

# MVP Holmes shines brightest on night of stars

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TAMPA, Fla. -- On a night when James Harrison ran himself into exhaustion on the longest play in Super Bowl history and Kurt Warner and Larry Fitzgerald passed and caught their way into the postseason record books, it was going to take something special to steal the show.

It was going to take someone making one of those receptions -- like Lynn Swann's and John Stallworth's -- that will find its way onto the loop tape of NFL Network's greatest plays.

It was going to take Santonio Holmes leaning out from a high wire, arms outstretched, and hauling in a pass amid a committee meeting of men outfitted in red jerseys.

So that's what Holmes did, the final, dramatic, decisive highlight in a game that wouldn't stop producing them.

Holmes' 6-yard touchdown catch meant so many things to so many people.

To Ben Roethlisberger, it was a bit of vindication for a quarterback who felt like his team won in spite of him in Super Bowl XL.

To the Rooney family, it was a chance for some separation among NFL royalty with a sixth Super Bowl title, one more than the regal 49ers and rowdy Cowboys.

To Mike Tomlin, it was a chance to prove the Steelers got it right two years ago when they hired him over popular former assistants Ken Whisenhunt and Russ Grimm, who looked on in stunned silence when Holmes came down with the ball.

And to Holmes, it was, if not redemption, then at least validation.

Since the Steelers drafted him out of Ohio State three years ago, the 24-year-old Holmes has been the young receiver with so much potential.

But he failed to emerge from the shadow of the popular, polished Hines Ward.

And he failed to avoid the missteps that hurt him and his team.

Suspended for a marijuana-related offense, Holmes missed the Steelers' home loss against the New York Giants, and his absence might have cost them a win.

But he climbed out of Tomlin's dog house to score touchdowns in each of the Steelers' AFC playoff wins, and on Sunday, against the Cardinals, he delivered a play that snatched the MVP trophy out of Fitzgerald's hands and into his own.

"I told him this morning, 'Players make names for themselves in games like this,' " Ward said afterward. "I'm so elated for him, because he worked his tail off to get where he is."

Until that last drive, when the Steelers trailed 23-20 and their chances seemed bleak, the night had belonged to Warner and Fitzgerald.

Warner had already become the first quarterback to throw for 300 yards in three Super Bowls and tied one of Joe Montana's records with 11 touchdowns this postseason.

Fitzgerald had broken playoff records for receptions, yards and touchdowns, and his 64-yard catch and run had given the Cardinals the lead and brought them back from the devastation of Harrison's 100-yard interception just before halftime.

"I dared the team," Holmes said of what took place on the sidelines as the Steelers' offense waited to take the field. "I came up and told Ben that I wanted to be the guy, that I wanted to win this game for you guys, man.

"Just give me the ball, give me the chance to make plays and I will do it for you."

And he did.

And if you happened to see it, it's something you'll never forget on a night with a lot of those things.

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