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## RULE: Age Is Just A Number When It Comes To Cullen



By [Heather Rule](#) - September 28, 2017

Matt Cullen could have ended his lengthy NHL career with back-to-back Stanley Cups. It's tough to get more textbook going-out-on-top than that. Instead, the Minnesota lad is back for another run with his former team, the Minnesota Wild.

He's won three Stanley Cups – championship rings for each of his three boys – and speculation about his retirement this past spring and summer was a hot topic. During an on-ice interview with Sportsnet after the 2017 Cup victory, the reporter asked Cullen if he was “going out on a winning note tonight?”

“Yeah, I mean, probably,” Cullen said. “Like I said, I'm gonna give it a little bit of time. ... Most likely.”

The guy just played two months of postseason hockey. It's easy to see the appeal of some rest and relaxation that retirement can bring.

It turns out, he's not quite done with the NHL. He decided retirement wasn't for him right now and signed a one-year, \$1 million deal with the Wild on Aug. 16. If he had to go somewhere for a final (?) and 20th NHL season, it might as well be back home.

This isn't just a feel-good, coming-home story though. Cullen, who turns 41 on Nov. 2, can still play hockey at a high level. After all, he was linemates with Sidney Crosby in Pittsburgh. It's not like he is a player on the verge of being washed up, or somebody that fans want to see hang up his skates before the downturn.

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Cullen played 72 regular-season games with Pittsburgh last season and the full 82 games the year before. He totaled 29 goals and 34 assists in his two championship seasons with Pittsburgh. He's been on the positive side of the plus-minus column the past five seasons. He scored 101 points in three seasons with the Wild from 2010-13.

He also ranks sixth among active NHL players in games played, has won more than 50 percent of faceoffs in every season since 2003-04 and has 56 points in 123 career playoff games.

Cullen came into Wild training camp this year and [reportedly passed coach Bruce Boudreau's rigorous skating test](#) without much trouble. Not bad for a so-called “old guy” in the NHL. Cullen missed Monday's practice with a lower-body injury but joined the optional skate Thursday, according to Michael Russo of *The Athletic*. At this point, I'm not too worried about it; Wild fans should be more concerned about Zach Parise's health, but that's another story.

For those that want to get into a leadership angle with Cullen, maybe his veteran experience will rub off on some of the younger players, too. He and Eric Staal were teammates in 2006 when they won a Cup with the Carolina Hurricanes. Staal signed with the Wild last year and ended up the team's leading scorer with 28 goals.

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Cullen's Minnesota hockey connections run deep. He's from Virginia, Minn, is a Moorhead Spud and St. Cloud State alum. Minnesota, and presumably North Dakota, fans flocked to Moorhead the past couple summers when Cullen made his visit with the Stanley Cup. This August, he posed for pictures, signed autographs and greeted fans at a Moorhead Dairy Queen. The DQ even turned Lord Stanley's Cup into a giant Blizzard treat.

At least Minnesota fans have the chance to get up-close to the Cup, thanks to so many hometown players scattered throughout the NHL. The odds are pretty good when they're spread out across so many teams.

Some professional athletes just don't show age, and Cullen is one of them. Minnesota Twins fans had fun watching 44-year-old Bartolo Colon pitch this summer. Now Wild fans can enjoy Cullen's time back in town. He still has the skating ability, scoring skills and physicality of a youngster.

Welcome back, young Cullen.

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## HEATHER RULE



Heather is a freelance sports reporter and blogger covering everything from the Minnesota Wild to high school sports to IndyCar racing. She's also a social media guru for MLB. She has a background in news reporting but can usually be found watching/Tweeting about sports. She's a journalism graduate from the University of St. Thomas.



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