

Timberwolves Look Toward the Future After Roster Changes

BY ANDREW WYLIE

The Timberwolves started their 2019-2020 campaign with a little hope that their young core of Andrew Wiggins and Karl Anthony Towns could take the team in a promising direction. But, after the first few weeks, the season fell apart, and long losing streaks followed. New GM Gersson Rosas had seen enough and completely revamped the roster into a full-blown rebuilding project.

Rosas started by trading away ineffective point guard Jeff Teague and his large contract for Allan Crabb. This was a trade mostly to get rid of Teague. Rosas then proceeded to trade his best trade-eligible asset in Robert Covington for Malik Beasley, Juancho Hernangomez, and a first-round draft pick in a massive four-team trade. The assets Rosas got in return are something that the Wolves can build their future on. Beasley contributed immediately and is playing with passion after being lost behind Denver's deep bench.

The most surprising and welcome trade came shortly after when Rosas traded away Andrew Wiggins and his massive max contract to the Golden State Warriors as well as a future first-round pick for All-Star point guard D'Angelo Russell. Russell is one of the top point guards in the league and is also one of Karl Anthony Towns' best friends. Wiggins was one of the most divisive Timberwolves in team history, as he constantly floated through games and played with low passion. Wiggins may eventually flourish in the high-class Warriors organization, but he was never going to make a positive difference in Minnesota.

The Wolves also were able to trade Gorgui Dieng and his high-priced contract in a three-team trade, receiving forward James Johnson in return.

While Dieng had his moments with the Wolves, he clearly had not earned his costly contract and didn't move the Wolves forward when he was on the court.

The rest of this season will be an opportunity for the new Wolves to forge a new identity and grow as a team with an eye to the future. Wins will still most likely be hard to come by, especially after KAT suffered a fractured left wrist and is expected to miss significant time for the remainder of the season. KAT and Russell were only able to play one game together, so fans will have to wait a little longer to see how the two stars play together.

This team does have a pulse that has been missing from the Timberwolves for the last few seasons. They have a solid core in Russell, Beasley, and KAT, along with some young role players that certainly have an opportunity to be solid contributors for years to come. On top of that, the Wolves will be in play for a top lottery pick this year, and if they can get into the top three, they can potentially get another quality young piece.

One thing that Rosas and the Timberwolves will have to focus on this offseason is their defense. In the small sample size of the new-look Wolves, the defense has shown that it is still the weakest aspect of the team. The NBA's Western Conference is stacked with talent, and the Wolves will have to get a whole lot better on that end if they are going to make a run at the playoffs next year. Either way, the team looks to be heading in the right direction and will most certainly be more exciting than they have been since Jimmy Butler forced his way out of town.



Getting a good look at the Timberwolves at Target Center. CREDIT: Andrew Wylie