

2016



# 2016 Hockey Wilderness Offseason Trail Guide

AN OFFSEASON PRIMER FOR ARMCHAIR GMS EVERYWHERE  
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Hello, readers!

This is Tony “Wiseau” Abbott, and I’m excited to see that you downloaded Hockey Wilderness’ 2016 Offseason Trail Guide. We’re hoping that you find it as a great and fun resource to get you through what should be a fun and exciting summer for the Minnesota Wild.

This was a project that was many months in the making, and I want to take some time to acknowledge the people and resources that made this possible. I’d first like to make a major shout-out to Jack Van Thomme, who put in a ton of work to make this look fantastic. I’d also like to extend my gratitude to Joe Bouley, Chris Boyd, Barry Campbell, Aaron Holm, and Alec Schmidt- all veteran HW writers who contributed their talents throughout these pages.

I’d also like to direct you to the fantastic sources of information we used while researching this project. For stuff pertaining to player contracts, salaries, and the salary cap, we relied heavily on [General Fanager](#) and [Cap Friendly](#). The bulk of the stats we used for the Trail Guide came from [Corsica](#), which is a brilliant successor to War on Ice (You can- and should- support [Corsica on Patreon](#)). But other invaluable statistical resources in that regard came from [Hockey Reference](#), [Elite Prospects](#), [Hockey Analysis](#), and the now-defunct War on Ice. Also, we’d like to thank our many sister sites from SBN NHL for doing great work in covering many of the players that we profiled throughout this project.

And again, thank you guys. Without you, we’re talking to no one. And how sad is that? Thanks for reading, sharing, and supporting our work.

Enjoy the Hockey Wilderness 2016 Offseason Trail Guide!

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# Stats Glossary

Our player profiles include a variety of stats, some you'll know, and some you may not. In the interest of clarity, we're going to list and explain every stat we use, no matter how dumb it might be to explain.

## Stats for everyone (even you!)

**Age:** How old a player will be on July 1st, 2016.

**Games Played (GP):** The number of games a player took the ice.

**15-16 Cap Hit:** The Average Annual Value (AAV) of a player's contract during the 2015-16 season.

## Stats for Skaters

**Goals:** The number of goals a player scored.

**Assists:** The number of times where a player made a pass or shot that led to a goal without personally scoring said goal.

**Shots/60:** The number of times a player had a shot on goal, prorated to a 60-minute pace. Unless noted otherwise, this measure only considers shots generated during 5-on-5 play.

**Shot Attempt Percentage (Or SAT% or "Corsi%"):** The percentage of shot attempts a player's team gets when an individual player is on the ice. For example, if the Wild out-attempt their opponent 15-5 when Jared Spurgeon is on the ice, Spurgeon would have a 75% SAT% for the game. When people talk about "puck possession", this is what they're talking about.

Generally, being over 50% is good, being under is bad. Unless noted otherwise, this measure only considers shot attempts during 5-on-5 play.

**SAT% relative to team (SAT% rel):** Here's why I said generally having over 50% of the shot attempts is a good thing. Sometimes your team can make you look better or worse at puck possession than you actually are.

For an example of this, let's take a look at Shea Weber and Ryan Suter. Shea Weber's SAT% this season was 51.4, as opposed to Suter's 50.3. Both Weber and Suter out-shot their opponents when they were on the ice, but Weber has a slight advantage. So he must be better, right?

(Probably) Wrong. Nashville was a good possession team, and the Predators actually did better in that regard with Weber off the ice (54.1% SAT) than with Weber on the ice(51.4). So relative

to his team, Weber's SAT% is actually negative. SAT% rel reflects that by subtracting the player's on-ice SAT% from their off-ice SAT%. In this case 51.4 minus 54.1 equals a -2.9 SAT% rel.

On the other hand, Suter's 50.3 SAT% was much better than the Wild were when Suter wasn't on the ice (45.9%). That impact is reflected in his 4.4 SAT% rel. There are factors that could in fact make Weber a better defenseman than Suter (impact on the power play, for example), but SAT% rel shows us that at least at 5v5, Suter probably has a more positive impact, despite their similar SAT%.

## Stats for Goalies

**Games Started (GS):** The amount of starts a goalie got during the season.

**W-L-OT:** Win/Loss record for goalies. Specifically, the amount of Wins, Losses, and Losses in either overtime or the shootout, respectively.

**Save Percentage (Sv%):** The percentage of shots a goalie faced that were stopped. For example, if Devan Dubnyk stops 9 of the 10 shots he faces, he would have a .900 Sv%.

**5v5 Sv%:** A goalie's Save Percentage, but only during 5-on-5 play. This is used to evaluate a goaltender's performance without the potential of special teams play skewing the results.

**3-Year Sv%:** A goalie's Save Percentage over the past three seasons. In some cases, it can give a more complete picture of who a goalie is than one season, particularly for a back-up.

**Shutouts (SO):** The number of games where a goalie played the entire game without giving up a goal.

With these stats in mind, you're fully equipped to dig into the Hockey Wilderness Offseason Trail Guide! We'll outfit you with the remaining stats you need along the way, let you know who to watch and what big moves to consider. At the end of the day, though, the perfect team isn't the one that looks best on paper, it's the one that works best together on the ice. So before we start making trades and shifting big blocks of players around North America, let's take an in-depth look at the roster the Wild currently have.

## The Team

As an armchair GM, you're in command of a lot of things -- in particular, a nice pen and a good deal of cash you use to bring in big name players. But before you run off and sign Steven Stamkos to a lucrative \$12,000,000 contract, you might want to remind yourself how many \$12,000,000 checks you can write as the GM of the Wild (hint: 0). So, first and foremost, this guide will give you a good grasp on what the current cap situation of the Wild is.

Once you've mastered the un-masterable – that is, counting up all the dollars you've spent and then finding more money in there somewhere – we'll hand you off to **The Market** to learn about who's available, how much they'll cost, and what they'll bring to the team. While many of your deals may seem great at first glance, other issues always emerge. Your players' dealings with the media, each other, and occasionally the dealings of their foot with a chair or a brick wall might irk you, but at the end of the day, they're the players you have. So, with that in mind, what players do you have?

## Minnesota Wild Salary Cap

The Wild enter this offseason with 15 players under contract that will be carried on the NHL roster, barring roster moves via trade or transaction to the AHL Iowa Wild. NHL rosters allow teams to carry up to 23 players, though it is possible to carry fewer. Minnesota currently has 8 forwards, 6 defensemen, and 1 goaltender under contract, so you'll need to add a minimum of 4 forwards, 1 defenseman, and 1 goalie to the roster. Since teams generally like to carry an extra forward and 1-2 extra defensemen, you should probably end up shooting for 5 forwards, 2 defensemen, and a goalie.

Let's take a look at what the Wild have in the books. The players included in this list currently have one-way contracts next season.

Name	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
<b>Zach Parise</b>	\$7,538,462	\$7,538,462	\$7,538,462
<b>Mikko Koivu</b>	\$6,750,000	\$6,750,000	
<b>Thomas Vanek</b>	\$6,500,000		
<b>Jason Pominville</b>	\$5,600,000	\$5,600,000	\$5,600,000
<b>Charlie Coyle</b>	\$3,200,000	\$3,200,000	\$3,200,000
<b>Mikael Granlund</b>	\$3,000,000		
<b>Nino Niederreiter</b>	\$2,666,667		
<b>Erik Haula</b>	\$1,000,000		
<b>Ryan Suter</b>	\$7,538,462	\$7,538,462	\$7,538,462
<b>Jonas Brodin</b>	\$4,166,667	\$4,166,667	\$4,166,667
<b>Marco Scandella</b>	\$4,000,000	\$4,000,000	\$4,000,000
<b>Jared Spurgeon</b>	\$5,187,500	\$5,187,500	\$5,187,500
<b>Christian Folin</b>	\$725,000		
<b>Nate Prosser</b>	\$625,000		
<b>Devan Dubnyk</b>	\$4,333,333	\$4,333,333	\$4,333,333
<b>Buyout</b>			
<b>Matt Cooke</b>	\$1,000,000		

<b>Total Cap Hit</b>	<b>\$63.831.087</b>	<b>\$48.314.424</b>	<b>\$41.564.424</b>
<b>Cap Projection</b>	<b>\$73.000.000</b>	<b>\$76.650.000</b>	<b>\$79.600.000</b>
<b>Room</b>	<b>\$9.168.913</b>	<b>\$28.485.576</b>	<b>\$38.035.576</b>

With the projected \$73M salary cap, you have a little more than \$9M free to add 5-8 player contracts to the roster. Some of these contracts will come from outside the organization, but most will be a combination of retaining your own free agents and bringing up players from the AHL. Teams also try to spend a few million less than the upper limit of the cap to allow for flexibility and trades within the season. An extra \$2M of cap space is a pretty good safety net, so if you want to give yourself room to work with, you actually have more like \$7M to spend on the free roster spots.

That's not a whole lot of room to work with. But then again, some of the best signings in the past few years have come from teams who have recognized talent where it is and understood the valuable role veterans can play on a young roster. Take Virginia, Minnesota native Matt Cullen as an example. Following his departure from the Wild a few seasons ago, Cullen eventually found himself hoisting the cup with Pittsburgh in the 2016 season as a valuable, and decidedly *essential*, part of a championship roster. Diamonds hidden in the rough.

But despite all this and the real value of UFA veterans, that remaining cap space will be even less once you consider the team's restricted free agents. The Wild have 3 RFAs in forward Jason Zucker, defensemen Matt Dumba and goalie Darcy Kuemper. Zucker underwhelmed two coaches, Dumba couldn't build on his previous season, and Kuemper's destined to be nothing more than a backup in Minnesota. You likely won't commit long-term to these players, but you'll need to offer them at least a qualifying offer, lest you lose them for nothing. Here are the minimum salaries you'll need to offer, as well as realistic figures for their next contracts:

<b>RFA</b>	<b>2015-16 Salary</b>	<b>Qualifying Offer</b>	<b>2016-17 Projection</b>
Jason Zucker	\$900,250	\$990,275	\$1,500,000
Matt Dumba	\$894,167	\$983,584	2,666,667
Darcy Kuemper	\$1,250,000	\$1,375,000	\$1,500,000

Suddenly, that remaining space could be gone quite quickly.

With such a tight cap situation, you may have to rely on players on entry-level contracts. Fortunately, you do have options inside the organization to contribute to the roster. A couple of the Wild's top prospects like Alex Tuch and Mario Lucia have turned pro and will join the ranks as rookies. Sam Anas, a goal-scorer in Quinnipiac, was signed as a college free agent this summer. You have Tyler

Graovac and Grayson Downing in Iowa, both could figure into the roster. Mike Reilly will certainly see time at the NHL level, possibly on a full-time basis. Christian Folin and Gustav Olofsson also figure to see some time with the big club.

Getting production out of any of these players would have a profound effect on the Wild's ability to manage the cap, as their entry-level contracts are cheap and allow flexibility. Here's a look at the bubble players and their effect on the cap.

<b>Bubble Roster</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>
<b>Forwards</b>			
Kurtis Gabriel	666,667		
Grayson Downing	692,500		
Zack Mitchell	615,000		
Alex Tuch	925,000	925,000	925,000
Mario Lucia	792,500	792,500	
Sam Anas	792,500	792,500	
Adam Gilmour	717,500	717,500	
Pavel Jenys	688,333	688,333	688,333
Joel Eriksson-Ek	925,000	925,000	925,000
<b>Defense</b>			
Mike Reilly	925,000		
Gustav Olofsson	795,500		
Hunter Warner	623,333	623,333	
<b>Goalies</b>			
Stephen Michalek	687,500		

Here's another way you will be able to free up cap space: buyouts. You will be presented an opportunity to buy your current players out of their contracts starting either June 15<sup>th</sup>, and this window will be open until June 30<sup>th</sup>. In order to buy a player out, the team puts the player on unconditional waivers. Once they have cleared, the buyout clause is enacted. The only way for a player to block a buyout is if they are not medically cleared to play at the time of the buyout window.

Buyouts are calculated as either one-third or two-thirds of the remaining salary on the contract, determined by the player's age. All of the money is spread out over twice as many years as remain on the contract. We'll take a more in-depth look later, but this can actually save quite a bit of cap space for next season.

With the amount of salary already committed to the players on the roster, you are going to need to be very creative in order to improve your squad. It will take just the right combination of RFA offers, trades, buyouts and UFA pickups to move the needle for this team heading into next season. Ultimately, you will have to be efficient with your spending to shape the roster heading into next season, which puts trades and buyouts of highly-regarded players on the table.



**David Jones**

Age: 31  
Position: RW  
GP: 75  
Goals: 11  
Assists: 7  
Shots/60: 5.61  
SAT%: 43.4  
SAT% rel: -5.42  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$4M

It's been a long time since David Jones was worth his 4-year, \$16M contract, if he ever

was. But when the Wild traded Niklas Backstrom (and a 6th-round pick) for Jones, he didn't hurt the team, at least compared to the in-house alternatives. If you choose to bring him back, you're hoping he can get to the level he was at in 14-15, where he scored 30 points in a defensive role. Since he's a better goal-scorer than most fourth-liners, you could do worse in trying to take a flyer on him.



**Justin Fontaine**

Age: 28  
Position: RW  
GP: 60  
Goals: 5

Assists: 11  
Shots/60: 4.56  
SAT%: 45.0  
SAT% rel: -4.42  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$1M

Fontaine gets a reputation of being a player that stat-heads love, so most assume he's pretty good at puck possession. While he's a decent defender, that's not really his game. It's all about his scoring. And after a breakout year in 2014-15, he saw his point total cut in half in his most recent campaign.

The difference between 14-15 and 15-16? Fontaine produced no matter which line he was on in 14-15, but struggled this past season to score when not alongside players like Charlie Coyle, Thomas Vanek, and Nino Niederreiter. When put on the fourth line, he struggled mightily to carry the likes of Jarret Stoll and Ryan Carter.

Perhaps you'll decide that your Wild are better off moving on from Fontaine. In that case, make sure you can replace his scoring. If you bring Fontaine back, it'll be crucial that you put him in a position to succeed.



Age: 34

Position: C  
GP: 80  
Goals: 4  
Assists: 5  
Shots/60: 3.24  
SAT%: 37.1  
SAT% rel: -11.8  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$800K

It's not an exaggeration to say that Minnesota had the worst fourth line in the league, and Stoll was a big part of that. Stoll was a fixture in the lineup from the moment he was acquired off waivers in December, contributing little more than face-off skills. While once a capable two-way center, his decline in speed has siphoned off his value on both ends of the rink.

Stoll still is a very good face-off man, however, winning more than 56% of his draws last season. He should still be very affordable this offseason. You might want to aim higher, but if you need a 13th forward to stash in the press box, Stoll at least has one skill you can deploy when he draws into the lineup.



**Ryan Carter**

Age: 33

Position: C/LW  
GP: 60  
Goals: 7  
Assists: 5  
Shots/60: 6.01  
SAT%: 39.1  
SAT% rel: -11.7  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$600K



**Chris Porter**

Age: 31  
GP: 61  
Goals: 4  
Assists: 3  
Shots/60: 5.16  
SAT%: 41.6  
SAT% rel: -7.72  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$575K

Carter's story is pretty similar to Stoll's. He, too, was part of the worst fourth line in hockey, posting fancy stats that weren't too dissimilar to Stoll. But while Stoll didn't really provide much other value, Carter has two things that separate himself from Stoll.

The first is his penalty kill acumen. While he doesn't do much to create offense on the kill, he's been one of the best in the league at suppressing shots while shorthanded for a few years now. The second is that he's provided a bit more offense than the rest of the Wild's fourth-liners. If you want a PK specialist on your fourth line, Carter could work.

Porter was claimed off waivers just before the season, and he provided pretty similar value to Carter. He doesn't have the track record that Carter has on the PK, but they performed about equally well last year. If you put any stock into physicality, then you should be happy with Porter's game, as he led the team in hits despite playing limited minutes over 61 games.

You don't want to be in a position the Wild were in the playoffs, where they played Porter in a Top-9 role by necessity, but- and perhaps you're noticing a theme here- he's fine as an energy, 12/13th forward role.

## Minor Leagues

### Tyson Strachan

Age: 31

Position: D

*AHL Stats*

GP: 67

Goals: 1

Assists: 12

PIM: 68

15-16 Cap Hit: \$650K

Strachan is one of the few veterans on the Iowa Wild, serving as an alternate captain. He had a tiny cup of coffee for Minnesota, but if you bring him back he'll be needed in Iowa. An added bonus: He runs a charity for dogs, which is pretty endearing.

### Ruslan Fedotenko

Age: 37

Position: LW/RW

*AHL Stats*

GP: 16

Goals: 0

Assists: 4

PIM: 8

15-16 Cap Hit: \$600K

In theory, Fedotenko is a veteran presence for the Baby Wild, but it's hard to lead when you're not on the ice. The long-time NHLer played just 16 games for Iowa this season. Perhaps you're better off using one of your 50 contracts elsewhere.

### Conor Allen

Age: 26

Position: D

*AHL Stats*

GP: 66

Goals: 3

Assists: 11

PIM: 68

15-16 Cap Hit: \$575K

The minor-league journeyman came to the Iowa Wild in the Michael Keranen trade. He can bring some physicality and the Iowa blue-line isn't exactly the greatest. But on the other hand, there's no upside, so you might not want to spend a contract on him.

## Buyout Options

Are you in a salary cap crunch and don't know what to do? It's time I introduced you to the buyout. The buyout is a magical device that allows you to make players disappear from your roster- even the ones with those hard-to-remove No-Move Clauses your predecessor was so fond of!

Well, kind of, anyway. It's not quite that simple. Yes, you do get cap space back- in some cases, a significant amount- but there are some drawbacks.

- 1) You have to pay that player two-thirds of what he's owed on the rest of his contract, meaning that you have to ask your owner to pay for him to not play for you (and in many cases, play for someone else). That's probably not a fun conversation.
- 2) You save cap space, but you get penalized a portion of that contract for twice the remaining length of the deal. It's why Matt Cooke takes up \$1M of next year's cap, even though his contract would've expired this summer.
- 3) You don't have that player anymore. If you're using the buyout on dead weight, that doesn't matter much, but if it's a useful player who happens to be a cap casualty (think Tom Gilbert in 2013), then that's a bad thing.
- 4) You can only be paying for three buyouts at once- and one of those slots is already being used on Cooke. You probably don't want to be the team that has to buyout three guys at once, but if you are that team, that limitation bites.

Buyouts are a viable tool (Ask Chuck Fletcher how happy he would've been to buyout Niklas Backstrom last off-season), but they can be a double-edged sword. Wield this power wisely. Here are some players you may want to consider buying out:



**Thomas Vanek**

**Why buy him out?**

When the Wild signed Vanek in the 2014 offseason, he was coming off 109 points in 116 games over the previous two years. The Wild desperately needed that firepower in their lineup.

