

## All things Cardinals flying off the shelves in Valley, nation

by **Max Jarman** - Jan. 24, 2009 12:00 AM  
The Arizona Republic

The Arizona Cardinals' Cinderella drive to Super Bowl XLIII has left manufacturers and retailers scrambling to keep Larry Fitzgerald jerseys and other team merchandise on store shelves.

Demand for products bearing the bird-beak profile has exploded as die-hard and newly converted fans stand in line and go online to snap up jerseys, shirts, hats and more than 450 other official team products.

"We're getting shipments in twice a day and selling out," said Lacey Millanes, operations manager at Sports Authority's Arizona Mills store in Tempe.

The sporting-goods retailer opened its Phoenix-area stores at 6 the morning after Arizona's 32-25 victory over the Philadelphia Eagles, and fans already were lined up outside to buy official NFC Championship locker-room hats and T-shirts.

Now, retailers are bracing for the first weekend of shopping since last Sunday's big win.

The Arizona Cardinals' team stores in Glendale and Tempe have been stocking up and have been experiencing record traffic all week.

"Anything with a Cardinals logo and a Super

Bowl logo flies off the shelves," said Percy Silva, merchandise manager for the Cardinals.

Silva said the daily numbers at the Glendale store are significantly more than during the stadium's grand opening in 2006.

"We've never seen volumes like this," he said.

For all retailers, the demand for Cardinals merchandise is a new phenomenon.

"A year ago, we were selling 10 Diamondbacks and Suns T-shirts for every Cardinals one," said Karl Huizenga, manager at Sportsfan. "Now, it's the other way around."

Cameron Harmann of Waddell was shopping Thursday at Sports Authority for a football jersey for his father, who has been a fan since the Cardinals moved to Phoenix from St. Louis in 1988.

"He's a real die-hard," Harmann said.

And then, there was Katherine McMorris of Phoenix.

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"I'm taking these back to the girls at the office," she said Thursday, holding up a half-dozen "dueling teams" T-shirts. The "girls" are fellow nurses at the Veterans Affairs hospital in Phoenix.

Kenny Gamble, general manager for Reebok's sports-license division, said the company's NFL-licensed products are available at a wide variety of locations, from the stand-alone Sportsfan store at Arizona Center in Phoenix to Walmart stores across the state.

Gamble said demand for Cardinals merchandise has been much greater than Reebok expected.

Reebok is the official producer of NFL-licensed products such as jerseys, T-shirts and hats. It currently is trying to keep up with pregame demand while preparing to produce Super Bowl championship locker-room T-shirts.

The company, known for its athletic shoes, is one of 10 suppliers licensed to produce more than 450 NFL products ranging from caps and T-shirts to bar stools and recliners.

While demand for Cardinals merchandise is particularly high in Arizona, it also is strong all across the United States and internationally.

Brian McCarthy, spokesman for the National Football League, said the Cardinals' underdog status and storylines, such as quarterback Kurt Warner's career comeback, are making the team's merchandise even hotter.

"We started getting calls at halftime on Sunday, and they haven't stopped," said

Jamie Hannelley, a spokesman at Pennsylvania online retailer Sports Unlimited.

The company has sold out merchandise of Warner and wide receivers Larry Fitzgerald and Anquan Boldin.

"When you have a team that hasn't been there (the Super Bowl) before, the demand is always particularly strong," added Brian Lemmey, marketing director at Football Fanatics, an online retailer in Jacksonville, Fla.

He said Cardinals merchandise used to be one of the worst-selling lines at Football Fanatics, and now, the store can't keep it in stock.

"We keep asking Reebok for more," he said.

The NFL's McCarthy said sales of such merchandise adds up to \$3.5 billion a year, with Super Bowl memorabilia generating about \$100 million.

Products are distributed to a host of retailers, including Sports Authority and CSN Stores, which sell Cardinals shower curtains

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(\$38) and a brass door knocker "for letting everyone know where your NFL loyalties reside" (\$54).

The collectibles market has benefited from the Cardinals' unexpected rise to prominence, as well.

McFarlane Toys' Larry Fitzgerald action figure, which sold new for \$15 last year, is selling on eBay for \$50 to \$60.

Company founder Todd McFarlane said the Fitzgerald figure, produced to sell at last year's Super Bowl, is sold out, as is the Boldin figure.

The Tempe company still has plenty of the Matt Leinart action figures it made last year when it looked like he, not Warner, would be the Cardinals' starting quarterback.

McFarlane, a noted collector of sports memorabilia, said the trip to the Super Bowl has boosted the demand for Cardinals collectibles such as autographed helmets, jerseys and game balls.

"Demand for Warner and Fitzgerald collectibles has been average, but it's starting to heat up, especially Fitzgerald," he said.

But McFarlane added that the market for Cardinals collectibles really depends on the outcome of the Feb. 1 game.

"There's a big difference between winning and coming in second place," he said.

John Anton is banking on a Cardinals Super Bowl win. His Tempe-based business, Anton Sports, was called on to produce the first wave of NFC Championship T-shirts and hats, before official suppliers such as

Reebok International began cranking out fresh goods.

"We printed for 36 hours straight," Anton said.

Anton is confident that the Cardinals will beat the Pittsburgh Steelers and that his company will be called on again, this time to produce the first wave of Super Bowl XLIII championship hats and T-shirts.

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