

Providing independent coverage of the Minnesota Wild.

Something had to give

Feb 15 2016 07:30 AM | hlrule in Articles

We almost weren't surprised. We could feel something coming that afternoon, that week and really, this calendar year. Enough was enough for the Wild. It needed to make a change, pulling the parachute on another mid-season freefall.



Image courtesy of Heather Rule

So, head coach Mike Yeo was given a pink slip, after going 173-132-44 in his fifth season with the Wild. That includes going 11-17 in the playoffs.

It was a family day for us Saturday. We visited my brother and ended up watching the Wild versus Boston game. It was more of the same, just another frustrating effort for the hometown boys. As it went on, we wondered how long this could keep up.

Rock bottom

It had to be rock bottom, right? Well, Ryan Suter referenced rock bottom after the loss Thursday night to the Washington Capitals. I thought they hit rock bottom last year in Buffalo before they acquired Devan Dubnyk. But just when you think it can't get any worse for this hockey club, it gets worse.

Twitter was pretty lively Saturday. At one point, I fired off a Tweet saying: "I remember how exciting it was when Parise and Suter were signed to this club. What has happened?" #rhetorical

I just couldn't understand the decline in that moment. I remember exactly where I was when I heard about that historic signing. It was supposed to propel the Wild toward a Stanley Cup, not another coaching change. The Wild were supposed to improve, not regress from playoff series to playoff series. Each time they faced the Chicago Blackhawks in the playoffs it should have gotten better (2013-15). Instead, the series became more one-sided in favor of the Blackhawks.

All that said, it really did seem that Saturday truly was rock bottom.

My initial reaction to the Yeo news

see the move happening during the season.

In the middle of the slump, I figured it might be alright to have the Wild finally miss the playoffs and then it could ring as a huge wake-up call for the organization. Shake things up and make changes.

That wasn't to be. Yeo was fired after eight straight losses and a 3-12-4 record in 2016. Anyone remember the stat about how the Wild had its best calendar-year record in 2015? Yeah, I'm still rolling my eyes at that one.

As reactions flowed about Yeo's firing, it was obvious that people wanted to point fingers at players or anywhere else besides Yeo. They may be right, they may be wrong. I think there were things he could have done better, for sure.

Something had to be done

Here's the deal: Sports is a business.

I feel like that needs to be said, mostly because everyone is so emotionally invested in this team and what happens to it. I get that. But this goes out to the crowd that is frustrated because it was Yeo who ultimately got punished for the failures of the Wild players. The ones that say, "coaches can't score! Coaches aren't on the ice!"

True. But this is just something that goes with the territory. Is it always fair? Probably not. But that's how sports are, as a business. Sometimes things get so bad there needs to be a change. That easy change is a new coach/manager or general manager.

It reminds me a little of Ron Gardenhire with the Minnesota Twins, who was fired after the 2014 season. He won a bunch of division titles with the Minnesota ballclub, but then had four, 90-plus loss seasons. So, he had to go. Do I think it was all his fault or he was the main reason the Twins all of a sudden started losing? No. But the Twins decided something had to change. That something was Gardy.

Maybe this all sounds cold-hearted to some, or it could sound not harsh enough to others who have called for Yeo's head since last year, or before that point. It's just the way it is. I don't see it as this 100 percent failure on Yeo's shoulders or marking him as a bad coach.

No quick fixes

Going along with this, I don't think Yeo getting fired fixes everything. Far from it. Firing him now truly tells me how bad the situation is for the Wild. It's so bad that the club fired its coach during the middle of the season.

But the players are still there. It's hard to know what went on in that locker room with the players and Yeo. Speculation - and Twitter - can suggest a lot of things. Did the players quit on Yeo? Are they just not as good as we've been told? Is Yeo really a bad coach? Why are they so bad now when they've proven to be good in the past? Some are wanting to hold Chuck Fletcher accountable. I might get into that another time.

These are all tough questions. I'm actually expecting this team to continue to struggle. Though I wouldn't be surprised if they turn it around for some wins either. The potential is there. But the attitude that I previously mentioned is still true: Players have to play. They need to start scoring, stop giving up prime scoring chances to the opposition, play as a team and get some wins.