That hasn't translated to Minnesota. Vanek's shots have taken a big decline upon his arrival, leading him to have only 93 points in his two seasons with the Wild... in 154 games. That drop in offense, combined with his atrocious defense, has caused both Mike Yeo and John Torchetti to limit his minutes. If you determine it's not going to get better, or if you desperately need cap room to make maneuvers, then you may feel that pulling the plug and saving \$5M against the cap is the way to go.

### **Why keep him?**

The Wild signed Vanek to provide offense, and while it hasn't been as much as he used to provide, it's been a decent amount. In the last two seasons, the only Wild player to have more Points/60 in all situations is Zach Parise. Even at 5v5, Vanek's been among the team leaders in scoring.

Removing Vanek from the Wild's equation takes away two things that the Wild don't have a ton of: creative playmakers and power play specialists. If you buyout Vanek, you're going to have to figure out how to replace those elements or risk seeing the 17th-ranked Wild offense take a dip in goals next year.

Also note that while you'd save \$5M on the cap this upcoming season, you're also going to lose \$2.5M in cap space for the 2017-18 season. Given that, it might just be easier to stick it out for the last year with Vanek and get a buyout-free cap the next offseason.

### **Buyout Breakdown:**

<b>Vanek Cap Hit</b>	<b>With a Buyout</b>	<b>W/O a Buyout</b>
<b>2016-17</b>	\$1,500,000	\$6,500,000
<b>2017-18</b>	\$2,500,000	\$0



## Jason Pominville

### Why buy him out?

Jason Pominville was one of the most hotly-debated players of the 2014-15 season. His production fell from 30 goals the season before to just 18, which was concerning. But he still provided 36 assists and had a ton of shots on goal. Was this luck, or evidence that his skills were in decline.

One year later, it looks like it had more to do with the latter. Pominville's goal total dropped further, as he hit the lamp just 11 times in 2015-16. And while he enjoyed a late-season resurgence riding shotgun with Erik Haula and Nino Niederreiter, producing 21 points in those first 56 games isn't acceptable for a player on the top line who makes \$5.6M per season.

### Why keep him?

Pominville's individual stats are pretty bad, but when you look at how the team performs with him on the ice? It's (weirdly) very good. At 5v5, the Wild out-scored opponents 39-27 when Pominville was on the ice- only Haula fared better. Teammates also tend to have better control of shot attempts when playing with Pominville, too, suggesting that he's some things well, even if his scoring is down. And who was Minnesota's leading scorer in the playoffs? Pominville.

And as for the cap implications? It's an expensive proposition, with you shelling out over \$9M over the next 6 years, and a punishing cap hit in 2017-18. Maybe it's smarter to wait a year on this one.

### Buyout Breakdown:

<b>Pominville Hit</b>	<b>Cap</b>	<b>With a Buyout</b>	<b>W/O a Buyout</b>
<b>2016-17</b>		\$877,777	\$5,600,000
<b>2017-18</b>		\$4,627,777	\$5,600,000
<b>2018-19</b>		\$2,127,777	\$5,600,000
<b>2019-20</b>		\$1,527,777	\$0
<b>2020-21</b>		\$1,527,777	\$0
<b>2021-22</b>		\$1,527,777	\$0



**Mikko Koivu**

**Why buy him out?**

You might want to give Zach Parise the captaincy in an acrimony-free way?

Just kidding, my non-Kaptain-loving friends. You'll be relieved to know that there actually is a case to buy Koivu out this summer. The Finnish center has just come off his least-effective season at 5v5

yet, posting Parise-Suter-era lows in Points/60, Shots/60, and even his calling card- SAT%. His postseason history is checkered at best, as he's scored just 16 points in his last 34 playoff games.

Koivu turns 34 next season. At a \$6.75M cap hit, are you going to spend your offseason crossing your fingers that he doesn't lose another step?

### **Why keep him?**

Koivu was first on the team in scoring. A lot of that came on the man advantage, but there's reason to believe that his spike in power play production was a result of him altering his approach to get to the net more often and lingering on the perimeter less.

It also needs to be said that, much like in past off-seasons, there really isn't anyone in the Wild organization to fill in the Koivu void, should you get rid of him. Without Koivu, your center options become Haula, Mikael Granlund, Charlie Coyle, Tyler Graovac, and (maybe) 2015 first-rounder Joel Eriksson Ek. Are those guys going to step in and provide Koivu's defense? Or even his offense? Probably not.

That's not to say you can't buy him out. But you're not getting his replacement in-house. Your first priority when you do that becomes replacing Koivu with a suitable center that can play a two-way game.

### **Buyout Breakdown:**

<b>Koivu Cap Hit</b>	<b>With a Buyout</b>	<b>W/O a Buyout</b>
<b>2016-17</b>	\$3,150,000	\$6,750,000
<b>2017-18</b>	\$3,150,000	\$6,750,00
<b>2018-19</b>	\$1,800,000	\$0
<b>2019-20</b>	\$1,800,000	\$0



**Ryan Suter**

### **Why buy him out?**

When the Wild signed Suter to 13-years and \$98M, that was the largest contract in the league for a defenseman. And while Suter hasn't been terrible since arriving, he hasn't quite made the Norris Trophy-winning impact we had all hoped when he inked that deal.

Suter's 31, and while that's not particularly old, there are *a ton* of miles on those legs. Since the lockout, he's logged the most ice time in the NHL with 8,294 minutes, almost 350 more than 2nd-place Drew Doughty, and about 900 more than 3rd-place Shea Weber. Forget worrying about the impact of his minutes over the course of a season, you have to start wondering how that'll impact him going forward in his career.

But perhaps the real benefits of buying out Suter lie in this: a lot of your roster problems go away (for now). Buying out Suter gives you \$7 million taken off your salary cap for the next 4 seasons, and it would free up a spot to protect a young defenseman in next year's expansion draft. Plenty of maneuverability for a team that hasn't had any the past couple of years.

### **Why keep him?**

Let's get the obvious out of the way, slugger: You probably don't have the power to do this. Not only aren't owners too keen on 36-million dollar buyouts, they don't tend to sign off on those transactions when the player in question is coming off a season where he set a franchise record in points at their position. And they're especially not excited to write that check when they've got a relationship with that player going back a decade. So your owner isn't going to be happy, and your franchise player (Zach Parise) isn't going to be thrilled, either.

But let's say you're the Prince of Persuasia, and you sweet-talk Craig Leipold and Parise into allowing you to do this.

I'm not even going to include the cap hit angle here. You're pretty much off scot-free until 2022-23. And let's face it, there's no guarantee you'll even *be alive* by then, let alone still the Wild's GM.

With that in mind, let's look at the immediate future. You need to replace 28 minutes a night on defense. No problem, right? Jared Spurgeon, Marco Scandella, Jonas Brodin, Matt Dumba. That's a solid Top-4. Backfill with Mike Reilly, Gustav Olofsson, Christian Folin.

Sure. Now let's try and make a trade to get that impact forward this team has been searching for. You now either have to lose *two* defensemen this offseason, or ship out a forward or first-round draft pick.

And as for the expansion draft? You're still on track to lose a defenseman you don't want to lose.

Still want to buy out Suter? OK, then. Just know there will be pressure from your owner to use that cap space to drastically improve the team.

**Buyout Breakdown:**

Suter Cap Hit	With a Buyout	W/O a Buyout
2016-17	\$538,461	\$7,538,461
2017-18	\$538,461	\$7,538,461
2018-19	\$538,461	\$7,538,461
2019-20	\$538,461	\$7,538,461
2020-21	\$1,538,461	\$7,538,461
2021-22	\$3,538,461	\$7,538,461
2022-23	\$7,358,461	\$7,538,461
2023-24	\$8,538,461	\$7,538,461
2024-25	\$8,538,461	\$7,538,461
2025-26 to 2033-34	\$2,000,000	\$0

So, now, as prospective, totally-not-real GM of the Wild, you've got your options laid out in front of you. You know who you can keep, who you maybe *should* keep, and who might have played his last game in iron range red. But at the end of the day, you're not the only one who cares about the composition of the roster.

No, in the middle of last season, as has been a troublingly-consistent pattern for the past few seasons, you had to make a drastic move to pull your team from the brink of non-contention. This year, though, you did something unprecedented over that span: you fired the coach. While Mike Yeo has landed firmly on his feet with the St. Louis Blues as heir to the Ken Hitchcock era, you've gone out and selected a new coach, and a good one at that.

So let's learn a little about ~~Gabby~~...er...Bruce Boudreau.

## The Coach

Minnesota Wild fans have forever been trapped in the purgatory that is mediocrity in the NHL. Never good enough to win anything of significance, never bad enough to draft franchise-changing superstars. We've lived through the "trap" with Jacques Lemaire, and years of Mike Yeo's suffocating defensive structure. With the hiring of Bruce Boudreau, the Wild finally have their first offensive-minded coach. In a time where speed, pace of play, and offense are more important than ever, bringing in a guy like Boudreau is exactly the direction a team should be headed to when looking to become a perennial contender.

When I think about the type of team the Wild will be under Boudreau, I picture a team that plays much like the Wild did to start the 2014-15 season. They entered that season seriously committed to controlled zone entries, and that focus showed in their play. Through the first two months of that season they were second only to the eventual Stanley Cup winning Chicago Blackhawks in Shot Attempt percentage.

Looking back on the start of the 2014-15 season really gets the juices flowing when thinking about what Boudreau is going to be able to accomplish with this team. Under Boudreau, it is very likely that the Wild return to the type of team they were to start the 2014-15 season; a team that emphasizes puck control out of their own zone, and looks to play an up-tempo style carrying the puck into the offensive zone.

One of the key abilities Boudreau has demonstrated over his career is a capacity to identify and maximize the strengths of his teams. In Washington, that meant emphasizing dominant offensive play to cover up for a less-than-capable defense group. In Anaheim, he coached a lineup filled with large bodies and strong finishers into one of the most ferocious and effective forechecking teams in the league, which in turn resulted in four straight division titles. The strength of the Minnesota

team that Boudreau and his staff will most likely look to maximize is a mobile, puck-moving defense corps.

The first step to becoming a strong puck possession team is transitioning out of the defensive zone with control. This is something the Wild seemed nearly incapable of accomplishing for the majority of last season. The Wild have always been a risk averse team in their own zone. They were much too willing to settle for dumping the puck out to the neutral zone- essentially handing possession over to their opponent- rather than make an aggressive pass through the middle of the ice to generate an offensive rush. This shortsighted mindset made it easy for the Wild to play in the defensive zone, but was a real inhibitor when it came to producing offense.

I expect Boudreau to ask his talented defenseman to start making more direct passes out of the zone, allowing the forwards to exit as a unit with speed and control. This style of play will undoubtedly lead to the occasional ugly turnover up the middle of the ice, but those are the types of risks a team must embrace when looking to generate offense.

Another way Boudreau can maximize the talent of the Wild defense will be by having them pinch in at the offensive blue line at a higher rate. Assuming Mike Reilly draws in as the sixth defenseman, all six defenders for the Wild will have great skating ability, which means they can recover from being caught out of position. It should be okay for these guys to gamble at the blue line because more often than not they will be able to recover with their speed.

Perhaps the most important way Boudreau will be able to utilize the skills of his defenders will be on the power play. A perennial weakness under Yeo, the Wild power play is sure to see an upgrade with the addition of Boudreau. Two years prior to Boudreau's arrival in Washington, their power play operated at 15.6%, good for 27th in the league. Two years later, Boudreau had their power play clicking at 21.8%, third in the NHL.

Boudreau's power play renaissance will likely center around Mathew Dumba being a true triggerman on the point. Over the past two years only Justin Faulk has shot the puck at a higher rate on the power play than Dumba, and I think it's likely we see Dumba's numbers increase under Boudreau.

Another change we might see would be Jared Spurgeon seeing some time quarterbacking the first power play unit. Spurgeon had 5.88 Points/60 on the power play last year, leading the team by a healthy margin. In Washington Boudreau preferred to have right-shot Mike Green quarterback his power play, and it was Green who was the primary passer to Alex Ovechkin. It's reasonable to think that Boudreau would opt for that familiar right-shot duo at the point, meaning a Spurgeon-Dumba pairing is a real possibility. That is, of course, if Boudreau is able to navigate the politics of removing Ryan Suter from the first unit.

Of course all of Boudreau's adjustments will not be an immediate success. It is likely that next season will be one spent learning the strengths and weaknesses of each of his players, and developing a style that best suits his team. It will certainly be refreshing to not have a coach who attempts to pound every square-peg offensive player into a round-hole defensive robot. Boudreau signed a four-year contract with the Wild so he can afford to be patient when making adjustments to mold

this team the way he sees fit. Wild fans have never been in a better position to escape NHL purgatory.

With optimism in your heart and a strong head coach to lead you out of the doldrums, it's time for one last reflection on where we've been before you decide where we'll go.

## The 2015 Minnesota Wild Offseason: A Retrospective

At the end of last offseason, many Wild fans took a look at their team heading into training camp and thought "This is the same team they had last year." And in a lot of really important ways, it was. Minnesota returned virtually all of their Top-9, their Top-5 defensemen, their goalie, and their coach. In many obvious ways, the 2015-16 Wild were the 2014-15 version.

That wouldn't have had to have been a *bad* thing, per se. After all, this was a team that got to the second round, one that dominated from the moment Devan Dubnyk took the ice for them. While there were still obvious holes on the roster, Chuck Fletcher had justification to see what this group could do with a full season of Dubnyk in the crease.

But this strategy was undermined by two subtle but important things. The first was that if you aren't getting better in the Central Division, you're getting worse. Dallas re-tooled and got Patrick Sharp, Johnny Oduya, and Antti Niemi. The Chicago Blackhawks gave up Brandon Saad with Sharp and Oduya, but Artemi Panarin filled that offensive void and Artem Anisimov gave the Hawks the Top-6 center they needed. St. Louis may not have looked like they got better on paper, but trading TJ Oshie for Troy Brouwer gave them a needed shaking-up.

Meanwhile, which teams took a step back? Nashville was out of the playoff picture until they made the Ryan Johansen trade mid-season. Winnipeg was quiet last offseason and were rewarded with a last-place finish. And Minnesota? They took a 13 point step back in the standings, fired their coach, and backed into the postseason with a 5-game losing streak to close out the year.

The second is that the Wild didn't return the same team. The main pieces were there, true, but the Wild lost a lot of depth. Kyle Brodziak, a long-time fixture of the bottom-6 and penalty kill, gone. Chris Stewart, the scoring winger who had played so well alongside Mikko Koivu, gone. Sean Bergenheim, a gritty winger who had a quietly good possession game, gone. Jordan Leopold, a capable 6th/7th defenseman who was credited with mentoring Matt Dumba, gone. Matt Cooke, who had at least *used* to be a decent penalty killer who could provide points, bought out.

Were any of these players difference-makers? No. But they were options. They all pushed each other. We saw that when Ryan Carter and Nate Prosser- the players Minnesota did manage to retain- were hardly in the lineup during the 2014-15 Wild's playoff run.

Without that competition coming from either returning players or the minors, the Wild fizzled. They didn't have a Stewart to move up alongside Koivu when Jason Zucker struggled. When they needed a spark to move up to center the third line, they had to resort to mid-season pick-up Jarret Stoll rather than a more capable Brodziak. Claiming Chris Porter off waivers prior to the season wasn't the solution, either.

While they didn't manage to improve their on-ice product from the year previous, Fletcher's front office did have some notable victories. Signing Dubnyk to a six-year contract was a risk at the time, but it paid off last season. Dubnyk was a workhorse, playing in 67 games and acquitting himself as an above-average starting goaltender.

The others will mostly have an impact on the future. Signing Mike Reilly after his rights expired with Columbus was a coup, and he even played well in Minnesota for a stretch. He'll be only 23 next year, so the offensive defenseman's best days are yet to come. A year out, the Wild's draft still looks solid. Joel Eriksson Ek was a great goal-scorer for his age in the Swedish Elite League. Jordan Greenway had a good freshman season for Boston University. And the Wild may have hit a 5th-round home run in Kirill Kaprizov, who had one of the best 18-year-old seasons of all time in the KHL.

We're not yet sure what this offseason will hold, but we do know one thing: The Wild's front office dedicated themselves to continuity last season, and the status was not quo. This year you're stepping into a situation where you have more flexibility to shake things up with this team.

With all this information at your hands, you've thought for a few minutes. You've swirled some brandy around in a short glass with an ice sphere that is totally super cool, and you think to yourself "this is an alright squad, but *something's missing*." In the next section, **The Market**, we'll lay out exactly what options you have to fill the gaps in the Wild roster and what it's going to take to get them.

## The Market

With a book of notes and cash in hand, you sit down with your phone. For the first few days, starting July 1<sup>st</sup>, you'll be calling *not* other teams, but players and their agents. You'll make your pitch and you'll set your dollar amount. You'll read to them everything you just read here about how the Wild has *potential* and the ability to go the distance, but there's just one thing missing: them. So whose numbers will you call? Let's take a look at the wonderfully-unattached, the most desirable of desirable, the Unrestricted Free Agents.

# UFA Profiles

## Centers



**Steven Stamkos, Tampa Bay**

Age: 26  
GP: 77  
Goals: 36  
Assists: 28  
Shots/60: 6.55  
SAT%: 51.5  
SAT% rel: -0.9  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$7.5M

This is probably a year Stamkos would like to have back. With rumors of his impending free agency and conflict with coach Jon Cooper hanging over him, Stamkos posted his lowest full-season goal total since his rookie season. The problem? Shots. While Stamkos doesn't necessarily rely on obscene shot volume, his 216 shots is absurdly low for a player of his caliber. Even worse, a blood clot knocked him out of most of Tampa's playoff run.

Of course, if we're talking about 36 goals being a down year for someone, they're

pretty great. And we don't need to tell you that Stamkos is pretty great. Even with some injury issues, Stamkos is still third in goals since the lockout, with Alex Ovechkin and Joe Pavelski surpassing him. You're going to want Stamkos. Everyone's going to want Stamkos.

So how do you land him? You can go about this one of two ways:

- 1) Be the Tampa Bay Lightning or Toronto Maple Leafs
- 2) Utilize the Imperius Curse

Let me know how those work out for you.



**Eric Staal, New York (Rangers)**

Age: 31  
GP: 83  
Goals: 13  
Assists: 29  
Shots/60: 7.8  
SAT%: 55.2  
SAT% rel: 6.0  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$8.25M

15-16 Cap Hit: \$4M

Let's be clear here: If Staal was still the two-time 40-goal scorer, he would never be hitting the open market right now. So, let's adjust our expectations accordingly. At this point in his career, somewhere around ~50 points is about all you can expect, which is good but definitely beneath the bar of #1 Center™.

Does this mean you should avoid Staal? No, not unless you don't like 6'4" centermen who have skill. Staal is still a workhorse, logging some of the most ice time in the league while driving possession for both Carolina and New York last season. His decline in points is concerning, and the deciding factor for you might be if you think that his career-low in shots and shooting% is a blip on the radar or something that will continue to plummet with age.

