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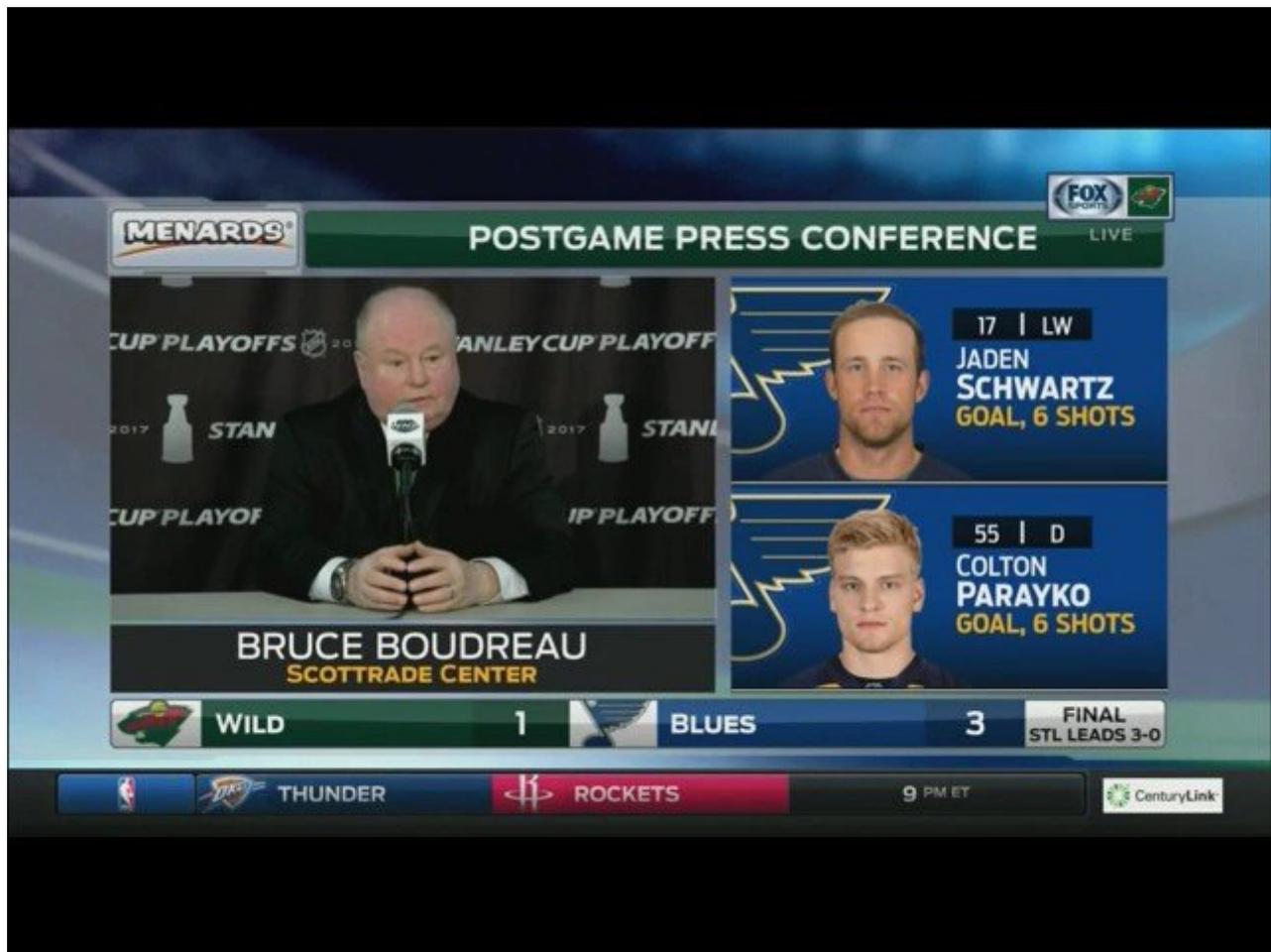
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# RULE: '06 Twins and 2016-17 Wild Provide Similar Empty Feelings



By [Heather Rule](#) - May 15, 2017

Apples and oranges be darned. It's time to compare the 2006 Minnesota Twins and the 2016-17 Minnesota Wild. After the abrupt end to the Wild's season, while the rest of the NHL playoffs roll on seemingly taunting and teasing local fans, the playoff exit still might need to be justified or explained to depressed hockey fans.

On the surface, these two Minnesota teams looked poised to compete for championships. With teams that had multiple postseason appearances close together, it looked like these particular seasons could be "the year" for each squad.

The biggest thing they have in common: These two teams each fell flat on their faces in the postseason, resulting in premature exits that left fans stunned and saddened. There's nothing scientific here with this comparison. It's been acknowledged already that this is a bit of an apples-to-oranges scenario, most obviously because they're two different sports.

