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The woes of Zucker

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Jason Zucker appears to be in Torch's doghouse lately, scratched the past two games. He's got just one goal and two assists in the past 21 games. The Wild's interim coach has sent the message that Zucker's game just isn't good enough right now.



Image courtesy of Brad Rempel-USA TODAY Sports

First off, I'm glad the Wild community is at least at a point where we're talking about Zucker's issues. Remember: He was out for six games with a concussion after a nasty-looking hit in the outdoor game in February. At the time, it was one of those scenarios that looked bad. Like, Pierre Marc Bouchard bad.

Fortunately, he only missed a few games and was back in the lineup. With all the precautions these days when it comes to the noggin, I really don't think he'd be back if he wasn't 100 percent. So I guess that rules out a reason as to why his performance hasn't been up to snuff lately.

His name is out there when people talk generally about the Wild's group of youngsters and the lack of progression they've had. I think it's a shame.

The 24-year-old winger dazzled me with his speed and offensive mindset when he came up with the Wild. But he kept getting bounced back down to the minors whenever there needed to be a lineup shakeup for injuries or whatever. It was frustrating as a fan because I didn't think he got a fair shake. Mike Yeo seemed to be harder on him than other guys, just from where I sat.

Last season, he was with the Wild for 51 games, scoring 21 goals and adding five assists. This season, he's already at 61 games but with only 12 goals and 10 assists. His offensive numbers have definitely taken a step back from his breakout year.

He's 12th on the team in points though he's sixth in goals scored and one of 10 players in double digits. Still, it's not quite good enough for a guy that was once on the top line this season and has consistently been a top-six forward.

When Yeo finally made a statement with healthy scratches this season, he sat Zucker. I wasn't too surprised but also disappointed. I mean, especially at that time I didn't understand why Zucker was singled out when pretty much no one on the team, except probably Charlie Coyle, was getting it done. It didn't seem right. Scratch Thomas Vanek or Mikael Granlund.

so up and down I can't keep up.

But I digress. Anyway, I can understand the need for poking holes in Zucker's game. He hasn't put up the numbers and lately has struggled playing two-way hockey (insert the "D3: Mighty Ducks" scene where Charlie Conway tells that coach he wants to play two-way hockey). From what I hear, (I didn't see the game) Zucker didn't have a great game at all against Edmonton.

He's got speed, there's no doubt about that. It's just that speed can't be everything for him. It's given him a few breakaways, but not enough of those chances have been buried. Of course, burying chances isn't just a Zucker problem. That's team-wide when it comes to any concerns about their offensive production.

I don't think Zucker is a lost cause. I think he can work on his game and improve some things to get back to a competitive level on the stats sheet again.

Unfortunately, he's clearly in the coach's doghouse right now. Maybe that will trickle to the front office and he could become trade bait at some point, too. Who knows?

Maybe it's the fact that I enjoyed watching his game early on, or that I just can't put my finger on what exactly this obvious blunder is when it comes to Zucker. I still think this team has bigger problems than Zucker right now.

To me, there's a problem with leadership in that locker room. The team needs to figure out a permanent head coach going forward, and possibly a new general manager depending on how the rest of the season plays out.

So really, Zucker is the least of their worries.

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beckmt

I agree Zucker is the least of the problems. Culture seems to be a big issue, with the lack of personal responsibility. This will not change until some of the