While Hudler had a career year in 2014-15, racking up 76 points playing alongside Johnny Gaudreau. He hasn't even been close to that before (57 points was his previous career high), and he didn't repeat it his past year in either Calgary or Florida. Looking at that, perhaps you're worried that he was just a flash in the pan.

Yes and no. It's a pipe dream to think he's got another 75-point season in him, but he's a great playmaker who boasts a career 15.1 shooting percentage. The bad news on that percentage is that even Mikael Granlund looks at this guy and says "You gotta fire the puck more." That said, he's a versatile player who's a legit Top-6 forward- a player anyone could use.



**Jiri Hudler, Florida**

Age: 32  
GP: 72  
Goals: 16  
Assists: 30  
Shots/60: 4.9  
SAT%: 48.7  
SAT% rel: 0.3



**David Backes, St. Louis**

Age: 32  
GP: 79  
Goals: 21  
Assists: 24  
Shots/60: 6.77  
SAT%: 51.4  
SAT% rel: -0.8  
15-16 cap hit: \$4.5M

Backes and Mikko Koivu have basically been the same player for some time now, with only very subtle differences between them. Backes is a better goal-scorer and a meaner player, while Koivu is a better passer and possession player. The results have been the same. Over the last three seasons, Backes has 160 points in 233 games while Koivu has 158 in 227.

The age might've scared some teams off, but Backes has been really durable over the years, missing just 14 games since the start of the 08-09 season. His playoff performance should also raise his stock. The term could hurt you, but in the short-term, Backes is a great option who can play in all situations.



**Brad Richards, Detroit**

Age: 36  
 GP: 68  
 Goals: 10  
 Assists: 18  
 Shots/60: 8.4  
 SAT%: 53.9  
 SAT% rel: 2.7  
 15-16 Cap Hit: \$3M

After being bought-out by the Rangers in the 2014 off-season, Richards had about as soft of a landing as you could possibly have—centering Patrick Kane on the Cup-winning Blackhawks. That landed him a million dollar raise from Detroit the following season, where he saw some struggles.

Richards has always relied on shot volume to generate goals, and while he still fires the puck at a nice clip, he's coming off two straight seasons where he's shot ~6%. It was even worse at 5v5, as his 4.5 shooting percentage drove his career-low 0.84 Points/60. It wasn't all bad for Richards, though. He was a productive member of the Red Wings' power play, and he seemed to complement his teammates offensively at 5v5, even if the points weren't there. Sounds a bit like a cheaper Jason Pominville. I'll let you decide whether that's a good thing or not.



**Frans Nielsen, New York (Islanders)**

Age: 32  
 GP: 81  
 Goals: 20  
 Assists: 32  
 Shots/60: 7.4  
 SAT%: 51.2

SAT% rel: 2.3  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$2.75M

Nielsen doesn't get a lot of attention around the league, but he's quite a good player. Despite being in a tough defensive role, he doesn't get outshot and gives you about 50 points per year. You can put him on the ice any time with confidence. Think of him as a souped-up Justin Fontaine, playing center and holding his own in the face-off dot.

Except that Nielsen does even more things that help his team win, despite the fact they don't show up on a scoresheet. He's legitimately one of the best penalty-killers in the league, able to both keep opponents' chances down while applying shorthanded pressure. And the dude is money in the shootout, converting at a greater than 50% rate. A great option for the middle-six, particularly if you want to move, say, Mikael Granlund to the wing.



**Darren Helm, Detroit**

Age: 29  
GP: 77  
Goals: 13

Assists: 13  
Shots/60: 9.5  
SAT%: 51.9  
SAT% rel: -0.2  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$2.13M

Helm has been a very solid player for a long time in Detroit. His speed allows him to be a good defender and penalty killer, but he also has enough skills to contribute to the score-sheet, too. But with so many young Red Wings forwards needing NHL minutes to develop, Detroit may look to move on.

This gives a team out there an opportunity to bolster their depth with a versatile two-way player. While Helm was mostly assigned duty on the wing last year, he's been proven to be a capable center in the past. He's not going to be someone that you sign for your top-six, but Helm would be a useful depth contributor for many teams.



**David Legwand, Buffalo**

Age: 35  
GP: 79  
Goals: 5  
Assists: 9  
Shots/60: 5.2  
SAT%: 45.1

SAT% rel: -2.8  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$3M

For years Legwand was a solid supporting player for Nashville- good for about 40 points a season while providing a solid two-way game that could be used in all situations. But since leaving Nashville, his scoring has dried up, and his age suggests that it's not coming back.

But the good news is that he's still useful on the penalty kill and is able to fill a role down the middle or at the wing. Legwand may not be able to command the type of money he was able to last season, but that may just mean you can get value on a player who should still provide solid depth.

Do you think the Wild are too small? You're in luck! Matthias is not too small. On the contrary, he is massive, measuring in at 6'4" and 231 pounds. But don't write off Matthias as a grinder. On a per-minute basis, he's been a pretty good goal-scorer, though he hasn't been able to have the minutes to crack the 20-goal mark. His underlying numbers as a penalty killer have been really good on some not-good defensive teams, too.

On the downside, Matthias is a slight negative in the possession game. He is also better suited as a winger than a center, as he's a bit of a liability in the face-off circle. Still, Matthias would give the Wild some decent secondary scoring.



**Shawn Matthias, Colorado**

Age: 28  
GP: 71  
Goals: 12  
Assists: 16  
Shots/60: 6.4  
SAT%: 48.2  
SAT% rel: -1.1  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$2.3M



**Nick Spaling, San Jose**

Age: 27  
GP: 58  
Goals: 3  
Assists: 10  
Shots/60: 4.5  
SAT%: 45.6  
SAT% rel: -9.9

15-16 Cap Hit: \$2.2M

If you're a depth player who is looking to *GET PAID*, a deep playoff run is a great opportunity to do so. That said, Spaling probably didn't take full advantage. He had just a lone assist during the Sharks' Stanley Cup run.

But that playoff run doesn't mean you shouldn't give Spaling a look. He's been a fine penalty killer who is a positive in the face-off dot. If you're looking for a third or fourth-line center, Spaling could work. Just be warned that he's been a negative possession player his entire career up to this point.



**Matt Cullen, Pittsburgh**

Age: 39  
GP: 82  
Goals: 16  
Assists: 16  
Shots/60: 7.0  
SAT%: 49.5  
SAT% rel: -4.4  
15-16 Cap Hit: 800K

Cullen is the Jaromir Jagr of role players: Ageless, tireless, relentlessly good. Given that he's been a useful player in every year since the '04 lockout, there's little reason to believe that the former St. Cloud State Husky will suddenly drop-off next season, even at age-40.

Cullen is still extremely fast and a good playmaker, but where he may have had the most value to the Penguins was on the penalty kill. Among forwards, Cullen was 6th in the league in shorthanded minutes, and tied for second in points. Not to mention that the Penguins boasted a Top-5 PK. It might be hard to expect another 16-goal season from him next season, but wresting him from the Penguins this offseason would be a huge upgrade over the Jarret Stoll / Ryan Carter / Chris Porter group of 4th-line PK specialists the Wild employed this year.



**Sam Gagner, Philadelphia**

Age: 26  
GP: 53  
Goals: 8  
Assists: 8  
Shots/60: 7.2

SAT%: 51.7  
SAT% rel: 2.0  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$4.8M

Usually when a 26-year-old NHL player gets sent to the minors and goes through unclaimed, it signals the end of them being perceived as a useful player. This happened to Gagner, who the Flyers buried in Lehigh Valley for a few games in the middle of the season- but perhaps not for the reason you'd think. This was more of a cap casualty move, with the Flyers wanting a bit of relief from Gagner's large contract.

There is a sense that Gagner- the 6th overall pick in the 2007 draft- had his growth as a player stunted by spending so many years in Edmonton. Even now- three organizations later he has yet to play on a team that wasn't in the bottom-10 of the league defensively. Gagner is a talented playmaker with some untapped potential. Perhaps he'd be worth taking a... Flyer... on for a depth role on a structured team.

GP: 11  
Goals: 2  
Assists: 0  
Shots/60: 6.0  
SAT%: 41.3  
SAT% rel: -12.7  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$3M

Kelly has been a role player on Boston for a long time, and he was very good at it at one point. Playing defensive minutes, Kelly was able to regularly be a positive possession player while being able to provide just enough scoring to not be a big liability on offense. While the possession slowly started to slip away, he was still a big part of Boston's amazing penalty kill.

Sadly, Kelly missed all but 11 games of last season after fracturing his femur in November. We've seen players come back from such an injury (Kurtis Foster, for one). But to sustain such a long-term injury at 35, it's fair to wonder if it will rob him of his effectiveness. If his health checks out and he wants to return, he could still be a useful shutdown center.



**Chris Kelly, Boston**

Age: 35



### **Trevor Lewis, Los Angeles**

Age: 29  
GP: 75  
Goals: 8  
Assists: 8  
Shots/60: 9.4  
SAT%: 58.1  
SAT% rel: -1.0  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$1.53M

Lewis could be an attractive option for many teams this offseason. He's a defensive center who comes from a very successful organization, he has two Stanley Cups under his belt, and since last hitting free agency he's enjoyed his two best offensive seasons.

But when you look for things that he's really good at, it's hard to come up with great answers. He's a positive possession player, but everyone's a positive possession player in LA. He kills penalties, but he's not even the best on the team. He shoots a lot for the ice time he gets, but even Jason Pominville thinks his 4.8 career shooting percentage is bad. It seems like whoever gets Lewis will be overpaying.



### **Boyd Gordon, Arizona**

Age: 32  
GP: 65  
Goals: 2  
Assists: 2  
Shots/60: 5.2  
SAT%: 42.6  
SAT% rel: -3.8  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$3M

Hockey's a weird game in that sometimes, a player like Boyd Gordon gets paid, and you don't know exactly how. I mean, there's nothing *wrong* with him- he was able to put up some points in a very defensive role in Arizona, he's a great face-off man, and has a reputation as a good penalty killer. But was that worth \$9M over 3 years? Edmonton definitely overpaid.

After getting traded back to Arizona, Gordon once again is the open market, though he'll almost surely sign for less money. You're a team that's looking for depth players, but there are a couple of concerns with Gordon. It might just be the team he was surrounded with, but his numbers looked really bad in Edmonton, even on the PK. Proceed with caution.

something you'd want him to try, should you sign him.



**Tyler Kennedy, New Jersey**

Age: 29  
GP: 50  
Goals: 3  
Assists: 13  
Shots/60: 6.5  
SAT%: 50.5  
SAT% rel: 5.6  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$600K

Kennedy's best days came early in his career, where he was a mainstay with Jordan Staal and Matt Cooke. They made for an excellent shutdown line, tilting the ice in favor of the Penguins and adding some goals of their own. But since that line was broken up, Kennedy hasn't been able to re-create that chemistry with anyone else, and he's bounced around the league since leaving Pittsburgh.

Kennedy isn't a bad player to have on your team, though. He's a fast, hard-nosed player that won't get you a lot of points, but tends to influence possession. He hasn't had a lot of experience killing penalties, but that may be



**Patrik Elias, New Jersey**

Age: 40  
GP: 16  
Goals: 2  
Assists: 6  
Shots/60: 5.4  
SAT%: 50%  
SAT% rel: 2.3  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$5.5M

While Elias was once an amazing player for the Devils. At age 40, those days are sadly gone. Elias struggled with knee issues throughout last season, which limited him to just 16 games. Still, a half-point-per-game is still pretty decent for a player who only skates about 15 minutes a night. Especially for the Devils, who are so boring they make the Wild look like the 1980s Oilers.

Alas, Elias doesn't seem to be a viable option for you to sign. Not only are there concerns with injury and age, but he's been in the Devils

organization his entire career, and it's hard to see him play for another team.

men in the league. If you're looking for someone to fill the Jarret Stoll role, Gaustad might be for you.



**Paul Gaustad, Nashville**

Age: 34  
GP: 63  
Goals: 2  
Assists: 4  
Shots/60: 4.3  
SAT%: 38.4  
SAT% rel: -14.9  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$3.25M

Once upon a time, Gaustad was one of the NHL's most effective role players, able to generate some points while locking down the opposition in tough minutes. It's hard to make the argument for that anymore, as Gaustad has registered just 20 points in 156 games over the past two seasons.

But it's hard to say exactly what Gaustad is capable of, because he plays what is absolutely the most defensive role in the NHL, starting a whopping 64% of his shifts in his own zone. It's no longer his job to provide offense. What is his job? In large part, it's to win faceoffs, as he's one of the best face-off



**Kyle Brodziak, St. Louis**

Age: 32  
GP: 76  
Goals: 7  
Assists: 4  
Shots/60: 4.0  
SAT%: 47.5  
SAT% rel: -2.2  
15-16 cap hit: \$900K

At this point, I'm shocked no one around the Twin Cities has bought a billboard to put Brodziak's face along with the caption "Miss Me Yet?" on it. The Wild moved quickly to sign their depth players last July, and decided to sign Carter at 600K while letting Brodziak test the market. The salary cap staying stagnant wasn't kind to him, and he signed for under \$1M, which probably neither he nor the Wild expected.

While the PK faltered in Minnesota, Brodziak enjoyed one of his best penalty killing seasons ever. But what did decline in his game was his 5v5 game. Once capable of holding his own at 5v5, he played more like a pure PK specialist, at least in his offensive game. Don't be afraid of bringing him back, but don't be shocked if the days of him providing 20+ points are done.

A wrist injury hampered his production, leading to season-ending surgery in January.

There's some upside to be unlocked in Tlusty, as he had a really productive run with the Hurricanes from the 11-12 to 13-14 seasons. His Goals/60 in that time was comparable to Logan Couture, John Tavares, and Jeff Carter. If healthy, his shot is a weapon any team would be glad to have. But the bigger question is whether he's a player who's good enough to be a Top-6 player, and if he isn't, whether he can play a bottom-6 role.



**Jiri Tlusty, New Jersey**

Age: 28  
 GP: 30  
 Goals: 2  
 Assists: 2  
 Shots/60: 5.7  
 SAT%: 48.5  
 SAT% rel: 1.13  
 15-16 Cap Hit: \$800K

Now 28 and having gone through 3 organizations, Tlusty is running out of time to fully deliver on the promise he had when he was a first-round pick. After being traded from Carolina to Winnipeg in the 14-15 season, Tlusty couldn't catch on with the Jets, and went to New Jersey on a one-year deal.



**Shawn Horcoff, Anaheim**

Age: 37  
 GP: 59  
 Goals: 6  
 Assists: 9  
 Shots/60: 6.4  
 SAT%: 52.0  
 SAT% rel: -2.3  
 15-16 Cap Hit: \$1.75M

Horcoff is another player that used to be a Top-6 option and finds himself in decline. He had a couple of decent years in Dallas that landed him a one-year deal with the Ducks, where he was a fine depth center. His point

total was mediocre, but he was break-even in possession in a defensive role.

Two potential concerns, other than his age and declining skills: 1) Your coach, Bruce Boudreau, didn't trust him down the stretch, healthy scratching him in the playoffs. 2) Horcoff was one of few players who have been suspended for violating the NHL's PED program. You may want to pass to avoid the headache.



**Vernon Fiddler, Dallas**

Age: 36  
GP: 82  
Goals: 12  
Assists: 10  
Shots/60: 6.6  
SAT%: 50.1  
SAT% rel: -2.8  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$1.25M

Dallas' designated defensive center, Fiddler has held down a spot in the Stars' bottom-6 for the past 5 years. He's been solid in his role- scoring about 20-30 points a season while taking up some defensive zone starts. You could be concerned about his age, or that his production won't be as good on a less

talented team, but you could do a lot worse than bringing in Fiddler as a center option.



**Dominic Moore, New York (Rangers)**

Age: 35  
GP: 80  
Goals: 6  
Assists: 9  
Shots/60: 5.8  
SAT%: 42.7  
SAT% rel: -6.0  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$1.5M

Moore is your quintessential journeyman center. He's played for 9 organizations, playing in thankless, defensive roles filling out the bottom of rosters. He's played for the Rangers over the last three seasons- an eternity for him- and has logged the most PK minutes of any forward on the team in that stretch. You're paying for reliability- you know what you're getting with Moore, even if there's not upside involved- and playoff experience.



**Riley Nash, Carolina**

Age: 27  
GP: 64  
Goals: 9  
Assists: 13  
Shots/60: 5.7  
SAT%: 51.8  
SAT% rel: -0.2  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$1.15M

Riley Nash isn't spectacular at anything, but he's got a few things going for him. He's young, for one, and his underlying numbers rate him as one of Carolina's best defensive forwards. He provides some points, but he doesn't shoot a lot, and there's not much indication there's untapped offensive talent there. He might be worth a flier to fill out the bottom of a roster.



**Mike Richards, Washington**

Age: 31  
GP: 39  
Goals: 2  
Assists: 3  
Shots/60: 6.7  
SAT%: 51.8  
SAT% rel: -0.2  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$1M

Mike Richards' story is pretty sad even before you consider the pain-killer arrest last season that led to the Kings terminating his contract. Once a center with an deadly combination of skill and grit, it appears his physical, hard-nosed style appeared to be his undoing, and at just 31, he's in need of a career revival. It's *possible* that he could thrive in your organization, I guess, but if he couldn't make things work with two elite teams in LA and Washington, why would Minnesota be different?



**Kyle Chipchura, Arizona**

Age: 30  
GP: 70  
Goals: 4  
Assists: 8  
Shots/60: 4.1  
SAT%: 44.3  
SAT% rel: -2.4  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$875K

Kyle Chipchura has a really cool name, and that might be the best thing about him. That might have been a bit harsh- he's not great at anything, but he's a solid fourth-line guy. He plays defense, brings some physicality to the mix, and doesn't kill your team when he plays 10 minutes a night. If you want a replacement for say, Chris Porter, Chipchura could be your man.



**Steve Ott, St. Louis**

Age: 33  
GP: 21  
Goals: 0  
Assists: 2  
Shots/60: 5.8  
SAT%: 51.8  
SAT% rel: -3.5  
15-16 cap hit: \$2.6M

Can we still #LaughAtOtt? I would, if his decline wasn't so sad. Once able to combine sand-paper with 30-40 points a year, Ott spent this past season barely clinging to the Blues' 4th-line, playing in just 21 games and having a measly 2 points to show for it. At this stage of his career, the only reason to get him is if you want a guy at the bottom of your roster who's more valuable for getting under the opponents' skin than he is for his actual play.



**Ryan White, Philadelphia**

Age: 28  
GP: 73  
Goals: 11  
Assists: 5  
Shots/60: 6.1  
SAT%: 46.2  
SAT% rel: -5.5  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$800K

White is your stereotypical fourth-liner-providing grit, but not any kind of threat to move into your Top-6. He had 101 penalty minutes last year, but he was more prone to getting misconducts than actually dropping the gloves. What separates him from a typical fourth-liner is his shot, which he uses more than a typical grinder, and has had a pretty accurate 12.8 shooting% during his time in Philly.



