

Future of Minnesota Wild Remains Uncertain

BY ANDREW WYLIE

The Minnesota Wild entered the month of February with a 23-21-6 record, which puts them 12th in the Western Conference. If the standings hold, the Wild will miss the playoffs for the second year in a row. Bruce Boudreau's squad has struggled with inconsistency, earning some impressive wins like the victory over the conference-leading Tampa Bay Lightning, but are also finding ways to lose to any team on any given night.

The team has some aging and untradable roster pieces in players like Zach Parise, Mikko Koivu, and Ryan Suter, who are taking up a huge chunk of their salary cap. New GM Bill Guerin has a difficult road ahead to build the Wild into a contender, not only for this season, but also to put together a core that can contend for a Stanley Cup for the seasons to come. Guerin took over for Paul Fenton, who made some very questionable decisions in his one year at the helm. Guerin not only has to work around the remaining contracts of players like Parise, but he must also decide which quality players he can trade now to make the team better.

Jason Zucker's name is again being rumored to be on the move. Last year, Fenton ham-handedly a potential trade for Zucker. Now Guerin must navigate the trade waters more carefully as not to cause the same kind of locker room strife that arose last year under Fenton's leadership. Zucker is the Wild's most tradeable asset and, if handled right, could bring the Wild the multiple prospects of draft picks they so desperately need. Alternatively, if Guerin can find alternative ways to make the current roster stronger to contend this year, having Zucker around will only make this season more successful.

The Wild is a long-shot to make the playoffs this year, and the biggest date for this season is probably February 24th, which is the NHL trade deadline. Guerin has not rushed into any trades thus far, which means he is probably waiting for inquiring teams to make their best offer for players that can help their stretch run.

Even after the trade deadline, important decisions will need to be made, most notably on head coach Boudreau, whose contract is up after this year. Younger stars like Jordan Greenway and Luke Kunin are also set to become restricted free agents. This is also the last year for the contract of long-time Wild captain Mikko Koivu, although it is unlikely that he fits into the long-term plans of the team.

The state of the franchise for the Wild is probably going to be the long game as they wait for their older player's contracts to expire and for their minor league prospects to grow into NHL-ready stars. The important decisions yet to be made this month on the direction of the franchise moving forward will shape the team for years to come.



Wild hockey season update. CREDIT: Ben Diers

Twins Sign Josh Donaldson to Four-Year Contract

BY BENJAMIN DIERS

After finishing the 2019 regular season with a record of 101-61 and hitting an MLB record 307 home runs, the Twins have added even more firepower to their stellar lineup, with the addition of third baseman Josh Donaldson. Donaldson, who signed a four-year \$92 million contract with the Twins this offseason, is a veteran slugger and a former American League MVP who hit 37 home runs for the Atlanta Braves last season.

Throughout his career, Donaldson has moved around the league several times, having previously played for the Oakland Athletics, Toronto Blue Jays, Cleveland Indians, and Atlanta Braves. Despite posting great batting numbers with each team he has played for, Donaldson has struggled to find a team that would give him a long-term contract. Prior to his deal with the Twins, the longest contract of his career was a two-year deal with Toronto. The Twins, who failed in their offseason pursuit of other big-name free agents like Gerrit Cole and Madison Bumgarner, were willing to give the 34-year-old Donaldson one more year on a contract than any of the other teams pursuing him. This added job security is likely the biggest reason Donaldson chose to sign with the Twins over other teams. In any case, Donaldson brings a proven veteran presence to the relatively young and inexperienced Twins locker room.

The addition of Donaldson further bolsters the record setting lineup we saw from the Twins last year, but questions surrounding the Twins pitching rotation remain. The Twins attempted to go after several pitchers in free agency but were relatively unsuccessful. The only free agent pitchers the team signed were Rich Hill and Homer Bailey, both aging veterans with significant injury concerns in their pasts. With the departure of starting pitcher Kyle Gibson, the Twins rotation behind José Berrios and Jake Odorizzi looks murky. The Twins are clearly hoping that promising young pitchers like Devin Smeltzer and Randy Dobnak, who both made MLB appearances last season, will take big steps forward this season.

Heading into the 2020 season, the Twins seem content to rely on their homer-happy batting lineup to push them over the edge in games. The long-term commitment to Donaldson signals that the team feels that their championship window is open for at least a few more years. If the team can get average or above-average performances from their pitching staff this season, their lineup should be enough to propel the team to the playoffs for the second season in a row.



Newest addition to the Twins - Josh Donaldson. CREDIT: Ben Diers