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Down And Out

By Heather Rule

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(MHM Photo by Jonny Watkins)

Loss of Dumba deals huge blow to struggling Wild offense

In the midst of a three-game skid that has the Minnesota Wild (17-15-2) currently out of the playoff picture, the team's general manager Paul Fenton told the media on Dec. 21 that defenseman Matt Dumba is expected to have surgery next week after receiving a second opinion. Dumba left the Dec. 15 game against Calgary with an upper-body injury.

"He will be out for a significant time," Fenton said.

The GM also did not elaborate on the type of injury other than to say "upper body," saying he really wants to protect the player. Fenton also would not confirm how/when Dumba got injured, but it's not like he was trying to keep mum about something.

"When the player says, 'I don't know when it happened,' that's what I'm going on," Fenton said. "(Dumba) does not know when it happened."

While the 24-year-old Dumba has been a durable player so far in his career, playing 81, 76 and 82 regular-season games his first three full seasons with the Wild, this injury will certainly derail would was a promising season to shatter his career-highs in various statistical categories.

His 12 goals this season lead NHL defenseman and were just two shy of his career-high 14 goals he tallied last season.

"He had a great chance to get 25," said teammate Zach Parise. "I mean, who knows?"

ABOUT HEATHER RULE



Heather's love for watching hockey started when the Minnesota Wild came to town in 2000. Before that, she caught a few Minnesota Moose games as a youngster, and more recently she's kept up with the Austin Bruins and Fargo Force. She's a writer, freelance journalist and blogger who previously worked as a news reporter in Austin and Fergus Falls, Minn. She enjoys watching sports and closely follows the Wild, Minnesota Twins, IndyCar Series, tennis and prep sports. Heather keeps up her sports blog [Thoughts from the Stands](#). You can follow her on Twitter [@hlrule](#).

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five-year, \$30-million contract he signed with the Wild over the summer.

The Wild are certainly going to miss having Dumba on the blue line, especially lately when the team has struggled to finish off chances and put the puck in the net. His 12 goals are tied for second on the team and his 22 points are tied for fourth, both with Eric Staal. Dumba had a seven-game point streak in November (5-5—10) and is also second on the team in hits with 60.

Dumba's cannon of a shot, notably a weapon on the power play where he's scored six goals this season, could help cure the team's struggles. The Wild are winless since he left the game in the first period against Calgary.

The word that has been uttered is "frustrating."

"It's frustrating because we're playing well enough, I think," said coach Bruce Boudreau. "Our defensive game is really good, and if we can continue to allow two goals or less, eventually we're going to start scoring three goals or more."

Even playing well, according to Boudreau and some of his players, the Wild dropped eight-of-11 games with a pair of three-game losing skids mixed in. The penalty kill is 15-for-15 over the past eight games, and shots on goal during the latest three-game skid were 35 shots, 26 and 41. So the chances are there. But power plays haven't come in the usual bunches lately, with just six opportunities over the latest four-game stretch.

It's tough to score 5-on-5 and with a lack of power-play chances lately, the opportunities just aren't there, according to Parise.

"I just think there are a lot of things that happen before scoring a goal that we're just not doing, not doing them well enough," Parise said. "It's not a coincidence that we're not scoring."

It's not just one player either. But to single out a few, Mikko Koivu (who missed four games with a recent injury) hasn't lit the lamp since Nov. 15 against Vancouver. Jason Zucker is scoreless in the past six games and has just three goals and one assist in the past 11 games. His linemate Mikael Granlund has dazzled somewhat with his playmaking abilities to get some assists – nine in the past 11 games – but he's gone nine games without a goal of his own, and four of his nine assists came in the 7-1 drubbing of Montreal. Staal also has no points in this three-game skid and has just three goals and two assists since Nov. 27.

It can be easy to feel frustrated and sorry for yourself and as a team, Koivu said, who added the differences are small in games, win or lose.

"It will change eventually if you keep getting those chances individually and as a line," Koivu said.

Could the slumps be a case of players trying to do too much to get out of the rut?

"Well, usually that's what happens," Boudreau said. "When things aren't going well, everybody wants to do too much. You want to make the perfect play."



Celebrations like this had become commonplace for Matt Dumba this season prior to his injury (MHM Photo by Jonny Watkins)

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out twice in their past five losses. They've scored just four goals over those five losses (with the 7-1 and 5-1 victories sandwiched in between). Dumba's cannon of a shot from the blue line could sure come in handy.

After a game Saturday against Dallas, the Wild won't play again until Dec. 27 in Chicago following the holiday break.

"I think it's going to be nice to spend some time with family and get away from hockey and not think about the game for a few days," Zucker said.



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