**Brad Malone, Carolina**

Age: 27  
GP: 57  
Goals: 2  
Assists: 4  
Shots/60: 3.9  
SAT%: 49.3  
SAT% rel: -1.9  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$650K

There's really not a lot to say about Brad Malone. He's not really a scorer, he's not a good possession guy, he doesn't shoot, he doesn't play special teams. He's good for a little bit of grit, but at that point, is he a big enough upgrade over Kurtis Gabriel to bring him into the fold?



**Jonathan Marchessault, Tampa Bay**

Age: 25  
GP: 45  
Goals: 7  
Assists: 11  
Shots/60: 9.34  
SAT%: 53.9  
SAT% rel: 1.6  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$600K

Jonathan Marchessault is just 25 and only received his first extended stint in the NHL last season. This coming off several years in the AHL where he was a high-scoring player, racking up 91 points in 100 games during his time with the Syracuse Crunch. Marchessault is going to become a free agent because of a rule that states that players his age can become free agents if they play 3 seasons with an organization but see 80 NHL games or less. He played just 47 games for Tampa in that stretch.

So why? Marchessault is able to make things happen offensively, and he was a positive possession player in a defensive role. Surely that's something a team could use. It's easy to say "He never got a chance because he's 5'8", but Tampa Bay is the team that prominently features Tyler Johnson, so I don't know how fair that actually is. What's more likely is that

Marchessault got lost in a numbers game—remember, even stud prospect Jonathan Drouin was in the AHL. Marchessault could be worth a look if you're looking for the next Justin Fontaine.

### Left Wings



**Milan Lucic, Los Angeles**

Age: 28  
GP: 81  
Goals: 20  
Assists: 35  
Shots/60: 5.2  
SAT%: 59.5  
SAT% rel: 3.1  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$6M

It's no secret Lucic would be a good candidate to return to the Kings after a solid year, and an early out at the hands of the San Jose Sharks. However, after recently announcing his intentions to hit free agency, Lucic's size and grit will be in demand on the market, making that return less and less likely. Ranking third on his own team in shot attempt

percentage, he posted the 4<sup>th</sup> highest point total of his career. He's a career 9.4% shooter, which could very well come in handy for a team like the Wild that struggles to score.

Oh, yeah, and Lucic also happens to be a big, mean power forward who punishes opponents. Guys who can do that and score 50 points tend to be in demand. Due to salary cap issues, Lucic almost certainly won't be able to sign with the Kings, and unfortunately for you, you don't have that much more cap room than LA.



**Tuomo Ruutu, New Jersey**

Age: 33  
 GP: 33  
 Goals: 0  
 Assists: 1  
 Shots/60: 5.7  
 SAT%: 47.1  
 SAT%Rel: 1.9  
 15-16 Cap Hit: \$4.75M

Once a decent middle-six scorer, Ruutu couldn't get anything going this year. He was sidelined for 27 games in October after suffering a broken foot. The Finnish winger's lack of points this season is troubling, but even

when accounting for the possibility his injury hampered his play, his downward trend in scoring should ring alarm bells for anyone looking to sign the vet.



**Andrew Ladd, Chicago**

Age: 30  
 GP: 78  
 Goals: 25  
 Assists: 21  
 Shots/60: 7.4  
 SAT%: 50.6  
 SAT%Rel: -0.9  
 15-16 Cap Hit: \$4.4M

While not a star, Ladd has been a productive player for most of his career, going back to the first time he was in Chicago. The former Jets captain was traded back to the Blackhawks just days prior to the trade deadline as contract extension talks between him and Winnipeg GM Kevin Cheveldayoff stalled out. He plays a heavy game and has skill- a combination that any Cup contending team would like to have, but the price would have to be right. Unfortunately, it would seem that if he takes a discount for anyone, it will be Chicago, where he's a nice fit.



**Kris Versteeg, Los Angeles**

Age: 30  
GP: 77  
Goals: 15  
Assists: 23  
Shots/60: 7.7  
SAT%: 56.9  
SAT%Rel: 5.4  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$2.2M

Versteeg is a typical 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> line winger as his points aren't incredibly eye-popping, but he was a possession monster last season. Versteeg's been pretty consistent, scoring about 35 points per season while making the players around him better. Throw in the fact that he can be had for a reasonable price, and what more could you ask for?



**David Perron, Anaheim**

Age: 28  
GP: 71  
Goals: 12  
Assists: 24  
Shots/60: 8.0  
SAT%: 51.8  
SAT%Rel: 1.0  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$3.8125M

Due to concussions, Perron has bounced around quite a bit in recent years. He started in the NHL with the St. Louis Blues, then signed with the Edmonton Oilers. Edmonton sent him to Pittsburgh, who then acquired Carl Hagelin from the Anaheim Ducks. If he can stay healthy, he's about a 40-50 point player who won't hurt you in the defensive game. He won't be one of the more pursued guys, but that just means he could be a sneaky-cheap option for you to snag.



**Mikkel Boedker, Colorado**

Age: 26  
GP: 80  
Goals: 17  
Assists: 34  
Shots/60: 6.0  
SAT%: 45.6  
SAT%Rel: -1.4  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$3.75M

The former first round pick (8<sup>th</sup> overall in 2008) was sent to Colorado in a trade deadline deal. Boedker has gotten first-line minutes throughout his career, despite the fact that his play at even strength doesn't suggest he should. But Boedker is one of the youngest bigger-name free agents at 26, and is a deadly weapon on the power play due to his shot and playmaking skills. He might get paid higher than his play warrants, but if his price comes down, this could be a smart move to make, provided you give him a lesser role than he's accustomed to.



**Alex Tanguay, Arizona**

Age: 36  
GP: 70  
Goals: 8  
Assists: 27  
Shots/60: 3.8  
SAT%: 45.5  
SAT%Rel: 2.0  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$3.5M

Tanguay was one of the pieces going back to Arizona for Boedker at the trade deadline. Once a fearsome scorer, the aging vet is in decline both in terms of scoring and possession. At 36 years of age, the word "retirement" pops up more and more as he'll likely never see the kind of dough he saw on the previous contract. Tanguay could very well opt for one last shot at a Cup as a scoring depth on a really good team, but the question is: Will a really good team bother with 36 year old vet?



**Jamie McGinn, Anaheim**

Age: 27  
GP: 84 (not a typo)  
Goals: 22  
Assists: 17  
Shots/60: 7.5  
SAT%: 47.5  
SAT%Rel: -1.0  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$2.95M

Many fans in Buffalo were sad to see McGinn get traded to the Ducks in the lone trade deadline deal by Sabres GM Tim Murray. He was one of the Buffalo's few consistent goal scorers, outside of Jack Eichel, Ryan O'Reilly, and Sam Reinhart. Billed as a third line winger, he has played some time on the second line in both Colorado and Buffalo. With 1.47 points per 60 minutes in the last three seasons, he's an intriguing depth player to be had on the free agent market.



**Travis Moen, Dallas**

Age: 34  
GP: 23  
Goals: 0  
Assists: 2  
Shots/60: 4.2  
SAT%: 46.4  
SAT%Rel: -7.5  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$1.85M

The Stars barely missed Moen as he was out with injury for most of the season. In fact, injuries have been a recurring theme at this stage in his career. The last year he stayed healthy was the lockout-shortened 2012-13 season. With lackluster possession numbers, even on a team with the firepower of the Stars, he's not going to be able to demand much from another team in terms of contract. You'd be wise to stay away, too, as there are younger, more productive options available.



**Nathan Gerbe, Carolina**

Age: 28  
GP: 47  
Goals: 3  
Assists: 4  
Shots/60: 7.2  
SAT%: 49.1  
SAT%Rel: -2.7  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$1.75M

Standing at 5 feet 5 inches, this diminutive forward has twice scored 31 points in the NHL. Other seasons were consisting fluctuating mediocrity. He only had 7 points this season, which doesn't bode well for a 28 year old in a contract year.



**Viktor Stalberg, New York (Rangers)**

Age: 30  
GP: 75  
Goals: 9  
Assists: 11  
Shots/60: 8.51  
SAT%: 47.5  
SAT%Rel: 0.4  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$1.1M

Ever since leaving Chicago a few seasons ago, Stalberg hasn't been the same player. He's been struggling to get points and he has not been the possession driver that made him a promising young player arriving in Nashville. Not that he still couldn't help a team at 30 years old, but he's not a cornerstone player that at team can build around.



**Matt Martin, New York (Islanders)**

Age: 27  
GP: 80  
Goals: 10  
Assists: 9  
Shots/60: 6.3  
SAT%: 49.3  
SAT%Rel: -0.5  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$1M

Matt Martin will forever be known around Minnesota as the guy who ended Keith Ballard's career with a hit that knocked unconscious on the ice. Maybe that unfortunate hit will influence whether you take a look at him or not.

But for the Islanders, his physical brand of hockey and decent possession metrics helped make up what was deemed by some people as the best 4<sup>th</sup> line in hockey. He takes the body, and plays near 50 percent possession in tough minutes. What more could a team want from depth players?



**Tomas Fleischmann, Chicago**

Age: 32  
GP: 76  
Goals: 14  
Assists: 11  
Shots/60: 6.9  
SAT%: 50.4  
SAT%Rel: -2.0  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$750K

Fleischmann has moved around the league...a lot. Getting moved at the trade deadline the past two seasons – going from Florida to Anaheim in 14-15, and from Montreal to Chicago in 15-16 – Fleischmann has had to adapt to many different systems. The unsettled nature of his career seems to have taken a toll on his overall numbers. He hasn't crossed the 30 point threshold in each of the last two seasons and hasn't passed 20 goals since before the last lockout. Still, he's a decent secondary scoring option, especially at that cap hit.



**Scottie Upshall, St. Louis**

Age: 32  
GP: 70  
Goals: 6  
Assists: 8  
Shots/60: 9.9  
SAT%: 52.0  
SAT%Rel: 0.0  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$700K

Upshall was signed by the St. Louis Blues on a one-year deal and teamed up with Kyle Brodziak and Steve Ott to create more depth on a team that has notoriously struggled to get past the first round of the playoffs until this last year. Upshall is a good, shoot-first depth player that has been on the right side of 50 percent on shot attempts his entire career spanning five different teams. If a team is looking to shore up the 4<sup>th</sup> line, like say a team with the worst 4<sup>th</sup> line in the league, he'd be a player to target.



**Dainius Zubrus, San Jose**

Age: Old  
GP: 50  
Goals: 3  
Assists: 4  
Shots/60: 3.9  
SAT%: 49.9  
SAT%Rel: -3.2  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$600K

One of those “He’s still in the league?” guys, Zubrus found a spot on the Sharks’ fourth line last year. With almost 1300 career games in the NHL, Zubrus is finally starting to see his age catch up to him. Being a decent puck possession player for most of his career, those numbers have dipped over the last couple of years, and he doesn’t contribute on the scoresheet anymore, either.



**Drew Miller, Detroit**

Age: 32  
GP: 28  
Goals: 1  
Assists: 1  
Shots/60: 5.7  
SAT%: 39.1  
SAT% rel: -13.4  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$1.35M

Drew Miller was sidelined by a major knee injury this season, officially getting shutdown on January 12<sup>th</sup>. Placed on long-term IR for a torn meniscus, he also missed 14 games with a broken jaw. At best, he's a depth forward and mediocre as a penalty killer.

**Right Wings**



**Shane Doan, Arizona**

Age: 39  
GP: 72  
Goals: 28  
Assists: 19  
Shots/60: 7.0  
SAT%: 47.6  
SAT% rel: 0.5  
2015-16 Salary Cap Hit: \$5.3M

Doan, the captain of the Arizona Coyotes, has only belonged to a single organization in his 20 year NHL career. At age 39 there is a fair chance that career may be coming to an end, but last year was somewhat of a renaissance season for the grizzled veteran scored 28 goals, his highest total since 2008-09. His leadership has helped develop a newly assembled infusion of youth featuring Max Domi and Anthony Duclair, who are making strides to bring the Coyotes back into relevancy as the team continues to improve.

Doan is a big body at 6'1" and 222 lbs. He has wreaked havoc on opposing goaltenders by planting his body in the crease and scoring dirty goals, which is something the Wild could value. However, because of his age, salary, and loyalty to the Coyotes franchise, it is highly unlikely that Doan would continue his career in Minnesota.



**Radim Vrbata, Vancouver**

Age: 34

GP: 63

Goals: 13

Assists: 14

Shots/60: 10.5

SAT%: 46.9

SAT% rel: -0.7

2015-16 Salary Cap Hit: \$5M

Vrbata’s contract year was ended early by a lower body injury he suffered on March 22- a disappointing finish to a disappointing season for the journeyman forward. It was a 180 from his 2014-15 season, when he scored 31 goals and a career-high 63 points for Vancouver. That actually wasn’t even his only 30-goal season. In 2011-2012, Vrbata tallied 35 goals for Arizona, so he actually has a decent track record as a goal-scorer.

Vrbata will have a hard time finding a job if he holds out for the kind of payday he is accustomed to. With his age climbing and his production falling, Vrbata will be hard pressed to find a multi-year deal as well and may have to take a small 1 year deal to earn one final contract before he retires. This is the type of player the Wild have been known to

target in the past, and he could be had at a discounted rate. However, the you have all the 30+ year old forwards a team can handle and should probably look elsewhere.



**Loui Eriksson, Boston**

Age: 30

GP: 82

Goals: 30

Assists: 33

Shots/60: 6.6

SAT%: 52.2

SAT% rel: 3.6

2015-16 Salary Cap Hit: \$4,250,000

Eriksson is one of the most productive UFA RWs on the market, playing in each game last season and eclipsing the 30-goal mark for the second time in his career. His 63 points will make him a hot commodity in a thin market for RW. He has size, speed and scoring touch to go along with his elite defensive game. This season Eriksson developed a reputation for going to the dirty areas and using his body to score goals in new ways he wasn’t previously known to do. He had been referred to as the “Soft Swede” but his play this year boosted offensive output while dispelling that nickname.

The Wild were said to be deep in pursuit of Eriksson at the trade deadline, but his acquisition would only have been as a rental player. The decision of the Bruins to hang onto Eriksson hints that they would like to re-sign him and both sides have said that he is due for a raise, which will likely price him completely out of your budget.



**Troy Brouwer, St. Louis**

Age: 30  
 GP: 82  
 Goals: 18  
 Assists: 21  
 Shots/60: 6.3  
 SAT%: 49.6  
 SAT% rel: -3.3

2015-16 Salary Cap Hit: \$3,666,667

Brouwer was the main NHL piece the Blues acquired in the T.J. Oshie trade. It seemed to have worked out well for St. Louis. Brouwer had a fairly pedestrian regular season posting 39 points in 82 games, but made some noise in the playoffs with 8 goals and 13 points in 20 games, most notably notching the final strike against the Blackhawks in Game 7, sending the Blues past the first round for the first time since roughly the Ford

administration. His playoff experience, physicality, and scoring touch will likely get him some interest in a thin market.

He has likely priced himself out of Minnesota's budget and will likely command a multi-year deal, which the you're not in a great position to offer. The Blues will likely want to hang on to Brouwer and should be able to offer fair market value, especially if they don't retain David Backes. The only way you can make a play here is if you find a way to shed some payroll, and Brouwer still likely isn't the type of scorer this team really needs.



**Kyle Okposo, New York (Islanders)**

Age: 28  
 GP: 79  
 Goals: 22  
 Assists: 41  
 Shots/60: 8.1  
 SAT%: 50.9  
 SAT% rel: 1.9

2015-16 Salary Cap Hit: \$2,800,000

The Isle's alternate captain just wrapped up the second most productive season of his career. At age 28, Okposo has posted 4 seasons over the 50 point mark, but has yet to

reach 30 goals. Okposo is a stout player who uses his bulk to grind through the corners and drive the forecheck. He is a possession monster and has a gritty style that sees him score from the dirty areas. He has respectable speed and a unique ability to roof the puck with his above-average shot. He throws big checks and is an intimidating presence on the ice. He is known for his offensive game, but is no slouch on the defensive side of the puck.

Besides being #OneOfUs (Shattuck, U of M alum) Okposo possesses many skills that the Wild could be looking for from a right-handed scorer. Fans have been clamoring to bring him to Minnesota for years and he was even mentioned in some trade rumors in this past season. But, much like the situation with Thomas Vanek, the Wild chose not to trade away assets when they would have the opportunity to pick him up in free agency. The ironic part of this is that you will almost certainly be unable to afford Okposo without buying out Vanek. Okposo will also demand a multi-year contract, and there are plenty of those already on the books in Minnesota. Bringing Okposo back to the State of Hockey looks like a longshot for now, but could be possible if a roster shakeup occurs.



**Jason Chimera, Washington**

Age: 37

GP: 82

Goals: 20

Assists: 21

Shots/60: 9.0

SAT%: 48.0

SAT% rel: -3.9

2015-16 Salary Cap Hit: \$2,000,000

Chimera has long been known for his energy and skating ability, neither of which have diminished at his advanced age. He reaches the end of his latest contract sporting the second highest point total of his career. He did so playing on the third line for a powerful Capitals offense and matched his career-high for goals scored and was only one point shy of a personal best. However, the point totals are likely an anomaly as his career average is much closer to 30 points.

He has likely earned himself a modest raise by reaching the 20 goal mark, and that could price him out of Washington's plans. But can he match that success outside of Washington's well-oiled scoring machine? This is the type of player that could be attractive to the Wild, but they should ultimately avoid due to age and circumstance.



**Chris Stewart, Anaheim**

Age: 28

GP: 56

Goals: 8

Assists: 12

Shots/60: 7.4

SAT%: 51.3

SAT% rel: -0.4

2015-16 Salary Cap Hit: \$1,700,000

Stewart was limited to just 56 games during his 1-year contract with Anaheim after suffering a broken jaw in February. Stewart missed a big portion of games during Anaheim's strong second half but still managed to put 20 points on the board. Stewart is a heavyweight at 6'2" and 228 lbs and his game matches his build. He is known for using his body to finish checks, establish a strong forecheck and score from the tough area in front of the net. This hard-nosed game could be a detriment, though, as he only has two 70+ game seasons under his belt.

This is another player you might want to take a look at. The team and its new coach are both familiar with the player from their time together over the last two seasons. Stewart was mostly disappointing in his short stint in Minnesota as he battled through injuries while

adjusting to his new team. However, he could still be useful in a bottom-6 role as a net front presence and could be very affordable after a mediocre season in Anaheim. But buyer beware, even though he is under 30, he still has a deep history of missing playing time.



**PA Parenteau, Toronto**

Age: 33

GP: 77

Goals: 20

Assists: 21

Shots/60: 7.4

SAT%: 53.8

SAT% rel: 3.65

2015-16 Salary Cap Hit: \$1,500,000

Parenteau had a productive season during his first year in Toronto, putting up 41 points for a very bad team in the middle of a transition toward youth. He matched his career-best 20 goals and was thought to be a huge target at the trade deadline, but an injury kept him in Toronto. Parenteau is more of a playmaker than a goal scorer, but likely has a couple years left in the tank.

