



HOME OF MINNESOTA SPORTS

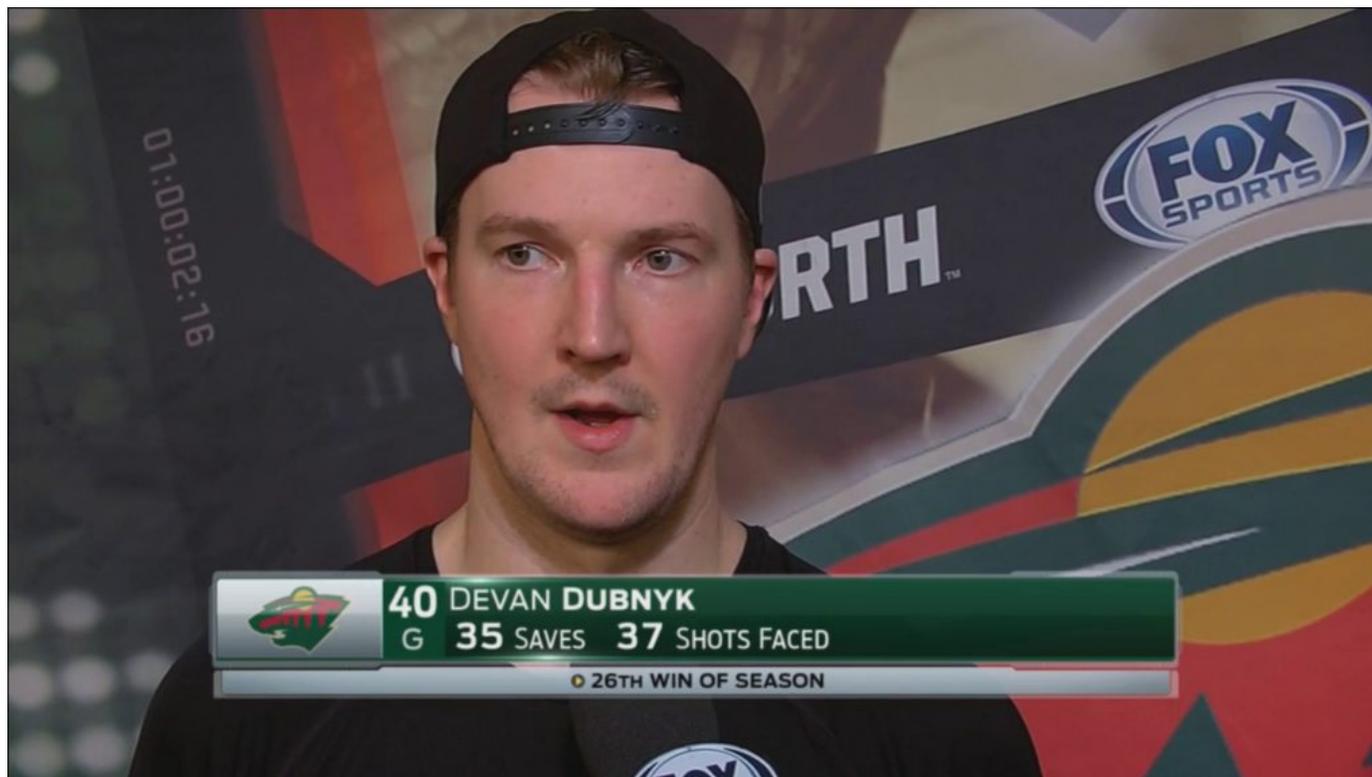
- VIKINGS
- TWINS
- TIMBERWOLVES
- WILD
- GOPHERS
- MN UNITED
- LYNX
- HIGH SCHOOL
- VIDEO GAMES

SHARE



WILD

This Minnesota Wild Regular Season is a Welcomed Change of Pace



By [Heather Rule](#) - January 30, 2017

I'm not sure I know where to start with this rendition of the Minnesota Wild. This situation really isn't normal. The team leads the Central Division with 69 points at 32-11-5 at the All-Star Break. They

actually played dominant hockey in the month of January, which is a refreshing change. It really seems unprecedented.

After the Wild dispatched the St. Louis Blues 5-1 Thursday night, the NBCSN broadcast went back to the studio for analysis. Keith Jones promptly said he sees no weaknesses in the Wild right now. I'm not even sure how to process that statement. Actually, as a Minnesota sports consumer, I know that I should consider it the kiss of death because now something bad is on the horizon, right?

Really, it's almost hard to believe what has happened with this team. At the same time, it's been a lot of fun to watch. Consider this: At the All-Star Break, the Wild need just six more wins to tie last season's win column.

They're second in the NHL behind the Washington Capitals (72 points in 49 games). The Wild are at the top of the Western Conference and Central Division by four points over Chicago, a team that's played three more games. The division's third-place team, Nashville, trails by 13 points.

Eight players are in the double-digits in the goal column, led by off-season acquisition Eric Staal

Mikael Granlund is the team points leader with 42 (12 goals, 30 assists). I double-checked the leaderboard on that one. In fact, Granlund's career high in points came last year when he got 44 playing in all 82 games.

Eight players are in the double-digits in the goal column, led by off-season acquisition Eric Staal (16-25-41). Captain Mikko Koivu and Nino Niederreiter each have scored 15 goals, followed by Jason Zucker, Charlie Coyle and Granlund. Erik Haula and tough-guy Chris Stewart have 10 goals.

Defenseman and big-money man Ryan Suter leads the NHL with a plus-28. He has 30 points and three power-play goals this season. He's having a very solid season.

Actually, most of the Wild players have had a good year. When things are going this well and the numbers look like they do, it's not a shocker to see a lot of scoring depth.

This season, with the most obvious change being a new head coach behind the bench in Bruce Boudreau, I've noticed more offense for the Wild. Guys are going into the zone with speed and heading straight for the net to take shots. They're creating give-and-go scoring chances – that they're capitalizing on – for their teammates.

Wild coach Bruce Boudreau: "I believe that these guys are all winners"



They're scoring goals in bunches. In their 48 games, they've scored four or more goals in 20 of them this season, with the only loss a 5-4 decision against Vancouver Nov. 29. That's seven games with five goals, three with six goals and two with seven goals.

Let's compare that to last season at this time, when they had played 49 games. They scored four or more goals in just 10 games – so that's half – also losing just one 5-4 game to Winnipeg. They scored a season-high six goals in a game just once and five goals four times.

Their goals-per-game mark last season was 2.60, which is up to 3.29 through 48 games this year. Power play and penalty kill percentages are up, too.

The other encouraging sign for the Wild is seeing some of the victories they've pulled off. You know, games that in seasons past would have been collapses. It's always said that a two-goal lead is the worst lead in hockey, something that's been true for the Wild lately, as they've let teams get back into games.

But this group finds a way to win. They were up 4-0 in Dallas earlier this month before giving the lead back and seeing the game tied up 4-4. Last year, you just sit and wait for the collapse to take shape. This time around, the Wild found a way to get the 5-4 victory. They kept at it and didn't fold the tents.

Whatever it is, it's working for the Wild. At this point, it's OK to be excited and enjoy the ride, courtesy of Boudreau at the controls.