

In Arizona, Kurt Warner is looking like a miracle worker

By **RANDY COVITZ**
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Kurt Warner's rise from grocery store stock boy to Super Bowl hero in St. Louis may have been improbable.

But now, as Arizona's quarterback, Warner may be performing the impossible.

The Cardinals haven't been to the playoffs since 1998, haven't won a division title since 1975 in St. Louis, haven't hosted a playoff game since 1947 — in Chicago.

Warner not only has Arizona, 6-3, at the top of the NFC West, but if the Cardinals were to win just their fifth division title in the franchise's 88 seasons, he's making a strong case for a record-tying third league MVP award (though Brett Favre just might win a fourth MVP, the way the Jets are playing).

Another MVP for Warner — coupled with his two Super Bowl appearances, Super Bowl MVP and rating as the third-best passer in NFL history — just might clinch a place for him in the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

"Obviously he has some outstanding receivers, but there's no reason in the world if they keep on this same run in the second half of the season, he couldn't be MVP. ... And if he's MVP ... I would say he would be a lock (for the Hall of Fame)," said former NFL coach and Fox analyst Jimmy Johnson.

Warner, 37, enters today's game at Seattle leading the NFL in passer rating (106.4) and completion percentage (70.6). He leads the NFC with 19 touchdown passes and ranks second with 2,760 yards. His Cardinals are the highest-scoring offense in the league, averaging 29.2 points per game.

Just as Warner had a corps of playmakers in St. Louis — Isaac Bruce, Torry Holt and Marshall Faulk — he has two of the best receivers in the NFL in Arizona's Larry Fitzgerald, who leads the NFC with 57 receptions; Anquan Boldin, who leads with 10 touchdown catches; and an emerging running back in rookie Tim Hightower.



Donald Miralle

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"I don't know if I'm playing better, but I feel like I'm playing as well as I did in some of those years," Warner said, comparing this season to the Greatest Show on Turf years in St. Louis.

"A lot of it has to do with that I've finally been in the system a couple years — the system plays to my strengths again, which I don't think I've had for a number of years — and they're giving me opportunities to just play football how I play football."

Less than two months ago, Warner contemplated retiring after the season. He had just thrown three interceptions, lost three fumbles and was sacked five times in a 56-35 loss to the Jets on Sept. 28, dropping the Cardinals to 2-2. Worst of all, he threw a pass that led Boldin into a frightening helmet-to-helmet collision with Jets safety Eric Smith.

"It really shook me up," said Warner, "and made me contemplate what I want to do moving forward."

Now, Warner, who is in the final year of his contract, hopes to play at least two more seasons, even though the Cardinals have former first-round pick Matt Leinart waiting in the wings.

"If I continue to play," Warner said, "I want to finish my career in Arizona and build on what we have started the last couple of years."

Super form

Through nine games, Arizona QB Kurt Warner's passing statistics are similar to those in his two MVP seasons with St. Louis.

Year	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yards	TD	INT
2008	238	337	70.6	2,760	19	6
2001	224	327	68.5	2,709	17	13
1999	191	279	68.5	2,448	26	6