Though he has publicly expressed his desire to return to Toronto to keep working with Mike

Babcock, there may not be room for him on a team that is stacked with prospects and in full-on rebuild mode. Toronto recently committed to Nazem Kadri on a multi-year deal, but has been very reserved about handing out contracts to other veterans to make room for their prospects. Parenteau could likely find himself on a team looking for depth scoring, and may have earned a modest raise based on reaching the 20 goal / 40 point mark.



**Mike Brown, Montreal**

Age: 30  
 GP: 58  
 Goals: 2  
 Assists: 3  
 Shots/60: 6.9  
 SAT%: 44.3  
 SAT% rel: -6.7

2015-16 Salary Cap Hit: \$1,200,000

Mike Brown is probably best known for his wicked mustaches rather than his play (No, seriously. Look at that 'stache!). He has a total of 34 NHL points in 393 career games and 751 PIM. Brown is part of a quickly dying breed of hockey player known as enforcers. He has many highlights on hockeyfights.com, but not so many elsewhere. Brown was placed on waivers by the Sharks in February,

and will likely not find himself another NHL roster spot.



**Patrick Eaves, Dallas**

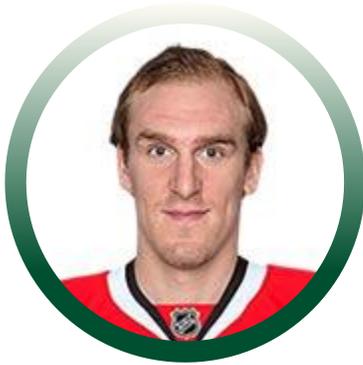
Age: 32  
 GP: 54  
 Goals: 11  
 Assists: 6  
 Shots/60: 7.5  
 SAT%: 53.1  
 SAT% rel: 0.7

2015-16 Salary Cap Hit: \$1,150,000

Eaves is a journeyman who has found moderate success in the NHL. He has yet to play a full season and topped out at 32 points in his sophomore season with the Senators in 2006-07, but put up 27 points as recently as 2014-15. He did have a successful postseason this year, notching 3 goals and 6 points in 9 games. He has made a career of being a depth scorer and would project into a bottom-6 role for any club picking him up. At 32, he is young enough to continue playing, but may not have many suitors on the open market.

Eaves makes little sense for you to pursue unless his price truly bottoms out. Chances are that Dallas works hard to retain him after he

found a niche playing for the Central Division juggernaut. He isn't a dazzling player but could offer experience and leadership to whoever signs him



**Dale Weise, Chicago**

Age: 27  
GP: 71  
Goals: 14  
Assists: 13  
Shots/60: 8.9  
SAT%: 52.4  
SAT% rel: 0.3

2015-16 Salary Cap Hit: \$1,025,000

Weise's career narrative is based more on a handful of clutch goals than it is on overall production. He helped the Canadiens to the Eastern Conference Finals in 2014 and became very popular in doing so. However, he was traded away to Chicago at this year's trade deadline, signaling the end of his career in Montreal. He is still under 30, but has likely realized his ceiling as a player and a signing team should expect around 25 points from him in a full season.

Weise isn't likely to have a line of suitors, but should find himself with a deal somewhere. He could fit in a depth role with the Wild if

you elect to build a typical shutdown 4<sup>th</sup> line, but beyond that, he's probably not a fit in Minnesota.



**Chris Terry, Carolina**

Age: 27  
GP: 68  
Goals: 8  
Assists: 3  
SH/60: 6.2  
SAT%: 48.0  
SAT% rel: -4.2

2015-16 Salary Cap Hit: \$875,000

Chris Terry has spent his entire career in the Hurricanes' organization, posting modest scoring numbers in limited use throughout his 4 years. He was a proven scorer in the OHL and put up respectable numbers in the AHL, but hasn't been able to find his groove in the NHL. In 2014-15, he posted 11 goals and 20 points in 57 games, but took a step backward this year after signing a 1-year deal. He's a smaller player at 5'10" and 195lbs. There is still a chance his NHL game comes around as he's only played 138 games. However, at 27 years old, he's probably not going to be able to develop much farther.

Terry could be an intriguing option to build a scoring 4th line. He hasn't yet arrived in the NHL, but could be had on a budget. It looks unlikely for him to return to Carolina after a disappointing season



**Mike Santorelli, Anaheim**

Age: 30  
 GP: 69  
 Goals: 9  
 Assists: 9  
 Shots/60: 6.8  
 SAT%: 50.1  
 SAT% rel: -1.7

2015-16 Salary Cap Hit: \$875,000

Santorelli is an NHL journeyman who just completed a one-year contract with his 6<sup>th</sup> team, the Anaheim Ducks. Though he had a strong finish to the regular season, he became a healthy scratch in the post season as the Ducks returned to health. Santorelli had a 20-goal season way back in 2010-11, but only has 42 goals in 5 seasons since. His career-best is 41 points in a single season.

Based on his limited usage in Anaheim, Santorelli will likely need to take a 1-year deal to try to boost his value and could likely had at a very affordable rate by a team

looking for a bottom-6 forward. This is likely not the type of forward you should be in the market for, unless you're filling out the roster.



**Stephen Gionta, New Jersey**

Age: 32  
 GP: 32  
 Goals: 1  
 Assists: 10  
 Shots/60: 4.2  
 SAT%: -2.2  
 SAT% rel: 44.4

2015-16 Salary Cap Hit: \$850,000

Gionta is a diminutive player at just 5'7" and is known for bringing energy and intensity. What he's not known for is scoring points. His best NHL season saw him post all of 4 goals and 14 points. His path to the NHL came as an undrafted free agent, as many smaller players do. He has spent his entire career in the Devils' organization and has played alongside Zach Parise on those teams. That familiarity could lead to Zach making a case for you to acquire Gionta similarly to how he advocated for Chris Porter. He could be an affordable stop-gap veteran to put on the 4<sup>th</sup> line, depending on what you decide to do with Minnesota's 4th-liners from last year.



**Lee Stempniak, Bruins**

Age: 33

GP: 82

Goals: 19

Assists: 32

Shots/60: 6.1

SAT%: 48.5

SAT% rel: 0.1

2015-16 Salary Cap Hit: \$850,000

The ultimate NHL journeyman, Stempniak found himself playing last season for his 9<sup>th</sup> NHL team over his 11 year career. With all that movement, it has been hard for Stempniak to become completely established in any one place or system. Credit to him, though, he's still found a way to continue to produce. Though he averages around 35 points per season, he was the leading scorer for the Devils this year before they sent him to the Bruins at the trade deadline. His 51 points between New Jersey and Boston were the highest he's had in almost a decade.

Stempniak is one of the most productive unrestricted right wings on the market, and his salary will be very attractive in a cap-strapped league. Stempniak is the type of player who could bring a scoring threat to a bottom-6 role, which is something Minnesota

lacked last year. Even though he is on the wrong side of 30, he could be a valuable short-term investment for the Wild.



**Jordin Tootoo, New Jersey**

Age: 33

GP: 66

Goals: 4

Assists: 5

Shots/60: 7.5

SAT%: 46.6

SAT% rel: 0.1

2015-16 Salary Cap Hit: \$825,000

Jordin Tootoo has made a career out of agitating his opponents. His resume is scattered with various suspensions, but also includes a very honest book about life behind the scenes of being an NHL enforcer and escaping the culture of alcohol, drugs, abuse and suicide. This will be Tootoo's 10<sup>th</sup> season in the NHL and he has never scored more than 30 points in a single season, but has created value by his contributions as a role player.

While the enforcer is a dying breed, Tootoo makes just enough noise on the scoreboard that he will likely find another NHL job.

However, this franchise went a similar route when they signed Matt Cooke, who provided more embarrassment than he was worth. It may be wise to steer clear of this infamous character.



**Brad Boyes, Toronto**

Age: 34  
GP: 60  
Goals: 8  
Assists: 16  
Shots/60: 5.6  
SAT%: 55.0  
SAT% rel: 4.7

2015-16 Salary Cap Hit: \$700,000

Boyes is a one-time 43 goal scorer who is sailing off into the sunset of his career. His best years were from 2007-09 while playing for the Blues and has been on a steady decline since, with his best season in the 2010's saw him score 38 points. His role has been reduced over time, but his scoring statistics have fallen off when adjusted for TOI as well. He might be valuable to a team looking to add a veteran presence to the bottom-6, but will likely not find another multi-year contract.

The Wild have plenty of veterans on their roster and need to empower and rely on their youth even more moving forward. This doesn't appear to be a good match.



**Colton Sceviour, Dallas**

Age: 27  
GP: 70  
Goals: 11  
Assists: 12  
Shots/60: 8.8  
SAT%: 50.6  
SAT% rel: -2.3

2015-16 Salary Cap Hit: \$650,000

Sceviour is an energy player who has been utilized as a bottom-6 forward, but packs some offensive punch. He spent time on the very dangerous top power play unit for the Stars yesterday, and was known to crash the net as well as have soft hands for making delicate passes. The knock on him has generally been being able to deliver that talent consistently, which has led to his decreased deployment and TOI. He has yet to reach the 30 point mark, but has only played 170 games. At 27, it appears he could be a bit of a late bloomer.

Sceviour might make an interesting target for a team looking to add offensive upside to their 4<sup>th</sup> line. He is at a ripe age and his production doesn't necessarily warrant a big raise or multi-year contract. If he is not retained by Dallas, he could be a nice depth signing for the Wild at a good price.

## Defense



**Brian Campbell, Florida**

Age: 37  
GP: 82  
Goals: 6  
Assists: 25  
Shots/60: 2.9  
SAT%: 52.6  
SAT% rel: 6.1  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$7.14M

Campbell is a good defenseman, particularly for one who is aging. He's no spring chicken, but is a solid player, playing nearly 17 minutes per night and being very effective doing so. He added 8 power play assists (playing nearly 3 minutes per game on the man advantage) and was only on the ice for one penalty kill goal despite 124 minutes played. As one of the Panthers' leading defensemen and on a team that made it

further in the playoffs than Minnesota, he won't be a cheap signing. Worthwhile, but expensive.



**Nikita Nikitin, Edmonton**

Age: 30  
GP: 11  
Goals: 0  
Assists: 1  
Shots/60: 4.3  
SAT%: 53.3  
SAT% rel: 3.4  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$4.5M

Nikitin was a gamble by the Oilers, with whom he signed two years ago for 4.5 million per year. It has not worked out, and he has played only 53 games for Edmonton, and spent the rest of the time in the AHL. At between 13 and 15 minutes per night and a mediocre possession driver on a bad possession team and little scoring punch, Nikitin is not someone the Wild should sign.



**Dan Boyle, New York (Rangers)**

Age: 39  
GP: 74  
Goals: 10  
Assists: 14  
Shots/60: 3.2  
SAT%: 50.0  
SAT% rel: 3.8  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$4.5M

Boyle is turning 40 soon, and can hold serve at 15 minutes per night. To this he adds two minutes per game on the power play and even gets some time on the penalty kill. There is virtually no way he should be making 4 million again, but it's no secret New York likes him and will want to bring him back. He could opt for Minnesota, especially if the Wild move a blue liner in a trade, and there are definitely worse options available.



**Dan Hamhuis, Vancouver**

Age: 33  
Games Played: 58  
Goals: 3  
Assists: 10  
Shots/60: 3.7  
SAT%: 50.1  
SAT% rel: 3.0  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$4.25M

Hamhuis is the Suter of the Canucks in many ways. He was their best possession driver from the blue line, and one of the better producer in terms of Points/60. It's unlikely he'll be leaving the Canucks unless he gets a very good offer from another team, an offer you shouldn't make. The problem is not that he's not a decent player, it's that Hamhuis you're pretty set along the left side, and most of your options at left D (Suter, Brodin, Scandella, and Olofsson) play a similar style of game.



**Willie Mitchell, Florida**

Age: 39  
Games Played: 46  
Goals: 1  
Assists: 6  
Shots/60: 2.6  
SAT%: 42.5  
SAT% rel: -7.2  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$4.25M

Mitchell cashed in on his Stanley Cup/Leadership bona fides, getting a two-year deal worth quite a bit of money for a defensive defenseman. He has had two rough years, being a drag on Florida's possession numbers and posting minimal points in the process. You may have some good memories from his days with the Wild, but it's hard to see him being an asset on Minnesota's blue line.



**Kyle Quincey, Detroit**

Age: 30  
Games Played: 47  
Goals: 4  
Assists: 7  
Shots/60: 4.5  
SAT%: 48.8  
SAT% rel: -5.0  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$4.25M

Quincey was the second-most played defenseman for Detroit despite being a bottom-feeding point producer and possession driver. In other words: the Red Wings love him despite his apparent ineffectiveness. At just 30 years old, look for him to return to Detroit or take bigger money elsewhere. You should stay away, though



### **John-Michael Liles, Boston**

Age: 35  
Games Played: 81  
Goals: 6  
Assists: 15  
Shots/60: 3.8  
SAT%: 51.8  
SAT% rel: -1.6  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$3.88M

Liles was traded to Boston from Carolina after being traded from Toronto two seasons before that. His cap hit was simply too much for what he offers. He's played only 15-16 minutes per night for several years and is neither a point producer nor a possession driver. He's a 2nd or 3rd pairing defenseman, and you cannot spend nearly 4M on those.



### **Luke Schenn, Los Angeles**

Age: 25  
GP: 72  
Goals: 4  
Assists: 12  
Shots/60: 3.9  
SAT%: 50.6  
SAT% rel: -5.5  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$3.6M

Schenn has had an up-and-down career by some measures (he has been both + and - in the SAT% rel) while playing for a middling-at-best Philadelphia team before being moved to the Kings this season. A right-shot defenseman who is an inconsistent possession player and who doesn't add a scoring punch should not be a target for the Wild.



**Nicklas Grossmann, Arizona**

Age: 31  
GP: 58  
Goals: 3  
Assists: 4  
Shots/60: 2.8  
SAT%: 44.5  
SAT% rel: -4.5  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$3.5M

Grossman is a low-producing (albeit on a bad team) defenseman who has been a bad possession player on a bad possession team. There is little reason to be interested in an aging bottom-pairing defenseman.



**Jason Demers, Dallas**

Age: 28  
GP: 62  
Goals: 7  
Assists: 16  
Shots/60: 4.5  
SAT%: 54.2  
SAT% rel: 1.3  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$3.4M

Especially at his young age, Demers should be a high-earning defenseman next season. He has put out a good offensive output throughout his career, and has been a possession-driving defenseman since he turned 25. His 3.4M cap hit this season was a great deal for Dallas, where he's likely to resign for a raise, particularly after they lost Alex Goligoski. He'd be a good add for any team, but is likely out of the Wild's price range.



**Yevgeny Medvedev, Philadelphia**

Age: 33  
GP: 45  
Goals: 4  
Assists: 8  
Shots/60: 4.3  
SAT%: 53.3  
SAT% rel: 4.8  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$3M

Medvedev was a newcomer to the league this season, coming over from the KHL. He only played 45 games, so don't let the low point total frighten you. He still added value as a puck-moving defenseman, which is nothing to sneer at.

Philadelphia could re-sign him, or they could let him go to free agency. Either way, despite his age his very-good season in the NHL could mean he's in for a big paycheck, which would price him out of Minnesota's reach. Unless, that is, you create room for him by trading defenseman. Moving Brodin while bringing in Medvedev wouldn't hurt the Wild's offensive output while maintaining control of the puck. But even if Brodin's contract is off the books, he may still not fit into the budget.



**Tom Gilbert, Montreal**

Age: 33  
GP: 45  
Goals: 1  
Assists: 1  
Shots/60: 3.0  
SAT%: 49.1  
SAT% rel: -5.2  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$2.8M

You'll remember Gilbert from when he was bought out by the franchise. He had a nice bounce-back year playing alongside Brian Campbell, but has been a bust for the last two seasons in Montreal. Once a good puck-mover, he's now a possession player on a bad team with a low scoring punch. He will likely find a gig somewhere, but bringing him in for a second go with the organization would likely be a mistake.



**Roman Polak, San Jose**

Age: 30  
GP: 79  
Goals: 1  
Assists: 15  
Shots/60: 4.1  
SAT%: 50.0  
SAT% rel: -2.9  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$2.75M

Polak has been a possession drag throughout his career, and this was his first double-digit-assist season since 2011-12. The Wild should not be interested in him, save for a depth signing. He provides neither defensive reliability nor offensive power. He was seen as disposable from a very-bad Toronto team, and was a liability against the speedy Penguins in the Cup Final.



**Kris Russell, Dallas**

Age: 29  
GP: 62  
Goals: 4  
Assists: 15  
Shots/60: 2.7  
SAT%: 44.9  
SAT% rel: -4.7  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$2.6M

Russell is at an age where he's in his prime, but neither his possession numbers nor offensive output are anything to write home about. He's only played more than 70 games in a season twice, and hasn't found a home yet. Judging by the high price Dallas paid for his services at the deadline, Russell will likely be signed with a raise in salary. It'd be wise to pass.



**Matt Bartkowski, Vancouver**

Age: 28  
GP: 80  
Goals: 6  
Assists: 12  
Shots/60: 3.9  
SAT%: 45.8  
SAT% rel: -1.8  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$1.75M

Bartkowski is an all-around iffy player. He was an iffy possession player on an iffy possession team. His offensive output is iffy. His silver lining is that he is and will in all likelihood remain cheap due to his iffy-ness. Your interest level should be similarly iffy, unless you move a number of young defenseman in a big trade. Even then, there are likely better options.



**Mike Weber, Washington**

Age: 28  
GP: 45  
Goals: 1  
Assists: 4  
Shots/60: 3.8  
SAT%: 49.7  
SAT% rel: 1.0  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$1.67M

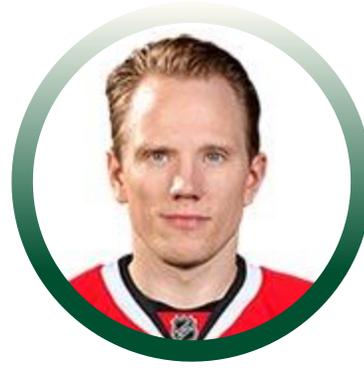
Weber has youth on his side, but is a meh player. He is a regular scratch for Washington, and would be a younger, not-hometown Nate Prosser. That's maybe unfair, as Weber handles a bit more ice time and is a little better possession-wise. In any case, Weber should not be a target for the Wild.



