

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH SPORTS

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SECTION
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**Sound the alarm:
Rib injury might
sideline Warner**

The Rams' newspaper-clipping service has provided no choice fodder this week. Coach Mike Martz likes to recycle trash talk and turn it into a pile of weekly motivational material for his team.

So far this week, the pickings have been slim. Merrill Hoge has hushed up. The Philadelphia Eagles are on their best behavior. Diplomacy is in. Dissing the Rams is out.

OK, so I'll be the one to do it. Pin this comment to the bulletin board:

Kurt Warner is in trouble, and so are the Rams.

Better give the defense some extra vitamins.

Make sure that Marshall Faulk's knees are properly lubed and aligned.

Make a wish that backup quarterback Jamie Martin can do for the Rams what Jeff Hostetler did for the 1990-91 New York Giants: step in for the injured starter, Phil Simms, and lead his team to Super Bowl glory.

It's obvious that Warner's injury is worse than what the Rams are divulging. Or maybe the Rams are being truthful. Maybe they've just talked themselves into a state of optimism, and are convinced that Warner will be strong and splendid.

But someone must be an alarmist ... at least until Warner pulls a John Wayne stunt, recovers from his wounds, passes for 335 yards and saves the town from the green meanies.

If the Rams are to prevail in Sunday's NFC Championship, they might have to get the dirty job done without the spirals contributed by their two-time National Football League MVP.

Warner is listed as "probable" on the team's official medical report for Sunday. That's a questionable, or even doubtful, assessment.

The Rams shut Warner down Thursday after he skipped a short pass to tight end Ernie Conwell in practice. The sore ribs flared again. Martin took over.

After practice, medical doctors treated Warner. Spin doctors treated the media.

Explanations were confusing and conflicting. Martz first said Thursday's problems were caused by Warner's adverse reaction to an electrical-stimulation treatment. But trainer Jim Anderson clarified Martz's version and attributed Warner's discomfort to the original prognosis: bruised ribs.

One high-ranking team executive visited the media workroom in an attempt to get a straight answer about Warner's status. He was puzzled by the contradictory answers he got from other members of the organization.

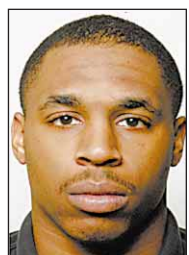
All we know is that Warner failed to make it through practice about 72 hours before the NFC Championship.

That's an ominous development. Warner's availability is anybody's guess, as is his viability. Even if Warner does start Sunday, how effective can he be? If Warner can't make it through a simple, noncontact practice, how can we expect him to endure the savagery of Philadelphia's blitzers?

One Rams player told me that the team is worried about Warner, because rib injuries are especially painful for a quarterback, who must turn and twist and put a lot of torque on his rib cage to throw a football. The player added that Warner needs to be mentally sharp to make precise, quick decisions against the Philly blitz — and that the pain could cause Warner to lose focus. The feeling in the locker room: It will be difficult to beat the Eagles without Warner.

Warner never has wavered in his toughness. In Super Bowl 34, he attempted 35 passes in the first half, exposing his torso to the constant stinging of the Tennessee blitzers. Warner was squirming in pain at halftime, and Martz told No. 2 quarterback Paul Justin to get ready to play. But Warner refused to give up, and was named the game's MVP after passing for 414 yards and two TDs.

See Miklasz, B9



College basketball insider

Two-sport standout Justin Gage decides another year as a wide receiver for Missouri will enhance his chance of being a first-round pick in the NFL. The MU hoops team is also glad the hustling backup forward won't be leaving school early. **B3**



Sunday's game
▶ 3:15 p.m. KTVI (Ch. 2)
The line: Rams by 12

Inside
▶ Orlando Pace and Hugh Douglas will go head-to-head Sunday. **B4**

▶ Rams DT Jeff Zgonina is in touch with his comedic side. **B4**

▶ Eagles RB Duce Staley says he's ready for the Rams this time. **B5**

Rib injury curtails Warner's day

Soreness lingers so trainer decides to shut him down

BY JIM THOMAS
Of the Post-Dispatch

There were no spasms, or no problems associated with electronic-stimulation treatments as first reported by Rams coach Mike Martz. Just sore ribs, very sore ribs, for quarterback Kurt Warner.

