

Rookie gets curtain call

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Seven games into his career, Albert Pujols has already made a curtain call.

The 21-year-old rookie, off to an impressive start for St. Louis, hit a two-run homer as the Cardinals beat the Colorado Rockies 3-2 in their home opener Monday. The sellout crowd stood and cheered until Pujols came out of the dugout and tipped his cap. "It was unbelievable," Pujols said. "It's amazing the way the fans received me."

Pujols, who played most of his first professional season at Class A last year, was 7-for-14 with a homer, three doubles and eight RBIs in a three-game sweep of Arizona over the weekend. He's batting .346 and leads the Cardinals with 10 RBIs.

Pujols gave St. Louis a 2-0 lead Monday when he connected off Denny Neagle in the second inning for his second homer.

"He threw me a pitch I wanted and I just hit it," Pujols said. "It happened so quick, I couldn't explain it."

Larry Walker, who leads the Rockies with 12 RBIs, hit his fourth homer off

Andy Benes in the sixth to tie it at 2. Walker broke his bat on the swing, following through with a stub in his hands.

"Obviously, I've broken my bat and gotten hits off the wall before, but not out of the park," Walker said. "I'm glad it happened here and not at Coors Field because then it would be leading off ESPN tonight."

St. Louis won it in the ninth on a bases-loaded wild pitch. Jose Jimenez threw a fastball over the head of catcher Brent Mayne with one out, and Ray Lankford scored easily.

"The ball that Jose threw just kind of took off," Rockies manager Buddy Bell said. "That happens when you have a pitcher with a lot of movement. It was a bad time for that to happen."

The Cardinals have won four in a row after getting swept and outscored 32-11 in their season-opening series at Colorado.

The Rockies, who have lost four straight, missed a chance to take the lead in the ninth when Ron Gant doubled to left-center off Mike Timlin

(1-0) with one out and Jeff Cirillo on

first. Cirillo was an easy out at the plate on second baseman Fernando Vina's relay throw.

"I made sure I got my feet planted and got rid of it quick," Vina said.

Bobby Bonilla, activated from the disabled list for his first game of the season, started the winning rally when he doubled on the first pitch from Gabe White (0-1) in the ninth.

Pinch-runner J.D. Drew beat White's throw to third on Lankford's sacrifice bunt, and Jimenez intentionally walked Pujols to load the bases. Pinch-hitter Larry Sutton bounced into a force at home before Jimenez's wild pitch.

Benes, who allowed 10 runs in 2-3 innings at Colorado in his first start, gave up two runs on three hits in six innings. Neagle, who beat Benes in the second game of the season, allowed two runs on four hits in six innings. He struck out six.

Mark McGwire, was 0-for-3 and played six innings at first base. Hitless in 10 at-bats this season, McGwire hit a pair of fly balls to the warning track and struck out.

Quarterback chooses broadcasting

IRVING, Texas (AP) — As always, Troy Aikman came to Texas Stadium with his game face on.

He brought an inch-thick stack of index cards and enough family and friends to fill a ballroom. Banners from the three Super Bowls he won hung from the hole-in-the-roof visible behind him.

But when it came time to talk about the end of his 12-year career, the usually unflappable quarterback was overcome by emotion.

A few sentences into his nearly 1 1/2-hour retirement news conference Monday, Aikman put down the cards, took a breath and dragged a finger beneath and above his left eye.

"You watch and you think your time will never come," Aikman said slowly. "And my time's come."

Aikman called it a career 33 days

after being waived by the Dallas Cowboys.

While he believes he can still be a starting quarterback in the NFL, the right job wasn't out there.

So rather than risk suffering an 11th concussion or taking another hit on his aching back, the 34-year-old Aikman ended his playing career and is preparing to start another as a broadcaster.

"I know it's the right thing for me because of my health, concussions, the back problems I've had," Aikman said. "It took its toll."

Aikman is close to finalizing a deal with Fox to replace Matt Millen as the partner for play-by-play announcer Dick Stockton. An announcement could come as early as Tuesday, the source said.

Aikman's life is rapidly changing. He recently moved to California and in

late August his wife is due to have their first child. The couple also is raising an 11-year-old daughter from her previous marriage.

"I wanted to play. I just can't do that anymore," Aikman said. "I think when all things are considered it was the right thing for me and my family."

Aikman bit his lip as Cowboys owner Jerry Jones introduced the first player he ever drafted and reminisced about the rise of the team and the quarterback.

Before he turned the microphone over to Aikman, Jones presented a video prepared by NFL Films. It began with home movies from Aikman's youth and featured great moments from his career.

Dallas made Aikman the first pick in 1989.

youth soccer scores

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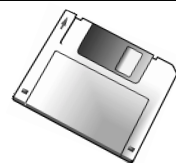


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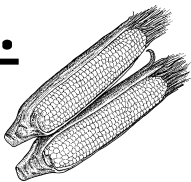
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