**Yannick Weber, Vancouver**

Age: 27  
GP: 45:  
Goals: 0  
Assists: 7  
Shots/60: 3.2  
SAT%: 48.4  
SAT% rel: 0.9  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$1.5M

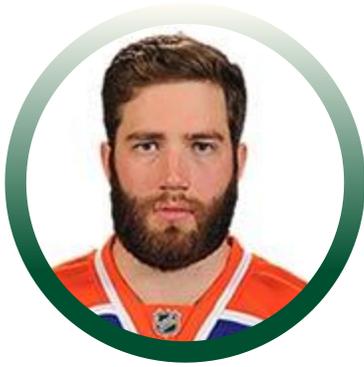
Weber is an oft-scratched defenseman for the unimpressive Vancouver Canucks. The Wild should not be looking to him to shore up their blue line. At 27 years old, Weber will not likely be improving, and there are better options out there, unless you want your PR team to write a Yannick! At the Disco! headline when he signs.



**Christian Ehrhoff, Chicago**

Age: 33  
GP: 48  
Goals: 2  
Assists: 10  
Shots/60: 5.9  
SAT%: 54.3  
SAT% rel: -1.3  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$1.5M

Ehrhoff was top-notch at one point, and even now can be a capable defender. The concern is health. Ehrhoff has played in fewer than 50 games in each of the last two seasons. He is a good power play quarterback for the 40+ games you get him, but the Wild don't have an urgent need for what he brings to the table. He might be worth calling, but if Ehrhoff wants more than 1M he shouldn't be signed simply because you shouldn't tie up your precious cap space with that kind of injury risk.



**Eric Gryba, Edmonton**

Age: 28  
GP: 53  
Goals: 1  
Assists: 5  
Shots/60: 4.3  
SAT%: 49.4  
SAT% rel: 1.0  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$1.25M

Gryba was a slightly positive player on a bad team. He has a willingness to fight, if that's your thing, and he does that without being constantly trapped in his zone. But he's not really a full-time player, playing in 60+ games just once in his career., last season in Ottawa. If you're going to sign someone to play half the season, it may as well be Ehrhoff.



**Ben Lovejoy, Pittsburgh**

Age: 32  
GP: 66  
Goals: 4  
Assists: 6  
Shots/60: 5.0  
SAT%: 51.3  
SAT% rel: -0.9  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$1.1M

Lovejoy is coming off a Cup-winning season in which he played 90 games total (66 in the regular season).He's not great, but he's not going to hurt you, either. As long as he doesn't get paid more than he's worth based on his Stanley Cup experience, he could be interesting.



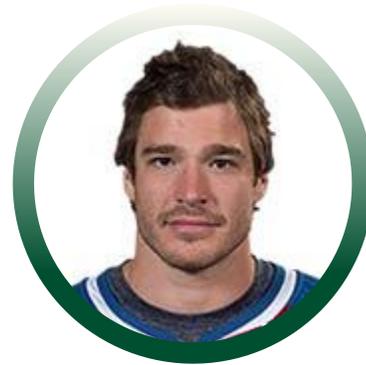
**Adam Pardy, Edmonton**

Age: 32  
GP: 23  
Goals: 0  
Assists: 4  
Shots/60: 4.2  
SAT%: 48.8  
SAT% rel: -3.1  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$1.0M

Pardy is an aging defenseman who was bad on two bad teams. Pass.

SAT%: 48.0  
SAT% rel: 1.7  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$900K

Colaiacovo has two things going for him: he's a decent possession player, and he has an amazing name. The journeyman wouldn't be a terrible addition for the Wild, but there are in-house options that are younger and have more upside.



**Zach Redmond, Colorado**

Age: 27  
GP: 37  
Goals: 2  
Assists: 4  
Shots/60: 2.9  
SAT%: 46.6  
SAT% rel: 1.1  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$750K

Redmond could possibly be a serviceable bottom-pairing defenseman, but you should look elsewhere unless they are in the absolute worst-case scenario.



**Carlo Colaiacovo, Buffalo**

Age: 33  
GP: 36  
Goals: 1  
Assists: 4  
Shots/60: 3.2



**David Schlemko, New Jersey**

Age: 29  
GP: 67  
Goals: 6  
Assists: 13  
Shots/60: 4.6  
SAT%: 49.0  
SAT% rel: 3.7  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$625K

Schlemko is a decent defenseman who is still young, chips in offense, and drives possession in a bottom-pairing role. If you want to make an upgrade over Prosser on the cheap, he's a solid option.



**Michal Rozsival, Chicago**

Age: 37  
GP: 51

Goals: 1  
Assists: 12  
Shots/60: 2.7  
SAT%: 50.0  
SAT% rel: 0.3  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$600K

Rozsival is an aging defenseman who can still play. He would be a fine pickup for the Wild, but it's hard to see the Blackhawks letting him go.

**Goalies**



**James Reimer, San Jose**

Age: 28  
GP/GS: 40/37  
W-L-OT: 17-14-7  
Sv%: .922  
5v5 Sv%: .940  
3-Year Sv%: .913  
SO: 3  
2015-16 Cap Hit: \$2.3M

Reimer has been a solid goalie throughout his career with the Toronto Maple Leafs. While

the Leafs have struggled during his tenure there, he has held up his end of the bargain with a .914 save percentage in 5 ½ seasons in Toronto. He was traded to the San Jose Sharks during the season and was very successful as a backup.

If you're looking to spell Dubnyk in a more two-headed-monster-type goalie platoon, James Reimer should be a target for the organization. But with a thin market for free agent goalies, Reimer could very well be looking for a big payday and a starting role this summer. The price he may command could keep you out of serious talks with Reimer.



### **Karri Ramo, Calgary**

Age: 29  
GP/GS: 37/37  
W-L-OT: 17-18-1  
Sv%: .909  
5v5 Sv%: .919  
3-Year Sv%: .911  
SO: 1  
2015-16 Cap Hit: \$3.8M

Ramo struggled as a backup for the Tampa Bay Lightning but found his footing in

Calgary. Ramo entered last season as the Flames' #1 goalie, but his year was cut short in February when he damaged his meniscus and tore his ACL. With a recovery timetable of 6-8 months, he could be ready to go in October. If he wants the role and money he enjoyed in Calgary, Ramo will price himself out of your range. But with his injuries and performance from last season he may have to settle for a backup role.

### **Anton Khudobin, Anaheim**

Age: 30  
GP/GS: 9/7  
W-L-OT: 3-3-0  
Sv%: .909  
5v5 Sv%: .902  
3-Year Sv%: .914  
SO: 1  
2015-16 Cap Hit: \$2.25M

Khudobin came up with the Minnesota Wild, and has bounced around the league since the Wild traded him in the 10-11 season. He's had decent years as a backup with Boston and Carolina, but his tenure in Anaheim was unsuccessful. Khudobin was unable to fend off John Gibson from an NHL start, and Gibson and Frederik Andersen pushed him to San Diego in the AHL. Khudobin made the most of the opportunity, registering a .921 Sv% over 31 games. Khudobin will be looking to get back into an NHL gig, which you may be able to provide him.

### **Ben Scrivens, Montreal**

Age: 29  
GP/GS: 15/14

W-L-OT: 5-8-0  
Sv%: .906  
5v5 Sv%: .928  
3-Year Sv%: .904  
SO: 0  
2015-16 Cap Hit: \$2.3M

Scrivens has been in the league for 5 seasons, and in that time has played for 4 teams. His career numbers are about what you would expect for a goalie that has been bounced around the league. Prior to landing in Edmonton via a trade from the LA Kings, Scrivens did show some promise. There is probably some value in picking up Scrivens to fill in as a backup.

Given Scrivens history in the NHL, he's probably looking for some stability. It would also be nice to get that back within your organization, since apart from last season, the goalie carousel in Minnesota has been a little frustrating. If you determine Scrivens would thrive behind a structured defense like he did in LA, he could be a cheap back-up option for you next year.



**Chad Johnson, Buffalo**

Age: 30  
GP/GS: 45/40  
W-L-OT: 22-16-4  
Sv%: .920  
5v5 Sv%: .925  
3-Year Sv%: .915  
SO: 1  
2015-16 Cap Hit: \$1.3M

After being a journeyman backup for his career, Johnson was thrust into a #1 goalie role when the Sabres lost Robin Lehner in the opening game of the season. He took advantage of his elevated role, just in time for him to hit the UFA market.

The risk in Johnson lies in his limited experience and inconsistency throughout his career. His .925 Sv% in Boston and a .920 Sv% last season with the Sabres are pretty encouraging, but sandwiched between those years is a .889 Sv% in 19 games with the 14-15 Islanders. But it seems you can feel safe having Johnson spell your starter or hold down the fort in case of injury.



**Jhonas Enroth, Los Angeles**

Age: 28  
GP/GS: 16/13  
W-L-OT: 7-5-1  
Sv%: .922  
5v5 Sv%: .937  
3-Year Sv%: .909  
SO: 2  
2015-16 Cap Hit: \$1.25M

Enroth came up with the Buffalo Sabres and spent 5 1/2 seasons with the organization before being shipped off to Dallas during the 2014-15 season, where he struggled before hitting free agency. He winded up landing with the Los Angeles Kings last season to rehab his value. Enroth played well, but saw action in just 16 games for the Kings (after playing in 50 the season prior) and seemed a bit disillusioned with his playing time in LA.

It's worth noting that his size (5'10") could hurt his value on the free agent market, as goalies around the league are getting bigger and bigger. But Enroth has had some success in the league in a backup role. With Boudreau seemingly much more willing to split time among his goalies, Enroth could view Minnesota as an attractive landing spot this summer. A cap-friendly price tag could

convince you to feel the same way about Enroth.



**Al Montoya, Florida**

Age: 31  
GP/GS: 25/22  
W-L-OT: 12-7-3  
Sv%: .919  
5v5 Sv%: .925  
3-Year Sv%: .913  
SO: 0  
2015-16 Cap Hit: \$1.05M

With 7 seasons under his belt in the NHL, Al Montoya has played in over 30 games just once. Montoya has mixed in some good seasons in his time along with some sub-par campaigns. But Montoya was solid last season, providing solid relief to Roberto Luongo as the Panthers won the Atlantic Division

But with his year-to-year inconsistency, it's tough to tell which Montoya you might be getting. When he's on, the guy can steal a game for you. When he's off, it can be frustrating enough to make you want to pull

your hair out. There's both risk in reward, should you choose Montoya as a backup.



**Anders Lindback, Arizona**

Age: 28  
GP/GS: 19/13  
W-L-OT: 5-7-1  
Sv%: .894  
5v5 Sv%: .908  
3-Year Sv%: .900  
SO: 0  
2015-16 Cap Hit: \$875K

Lindback had a disappointing season with the Coyotes, unless you were an Arizona fan rooting to get Auston Matthews. When Mike Smith went down with a torn muscle in December, Lindback was in a position to take the reigns. But he somehow managed to be worse than Smith, and to make matters worse he was sidelined in February when he tore his Achilles.

Lindback has been bounced around the league recently, playing for 3 teams in the past 2 seasons. He's relatively young and has great size, but he hasn't put it together yet. Lindback simply hasn't shown the kind of

consistency you might feel comfortable with in a goalie tandem.



**Carter Hutton, Nashville**

Age: 30  
GP/GS: 17/15  
W-L-OT: 7-5-4  
Sv%: .918  
5v5 Sv%: .945  
3-Year Sv%: .910  
SO: 2  
2015-16 Cap Hit: \$725K

Carter Hutton played just 1 game in his rookie season with the Chicago Blackhawks. The very next season he would find himself playing in Nashville, and was thrust into the starting role when Pekka Rinne contracted a bacterial infection in his hip. With Rinne out long term in the 2013-14 season, Hutton would see action in 40 games and was able to perform quite admirably.

But since Rinne has that gigantic contract, Hutton was relegated to a backup role once again, even when Rinne struggle mightily this season. But Hutton has been consistent when called upon. Rinne isn't going anywhere, so a 30 year old Hutton is likely not a long-term

solution for the Predators, who may be eyeing a transition to a Goalie of the Future™.



**Jonas Gustavsson, Boston**

Age: 31  
GP/GS: 24/20  
W-L-OT: 11-9-1  
Sv%: .908  
5v5 Sv%: .914  
3-Year Sv%: .908  
SO: 1  
2015-16 Cap Hit: \$700K

Gustavsson is a 7-year veteran in the NHL who has never had much of a shot at the #1 spot on a team. His rookie season in 2009-10 he started 39 games for the Toronto Maple Leafs but he has struggled at times to find any kind of rhythm between the pipes. Gustavsson has a career .902 Sv% with a 2.87 GAA through 172 games, so while he could be worth taking a chance on, you may want to aim higher.



**Jeff Zatkoff, Pittsburgh**

Age: 28  
GP/GS: 14/11  
W-L-OT: 4-7-1  
Sv%: .917  
5v5 Sv%: .918  
3-Year Sv%: .915  
SO: 0  
2015-16 Cap Hit: \$600K

Zatkoff doesn't have a lot of experience in the NHL. With just 35 games through 3 seasons with the Pittsburgh Penguins, he's much more of a career backup than anything else. Don't let his win/loss record scare you away though, he has a good track record in the AHL and his numbers in the NHL are perfectly acceptable for a backup. Small sample size aside, Zatkoff could very well fly under the radar and be a sneaky good pickup for the Wild this offseason.

**Alex Stalock, Toronto**

Age: 28  
GP/GS: 13/9  
W-L-OT: 3-5-2  
Sv%: .884

5v5 Sv%: .889  
 3-Year Sv%: .911  
 SO: 0  
 2015-16 Cap Hit: \$1.6M

Alex Stalock is a St. Paul-native and UMD alum, so he's been a player Minnesota fans have had their eyes on for a while. But is the hometown product actually good? After a

strong rookie season, Stalock had an opportunity to claim the crease in San Jose, but he showed poorly in 2014-15, leading to the Sharks trading for Martin Jones. Stalock was then traded to the goalie-needy Maple Leafs, who said "Naw", sending him home from the Toronto Marlies. You might want to take a chance on him and hope he reclaims his rookie form, but every other season he's had suggests that was a fluke.

## RFA's

As the GM of the Minnesota Wild, one available method to upgrade your team is restricted free agency. While many players without a contract are unrestricted free agents (able to sign with any team in the league, no strings attached), players under the age of 27 who haven't accrued 7 NHL seasons aren't. But through the magic of restricted free agency, you can sign those players to a contract (or "offer sheet"), so long as their Entry-Level Contract has expired.

What's nice about the RFA process is that, in theory, it allows you to target younger, "Franchise Players™" that typically don't become available in free agency. But there are a couple of important- go figure- restrictions that come into play when signing an RFA.

The first is that when you sign an RFA, the team that holds his rights then has a week to decide whether to match your contract or not. If the team agrees to match, then the hard work you did in negotiating with that player and drawing up the contract is wasted. You just helped a fellow GM sign one of his players. This is often what happens in this situation. Of the 8 offer sheets submitted since the 03-04 lockout, 7 of them were matched.

The second is one of the reasons why offer sheets are so rare: If a team doesn't match your offer sheet, you'll have to surrender draft picks as compensation. The compensation is determined by the average annual value of the contract, and the cost for higher-priced players is prohibitive.

Contract AAV	Compensation
< \$1,239,226	No Compensation
\$1,239,226 - \$1,877,615	Third-round pick
\$1,877,615 - \$3,755,233	Second-round pick
\$3,755,233 - \$5,632,847	First and third-round picks

\$5,632,847 - \$7,510,464	First, second, and third round picks
\$7,510,464 - \$9,388,080	Two firsts, one second, one third round picks
Over \$9,388,080	Four first-round picks

Unfortunately, this doesn't leave you with a ton of options. The draft picks you spend have to originally be assigned to you (so traded picks don't count), and have to be available in the next draft. Since you don't have your second-round pick for 2017, the only tiers of players you can sign are under \$1.87, between \$3.76 and \$5.64M and over \$9.39M. Teams are almost certainly going to match any of the first two on principle, and if you manage to get the latter you're giving up 4 first-rounders for the privilege of giving that player the 5th-highest cap hit in the NHL.

With your cap troubles and lack of depth in your prospect pool, signing an RFA would be a massive gamble. But if you can manage to pry away a player that elevates you to a Stanley Cup, then that's worth it.

So with all that out of the way, here are some elite RFAs who *juuuuuuuust might* be worth the draft picks, money, and hatred from your fellow GMs.

**Filip Forsberg**  
Left Wing  
Nashville Predators

Age: 21  
GP: 82  
Goals: 33  
Assists: 31  
Shots/60: 9.3  
SAT%: 56.3  
SAT% rel: 5.6

Positionally, Forsberg may not be a perfect fit. He was drafted as a center, but is firmly established as a left winger. It's not known if moving Forsberg to the pivot would hurt his offensive game or if he would be a liability in the face-off circle. But regardless, his production would be very welcome to this franchise, and between Forsberg and Suter, we'd get the potential to see Nashville fans boo so much that they forget to breathe and pass out.

Adding a 33-goal scorer? Good. Poaching him from a rival GM? Even better. Forsberg has steadily grown into being the premiere offensive threat for the Predators, and he's led them in points for two seasons in a row. Forsberg has a well-rounded two-way game, good speed, and he's not afraid to use his great shot. Sounds OK to me.

**Johnny Gaudreau**  
Left Wing  
Calgary Flames

Age: 22  
GP: 79  
Goals: 30  
Assists: 48

Shots/60: 6.9  
SAT%: 49.6  
SAT% rel: 2.2

At 5'9", Gaudreau doesn't have the size that the Wild have been generally targeting, but woe to you if you underestimate him. Gaudreau is exactly the type of dynamic player the Wild have been begging for at forward. Gaudreau is fast, shifty, and almost impossible to hit, which creates space for himself and his teammates. There are just so many ways Gaudreau can beat you, whether it's with his speed, his shot, or by finding a linemate that got open when you were focused on stopping him.

It's hard not to see Calgary matching this offer sheet in a heartbeat, since Gaudreau is easily the Flames' most marketable player. But if you want to bring in an electric winger, Gaudreau fits the bill better than anyone.

**Seth Jones**  
Defenseman  
Columbus Blue Jackets

Age: 21  
GP: 81  
Goals: 3  
Assists: 28  
Shots/60: 5.67  
SAT%: 52.9  
SAT% rel: 2.9

When your predecessor traded Brent Burns, he acknowledged that for all the talent he got in return, he parted ways with a uniquely gifted player. Five years later, and you could argue that this franchise is still looking for that player.

Not that there aren't good defensemen along the right side in Minnesota- there are. Jared Spurgeon is as mobile as they come, and Matt Dumba, for all his faults, is absolutely a Burns-like weapon on the power play. But no one since has provided the sheer size and athleticism that Burns had.

If you identify that as the team's biggest need, it could make sense to ink Jones to a big-money offer sheet. Jones broke into the league at age-18, but it wasn't until his trade to Columbus this season where he finally got #1 defensemen minutes. Playing in all situations, Jones showed a ton of promise, putting up a half-point per game and being a positive possession player.

You'd almost certainly have to trade Spurgeon or Dumba to acquire him, but Jones is a supreme athlete who can drive offense. If you want a right-shot RFA defenseman, he's your guy.

