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WILD

It's Been One Year Since the Wild Fired Mike Yeo



By [Heather Rule](#) - February 13, 2017

One year ago, the Minnesota Wild played a home game against Boston for a Saturday matinee. It was another frustrating game in a string of losses that made up the latest Winter Swoon for the Wild. It seemed to some fans that the players quit on their coach. It seemed like it was rock bottom and the worst of the swoons.

The Wild lost to the Bruins, 4-2. By the end of the night, Mike Yeo was fired as the Wild's head coach. He was in the middle of his fifth season with the Wild, going 173-132-44 in his Minnesota tenure. As the calendar turned to 2016, the Wild won just three games until the firing (3-12-4) and added a five-game losing streak prior to the eight-game skid that ended with Yeo's exit.

John Torchetti took over and finished 15-11-1 with the Wild, a team that once again found a way into the playoffs. They lost to Dallas in six games. But Yeo's demise certainly felt like a very low point for the state of hockey.

One year later, the mood around this team couldn't be more opposite.

The Wild hired Bruce Boudreau in the offseason. The hire excited a lot of people based on his history as a head coach, frank nature with the media and overall just a fresh face that seemed like the right move.

It really is remarkable how far this team has come in a year

So far, whatever he's done is working wonders. The Wild are the best team in the Western Conference. They've gone 26-4-3 since Dec. 2, with their latest victory coming at home Sunday (against another Original Six team with an afternoon start – like Boston last year), 6-3 over the Detroit Red Wings. They sit at 37-12-6 with 80 points.

The individual stats for the Wild are positive as well. Goaltender Devan Dubnyk leads the league with 31 wins. Mikael Granlund leads the team with 50 points, good for 17th in the NHL. Ten players are in double-digits for goals. They consistently score three, four, five goals per game, rather than scrape by with just one or two.

It really is remarkable how far this team has come in a year. If anything, I think it shows how much a coaching change can affect a group of players. Basically, it's a very similar group to last season. The Wild added Eric Staal and Boudreau brought in Chris Stewart for his second stint with the team. The same group of players that floundered so much under Yeo last winter can't stop winning games under Boudreau. The jury's still out on what could happen in the playoffs, but he's definitely living up to the hype for the rest of the season.

This isn't necessarily indicative of Yeo's inability to be an effective head coach. Everyone knows how coaches in this league are hired to be fired, then rotate to another team who's in search of the next

leader behind the bench. Sometimes, it's about a change and not personal.

Don't ever forget that sports are a business.

By the same token, Boudreau came in with stellar credentials as a coach with Washington and Anaheim. Yes, everyone also gets reminded of his poor Game 7 record in the playoffs (1-7). He's developed a reputation as an outstanding regular-season coach but couldn't get over the hump of losing Game 7s.

He had the team going pretty well by December. He's candid with the media about players' shortcomings or sings their praises when warranted. That's probably one of the most visual differences between him and Yeo.

Meanwhile, Yeo went to St. Louis as an assistant coach to Ken Hitchcock this season. Yeo took the lead earlier this month after the struggling Blues fired Hitch. Yeo is off to a good start calling the shots for his new team, going 5-1-0. Maybe it really is all about a change of pace for these teams.

So a year after things looked so dire for the Wild, they're one of the hottest teams in the NHL with a new coach. Yeo moved on and is getting the chance to coach again. What a difference a couple changes can make.

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