

All's well in Cardinal Nation, as the team comes home for Game 3

by Mary Delach Leonard, Beacon staff

Just-marrieds Kevin and Jenna Wingenbach and their small army of bridesmaids and groomsmen posed for pictures amid the statues of Redbird greats outside Busch Stadium Saturday afternoon, about a half-hour before the Cardinals were to take the field in Philadelphia to play the first game of their playoff series against the Phillies.

"We're big Cardinals fans," said the groom as he and his bride smiled for the camera next to the bronze statue of Lou Brock.

The newlyweds have tickets to Game 3 of the National League Division Series that will be played Tuesday at 4:07 p.m. at Busch. They planned to listen



to Saturday's game aboard their party bus as they continued on their wedding photo tour of the town, Wingenbach added.

Then there's Jon Strini of St. Charles who broke his arm the day after the Cards made it to the playoffs. He asked his doctor for a special cast.

"I said, 'Do you have Cardinal red?' She said, 'Yes,' and I said 'OK,'" Strini said.

And so it goes in Cardinal Nation as the best fans in baseball continue to revel in their team's come-from-behind September race to the National League Wild Card, aware that few outside St. Louis expect the Redbirds to win in the postseason.

The Cards were blasted by the Phillies 11-6 in Game 1 and saw ace Chris Carpenter roughed up in Game 2 before coming back to beat the Phillies 5-4 to tie the series Sunday night. All eight of ESPN's experts, pick the Phillies to win the series, though at least seven of the eight predicted that the Cards would win at least one game.

But in Cardinal Nation, fans have been riding the roller coaster with their never-say-never team throughout the long 2011 season, and they have learned to believe until the game's last out.

Although, looks can be deceiving: All decked out in Cardinals shirts, the Rice family would seem to be a firm fans. Chris, Mason and Gabbie Rice of Lake Saint Louis planned to be watching the game later. Mason, 10, said, "I hope they play the Yankees in the World Series -- and lose." His parents, at the same time, said, "Hey!" Young Rice, it turns out, is a Yankees fan.



After the Redbirds snatched the postseason berth from the Atlanta Braves Wednesday night, Wild Card fever caught fire on the social networks.

On Twitter, TortyCraig has become a sensation with Cardinals fans, tweeting insider information from the Cardinals clubhouse. TortyCraig is the pet tortoise of Cardinals outfielder Allen Craig, who insists that he is not behind the Twitter account.

Although Torty's tweets tend to be lighthearted, fans got behind his comment after the team's loss on Saturday. "Being down 0-1 in the NLDS is an easier deficit to overcome than trailing in the Wild Card by 10 games on August 25. Our #STLCards can do it," TortyCraig tweeted. Replied one fan: "@TortyCraig if a tortoise can type then the @stl_cardinals can doitttt."

And in virtual Collinsville, the World's Largest Catsup Bottle is flying an impressive virtual Cardinal flag.

Mike "The Big Tomato" Gassmann, who promotes the roadside landmark, acknowledges that it was easier to photoshop a flag onto the ketchup bottle's Facebook page picture than trying to install a real flag on the 170-foot-tall water tower. He estimates a flag would have to be at least 12 feet by 25 feet to fly from the bottle.

Facebook friends of the big bottle have relished the image, he said.

"The Cardinals really had to play catsup baseball. Ten-and-a-half games since Aug. 25 is a monumental achievement," added Gassmann who loves the Redbirds and ketchup puns – and is hoping the Phillies can't cut the mustard. # # #