**Nikita Kucherov**  
Right Wing  
Tampa Bay Lightning

Age: 23  
GP: 77  
Goals: 30  
Assists: 36  
Shots/60: 7.7  
SAT%: 54.3  
SAT% rel: 2.9

Kucherov burst onto the scene in 2014-15, scoring 29 goals and 65 points while playing on the Lightning's second line. His emergence, along with that of line mates Ondrej Palat and Tyler Johnson, drove Tampa Bay to the Stanley Cup Final.

This season there were no more surprises. Everyone came into the year knowing how dangerous this trio was, and teams started adjusting. But while Palat and Johnson's scoring fell off somewhat, Kucherov followed up his breakout season with a nearly identical stat line, adding 11 goals and 19 points during Tampa's run to the Conference Finals.

His ability to be acquired as an RFA may be entirely dependent on whether Steven Stamkos leaves or not, as you can bet Tampa isn't going to let 66 goals combined walk out the door. But if the Lightning keep Stamkos and you manage to steal the Russian from Steve Yzerman, you'll have the young, dynamic goal-scorer this team needs.

### **Hampus Lindholm**

Defenseman  
Anaheim Ducks

Age: 22  
GP: 80  
Goals: 10  
Assists: 18  
Shots/60: 4.1  
SAT%: 57.3  
SAT% rel: 7.4

Can you imagine an offseason where Bruce Boudreau isn't the most impactful person Minnesota imported from Anaheim? Start imagining. Lindholm would step into the Wild's lineup and be their best defenseman. He can skate, defend, shoot, and drives possession like it's his job. Which is good, since it is. He can also quarterback the power play from the left side, which is something the Wild desperately need, according to everyone but Ryan Suter.

Getting Lindholm as an RFA doesn't seem like a good fit on paper. The left side of your defense would get even more crowded, as Lindholm would join Suter, Marco Scandella, Jonas Brodin, Mike Reilly, and Gustav Olofsson. Do you really need to invest another 10 million in that spot?

But it would create some interesting opportunities. You could then afford to easily trade both Scandella and Brodin to recoup the value you lost by forfeiting your next 4 first-round draft picks. You'd be able to bring along Reilly and Olofsson slowly, building their value for eventual trades. And in the meantime, you solidified the left side of your defense for the next several years. Given that Anaheim is a budget team, you might be able to pull this off.

### **Nathan MacKinnon**

Center  
Colorado Avalanche

Age: 20  
GP: 72  
Goals: 21  
Assists: 31  
Shots/60: 10.3  
SAT%: 46.5  
SAT% rel: 3.7

Who could forget Nathan MacKinnon in the 2014 playoffs? The then-18-year-old center was the bane of Minnesota's existence in that first round, terrorizing the Wild while scoring ankle-breaking goals. It was impossible to see him dominate in that series and not think that he was going to be one of the best players in the world. Fast forward two seasons and MacKinnon's growth has stagnated under Patrick Roy's tutelage, going from 63 points in his rookie season to 38 and 52 in the next

two years, respectively. How did this amazing player wind up looking so (relatively) pedestrian?

Here's a good start: Colorado is bad. Like, really bad. The Avs were basically a two-line team last season, meaning that teams could load up their best defensive players against MacKinnon's line and not get punished too heavily for it. And their defense was the worst in the league, lacking any semblance of puck-movers outside of Tyson Barrie and Erik Johnson.

If the Avs are foolish enough to let MacKinnon go to a division rival (unlikely, but hey, they're cheap and it's not like Joe Sakic is known for making good choices), he will automatically be in a better position to unlock his all-world potential. It's amazing what you can get done with defensemen who can move the puck.

**Sean Monahan**  
Center  
Calgary Flames

Age: 21  
GP: 81  
Goals: 27  
Assists: 36  
Shots/60: 7.2  
SAT%: 48.1  
SAT% rel: -0.1

Sean Monahan? That might seem to be a weird choice. In conversations about the best players in the game, Monahan's name never comes up. Arguably, his chief claim to fame among hockey fans might be a Twitter account about how boring he is. But look a little deeper, and you'll find that Monahan may just be one of the most underrated young stars in the game. Here's a list of centers under 25

who have had more points than Monahan's 125 over the last two seasons:

Tyler Seguin (150)  
Ryan Johansen (131)

Would you want that scoring on your team? Yes. Yes you would, especially when it comes from a natural center (!) who is 6'3" (!!), has a budding two-way game (!!!), and isn't a liability in the face-off circle (spontaneously combusts). There may be some doubt as to whether he'd be able to have the same success apart from Gaudreau, but being able to succeed while centering a great winger isn't a given. Just ask Mikael Granlund.

**Mark Scheifele**  
Center  
Winnipeg Jets

Age: 23  
GP: 71  
Goals: 29  
Assists: 32  
Shots/60: 8.3  
SAT%: 54.0  
SAT% rel: 4.2

Out of this list, Scheifele is probably the biggest risk. While other players on this list have a couple of great years under their belt, this last season was the first where Scheifele has broken out as an offensive force for the Jets. Scheifele almost doubled his career high in goals and went from scoring 49 points to 61. He was in the Top-10 in the league in 5v5 Points/60, and would've almost certainly eclipsed the 30-goal mark if not for him missing 11 games.

Is one year as an elite player enough to justify paying almost 10 million and sending 4 first-

round picks to a rival club? Probably not. But if you're desperate to land a center who can both score and create for teammates, Scheifele could well be the most vulnerable RFA target on this list. Winnipeg traded captain Andrew Ladd because of his impending free agency, and there's rumors

they may be looking to trade Jacob Trouba rather than meet his salary demands. While I could see, say, Calgary matching an offer sheet on Monahan, or Colorado matching on MacKinnon, a gigantic offer to Scheifele is probably going to get the job done.

Alright, so you've seen these targets and are now thinking "I'd like some of these guys, but there's no way the team will be able to stomach that cost." Which is fair, because you've already shelled out tons of cash to guys that are *already* on your roster. The most obvious answer to clear some of that cap space is to launch specific players directly into the sun, but alas, that's murder. So instead, why not trade them to another team, otherwise known as "making another man's trash into your treasure!"

### **Trade Targets**

It's 2 AM, and your phone starts to ring. Never a good sign. You don't recognize the number, but it has to be important if you're being called this late. You clumsily slide your fingers to answer the phone and raise it to your ear.

"Hello?" you mumble, not knowing that your life is about to be changed forever.

"It's Craig. I need your help."

Craig?

It's Craig Leipold, owner of the Minnesota Wild. And he has some important news to tell you about Chuck Fletcher.

"Unfortunately we had to let Chuck go," Leipold explains, his voice dripping with emotion. "He told me today that he didn't read Hockey Wilderness, or share their content with their friends, and that's just unforgivable. I had no choice but to move on."

It occurs to you that the idea Fletcher didn't patronize Hockey Wilderness- the Premier Minnesota Wild blog- probably should've occurred to Leipold when Fletcher inserted Kurtis Gabriel into the lineup in a playoff game. But the man is clearly distraught, so you wisely bite your tongue.

Craig continues talking. "Anyway, I've been all over the internet trying to find someone who'd make a good GM. I scoured Hockey Wilderness' comments, Twitter, message boards, and I decided to hire you. Take my money and make this team great again."

Of course you accept. Maybe almost too fast. You agree to meet at his office tomorrow to finalize a contract.

The shock starts to fade, and you're now left with one question: What the hell am I doing?

Your task isn't easy. The Minnesota Wild is too close to the Salary Cap for comfort, with big money committed to a veteran core that is either in or near decline. They have a massive hole at center that needs to be filled. Their depth was a dumpster fire that needs re-tooling. Oh yeah, let's not forget the discord in the locker room, or that this team only made the playoffs a fourth consecutive season because the Avalanche managed to choke just a bit harder than them down the stretch.

And to stay in your new boss' good graces, you're going to have to do all of that *and* read Hockey Wilderness on a regular basis.

As a first time GM, you're going to need help to navigate you through the offseason. And that's where Hockey Wilderness comes in. We put together a guide that will take you throughout the Wild's offseason. This guide will help you throughout each step of your offseason, analyzing departing players, trade targets, identifying free agents, and much more. We'll even throw in our own recommendations. By the time you get done with this guide, you'll know everything you need to make this summer a successful one for the State of Hockey.

*Let's get to work.*

## Trade



**Kevin Hayes**  
**New York Rangers**

Age: 24

GP: 79  
Goals: 14  
Assists: 22  
Shots/60: 7.0  
SAT%: 49.0  
SAT% rel: 2.45  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$900K

Hayes is a young right-winger with decent production and happens to be big—very big. His 6'5", 225-pound frame could add some size that some feel is missing from the Wild. He's not an oaf, though. His 49% SAT% playing in front of guys like Dan Girardi is nothing to sneeze at.

The kid can score, but he's an RFA this summer and has been stuck in Alain Vigneault's doghouse, meaning he could possibly be had this offseason. With New York looking to replace Keith Yandle, there could be an opportunity for you to swoop in there. Even better: the Rangers have shown an affinity for defensive defenseman; they might a Jonas Brodin or Marco Scandella more than other squads. Brodin for Hayes straight-up could be the backbone of a deal.



**Nick Bjugstad**  
**Florida Panthers**

Age: 23  
GP: 67  
Goals: 15  
Assists: 19  
Shots/60: 8.5  
SAT%: 49.3  
SAT% rel: 0.9  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$4.1M

Bjugstad is not a new name. The next offseason that passes where he isn't brought up as a trade target will be the first. At 6'6" and 240 pounds, Bjugstad can move bodies when he wants to. He checks off a lot of boxes

for Wild fans; he's big, he's from Minnesota, and he's a center. Bjugstad would seem to be a good addition to Minnesota's lineup.

There are two main problems, though. The first is that while he is a center, he's not a particularly high-scoring one. His scoring rates aren't bad, but they aren't star-caliber, either. The second and larger problem is price. Florida will simply want more than the Wild should be willing to give up. There's almost no way Florida accepts a single player; they will want two. Unless you believe Bjugstad's scoring will spike in Minnesota, acquiring him may hurt you more than it'll help.



**Alex Galchenyuk**  
**Montreal Canadiens**

Age: 22  
GP: 82  
Goals: 30  
Assists: 26  
Shots/60: 8.7  
SAT%: 53.1  
SAT% rel: 2.17  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$2.8M

Galchenyuk is a *darn* good hockey player. What's important about the Belarusian player is that he can drive offense and he can score

goals. Montreal is not a tire-fire of a team, but they get their bacon saved by Carey Price (or did before his injuries). While Galchenyuk looks like someone who should be Montreal's center of the future, he's had his name bandied around the rumor mill at times.

Similar to Bjugstad: when you want quality, you have to pay. Galchenyuk isn't going to come cheap, and will cost at least two players, likely one established and one promising. The viability of this deal all depends on what players the Canadiens want. It's hard to see a deal getting worked out, if only because Galchenyuk is so valuable. The former third-overall pick is coming into his own, and I don't see Montreal giving that up.

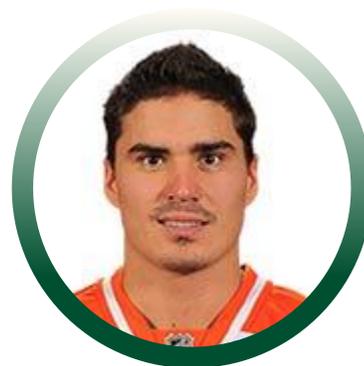


**Brad Marchand**  
**Boston Bruins**

Age: 28  
GP: 77  
Goals: 37  
Assists: 24  
Shots/60: 10.6  
SAT%: 55.0  
SAT% rel: 7.85  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$4.5M

Marchand is perhaps best known for being an instigator. Big news, I know. But what may be news to you is that he's making a case to be one of the best players in the NHL. A left winger, Marchand is on the short side at 5'9" and isn't large at 181 pounds. Still, he's tenacious and consistent- he only failed to score 20 goals or more twice; his rookie season and the lockout-shortened season (when he scored 18). He's also very durable for a smaller player, playing in 76 or more games every year (again, other than the lockout when he played all 45). He's also perhaps *the* best penalty killer in the game, and is always a threat to score short-handed.

Would the Bruins be looking to move him? Good question. Why would anyone want to move a high-scoring winger in his prime? Well, Marchand is a year away from free agency, and the Bruins are having issues getting Loui Eriksson back into the fold. He'd cost more than Eriksson would in a trade, presumably, and the Bruins wanted to get Brodin in return for Eriksson at the deadline. This is another player that would be a great pickup, but is likely unrealistic in terms of cost.



**Nail Yakupov**  
**Edmonton Oilers**

Age: 22  
GP: 60  
Goals: 8  
Assists: 15  
Shots/60: 9.2  
SAT%: 49.4  
SAT% rel: -0.2  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$2.5M



**Taylor Hall**  
**Edmonton Oilers**

Age: 24  
GP: 82  
Goals: 26  
Assists: 39  
Shots/60: 10.5  
SAT%: 52.2  
SAT% rel: 4.3  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$6M

Yakupov is another name that comes up a lot when talking about trade targets. The former first-overall pick has never blossomed in Edmonton (then again, no one seems to do that). A change of scenery and better line mates could finally ignite what scouts saw in him, and it's not too late for him to put it together.

Edmonton needs defensemen, so this is another trade that could make sense. They may be looking to dump what they think is a bust, and a defensive defenseman like Brodin could be up their alley. No one was willing to trade a second-rounder to acquire Yakupov this summer, so it might not even take Brodin to make it work.

Someone's going to buy low on his talent. Why not you?

Being the first #1 overall pick in a nightmarish, perpetual rebuild in Edmonton, Hall gets a lot of flak. And yes, he's had an up-and-down career in Edmonton, scoring in order 16, 27, 14, and 26 goals for the Oil. This has as much to die with the Oilers as with Hall, though, as there's been very little defensive support in Edmonton for the last decade. Hall had a great season, and no, it wasn't because he was skating with Connor McDavid (they spent just 75 minutes together). It was because for the first time in his career, he stayed healthy.

They could be looking to improve on defense, which makes this another "could happen" trade. The conversation would probably start with Jared Spurgeon or Matt Dumba, and go from there. But Hall's one of the very best per-minute scorers in the NHL, so it may be worth

the pain of giving up NHL defenders. Does Hall solve your problem down the middle? No. But he *is* the caliber of offensive superstar this team needs.



**Jordan Eberle**  
**Edmonton Oilers**

Age: 26  
GP: 69  
Goals: 25  
Assists: 22  
Shots/60: 7.4  
SAT%: 51.3  
SAT% rel: 3.2  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$6M

Eberle is the final possibly-traded Oiler, and perhaps is the most likely to leave Edmonton as well. He's a smaller guy, but his skill is off the charts. He's very creative, and gets around 25 goals per year because of his accurate shot.

Edmonton, as previously noted, needs defensemen, and they may be willing to move someone like Eberle to get them. Brodin and a sweetener may be enough to get the winger. Whether Eberle would be enough to push Minnesota over the hump is a different question. Adding his goal-scoring would be

great, but on the other hand, a mid-20's-scoring winger is something the Wild potentially already have in Zucker, Niederreiter, and Coyle.



**Derek Stepan**  
**New York Rangers**

Age: 26  
GP: 72  
Goals: 22  
Assists: 31  
Shots/60:  
SAT%: 49.0  
SAT% rel: 2.5  
15-16 Cap Hit: \$6.5M

Stepan is another name the Wild are rumored to have interest in. There are two main reasons. He's a two-way player who is both capable of scoring and playing on the defensive side of the puck, which is something the Wild don't have at center, aside from Koivu. And he's from Hastings, and there's a law saying every hockey player from Minnesota must play in the State of Hockey at some point. Not really a goal-scorer, Stepan hit the 20-goal mark for only the second time in his career.

Why would New York trade a capable player who is still in his prime? Salary cap may be a reason. The Rangers have 16.9 million to play with, but they have several UFAs and RFAs to deal with. Stepan's cap hit makes things difficult for the Rangers, who may want the flexibility to shake things up after getting humiliated by Pittsburgh in the first round. Again, Brodin may be attractive due to his age, quality, price tag, and being a defenseman, which New York needs right now.

Stepan is intriguing, but his contract would be tough to fit under the cap for the Wild as it is for New York; he is signed through 2021 at 6.5M per year. Granted, Stepan isn't, say, Jason Pominville's age, but you may not want another deal of that length on your books.

Rick Nash is a big winger for the Rangers; his 6'4", 220-pound frame allows him to get to the goalmouth and sit there. Nash had a very nice season two years ago, scoring 42 goals and 69 points; his best since his 08-09 season with Columbus. At 32 years old, he's probably past his best years, but Nash still has some gas in the tank.

Much like Stepan, New York is looking to dump salary by getting rid of Nash. His 7.8 million dollar contract only runs till the end of 2017-18, but it's more than you want to pay a 34-year old winger who scored 15 goals last season. Signing the Ontario native sounds a lot like signing Vanek; an older goalscorer who is past his prime. Nash might be cheap to acquire in terms of assets, but 7.8 million is a lot to pay an aging player who will need less and less ice time and is a bit of a possession anchor to boot.



**Rick Nash**  
New York Rangers

Age: 32  
GP: 60  
Goals: 15  
Assists: 21  
Shots/60: 10.3  
SAT%: 47.2  
SAT% rel: -0.4  
15-16 cap hit: \$7.8M



**David Pastrnak**  
Boston Bruins

Age: 20  
GP: 51  
Goals: 15  
Assists: 11

Shots/60: 8.9  
SAT%: 51.3  
SAT% rel: 2.3  
15-16 cap hit: \$925K

David Pastrnak has now played 97 games in the NHL and has impressed speed and willingness to shoot. Pegged by Hockey Wilderness in the 2014 draft as a player of interest, he eventually went 25<sup>th</sup> overall to the Boston Bruins. While the Bruins got old fast after winning the Stanley Cup in 2011, Pastrnak represented a new crop of young, talented players Bruins to learn from the likes of Patrice Bergeron and Brad Marchand.

So why would the Bruins want to part ways with such a promising young player? Defensemen. After the top pairing of Zdeno Chara, who is a millisecond from 40 years old, and Dennis Seidenberg, whose better days are behind him, the Bruins lack good, defensive depth that is nearing its prime. The Bruins should be in the market for a defenseman, and just like the position the Wild are in, they will have to give assets to get assets. Could Pastrnak, a player approaching the end of his entry level deal, be available at the right price for Minnesota?



**Jonathan Huberdeau**  
**Florida Panthers**

Age: 23  
GP: 76  
Goals: 20  
Assists: 39  
Shots/60: 7.6  
SAT%: 47.7  
SAT% rel: -0.7  
15-16 cap hit: \$3.25

Taken 3<sup>rd</sup> overall in the 2011 draft, Huberdeau has emerged as a top player from his draft class. His Florida Panthers are also on the rise as the talent is finally arriving in Sunrise. He's been able to amass points at the NHL level, and he reached the 20 goal plateau for the first time last season. He will be an RFA after the 16-17 season and he's likely to get a bump in pay.

