

# SPORTS

## Vikings Look to Bolster Offensive Line in the Off-Season

BY ZACK MOELLER

**T**HERE WAS A LOT OF HYPE around the Minnesota Vikings in the 2018 season. Coming off a near Super Bowl appearance, the team felt like they were one piece away from winning it all. So in the 2017 off-season, they spent big money to bring in Kirk Cousins, an untested but rumored stud of a quarterback.

The time was right, the defense was fantastic, the offense was dangerous; it was supposed to be the year. Unfortunately, in the most Minnesotan sports way, the Vikings failed to even make the playoffs. How could they be so close and then miss the playoffs altogether?

But the past is past. Looking forward, the Vikings have a few things they need to do this off season to get things back on track and working towards another playoff run. The main thing that needed to be handled this off season was the offensive line, which was horrendous last season. After the first wave of free agency, the offensive line unfortunately took a step backwards after Nick Easton left for the New Orleans Saints. All free agent moves so far have been with keeping the defense in line by resigning Anthony Barr after he almost signed with the Jets and restructuring Everson Griffen's deal. The Viking's other main free agent on the defensive side, Sheldon Richardson, signed a deal with the Browns at the beginning of free agency.

While keeping Barr and Griffen will be great for the defense in the future, the Vikings struggled to move the ball at all at the end of the season due to having a poor offensive line. No matter how good the defense is, the team will not find success without changing some of their big men. About a week into free agency, the Vikings took the first step in revamping the offensive line, signing former Titans guard Josh Kline to a three year deal.

Another place the team could look to get some linemen is in the 2019 draft which is at the end of April. The Vikings have one pick in each of the first four rounds and several picks later in the draft. It would be shocking if they didn't take a lineman with some of those picks if they haven't signed any by then, but only time will tell.

If the Vikings can continue to improve the line at all before the season begins, fans have the right to be excited for the Vikings to be a threat again this season. If no such changes are made, it could be another long, painful season. †



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## Minnesota Timberwolves Season All but Over

BY ZACK MOELLER

**I**F THE JIMMY BUTLER FIASCO at the beginning of the season wasn't enough of an ominous warning as to how the Timberwolves season was going to end up, one look at their record and remaining schedule should be enough to convince even the most die-hard fans that the Timberwolves' season is all but over. With thirteen games left, the team finds themselves five games below 0.500, 7.5 games out from a playoff spot, and boasting the third hardest remaining schedule in the entire league. Coming off the team's first playoff appearance in over a decade, the season should have been one filled with optimism as the team's young core should have begun to grow into a powerhouse in the Western Conference... So what happened?

The final days of the off season marked the beginning of the end of All-Star Jimmy Butler's short stay in Minnesota. Butler's growing disdain for upper management and teammates boiled over into an ugly departure from the team resulting in a trade to the Philadelphia 76ers. Although the Timberwolves looked to save face by acquiring solid players in the trade, the wheels continued to come off as the team fired then head coach Tom Thibodeau for his handling of the Butler situation and replacing him with interim head coach Ryan Saunders, son of the late Flip Saunders. While the team initially responded well to the turnover and went on a small winning streak, the team has been more mediocre recently.

Some of poor performance can be credited to injuries, including a key one to Robert Covington, a player received in the Butler Trade, which has sidelined him ever since the turn of the new year. Covington's absence has caused the Timberwolves to return to a poor defensive team after surging higher in defensive rating with his addition.

The name Andrew Wiggins is also starting to sound like a broken record at this point. Wiggins, full of potential, has had yet another disappointing season; historically bad amongst high usage players in the modern NBA history bad. If you need more of an explanation, take a look at his season shot chart.

Believe it or not, among all the negatives and mediocrity, there is some glimmers of success. Karl Anthony-Towns has been an absolute madman since his appearance in the All-Star game. In that time Towns has averaged thirty-four points, 13.4 rebounds, 3.4 assists, and 1.2 blocks with a shooting line of .606/.506/.800 including a couple games before the break. He has also led in the league in player efficiency rating since that time.

Minnesota native Tyus Jones has been playing well for the Timberwolves as well, averaging ten points and almost five assists per game. All three point-guards for the Wolves (Tyus Jones, Derrick Rose, and Jeff Teague) are all on their last year of a contract, and the team will look to keep two. This leads to the last bright spot of the season, the rise of Derrick Rose. Rose has had a breakout season after multiple mediocre seasons trying to come back from two horrific leg knee injuries. When healthy, Rose has shown he still has plenty in the tank to give to his team and has made a strong case for sixth man of the year award this season.

On paper, the Timberwolves have what it takes to be a very competitive team. When they have the drive to play hard and can manage to stay healthy, they can be very good. Depending on what they do in the off-season, fans could have a lot to look forward to next season, it's just unfortunate to have to talk about next season before this season is even over. †