We went to a Wild game a couple years ago, Jan. 4, 2014, against the Capitals. Suter scored a hat trick. It was during a tough stretch for the Wild. I took a close-up photo of the Wild bench and added this caption on Facebook: "Got some bench shots of Mike Yeo, since we thought his days were numbered as the head coach."

was easy to believe that he would always be here. I don't mean that in a taking-for-granted way. I just mean that the Wild couldn't possibly fire him like this during the season, right? If it gets bad enough, they'll wait until the season ends to dismiss him, I thought.

I guess not. Something just had to give.

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9 Comments



beckmt

Feb 15 2016 08:09 AM

Heather, if you read carefully enough between the lines the leaders in the clubhouse said they did not believe in him as early as last summer.(two of them working on power plays with Adam Oates).That should have been the first clear message and was ignored.When you do not trust the leader little things get magnified and when things start to go bad it is like here it goes again and becomes defeatist. Then you have to change the coach.I remember in baseball at the start of the season Baltimore(which had yet to win a game) came in early to the Metrodome with Cal Ripken SR as manager and a friend and I looked at each other and realized that the players where already just going through the motions.He was fired in the next week regardless of the fact his son was the star player on the team.

Every competitive sport(using the term loosely) has a mental aspect to it.When it becomes hard to motivate yourself(I know you should, but it does not always happen), then it is easier to fire the coach than the players.This is where Yeo got with this team and maybe it should have happened last summer when the reports first surfaced.He was not a bad coach and handicapped by the players he was provided and the salary situation.To me Fletcher is more to blame, but in the modern era players rule and if the coach cannot control them the coach or manager pays the price.

Doubles likes this



Right on, beck. I wonder if 11 & 20 bringing in Oates was a far bigger deal behind the scenes than it was portrayed publicly.

themselves, and their lack of commitment and effort. Embarrassing.

NickinNY and Giles Ferrell like this



hlrule

Feb 15 2016 03:05 PM

Right on, Doubles. I didn't always agree with him either. Now that he's been fired, I feel like I'm hearing a lot more about how the players quit etc. Which then makes it a real shame that Yeo was "loyal to a fault" (as many are now saying) with his players, and they couldn't give him the same respect.

Doubles, on 15 Feb 2016 - 2:30 PM, said:

I didn't always agree with Yeo, or endorse his decision making. But this group of players is under-achieving at a major level. Oughta be ashamed of themselves, and their lack of commitment and effort. Embarrassing.

NickinNY likes this



hlrule

Feb 15 2016 03:08 PM

Thanks for the comments, beck. Lots of good observations there. I agree - and I think a lot of others do, too - that Fletcher is more to blame. It's his young players, his long contracts, his head coach. This is just the way it goes. Looking back, I think there are some things that deserve a closer look now than they got at the time, such as bringing in Adam Oates. I remember just making jokes about that with other media when the power play struggled. But really, you're right. That was pretty telling.

beckmt, on 15 Feb 2016 - 09:09 AM, said:

To me Fletcher is more to blame, but in the modern era players rule and if the coach cannot control them the coach or manager pays the price.

NickinNY likes this



USNMCPO

Feb 15 2016 08:17 PM

My thought at the time that Oates was here that it showed that there were real problems in the locker room. Players don't go behind the back of their coaches for no reason.



twinsnorth49

Feb 15 2016 10:31 PM

I don't get how working with a guy like Oates on individual skills is somehow an indication of locker room problems, lots of players work with Oates, including Mark Scheifele of the Jets.

Perhaps the players had lost confidence in Yeo but I don't Oates working with Parise and Suter is some direct indication of that, seems a stretch.



Minniman

Feb 20 2016 08:07 PM

twinsnorth49, on 15 Feb 2016 - 11:31 PM, said:

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Many players work with former players in the off-season in many sports. I would like to know what they were working on and why they decided it had to be worked on.

Feb 22 2016 12:11 PM

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Isn't it usually to make themselves better players? New ideas from experienced sources are typically a good thing, I think that's why so many athletes do this type of thing.

I just don't believe it's as underhanded as some seem to be making it out to be.



Minniman

Feb 22 2016 02:47 PM

twinsnorth49, on 22 Feb 2016 - 1:11 PM, said:

Isn't usually to make themselves better players? New ideas from experienced sources are typically a good thing, I think that's why so many athletes do this type of thing.

I just believe it's as underhanded as some seem to be making it out to be.

I did not believe it to be underhanded. I just wonder why they thought they had to go outside of the team to do it.

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