

Rams victorious in close one, Warner gets the nod for MVP

■ By a final score of 23-16, St. Louis caps its Cinderella season with its first Superbowl win ever

By Dave Goldberg
The Associated Press

ATLANTA — The St. Louis Rams rediscovered their offensive firepower just in time, and the Tennessee Titans came up just 1 yard short.

Kurt Warner's 73-yard touchdown pass to Isaac Bruce with 1 minute, 54 seconds left gave the Rams their first Super Bowl win Sunday, 23-16.

The TD capped an improbable turnaround for St. Louis, which was 3-13 a year ago and 13-3 this season as they scored 526 points, third best in NFL history.

But Steve McNair and Eddie George almost led Tennessee to another miracle finish, rallying them from a 16-0 deficit.

On the game's final play with six seconds left, McNair's pass was caught by Kevin Dyson at the Rams 5. He scrambled for the end zone only to be stopped just short by Mike Jones, as Dyson's outstretched arm held the ball toward the goal line in vain.

"I always believed in myself, and had a whole bunch of people who believed in me," said Warner, the Super Bowl MVP who did a victory lap around the Georgia Dome.

"We're the world champions! How about the Rams!"

Warner, a former Arena League and NFL Europe quarterback, finished 24-of-45 for 414 yards and two touchdowns.

The Rams dominated for much of the game but had to settle for three field goals to take a 9-0 lead before finally scoring a touchdown.

St. Louis seemed to have put the game away when Warner threw a 9-yard pass to Torry Holt with 3:59 left in the third quarter to take a 16-0 lead.

But suddenly the Titans' offense came to life, and the St. Louis defense began to wear down behind the battering of George and short passes from McNair.

Tennessee scored on its next two possessions, both on 1-yard runs by George to make it 16-13 with 7:21 left. It would have been 16-14, but the Titans chose to go for two points on their first TD

and failed. Al Del Greco's 43-yard field goal tied it with 2:12 left. Then the Rams' quick strike for a touchdown set up one of the most exciting finishes in Super Bowl history. The Titans, however, just didn't have enough at the very end.



"We've been doing this off and on during the year. We knew we had an opportunity to go on in a n d score," McNair said of the game's final play on Dyson's near-touchdown lunge. "We said on the sideline when they scored that the only fault they did was scoring too quick. We fell just short."

Dyson almost became a big hero for the second time this season. He was the key player in the miracle finish that beat Buffalo in the wild-card game, taking a lateral and going 75 yards for a touchdown on a kickoff return with three seconds left.

The Rams' victory was vindication for coach Dick Vermeil, who returned to coaching in 1997 after being gone for 14 years. He had lost his only other Super Bowl appearance, in 1981 with Philadelphia.

"You know I'm an emotional guy but right now I feel so good and so proud of this football team and organization," said Vermeil, known for shedding a tear or two at times. "To be able to bring this home to St. Louis, such a won-

“We're the world champions! How about the Rams!”
Kurt Warner
Superbowl MVP
St. Louis Rams

derful city. I know they appreciate us a little more right now."

The Rams outgained the Titans 294 yards to 89 in the first half, but led just 9-0.

The first three possessions ended with field-goal attempts and the Rams holding a 3-0 lead.

St. Louis took the opening kickoff and drove from its own 31 to the Titans 17, twice con-

verting third and long plays. But holder Mike Horan fumbled the snap on what would have been a 35-yard field-goal attempt and Tennessee got the ball at its own 29.

The Titans then moved to the St. Louis 26 on a 32-yard screen pass from McNair to George.

But a delay of game penalty stalled the drive and Del Greco missed a 47-yard field goal.

Warner then hit two quick passes, 32 yards to Torry Holt and 17 to Marshall Faulk. But that drive stalled at the 9-yard line and Jeff Wilkins hit a 27-yard field goal to give St. Louis the lead.

The Rams got another chance when Warner found Faulk all alone for a 52-yard completion to the 17. But Wilkins missed a 34-yard attempt 12 seconds into the second quarter.

The Titans kept the Rams out of the end zone again after St. Louis drove 73 yards from its own 16 to the Tennessee 11. This time Isaac Bruce dropped a pass in the end zone and Wilkins ended up kicking a 29-yard field goal to make it 6-0.

The Rams then went 67 yards in 13 plays but ended up again with just a field goal, a 29-yarder by Wilkins.

The Titans reached the St. Louis 27 on the opening possession of the second half. But Del Greco's 47-yard field-goal attempt was blocked by Todd Lyght.

The Rams followed the block with a 68-yard, eight-play drive for the game's first touchdown.

It came two plays after the game was delayed for about 10 minutes while Titans safety Blaine Bishop was treated for a strained neck.

On third-and-goal from the 9, Holt slid inside of Dainon Sidney and Warner sidearmed the ball to him through the Tennessee pass rush and it was 16-0.

But the Titans came back, driving 66 yards for their first score, a 1-yard TD run by George with 14 seconds left in the third quarter.

The key on that drive was McNair's 23-yard scramble to the 2, the first time he broke loose all day.

But McNair threw wide of an open Frank Wycheck on the 2-point conversion attempt, so it stayed 16-6.

Titans' 2 TDs in 7:35 span not enough

By Teresa M. Walker
The Associated Press

ATLANTA — The Tennessee Titans ran out of miracles on the 1-yard line.

Eddie George's two touchdowns in an eight-minute span of the second half almost sparked one of the greatest rallies ever, but the Titans fell a Tennessee two-step short, losing to the St. Louis Rams 23-16 Sunday night in the Super Bowl.

Tennessee trailed 16-0 before the Beast took over.

The 1995 Heisman Trophy winner was a non-factor in the first half, nearly ignored, carrying the ball only seven times and gaining just 18 yards.

But then came the third quarter, and he flashed the form that made him one of only four backs to gain 1,200 yards or more in each of his

first four NFL season.

First, he capped a 12-play drive with a 1-yard TD run with 14 seconds left in the quarter.

That was nothing compared with his fourth-quarter performance.

He carried seven times on the Titans' next possession, the final one a beauty.

Tennessee had second-and-goal from the 1, and George just couldn't be stopped.

He broke not one, not two, but three tackles to reach the end zone, getting some help from officials, who failed to rule the play dead when his left knee touched the turf short of the goal line. Another burst put him over the line and the knee was overlooked.

Then George, who became the Titans' head cheerleader this season, stood up and screamed for

his teammates to get going.

But on the final drive, which began with 1:54 remaining, there wasn't enough time for a ground game, so the Titans turned to Steve McNair.

George had one last chance to help. But after catching 47 passes in the regular season, he failed to turn around for a pass from McNair with half a minute left, and the ball bounced off his elbow.

With six seconds left, McNair almost came through, finding Kevin Dyson over the middle just inside the 5 on what would be the final play. McNair spun toward the end zone, trying and trying to reach it as time expired.

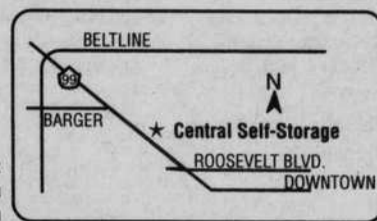
But Mike Jones was there to hook his hip and bring him down. No touchdown. No tie. No more miracles.

George could only watch.



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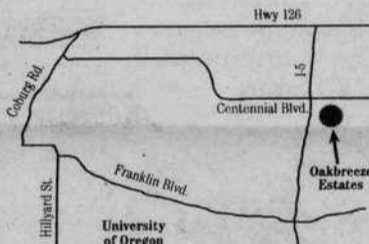
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