.

The defense doubled their interception total on the season (linebacker Zack Walz grabbed a Hail Mary attempt at the end of the first half) and continually forced Heppner out on the field despite ongoing injury problems.

"This was one of the biggest displays of heart, emotion and belief you'll ever get from a professional team," McGinnis said.

And maybe for this one game, that was enough.

"Definitely there is a greater presence," offensive tackle Anthony Clement said. "There is something new about this team."