



2009 Preview: Arizona Cardinals

Team continues to ride explosive offense

by [Andy Burns](#)

Outlook

The Arizona Cardinals used their high-powered passing game in 2008 to achieve the most successful season in franchise history, despite a 9-7 record. The team won its first division title since 1975, hosted a playoff game for the first time since 1947 and appeared in its first Super Bowl.

Prior to the season, many questions surrounded how well 37-year-old QB Kurt Warner would lead the offense. But he proved doubters wrong, throwing for over 4,500 yards and 30 touchdowns. Having Pro Bowl WRs Larry Fitzgerald and Anquan Boldin certainly made Warner's job easier, as each had over 1,000 yards receiving and caught over 10 touchdowns. Steve Breaston also surprisingly chipped in with over 1,000 yards.

Those spectacular offensive numbers helped cover some major problems, including a defense that gave up the fifth most points and allowed the most passing touchdowns in the league. Arizona's rushing attack was a problem as well, finishing last in both attempts and yards.

Because of the Cardinals' success last year, changes have come to the coaching staff. Offensive coordinator Todd Haley left to become the coach of the Kansas City Chiefs and defensive coordinator Clancy Pendergast followed.

Haley has been replaced with Russ Grim, who will serve as the running game coordinator and Mike Miller, who will be the Cardinals' passing game coordinator. Pendergast has been replaced with Bill Davis, last year's linebackers coach.

Whisenhunt hopes that a move to a 3-4 defensive scheme similar to that of the Pittsburgh Steelers will improve the defense.

The Cardinals signed former Steeler CB Bryant McFadden to start opposite second-year pro Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie and recently re-signed S Adrian Wilson to a five year deal. With S Antrel Rolle added to the mix, Arizona's secondary looks to be one of their most talented in years.

To aid with the poor rushing attack last year, the Cardinals selected physical RB Chris Wells from Ohio State. Wells is expected to become the starting RB, but Tim Hightower will more than likely be Arizona's goal line back.

Based on their performances last year, Boldin and LB Karlos Dansby are looking for new contracts from the Cardinals. Dansby, the team's franchise player, has been mentioned as a higher priority than Boldin by the team's front office, but he has expressed interest in testing the free agent market in 2010. Boldin, who wants a contract similar to Fitzgerald's, recently fired agent Drew Rosenhaus because of his inability to negotiate a new deal.

In a recent practice, Fitzgerald had an uncomfortable landing after making a sideline catch, but will be fine after only tweaking a groin muscle. Warner recently underwent surgery on his left hip to repair a torn labrum and remove loose particles. He is moving well, but still feels pain in the hip from the surgery.

Barring any injuries, the Cardinals will be the favorite to win the division and should bring another playoff game to the desert, but the defense must improve in order to make another deep playoff run.

Key offseason moves

a. Acquisitions

RB Jason Wright

Will provide depth as the third RB behind Tim Hightower and rookie Chris Wells.

CB Bryant McFadden

Expected to start in place of Rod Hood.

TE Anthony Becht

Expected to compete with Leonard Pope for the starting job.

b. Losses**RB Edgerrin James**

After the worst season of his career, Arizona cuts ties with James.

RB J.J. Arrington

The Cardinals will miss his kick-return production as he moves to Denver.

LB Monty Beisel

Backup in Arizona will compete for starting job with the Kansas City Chiefs.

CB Rod Hood

Last year's starter will be replaced by Bryant McFadden.

DE Antonio Smith

Team cuts ties with their starting DE, who now looks to start with the Houston Texans.

c. Impact Draft Picks**RB Chris Wells, Ohio State**

A physical runner who should help the Cardinals move the ball on the ground.

DE/OLB Cody Brown, Connecticut

The strong pass-rusher will compete for time at outside linebacker in Arizona's 3-4 defense.

S Rashad Johnson, Alabama

Gives the Cardinals more versatility in the secondary, should see time as a rotational player.

Star Tracker**Rising:**

With opposing defenses focusing on Fitzgerald and Boldin, Steve Breaston should be able to put up another 1,000 yard season, making him a good No. 2 in deep leagues and a great No. 3 in any league.

Falling:

After everything he overcame last year, it's hard to say anything negative about

37-year-old quarterback Kurt Warner, but this may be the season that his age finally catches up to him. Warner is a great value pick, but should not be taken too early.

Could Surprise:

Passing game coordinator Mike Miller has been impressed with second-year receiver Early Doucet's work ethic while learning from Fitzgerald. In an offense that produced three 1,000 yard receivers last year, Doucet could be the next great receiver to emerge from the Arizona offense.

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