

SPORTS

Minnesota Timberwolves Season Update

BY ANDREW WYLIE

THE FATE OF THE TIMBERWOLVES for the remaining portion of the 2018-19 season rests almost entirely with their two max contract players, Karl-Anthony Towns and Andrew Wiggins. As of this writing, the Timberwolves have compiled a record of 25-28, which is 11th in the western conference and puts them three and a half games out of the 8th and final playoff position.

The Wolves have had some things go right and a lot of things go wrong this season following their most successful year since 2004. The unquestionable leader of last year's Timberwolves, Jimmy Butler, forced his way out of town. The head coach, Tom Thibodeau, was let go after 40 games when it became clear he was not going to lead this team forward. He was replaced by Ryan Saunders, long time bench coach and the son of Timberwolves great, the late Flip Saunders.

The Jimmy Butler trade did bring in additions Dario Saric and Robert Covington, who have both proven to be valuable assets. Derrick Rose has become an excellent comeback story, as he is averaging 18.3 points a game and having his best season since his 2011 MVP campaign. Rookie Josh Okogie has been an exciting surprise with his hard-nosed play.

Injuries have decimated the Wolves with key players missing multiple games. Jeff Teague, Derrick Rose, Robert Covington, and Tyus Jones have all missed significant time. This year's unquestionable leader has been Towns. He has been averaging 22.8 points per game on over 50% shooting, with 12.1 rebounds and 3.2 assists per game. His intensity and focus seem higher this year than his previous three seasons, rewarding the team that gave him a max contract deal last offseason. The future of the Timberwolves rests with the continued maturation and dominance of Karl-Anthony Towns. He will need to continue to play at a high level for the team to make a playoff push.

Yet the Wolves will live and die by the play of Wiggins. No coach has succeeded in motivating him to excel consistently, though there have been some positive early signs under Ryan Saunders so far. He signed a max contract deal the previous offseason worth just under \$37 million a year. With that contract, they cannot trade him or keep him on the bench. That goes for every season until it expires in 2023. The Wolves will not be able to fill the roster with coveted free agents as long as Wiggins commands so much of the payroll.

Wiggins has averaged 17.8 points a game with a 39.6% shooting and 4.6 rebounds a game with only 2.3 assists. Anyone that has seen Wiggins play anywhere near his potential has been frustrated by his lack of consistency and what can only be described as a lack of heart.

There is a lot of regular season left, but the Timberwolves will need to get healthy, play consistent, and go on more than a few winning streaks if they want to make the playoffs. Simply making the playoffs is about the highest ceiling anyone could realistically hope for from this year's squad. They are also not bad enough to tank into the draft lottery.

The results of this season will determine the future in many ways. If they falter, they could be looking at a completely revamped roster next year and a new head coach, with yet another rebuild. If they succeed, perhaps they can continue to develop their core players and add the right pieces for a deep playoff run in future seasons. †



Photography provided by The Pioneer Press

Pictured above Minnesota Timberwolves forward Andrew Wiggins sizes up a defender

Trio of Concordia Graduates Making an Impact on the Final Four

BY BEN DIERS

AS THE MONTH OF MARCH draws nearer, preparations for the 2019 March Madness men's basketball tournament are well underway. Stadiums and facilities across the country are preparing to host basketball games and events related to the tournament. In Minneapolis, the city is preparing to host the Final Four at US Bank Stadium in early April. At the office of the 2019 Final Four Local Organizing Committee, a trio of former Concordia students, Helena Way, Cordell Smith, and Ivan Cardona, are hard at work planning and organizing many different facets of the event.

The youngest of the Concordia graduates working at the local organizing committee, Helena Way was brought onto the committee as a Future Stars Intern. In working at the local organizing committee, Way has helped plan community outreach projects like Read to the Final Four, a bracketed style reading competition for third graders, and The Final Four Dribble, a parade involving thousands of kids dribbling basketballs through downtown Minneapolis. When asked about her foundation in sports management at Concordia, Way mentioned how helpful some of her sport management classes were. She said, "Dr. Huberty's sports management class had a huge impact on me. Some of the speakers she brought in, including Ivan who hired me here, really helped me to understand the sports world." In talking about opportunity within the world of sports management, Way's biggest piece of advice to current students is to take every possible opportunity. "Always say yes to everything. Don't limit yourself. Take every opportunity that comes your way."

Another Concordia graduate making an impact on the Final Four is Cordell Smith. In his position with the local organizing committee, Smith is involved in planning events like Read to the Final Four and the Final Four Dribble along with Way. When asked about the ways that Concordia prepared him for his job, Smith said that the people and the connections he made there had a big impact on him today. He also noted the value of the informational interview he got to conduct with a real athletic director while he was a student at Concordia, saying, "I got to interview an athletic director that explained the not-so-glamorous parts of the job. It just gave me a realistic view of what it's really like to be an athletic director." As far as advice for current Concordia students, Smith said, "Be willing to do anything. Willingness to help and do whatever is what it takes."

The third and final Concordia graduate working at the local organizing committee is Ivan Cardona.