

RED-HOT CARDINALS OVERCOME VIKINGS TO BOOK PLAYOFF SPOT

LOS ANGELES: The Arizona Cardinals won their seventh straight and joined the Carolina Panthers in the post-season Thursday by holding off the depleted Minnesota Vikings for a 23-20 win Thursday. The Cardinals continue to roll over their opponents and are now assured of at least a playoff spot. They can claim their first NFC West division title since 2009 if the Seattle Seahawks lose or tie Sunday at Baltimore. "The season speaks for itself," said Cardinals coach Bruce Arians. "Knock on wood we get into the playoffs and everybody is healthy and ready to go."

The Cardinals blew a 10-point, fourth-quarter lead but got a 47-yard field goal from Chandler Catanzaro with 1:28 remaining to snap a tie and take a lead they would hold onto for good at the University of Phoenix stadium. The Vikings had a chance to win it or at least force overtime. But veteran pass rusher Dwight Freeney forced a fumble by Minnesota quarterback Teddy Bridgewater that was recovered by the Cardinals Calais Campbell with five seconds to go. Arizona just had to take one kneel-down after the turnover to run out the clock.

Arizona quarterback Carson Palmer beat up a Minnesota defense that was missing four starters. Palmer threw for 310 yards and two touchdowns and has 31 scoring passes on the year, breaking Kurt Warner's single-season franchise record. "This was a weird game but to win the weird ones shows the character of your team," Palmer said. Palmer, who was 25-of-35 with no interceptions, threw touchdown passes of 65 yards to wide receiver John Brown and 42 yards to wide receiver Michael Floyd.

The loss was the second in a row and the third in four weeks for the Vikings, who are fighting to stay in the post-season race. Bridgewater helped Minnesota get in position to tie the score at 20 with 4:55 left in the fourth quarter, but the Vikings' defense



ARIZONA: Arizona Cardinals tight end Darren Fells (85) is up-ended by Minnesota Vikings cornerback Trae Waynes (26) during the second half of an NFL football game on Thursday, Dec 10, 2015, in Glendale. — AP

couldn't stop the league's most explosive offense when it counted the most. Running back Adrian Peterson rushed for 69 yards on 23 carries after complaining publicly about his Minnesota coaches

because he got the ball just eight times the week before. Peterson also had a fumble and a touchdown. His touchdown Thursday was the 100th of his career and he moved ahead of Steven Jackson for

17th place on the NFL's all-time rushing list. Minnesota limped into the game without four starters on defense and without three others right behind them on the depth chart. — AFP

THUNDER DOWN HAWKS

OKLAHOMA CITY: Kevin Durant had 25 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists in his seventh career triple-double as the Oklahoma City Thunder beat the Atlanta Hawks 107-94 on Thursday. Russell Westbrook had 23 points and 10 assists. It was just the second time both Durant and Westbrook had at least 10 assists in the same game, and the first time it happened in a win. Durant got his final assist on a pass to Westbrook for a 3-pointer with 1:14 remaining. Serge Ibaka had a season-high 23 points and 10 rebounds for the Thunder, who won their third straight. Kent Bazemore scored 22 points and Jeff Teague had 18 for the Hawks, who had won their previous two games. Kyle Korver added 12 and Thabo Sefolosha fin-

ished with 11. The Thunder outrebounded the Hawks 52-34.

BULLS 83, CLIPPERS 80

Pau Gasol scored 24 points as Chicago beat the Clippers to end a three-game losing streak. The Bulls caught a big break midway through the third quarter when Clippers All-Star Blake Griffin was ejected for a hard foul against Taj Gibson, and they came away with the win after blowing a 16-point lead. Jimmy Butler finished with 14 points after pouring in a career-high 36 the previous night against Boston. Derrick Rose scored all of his 11 points in the second half, and Gibson finished with 12 points and eight rebounds. Griffin led the Clippers with 18

points. Chris Paul scored 12 but missed the tying 3-point attempt, while DeAndre Jordan added 10 points and 14 rebounds. The Clippers hit 10 of 22 3-pointers but came up short after winning three straight and six of seven.

NETS 100, 76ERS 91

Andrea Bargnani scored a season-high 23 points, and Thaddeus Young had 18 points and 11 rebounds as Brooklyn beat Philadelphia. Brooklyn won for the sixth time in its last seven home games. Philadelphia fell to 0-13 on the road. Shane Larkin scored 14 points and Bojan Bogdanovic had 10 for the Nets. Jahlil Okafor had 22 points and 10 rebounds, and T.J. McConnell scored

17 points for the 76ers.

KINGS 99, KNICKS 97

Rajon Rondo had 16 points, 12 assists and a jaw-dropping dunk in the fourth quarter that led Sacramento over New York. Rondo added nine rebounds to finish just shy of his fifth triple-double of the season. DeMarcus Cousins had 27 points and 11 rebounds for the Kings, who have just their second winning streak of the season. Sacramento also won three in a row in November. Carmelo Anthony had 23 points and 14 rebounds but missed a potential game-winning 3-pointer at the buzzer for the Knicks, who have lost four straight and eight of the past 10 games. — AP