

Players say blame for losses on them, not coach

Green had control of roster, and many moves failed

By **DARREN URBAN**
TRIBUNE

Dennis Green spent about six minutes addressing his players Monday morning, before being told by the Cardinals he was no longer head coach.

Green told them he was impressed with their professionalism, and he touched on the tragic death of Denver Broncos cornerback Darrent Williams earlier that day and how every player should appreciate playing in the NFL.

But Green never did address his job status, which had been in jeopardy since midseason.

There was probably no need to talk about it. His departure had almost been a foregone conclusion.

"Look at us on paper," cornerback Eric Green said. "We have all the talent in the world. That's why (the record) is hard for people to understand."

Not surprisingly, the players publicly backed the job Dennis Green did, taking the blame for a 5-11 season.

"Can't blame none of this on Denny, that's my take," linebacker Orlando Huff said. "He did his job."

"There were a lot of losses

we shouldn't have lost, and that put a lot of weight on Denny's back because he couldn't figure out what was going on."

Said receiver Anquan Boldin, "We just need to play better, point blank. Coaches don't win or lose games."

But the many losses were exactly the reason team vice president Michael Bidwill gave for Green's dismissal.

And it was a telling development that on the same day Green was fired, vice president of football operations Rod Graves — who was supposedly working hand-in-hand with Green — was given a new three-year contract.

Green was allowed to run

the show, and the show failed. Graves termed it a bit differently, saying that based on Green's track record when Green arrived Graves wanted to "give him support."

"Although I may have disagreed sometimes, I felt that supporting his plan in the way he wanted to build this football team was something I chose to try to do," Graves said.

Bidwill noted "We knew (Green) would be making bold moves when he came in."

Those moves frequently backfired.

Green tore up the offensive line, dumping players like Pete Kendall and L.J. Shelton. That worked as an initial step, ex-

cept that Green never fixed the offensive line until late in his final season.

Green went through three offensive coordinators and three offensive line coaches in three seasons. He made questionable hires for assistant coaches. He made rash personnel choices throughout his tenure, and his lack of interaction with his players did not help.

He also left behind a roster better than when he arrived.

"Obviously I want to see him happy," said receiver Larry Fitzgerald, who grew up around Green in Minnesota. "I care a lot about him as a person. He is almost like an uncle to me."

Now the players must wait to see how things play out.

"You are in limbo," defensive end Antonio Smith said. "You don't know what is coming."

Quarterback Matt Leinart said he is encouraged with the talent the Cardinals have and is certain 2007 will be an improvement.

But, Leinart acknowledged getting a new coach "is tough."

"It's something I have learned, this is part of the business," Leinart said. "I love playing for Coach Green. This was one of the most fun years of my life."

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WHO TO EXPECT WHEN YOU'RE EXPECTING Below is a look at six coaches the Cardinals have already identified as candidates to replace Dennis Green:

Mike Sherman

Current job: Asst. head coach, Houston Texans

Age: 52

Resume: Coached the Packers to an impressive 57-39 record from 2000-04 and also served as the team's general manager the final four seasons. Has a background as an offensive line coach.



Norm Chow

Current job: Offensive coordinator, Tennessee Titans

Age: 60

Resume: Close to Cardinals QB Matt Leinart, for whom Chow served as offensive coordinator at USC. Helped Titans QB Vince Young to probable rookie of the year award. Has never been a head coach at any level.



Ron Rivera

Current job: Defensive coordinator, Chicago Bears

Age: 44

Resume: Knows Cards' VP of football operations Rod Graves from when Rivera played for Bears and Graves worked in the front office. Eagles linebackers coach from 1999-2003 before getting current job.



Jim Caldwell

Current job: Asst. head coach/QBs coach, Indianapolis Colts

Age: 51

Resume: Wake Forest coach from 1993-2000. Has worked under Colts coach Tony Dungy in both Tampa Bay (2001) and Indianapolis (2002-present). QB coach for Colts' Peyton Manning.



Ken Whisenhunt

Current job: Offensive coordinator, Pittsburgh Steelers

Age: 44

Resume: Reputation for creative offenses despite Pittsburgh's perceived run-first mentality. Was a tight ends coach several places before getting Steelers job in 2004. Is candidate to get Steelers head coaching job if Bill Cowher retires.



Russ Grimm

Current job: Asst. head coach/offensive line coach, Pittsburgh Steelers

Age: 47

Resume: Is considered top choice to get Steelers' job if Bill Cowher retires. Served on Redskins' staff from 1992-2000 before coming to Pittsburgh in 2001. Has built very good offensive line in Pittsburgh.