Warner missed most of Thursday's practice at Rams Park because of discomfort in his bruised ribs. Suffice it to say, just three days before Sunday's NFC Championship game against Philadelphia, the news was not welcome.

"He is sore," head trainer Jim Anderson said. "The first thing is, the issue is the ribs. It's not the back at all. I've heard reports of spasms and things. And I think Mike termed it that way, but this is strictly dealing with the bruised ribs."

"Kurt was sore (Wednesday) at the beginning of practice," Anderson said. "He threw a couple of periods and said it

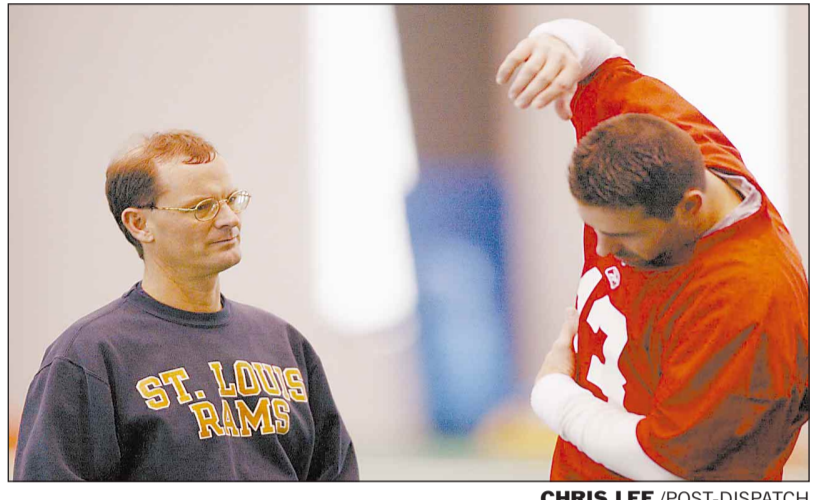
Coming Sunday

A 22-page special section will include a profile on Rams coach Mike Martz.

was loosening up. He continued to practice, and did fine and came in afterwards and said he was feeling good."

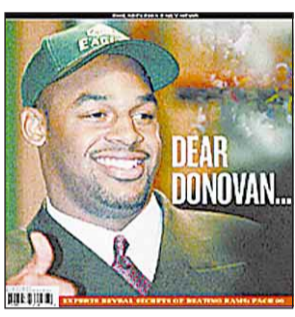
But that wasn't the case Thursday. According to Anderson, Warner underwent treatment for the ribs Thursday morning and at lunch time as he has done every day since suffering the injury with 8 1/2 minutes left in last week's divisional playoff victory over Green Bay.

See Rams, B4



Quarterbacks coach John Ramsdell takes a keen interest as Kurt Warner stretches Thursday. Warner injured his ribs vs. Green Bay. CHRIS LEE/POST-DISPATCH

The back (left) and front pages of Wednesday's Philadelphia Daily News make a statement.



Philadelphia likes QB McNabb now

He wins over the fans

BY DAN O'NEILL
Of the Post-Dispatch



Donovan McNabb's ability to run was key against the Bears. He gained 57 yards on four carries and was able to get away from Chicago's pass rush. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHILADELPHIA — The front and back of the Philadelphia Daily News said it all. The message began on the back of the tabloid on Wednesday, emblazoned onto a full-page color photo of Donovan McNabb in a thumbs-up pose. "DEAR DONOVAN ..." the headline blared, carrying the thought to the front page, where another giant photo depicted McNabb with his arms folded, as if waiting for the explanation: "WE'RE SORRY!"

The apology related to the way in which McNabb became an Eagle. When the Eagles used the No. 2 overall pick in the 1999 NFL draft to take McNabb, the City of Brotherly Love issued a resounding "Oh Brother." A group of locals attended the NFL Draft in New York and greeted the announcement with loud boos.

Even the mayor at the time, Ed Rendell, got in the act, making it known he was disappointed the Eagles didn't take running back Ricky Williams. As for the Daily News, they took it to a personal level, knocking McNabb's sex appeal with a story headlined "He's No Denzel."

