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# Running from history

## Whisenhunt brings record of successful ground attack to Cardinals

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Come on, fess up, someone said to Cardinals coach Ken Whisenhunt at the recent NFL meetings at the Arizona Biltmore, "You'll talk all off-season about wanting to run the ball then you'll throw it 45 times in the season opener in San Francisco on Sept. 10, right?"

"I hope not," Whisenhunt said, smiling.

Whisenhunt is hardly the first Cardinals coach to stress the need for a strong running game. From Gene Stallings through Dennis Green, everyone who has sat in the big office at the team's Tempe facility has talked about building a punishing running attack.

Not one of them did it. The Cardinals haven't run the ball more than 480 times in a season since moving to Arizona in 1988.

Whisenhunt at least has the track record - during his three years as offensive coordinator in Pittsburgh, the Steelers recommitted themselves to the run. And Whisenhunt would like the Cardinals offense to look like Pittsburgh West.

The Cardinals will begin work toward that goal on Friday, when the first of many off-season practices will be held. Players aren't allowed to wear pads at any minicamps, including the voluntary one this weekend, but expect Whisenhunt and his staff to begin stressing a physical, smart brand of football.

And when training camp opens - tentatively scheduled for July 29 - there won't be any lack of hitting.

"I think you have to have physical practices to establish the mentality, and I think you have to have fast practices," Whisenhunt said, "not so much from the standpoint of running, but getting to the line of scrimmage, getting out of the huddle, getting set.

"I think you have to have that speed in practice to get prepared for the regular season. And you have to know when to pull back, too, because you can't just go out there and put them on the Bataan Death March."

## Share the load

If the Cardinals are going to run the ball as much as Ken Whisenhunt desires, someone is going to have to share the carries with starter Edgerrin James. James is accustomed to a one-back offense, both in terms of formation and workload, but he'll have to adapt if the Cardinals run as much as Whisenhunt would like. Here's a breakdown of how carries were distributed when Whisenhunt was the Steelers' offensive coordinator.

### 2004: 618 total rushes

Jerome Bettis, 250 attempts (40 percent)

Duce Staley, 192 attempts (31 percent)

Everyone else, 176 attempts (29 percent)

### 2005: 549 total rushes

Willie Parker, 255 attempts (46 percent)

Jerome Bettis, 110 attempts (20 percent)

Verron Hayes, 74 attempts (14 percent)

Everyone else, 110 attempts (20 percent)

### 2006: 469 total rushes

Willie Parker, 337 attempts (72 percent)

Najeh Davenport, 60 attempts (13 percent)

Everyone else, 72 attempts (15 percent)

## Slimming down

The day after the season ended, Cardinals kicker Neil Rackers joked that if the uprights had been moved just a few inches, he would have had one heck of a season. Instead, Rackers missed nine field goals, including a few in late-game situations.

In 2005, Rackers enjoyed one of the finest seasons by a kicker in NFL history, making 40 of 42 field-goal tries. After last season ended, he tried to come up with reasons for the decline in 2006. One difference, he realized, was that he was carrying more weight.

So on Jan. 4, he hired a personal trainer, Kevin Kondo-Turner at Tthe Core Facility in Scottsdale.

"I had an extra 5 to 7 pounds and didn't feel quite as good physically," Rackers said. "I figured it was time to go to work."

Rackers worked with Kondo-Turner for three months, dropped weight and improved his muscle tone. It's hard to imagine there is an NFL kicker in better shape. He might be strong enough to move the uprights himself.

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