But looking back on the decade of success the Twins had, starting with their run to the American League Championship Series in 2002, the 2006 year seemed like the best bet. For the moment, this past season appeared that way for the Wild.

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Let's take a look at things.

## **2006 Twins**

The Twins won back-to-back-to-back American League Central Division titles from 2002-04. They lost to the Yankees three games to one in those last two years. The 2006 squad went 96-66 for another division title. More than that though, they had the big-three award winners on their roster: Johan Santana was the AL Cy Young winner, 23-year-old Joe Mauer was the AL Batting Champion (.347) and a 25-year-old Justin Morneau took the AL MVP award.

The stars also aligned because the Twins got home-field advantage in the first round and would not have to face the dreaded Yankees again. Instead, they drew the AL West champion Oakland Athletics (93-69). The first two games in the best-of-five series took place at the Metrodome, with Santana on the mound for Game 1. If there was a year to break through and make a run – starting with just winning the ALDS – this was it.

*They had Santana, Mauer and Morneau.*

Instead, the Twins didn't win a game. They were swept 3-0 (3-2, 5-2, 8-3) and missed the playoffs the next two years before being swept two more times.

One of the most cringe-worthy moments came in Game 2 when Mark Kotsay hit an inside-the-park home run off Dennys Reyes at the Dome to put the A's up 4-2 in the seventh inning, right after the Twins tied the score the previous inning. The pair of home runs Twins-killer Frank Thomas hit in Game 1 didn't help set the right tone either.

Santana pitched eight innings giving up two runs on five hits. Morneau hit a couple home runs and got five hits in the series. Mauer, however, went just 2-for-11 (.182) with no RBI, no extra-base hits and one walk. That reminder probably just adds more fuel to the fire of fans giving Mauer a hard time in 2017.

They had Santana, Mauer and Morneau. Their 96 victories were the most the Twins notched in a single season throughout that decade of postseason appearances. It just didn't net any results in the playoffs that year.

### **2016-17 Wild**

Now let's get back to the Wild, with the team that's fresh in the minds of Minnesotans. The 49-25-8 regular-season record was notable for a franchise-best in victories and points with 106. The Wild spent much of the season in first place in the stacked-with-talent Central Division in the Western Conference. It was all under new head coach Bruce Boudreau, so there was already some optimism in the air last fall, with a similar roster that hoped to build on a few years of playoff appearances.

The Wild scored 266 goals in the regular season (second in the league) and a lot of the young "kids" broke out for successful seasons. Mikael Granlund led the team with 69 points. They added veteran player and Stanley Cup winner Eric Staal to the mix. Devan Dubnyk was still a solid fixture as the No. 1 goalie between the pipes. The team won games consistently with three, four or five goals.

Though they did swoon in March, they didn't wait until the last day to clinch a playoff spot by sneaking in as the No. 8 seed. They finished just behind the Chicago Blackhawks to host the St. Louis Blues in the first round. This was a favorable option to many, rather than facing the more-physical Nashville Predators (who are now trading checks and jobs with the Anaheim Ducks in the Western Conference finals).

Things were coming together. Similarly to the Twins, the Wild got home-ice advantage (though this probably means more in baseball) and didn't have to face a regular foe: the Blackhawks (Yankees). Everyone wanted to look ahead to the second round and see the brackets match up to pit the Wild and Blackhawks against each other at that point.

Instead, like the Twins, the Wild failed to meet expectations. The Wild fell 4-1 in the series to the Blues and their former coach Mike Yeo. They scored just one goal per game as they dug themselves an 0-3 hole. Basically, they couldn't score. They didn't capitalize on rebounds and find ways to put

the puck in the net enough. Jake Allen showed in the next round that he wasn't the brick wall he was made out to be.

The Wild didn't score until Zach Parise put a puck in during the final minute of regulation in Game 1, but they lost 2-1 in overtime. Same score for Game 2 before heading to St. Louis and starting off slowly there to lose 3-1. They did something the 2006 Twins couldn't (albeit the length of series is a factor), win a game. The Wild shut out the Blues 2-0. Even Game 5 had optimism, until another deficit needed a comeback to get to overtime, which was where their season ended abruptly.

*Instead, like the Twins, the Wild failed to meet expectations.*

For all the offensive numbers in the regular season, it just didn't happen for the Wild in the playoffs. Pretty obvious when you don't score goals. Erik Haula, Nino Niederreiter, Jason Pominville and Staal all just had one assist and no goals. Leading-scorer Granlund, who's come alive in previous playoff series, failed to score and tallied just two assists.

### **There you go**

For Minnesota sports fans, maybe this comparison rings true. Two teams with so many things going for them. The solid regular season, some momentum headed into the postseason with the right players in the lineup. Every reason to believe the Minnesota team wasn't the underdog but the favorite. A series victory and subsequent playoff run should have been on the horizon.

The 2006 Minnesota Twins and 2016-17 Minnesota Wild both leave fans with that empty feeling or what could have been.

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## HEATHER RULE



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