Now, they all want to take it back. As the Eagles step to the threshold of the Super Bowl, See McNabb, B5

Blues' plan: Don't change anything

10-game win streak is on the line in Chicago

BY DERRICK GOULD
Of the Post-Dispatch

CHICAGO — Blues coach Joel Quenneville has been so anti-superstitious in his routine during this winning streak that it borders on superstitions.

With a franchise-record winning streak spanning 10 games that has propelled the Blues into what could be a bold, standings-altering weekend starting with tonight's game against Chicago, players and coaches could be expected to have bronzed their recent habits.

Right sock first. Always wear the tan belt. Sit in the same seat on the bus.

"I try to stay away from that," Quenneville said Thursday, pedaling on a stationary bike

Blues tighten the standings as streak continues

The Blues have won 10 consecutive games to put some pressure on the Red Wings and the Blackhawks in the Western Conference's Central Division.

Here's a look at where the Blues stood Jan. 3 — before their streak — and where they stand now.

JAN. 3	W	L	T	OL	Pts
Detroit	29	8	3	2	63
Chicago	23	12	8	0	54
Blues	18	12	6	3	45

TODAY	W	L	T	OL	Pts
Detroit	34	9	5	2	75
Chicago	29	15	9	0	67
Blues	28	12	6	3	65

after an optional practice in Buffalo's HSBC Arena. "In the past, I probably wouldn't have done anything different. Now I try not to do similar things, not to have carbon copies."

There is one carbon-copied custom. The lineup. With the exception of having

to alter the lines to fill in for the injury to winger Scott Young, Quenneville has marched out a similar lineup for all 10 games. In goal for all 10 victories has been Brent Johnson, effectively ending the goalie rotation between him and Fred Brathwaite. See Blues, B7

O'Hare drops complaint that race had been fixed

BY VAHE GREGORIAN
Of the Post-Dispatch

A month after short track speed skater Tom O'Hare asserted that he had been bumped from a U.S. Olympic berth because of a rigged race, O'Hare on Thursday withdrew from arbitration over the matter — and expressed no regret.

"I'm very glad I (fought) this. I feel like I can live with myself," said O'Hare, a Lutheran South High graduate who competed in the 1998 Nagano Olympics. "I'm just happy to put closure on the situation; I think I can move forward with my life now."

Under shadowy conditions that have the appearance of an undisclosed settlement being reached, both sides seemed to declare victory on what began as the third day of an arbitration hearing in Colorado Springs.

"As a result of circumstances outside of our control and outside the hearing, Tommy agreed to withdraw his complaint (and) agreed to resolve the matter amicably," said John Collins, an attorney for O'Hare.



"Tommy is very pleased with the results." Asked why the result would please O'Hare, Collins said he could not comment.

While it was unclear if a deal was struck, an attorney for one of the skaters O'Hare had accused of "conspiring to fix" the race acknowledged that a defamation lawsuit against O'Hare was dropped on Thursday. See O'Hare, B7

INSIDE

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- 7 **NHL:** The Flyers lose at home to Nashville 3-2 in overtime.
- 7 **NBA:** The Knicks rally from a 19-point deficit to beat the Suns.
- 9 **COLLEGE BASKETBALL:** The SIUC men's team earns its ninth win in 10 games.

Ted Williams is hospitalized

Baseball Hall of Fame member Ted Williams (right) was taken to a Gainesville, Fla., hospital in an ambulance Thursday.

Williams, 83, who has suffered two strokes and requires daily kidney dialysis, had a 100-degree temperature and low blood pressure Thursday when he was examined at his Florida home.

Williams was given fluids and antibiotics in the intensive

care unit, and his vital signs improved.

"Dad's doing all right," his son, John Henry Williams, told The Boston Globe. "He's got some sort of cold or flu or something."

John Henry Williams said he expected his father would be able to return home today.



Capriati, Hingis are set for final

Jennifer Capriati will try to defend her Australian Open championship tonight when she faces Martina Hingis in a rematch of last year's final.

Hingis is playing her sixth consecutive Australian Open final. But she has not won a Grand Slam title since taking the title in Melbourne in 1999.

On the men's side, Thomas Johansson will play in his first Grand Slam final. The 16th-seeded Swede won 7-6 (5), 0-6, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 over unseeded Jiri Novak. **B2**

Women's final 8:30 tonight, ESPN
Men's final 9 p.m. Saturday, ESPN