

This season, the trade deadline had the Wild in a somewhat similar situation as the year before. The Wild were competing but were wildly inconsistent and were just a few games out of the 8th and final playoff seed. New GM Bill Geurin took a more measured look at his roster than his predecessor and traded the Wild's talented and popular forward Jason Zucker to Pittsburgh for a first-round draft pick, a quality defensive prospect, and the talented but underperforming Alex Galchunyk. Many analysts have called the trade a big win for both teams.

Geurin surprised many by firing the popular head coach Bruce Boudreau right before the trade deadline. The Wild will be coached by interim coach Dean Evanson for the remainder of the season. Geurin also made headlines by almost trading Zach Parise and his monster contract to the New York Islanders. However, the trade didn't materialize before the trade deadline expired.

Just like last year, the Wild are a few games out of the 8th and final playoff spot in the Western Conference. However, the future is looking a lot brighter this year than it has for a few seasons. Longtime goaltender Devan Dubnyk continued his uneven performance this year, leading to a lot of the inconsistency the Wild has experienced this season. However, since turning to backup Alex Stalock, they have stabilized one of their weakest positions.

The emergence of Fiala, Stalock, and Donato are certainly encouraging for this year's squad. The playoffs are in reach, and the Wild are playing some of their best hockey at the right time. The future is looking bright as the Wild will have their exciting young Russian forward Kirill Kaprizov make his debut next season. Kaprizov is a scoring machine, and the idea of him and Fiala working on the same line is the reason for Wild fans to be excited. Bill Geurin has shown that he is not afraid to make big moves and seems to have a good plan in place for the Wild to return to prominence in the NHL.

Houston Astros' Cheating Hits Home For the Twins

BY ANDREW WYLIE

Major League Baseball had one of the biggest scandals in its history this offseason with the revelation that the Houston Astros concocted a scheme to steal the signs from the opposing catcher to the pitcher with illegally placed cameras. The message was conveyed to the batter via banging on a garbage can.

The biggest advantage a pitcher has on a hitter is that the hitter doesn't know what is coming. Thus, this cheating gave the Astros an unprecedented advantage in countless games and helped them win a World Series Championship after the 2017 season. Baseball commissioner Rob Manfred came up with some punishment for the Astros organization but gave zero punishment for all the players that participated in the cheating. This lack of foresight has turned him into baseball public enemy number two behind the Astros players.

The star players of the 2017 team, like Jose Altuve and Alex Bregman, initially gave smug and deflective answers that treated the situation flippantly. After this backfired, they gave written statements that were again treated flippantly and with a noticeable lack of real contrition, which backfired for them even more.

Much to the chagrin of Manfred and the Astros, fans, as well as major league players from past and present, have taken to social media and interviews to torch the Astros for their cheating. Some players, like former Dodgers pitcher Yu Darvish, had career-defining moments against the Astros in that World Series. He had a rough performance and was seen at the time as a pitcher who couldn't perform when he needed to. This perception undoubtedly cost him his offseason contract and the teams that were interested in him.

Another victim was our very own Minnesota Twins. In the last offseason, Marwin Gonzalez signed a two-year \$21 million deal to be a capable defender who could play multiple positions. One of the main reasons the Twins signed him was because he came up big in the World Series for the Astros. The Twins brass even called him a World Series hero in their press conference with Marwin sitting next to them with a big smile.

Using a small sample size, a Houston Astros fan watched 58 of the team's home games in 2017 to count the amount of cheating each player did. According to his tally, Gonzalez finished as the biggest cheater on the Astros. He then used his clout to get a large contract with the Twins and was silent about the cheating all last year.

After the players' and fans' anger at the Astros grew, Marwin decided to be the first Astros player to apologize for his role in the scandal publicly. He read a PR statement at the Twins Spring Training facility in Fort Myers and at least appeared sincere. The apology was national news and led to other cheating Astros to read their own PR statements.

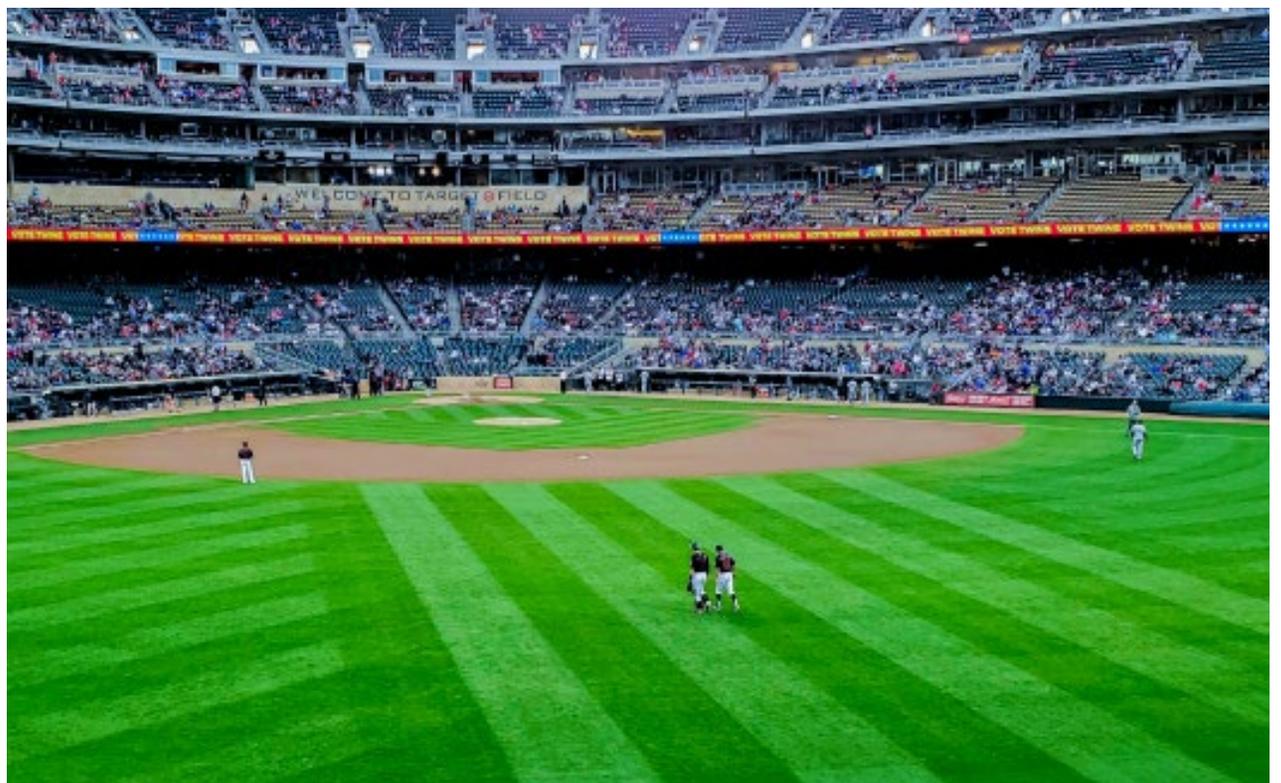
Since that time, the Twins have taken the same stance as the commissioner, banking on everyone moving on and forgetting about it. The Twins made a huge splash with the Josh Donaldson signing, and the team's focus remains on finding success this season.

This season is going to be intriguing just to see how forgiving and forgetting fans and affected players are going to be. It can be argued rather compellingly that there has never been a worse cheating scandal in baseball history, and that is saying a lot. And without any punishment at all brought down on the cheaters themselves like Marwin, it will be interesting to see how the season plays out.



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Spring is here and so is baseball. CREDIT: Andrew Wylie