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## RULE: Looking Back On the Parise, Suter Deals Five Years Later



By [Heather Rule](#) - July 3, 2017

Five years ago on July 4, I had just finished marching in the annual parade in a small Minnesota town representing a local newspaper. My co-workers and I were cooling down with some beverages and appetizers when I got a text from my brother (hard to believe this was before I had a smartphone with the Twitter app).

The Minnesota Wild had signed Zach Parise and Ryan Suter.

Yes, this Tuesday not only marks Independence Day, but it's also one of the biggest days in Minnesota Wild history. July 4, 2012 was the day general manager Chuck Fletcher inked identical deals with Suter and Parise. For those who have forgotten – or have maybe blocked it from the mind – they're 13-year, \$98 million contracts.

Fletcher called it a "great day in the history of the Minnesota Wild."

Parise, son of former North Stars winger J.P. Parise, was excited to return home to play hockey after reaching the Stanley Cup Finals with the New Jersey Devils. Suter, a Wisconsin native, played for seven years with Nashville before joining the Wild.

Of all the trades, moves and deals made by the local hockey club over the years, these definitely stand out as some of the most significant contracts. The Wild got two players – long-term – who brought league experience that could bring the Wild to that next step in hopes of winning a Stanley Cup.

There was so much hope and excitement bringing those two into the mix. The Wild's only true run of success was an early trip to the Western Conference Finals in 2003. Then they lost in the quarterfinals in the springs of 2007 and 2008. After that came four straight years of missing the playoffs and finishing 35-36-11 in 2011-12 for then-coach Mike Yeo's first season in Minnesota. The postseason drought and the latest record weren't exactly going in the right direction.

That's why it was such a big deal when Suter and Parise joined the Wild. Parise had seven seasons under his belt with the Devils and was 28 at the time of the deal. He came off a 69-point season with 31 goals and 38 assists.

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Similarly, Suter had seven seasons in with Nashville when he inked his deal with the Wild. His last four seasons netted him 30-plus assists each year, coming off career-highs in assists and points in 2011-12 with 39 assists and 46 points. Just a few months younger than Parise, Suter also seemed to be entering his prime.

With Suter, there was one of the best defenders in the league. Parise was the captain in New Jersey, a hard-working forward sure to bring in some goal scoring.

The feelings were that Suter and Parise would be the key to moving the needle forward and bringing a Stanley Cup to Minnesota. That's how positive this was for the team and for fans when it happened. Fans bought in and became re-energized with these guys wearing Wild sweaters.

Fans had to wait a little longer to see Parise and Suter together, thanks to the lockout-shortened season in 2012-13 when play didn't start until January. Parise scored 18 goals and 20 assists in the 48-game season. Suter tallied four goals and 28 assists.

This is where the story goes downhill a bit. Sure, the Wild have made the playoffs for five straight seasons since the historic dual-signing. But the needle hasn't moved forward much, especially after getting bounced in the first round this spring to Yeo and the St. Louis Blues in five games after producing the Wild's best regular-season in franchise history.

It was a first-round exit the first year with Suter and Parise, but they made the playoffs. That was progress and success might take time. They matched up against the dynasty of the Chicago Blackhawks multiple times, too. The postseason endings came in the second round twice before two first-round departures the past two seasons. Again, when it's just based on results of winning series and not getting close to a Cup, this seems unsuccessful.

Parise is a grinder in front of the net. But his career-high in goals was 45 with the Devils in 2008-09 and he tallied at least 30 goals in five seasons while hardly missing games until 2010-11. His highest goal total was 33 (62 points) in his third season with the Wild. He followed that up with 25 goals (53 points) and 19 goals (42 points).

He's had injury issues since coming to Minnesota causing him to miss games here and there. Plus, there were probably other games he wasn't at peak performance as he tried to tough it out. He also lost his father to lung cancer in January 2015, which had to take a personal toll. Suter's father, Bob, a member of the 1980 U.S. Olympic men's hockey team also died unexpectedly in 2014.

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If there's concern about the decline from either of these players, there's more worry about Parise rather than Suter. Go back to the part about Parise having that net-front presence (where he constantly gets pushed, cross-checked and roughed up) for the reason there might be concern. He turns 33 at the end of July.

Suter's played nearly every game possible in a Wild uniform. He's been one of the team's top defenseman logging more ice time per game (averaging just under 30 minutes) than pretty much any other player in the league. This past year, he was tied for the league lead in plus-minus at plus-34 with his nine goals and 31 assists. This came a year after his career-high 51 points.

He's a constant at the blue line.

The sting of the playoff losses is still fresh with fans after so many years of early exits. That doesn't mean signing Parise and Suter was a bad idea in the first place, just because there's been no Stanley Cup celebration. It doesn't take just two players to win a championship, after all. They're a couple of players that are staples on this team now. They've provided offense and defense that's shown up on the stats sheets as well.

Thirteen years is a long time for a contract. It's enough time for significant decline in play, career-altering injuries and seeing the team around them change personnel multiple times. Let's see what the next few seasons bring for these two.

If anything, July 4 will always be a day Wild fans remember as one that changed the franchise.

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## HEATHER RULE



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