

BY PAUL DOMOWITCH

EAGLES VS. CARDINALS

Recent history: The Cardinals defeated the Eagles, 27-6, at the Linc on Sept. 23, 2012. The Cardinals lead the series, 57-54-5.



THE RUNNING GAME

WHEN THE EAGLES RUN THE BALL

LeSean McCoy leads the league in rushing with 1,009 yards and is on a 1,400-plus-yard pace. That said, the Eagles' ground game has been inconsistent. In the Eagles' last seven games, McCoy has two 100-yard rushing performances (against the Bucs and Packers). But in the other five games, he's been held to just 3.2 yards per carry. In the Eagles' last game against the Redskins, McCoy averaged just 2.3 yards per carry on first down and had a season-high five runs for losses. His chances for a productive afternoon Sunday — at least as a rusher — aren't particularly good. The Cardinals are second in the league against the run (81.3 yards per game) and third in yards allowed per carry (3.5). Their front seven, led by tackles Darnell Dockett and Calais Campbell, are as good as any.

EDGE: Cardinals

WHEN THE CARDINALS RUN THE BALL

The Cardinals' ground game hasn't been very productive this season, and the fault for that lies primarily with their offensive line, which just isn't very good. They've averaged just 112.1 rushing yards per game and 3.7 yards per carry. Rookie Andre Ellington is an elusive runner who is averaging 6.0 yards per carry. But he has carried the ball more than 11 times in a game just once this season. Rashard Mendenhall, who had two 1,000-yard seasons with the Steelers, has been used mainly as a goal-line and short-yardage guy. Ellington had 50 yards on 10 carries last week against the Colts, but managed just three yards on nine carries the week before against Jacksonville. The Eagles have done a decent job against the run this season, though you wouldn't know it by looking at their league ranking (21st).

EDGE: Eagles

THE PASSING GAME

WHEN THE EAGLES PASS THE BALL

Nick Foles has given Chip Kelly the two things he wants most from his quarterback — wins and ball security. The Eagles have won five of the six games in which Foles has taken the majority of snaps, and Foles has yet to throw an interception in 162 attempts this season. Foles' 128.0 passer rating is the best in the league. So is his 9.59 yards-per-attempt average. He has a 100.9 passer rating on third down and an impressive 136.1 rating against the blitz (26-for-42, 432 yards, 5 TDs, 0 INTs). His success against the blitz could be critical since the Cardinals' defense blitzes as much as anybody in the league. DeSean Jackson is having his best season. He still is one of the league's most dangerous vertical threats, but has evolved into a more complete receiver. He's been the Eagles' most productive receiver on third down and in the red zone.

EDGE: Eagles

WHEN THE CARDINALS PASS THE BALL

The Cardinals' passing game wasn't much to look at the first half of this season as Carson Palmer struggled to learn Bruce Arians' offense. Palmer, who has averaged an interception every 31 attempts in his career, threw 13 of them in the first seven games and had a 69.4 passer rating. But the last four games have been a different story. Palmer's passer rating in those games — all Arizona wins — is 110.8. He's completed 69 percent of his passes, has averaged 8.9 yards per attempt and has thrown eight touchdowns and just two interceptions in 129 attempts. With the emergence of Michael Floyd, opposing defenses no longer can focus all of their attention on Larry Fitzgerald. The 6-3, 220-pound Floyd has 13 catches for 297 yards in the last two games. Fitzgerald has 11 catches, three for TDs. For the Eagles, a lot is going to depend on their ability to get pressure on Palmer and force him to throw some balls up for grabs.

EDGE: Cardinals

SPECIAL TEAMS

Punter Donnie Jones is having an outstanding season. Just three of his last 20 punts have been returned. He has a 44.3-yard net average over the last seven games and a 40.9-yard net average for the season, which is the seventh best in the league. Alex Henery has made 17 of 22 field goal attempts this season, but is just 5-for-10 from 39 yards or longer. Just one of those 10 attempts has been from beyond 48 yards. The Eagles' return game hasn't been very productive thus far, which is why they've started using DeSean Jackson more on punt returns. Newcomer Brad Smith may return kickoffs Sunday. Their coverage units have been effective lately. They haven't given up a kick return of longer than 27 yards in the last four games and haven't given up a punt return longer than nine yards in the last five games. The Cardinals' Patrick Peterson is a dangerous punt returner. Two years ago, he had four returns for touchdowns. But he's averaging just 6.8 yards per return this season.

EDGE: Eagles

INTANGIBLES

Both teams are playing their best football of the season. The Cardinals have won four in a row, the Eagles three in a row. The Eagles are coming off their bye and should have everyone back, with the exception of rookie safety Earl Wolff. While the game is at the Linc, that isn't particularly meaningful. The Eagles are 1-4 at home this season. The Cardinals have won four of the last five meetings.

EDGE: Even

STATSGLANCE

A look at the factors driving Sunday's game.

WHO'S HOT, WHO'S NOT

HOT



EAGLES

LB Connor Barwin. Leads the team in tackles for loss (6) and is tied for the lead in sacks (4).



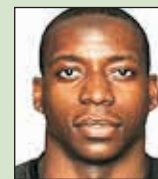
CARDINALS

WR Michael Floyd. Has 13 catches for 297 yards and a touchdown in last two games.



EAGLES

WR Jason Avant. Has just three receptions for 10 yards in the last three games.



CARDINALS

RB Rashard Mendenhall. Has averaged just 2.6 yards per carry in his last four games.

KEY MATCHUPS

1. Eagles G's Evan Mathis and Todd Herremans and C Jason Kelce vs. Cardinals DL Calais Campbell and Darnell Dockett. Neutralizing Campbell and Dockett is at the top of the defense's things-to-do list. **Advantage: Even**

2. Eagles WR DeSean Jackson vs. Cardinals CB Patrick Peterson. Peterson is a big, fast cover man whose physicality could be a problem for Jackson if the zebras don't call it tight. **Advantage: Cardinals**

3. Eagles CBs Cary Williams, Bradley Fletcher and Brandon Boykin vs. Cardinals WRs Larry Fitzgerald and Michael Floyd. The emergence of Floyd has made it more difficult for defenses to focus on Fitzgerald. **Advantage: Cardinals**

FOR NICK'S NEXT TRICK

First, Nick Foles tied the NFL single-game records for touchdown passes (7) and passer rating (158.3).

Then he recorded the highest passer rating (152.8 in November) in a single month since the NFL started keeping the stat officially (1960).

One of the only things left is the highest passer rating for a whole season. Foles (currently at 127.9) and Peyton Manning (114.5) are both on pace to crack the top 5:

QB, Team	Year	Cmp.	Att.	Yds.	TD	Int.	Rat.
Aaron Rodgers, Packers	2011	343	502	4643	45	6	122.5
Peyton Manning, Colts	2004	336	497	4557	49	10	121.1
Tom Brady, Patriots	2007	398	578	4806	50	8	117.2
Steve Young, 49ers	1994	324	461	3969	35	10	112.8
Joe Montana, 49ers	1989	271	386	3521	26	8	112.4
Tom Brady, Patriots	2010	324	492	3900	36	4	111.0

WHERE TEAMS RANK

A look at where the Eagles and Cardinals rank:

	Offense			Defense		
	Total	Rushing	Passing	Total	Rushing	Passing
Eagles	4	1	9	31	21	32
Cardinals	16	24	13	8	2	17

WEATHER REPORT

Partly cloudy

46°

DOMOWITCH'S PREDICTION: CARDINALS 20, EAGLES 17