He'd be able to come into this Wild squad and immediately increase the talent on the wing and do it for many years. While many think of the Wild as a "pass-first" team, they don't have many playmakers, especially if you choose to buyout Thomas Vanek. While Huberdeau hasn't been rumored to be on the block at all, maybe a big offer can pry him away from South Florida.

**2016 4<sup>th</sup> Overall Pick**  
**Edmonton Oilers**

Age: Probably ONLY 18!!!!!!  
GP: ?  
Goals: ?  
Assists: ?  
Shots/60: ?  
SAT%: ?

SAT% rel: ?  
15-16 cap hit: None

The Edmonton Oilers made significant changes to the front office and coaching staff before last season. The organization is finally fed up with looking up from the bottom of the Pacific Division, and they have numerous first-round talents that could fetch someone to fill the void in the team's roster – defense. It's been an obvious need for years; we see it, the league sees it, and after being in observation mode for his first season as Oilers GM, Peter Chiarelli will finally act to address it.

The 4<sup>th</sup> overall pick will miss the big prizes at the top of the draft in Auston Matthews, Patrik Laine, and Jesse Puljujarvi, but there is still great talent available right after them. That 4<sup>th</sup> pick could fetch quite the price in a trade for big-time assets now, instead of waiting on yet another prospect to come into his own in the NHL. Players like Pierre-Luc DuBois, Matt Tkachuk, and Olli Juolevi are available and the Wild could use the boost to their prospect pool. You've got what the Oilers need, it just makes sense that these two teams could make a trade during the draft, but will it be for the 4<sup>th</sup> overall?



**Ryan Nugent-Hopkins**  
**Edmonton Oilers**

Age: 23

GP: 55

Goals: 12

Assists: 22

Shots/60: 5.7

SAT%: 47.9

SAT% rel: -1.1

15-16 cap hit: \$6M

When examining the list of names that could be available and might be able to fill the role of first-line center for the Wild, Nugent-Hopkins is near the top of the list. With the addition of Connor McDavid and the emergence of Leon Draisaitl, Nugent-Hopkins may find himself the odd man out due to his higher price tag. Though he was considered part of Edmonton's untouchable core just a season or two ago, the team's future salary cap considerations may make Nugent-Hopkins' \$6M annual price-tag through the 2020-21 season.

Nugent-Hopkins could be the dynamic center the Wild are looking for to make the team better now, but he also be the guy to fill the shoes of an aging Mikko Koivu as he moves toward retirement. He's one of those players who makes everyone on the ice with him better, and while his value may not be

immediately apparent in his 222 points over 313 NHL games, it is what he enables his linemates to do that makes him valuable. Paired with a finisher like Zach Parise or an emerging Charlie Coyle or Nino Niederreiter, the combination could truly unleash the wingers' ability to put the puck in the net. And that is before we examine Nugent-Hopkins' defensive play, in which he is known as a shutdown defender that drives possession and can play top minutes on the penalty kill. At just 23, Nugent-Hopkins already plays a complete game and would instantly improve the Wild's top line while allowing Mikhael Granlund and Charlie Coyle to remain on the wing and increase overall team scoring.



**Leon Draisaitl**  
Edmonton Oilers

Age: 20  
 GP: 72  
 Goals: 19  
 Assists: 32  
 Shots/60: 6.0  
 SAT%: 52.2  
 SAT% rel: 4.1  
 15-16 cap hit: \$925K

Perhaps the Oilers opt to hang onto RNH and instead sell high on another talented

centerman. Draisaitl had an electrifying second NHL stint, notching 51 points over 72 games while shoring up the pivot position, most notably while Nugent-Hopkins and Connor McDavid missed some time due to injury. Draisaitl dazzled the league as he jumped out to score 33 points over his first 30 games. But he couldn't sustain that torrid pace and finished with just 18 points over his last 41 contests. This can be credited to the grind of his first complete season and opposing coaches staring to focus on taking away what he does best.

Draisaitl should adjust back, though. He's got size, speed, fantastic hands, and plays a mature game for a 20 year old. He wouldn't likely take over as the Wild's top center immediately, but would do so quickly if he continued to display the growth curve he's shown since being drafted in 2014. Trading for him could go a long way to being set down the middle for years to come.



**Patrik Berglund**  
St. Louis Blues

Age: 28  
 GP: 42  
 Goals: 10  
 Assists: 5

Shots/60: 7.2  
SAT%: 51.7  
SAT% rel: 0.8  
15-16 cap hit: \$3.7M

Berglund is another interesting case to take a look at. He is entering the final year of his contract, and even though he plays for Central Division foe St. Louis, it's been rumored that he could be available. He doesn't profile as the top center candidate the Wild are and should be looking for. However, his acquisition would be at a lesser cost in trade value and salary cap consumption than many of the other candidates mentioned here, and would bring

solid depth down the middle for the Wild, again allowing Charlie Coyle and/or Mikael Granlund to stay on the wing or even be moved in a separate trade.

Berglund brings a hulking 6'4" frame into the fray to menace opposing defenders and netminders. A one-time 50 point scorer, Berglund has had some ups and downs in production during his career in St. Louis, but became a bona fide scoring threat while playing on a line with T.J. Oshie a couple of years ago. Berglund could shore up the second or third line center spot if you Wild miss out on a top-flight center in the trade market.

## The Plan

So now that, as GM of this bizarro Minnesota Wild team, you know what we've got, what you can get for it, and who's out there and available, what's the next step? How do you pull it all together over the next day, week, and summer to turn a middling, underachieving roster into the cup contender it believes it is? Look no further than the following Offseason Plans as templates for a successful future for the Minnesota Wild.

## Tony's Offseason Plan

### Step 1: Wild's pending UFAs

I'm thoroughly unimpressed by Jarret Stoll, Ryan Carter, and Chris Porter, and I'd rather go another direction with my fourth-line and penalty kill. I could maybe see myself bringing back David Jones as a 13th forward, but that'd depend on how the offseason shakes out. As for Justin Fontaine, I'm a fan, but he may want a change of scenery. Let's assume he leaves.

### Step 2: Wild's Pending RFAs

I would bring back Mathew Dumba, Jason Zucker, and Darcy Kuemper back on one-way deals. Both Dumba and Zucker have performed well enough to earn raises, but it would benefit both sides to keep their deals short. I'd aim to offer matching 2 year, 3.5 million deals for each of them. As for Kuemper, I'm not confident in his trade value, nor any free agents to step in and do what he can for cheaper. I'd offer 2 years, 3 million for him, and with Dubnyk between the pipes for 60+ games a year, I'm perfectly content with waiting until August to sign him, if necessary.

As for minor league free agents, Tyler Graovac is a slam-dunk to stay, and he'll compete for a roster slot. I'm perfectly fine with signing Zac Dalpe and Jordan Schroeder as AHL scorers that can slot into the NHL lineup if needed. There's not much reason for me to give up on Raphael Bussieres, Brody Hoffman, or Zach Palmquist, so I'd extend them qualifying offers. The rest, I could take or leave.

### Step 3: Trade Charlie Coyle and Marco Scandella to Montreal for Alex Galchenyuk

I think the best way that you're going to acquire an elite center is by trading multiple good players to get one. Both Coyle and Scandella are young, cheap, hard-working players with upside. I chose to part ways with Coyle because I felt there was a replacement waiting in the wings in Alex Tuch. As for defensemen, it came down to Scandella and Jonas Brodin, and elected to keep Brodin because I'm curious to see what Bruce Boudreau and Scott Stevens can get out of the smooth-skating defenseman.

As for Galchenyuk, I think he adds a lot of what Minnesota needs at the center position: an offensive-minded player who can create his own shot. In my head, I have him flanked by Mikael Granlund's playmaking to the left, and Jason Zucker's speed to the right.

This allows me to put Zach Parise, Mikko Koivu, and Nino Niederreiter on the second line. Koivu and Niederreiter were lethal together last season, and Parise's tenacity and two-way play will fit right in. I imagine this line would be used defensively, and it would own.

### Step 4: Free Agency

This breaks up the Niederreiter - Erik Haula - Jason Pominville line that dominated last year. That was a great line, but Nino needs to move up the lineup. I still don't want to break up that chemistry, though, so I'd sign Viktor Stalberg for 1 year, 1.5 million. Stalberg doesn't have the sheer play-driving ability Niederreiter has, but he's speedy, loves to shoot, and is a decent defender. I could see that chemistry working.

And chemistry is what is needed on the fourth-line. I didn't buyout Vanek- I think he brings enough to the table that I preferred sticking it out with him. But I don't want him playing in a position where he can't succeed. So I decided to sign Colton Sceviour to 2 years, 4 million. The way I see it, Graovac and Sceviour should be hard-working enough to mitigate Vanek's poor defensive game while being able to cash in passes from Vanek. I also signed Jonathan Marchessault to 1 year, 900K because I was intrigued by what the diminutive center did in Tampa last year. He'd slot in the lineup in case of injury.

All told, this is going to cost a touch under 71 million in cap space, giving the team some breathing room against the cap. And all it took was a kinda crazy trade idea that might seem totally outlandish to everyone but me! Hooray!

## Joe's Offseason Plan

How do you go about an offseason plan for a team that desperately needs some fixing, but yet there's enough pieces on the team to be a solid team? There's promising youth, there's immovable contracts, the team has to deal with a bad 4<sup>th</sup> line, there's decisions to be made on aging vets, and it all has to somehow accomplish that with just over \$9 million in cap space to work with.

First things first, the Wild will have to buyout Thomas Vanek. It's not a decision that I take lightly. It's a travesty that they have to buyout the last year of a three year deal, but by doing so, there will be an extra \$5 million in cap space to work with. Vanek, while easily being the tallest lightning rod in Minnesota in the electrical storm that is the Wild Twittersphere, was a pretty productive player in a Wild sweater. He is historically a streaky player and that streakiness is what will cost him his time with the Wild.

A buyout of Vanek raises the amount of cap space from \$9,168,913 to 14,168,913, and the vacant spot is one that is easily replaceable either within the organization or in free agency. However, the 1.86 and 1.60 points per 60 minutes the past two seasons he had will be tougher to replace.

With the new cap space, Minnesota should reach agreements with RFAs Matt Dumba, Jason Zucker, and Tyler Graovac. While that's easier said than done, Graovac and Dumba should be the main ones to get done. Why Dumba? It's easy, what he can do on the back end on the power play is something you cannot give up on just yet. Let him get in the room and work with new assistant coach Scott Stevens, and if Bruce Boudreau is true to his word, Dumba should see regular shifts with minutes getting balanced out among the defensemen. For Graovac, he represents depth down the middle. He'd have been in the NHL last season were it not for a sports hernia suffered early in the season.

If he's ready to be at the NHL now, and his contract is still cheap, then there is no reason to play around with the center depth on the team and get him re-signed.

As for Jason Zucker, he still does a lot of what this team needs. He can create his own shot and his best asset – his speed – creates headaches for defenses. It stretches the ice and makes the rest of the team look and play faster. He even admitted that he had a down year last season. He's struggled with consistency for most of his career and last season the amount of shots he took, which had rivaled only Zach Parise on the team, dwindled as the season went on until he played himself out of the line-up. So how do you approach negotiations with him, especially knowing that an expansion draft is coming? The tough thing is that no matter what you do – sign him long term or short term – there's still a chance to lose him. I would just give him a qualifying offer and attempt to keep his rights. If he is still here after the Vegas expansion draft, then you look at extending him longer term. That and it gives him a chance to rebound from his lackluster season.

With the RFAs locked up, the attention can turn toward that awful 4<sup>th</sup> line.

The fourth line needs drastic improvement. No longer should the Wild depend on Chris Porter or Jarret Stoll to make up the worst fourth line in the league. You ask, "Why does the fourth line need to be good?" It's simple really. If a team can attack in continuous waves and not have a drop off when the lower lines are on the ice, then the top lines can come on to the ice better rested, and more often in an attacking mindset, rather than trying to dig the puck out of their own zone to start their shift. I am signing Islander free agent Matt Martin. Martin shouldn't cost a ton and he was a vital member of the best 4<sup>th</sup> line in the league. Martin is a tough guy to play against, a gritty player, but his possession stats mean he isn't getting bottled up in his own zone. I would have Tyler Graovac center the fourth line as his size, strength, and ability to add offense can help push the play into the offensive zone. Finally, I'd bring up Grayson Downing to fill the final spot on the roster. Martin can provide the energy and sand paper, Graovac is a big body that can win faceoffs, and Downing should be able to add more offense to that line as well.

Next, I would package Darcy Kuemper and Jonas Brodin in a deal for David Pastrnak of the Boston Bruins. By doing this, it would allow the Wild to protect Ryan Suter, Jared Spurgeon, Matt Dumba, and Marco Scandella in the expansion draft. There should be a goalie on the market for cheap to be a decent back up to Dubnyk like Al Montoya, Alex Stalock, or Jhonas Enroth.

Here is my starting line-up for the October 13<sup>th</sup> opener in St. Louis:

Zach Parise – Mikko Koivu – Charlie Coyle

Nino Niederreiter – Erik Haula – David Pastrnak

Jason Zucker – Mikael Granlund – Jason Pominville

Matt Martin – Tyler Graovac – Grayson Downing

Ryan Suter – Matt Dumba

Marco Scandella – Jared Spurgeon

Gustav Olofsson – Mike Reilly

Devan Dubnyk

Al Montoya

## **Barry's Offseason Plan**

Let me address my offseason plan by stating a few general concepts before I discuss the steps I would take to get there. The first concept I'd like to talk about is staleness. Due to roster cap concerns, the 2015-16 Wild returned in a remarkably similar version as the 2014-15 Wild. With the regression we saw from year to year, it is apparent to me that something needs to change in order to invigorate this group of players, and making some kind of change to the roster is the best way to do it. Based on the mood and tenor surrounding the team and especially the captains during the past year, a change in coach was not enough, and the names on the back of the sweaters are due for a change, forcing the team to readjust.

The second point is more obvious, but provides a vessel for the first point to be addressed. The Wild have a hole down the middle. Koivu probably can't be expected to match his output from last season. Erik Haula has certainly taken a huge step, but at this point can't be counted on to be more than a third-line center. Charlie Coyle and Mikael Granlund proved over and over that they are more suited to the wing. With an approaching expansion draft that may force the Wild to expose 2 of their young defenders to being claimed if it happened today, the team must find a way to transform one of those players into a top-6 center, thus shaking up the roster a bit and giving them some assistance on the offensive side of the puck. Let's take a closer look at how I recommend shaping the roster.

### **Re-sign RFAs**

The Wild should extend qualifying offers to Jason Zucker, Jordan Schroeder, and Zac Dalpe. None of these players had the kind of year one would expect to generate a large raise, and need to prove their value to the organization. The Wild would need to be prepared to match any offer sheets that might come through for Zucker, who could also prove valuable to retaining their core players when the Las Vegas expansion occurs.

### **Extend Niederreiter and Haula**

Nino Niederreiter makes everyone around him better, and the team can take no chance of losing him to free agency. As they have committed to Charlie Coyle long term, they should also commit to Niederreiter, who will command more dollars and term. I believe he can be signed for around 4 years at \$4.5M AAV. Erik Haula has more to prove, but I believe can be signed in the neighborhood of 4 years at \$2.5M AAV.

## Re-Sign Depth UFAs

Re-sign Chris Porter for \$650,000 as a depth forward that can slot in when called upon but provides flexibility for Boudreau to give some of the young players a taste of the NHL throughout the season.

## Acquire a top-6 Center

Because of the newly-announced expansion rules, the trade market will be open for business as teams work to position themselves to expose the least amount of their core players possible. The Wild are on track to having to expose two of the following players: Jared Spurgeon, Marco Scandella, Jonas Brodin, Matt Dumba. There is no compensation for a player claimed in an expansion draft, so by leaving them exposed, there is a risk of giving them up for nothing. A shrewd GM would find a way to parlay that into some value, and everyone must realize that there are 29 other teams in similar situations, so there will be plenty of names tossed around the rumor mill this summer. The Wild have to build their team for now and the future by trading at least one of their young core defenders to address their need for a center. There will likely be several options on the market, including big names such as Derek Stepan, who could cost multiple core players. However, if I'm the Wild I'm going to do everything in my power to only trade one of those names, and here's the deal I would recommend. I would trade **Matt Dumba** plus **Gustav Olofsson** to the Edmonton Oilers for **Ryan Nugent-Hopkins**. The Oilers are thin on defense and seeking a right-hand shot defender with offensive upside. The Wild's window to win a Cup is closing, and Dumba offers a bright future, but I'm afraid that he will reach his peak too late for it to matter for the Wild. Spurgeon is absolutely untouchable for me, Scandella fulfills roles that are not readily replaceable on the free agent or trade market, and Brodin plays a more mature game. Nugent-Hopkins is just 23 and is signed through 2020-21. He brings a solid two-way game and can play on all special teams. He is also known for his passing and playmaking abilities, and would look magnificent centering a line with Nino Niederreiter and Charlie Coyle for years to come.

## Clear Cap Space for the Acquisition

Olofsson did not count against the NHL cap last year and Dumba counted just \$1.6M towards the cap. With Nugent-Hopkins locked in at \$6M, the Wild need to clear some cap space to take on the extra salary. In order to facilitate this trade, the Wild must **buy out Thomas Vanek**. This is due to many reasons- the results he has posted in Minnesota, him wearing out his welcome with two coaching staffs, and the economics of the game. Is Thomas Vanek a bad player? No. Will he likely be in a better position to succeed under Bruce Boudreau? Yes. Can the Wild afford to continue without a top center if they have the opportunity to acquire one? No. Vanek has never seemed to fit amongst the players on his team as his style does not seem to complement the strengths of the players around him. He needs an elite playmaker to rev his scoring engine, and he won't have the opportunity to play with one in his final year in Minnesota.

## Trade Darcy Kuemper

Kuemper wants to be a #1 goalie, and that won't happen in Minnesota. He's shown his ability to play in the NHL, but has lacked the playing time to mature. He should net a second-round pick

from a team looking for immediate help in net or could potentially be included in a deal for a center.

### **Sign Backup Goalie**

The Wild don't need a backup netminder who figures to play a bunch of games unless Devan Dubnyk gets hurt. Alex Stalock is available as a reclamation project and could be signed for under \$1M to back Dubnyk up but leave the team with the financial freedom to make a move should Dubnyk get hurt.

### **Salary Cap**

My proposed solutions would bring the Wild's 2016-17 salary cap number to approximately \$69M, leaving some freedom should the cap remain the same, or greater freedom to acquire a free agent top-6 forward or proven backup netminder should the cap increase.

### **Proposed Roster:**

Parise-Nugent-Hopkins-Coyle

Granlund-Koivu-Pominville

Niederreiter-Haula-Zucker

Porter-Graovac-Schroeder

Tuch-Downing-Anas

Suter-Spurgeon

Scandella-Brodin

Reilly-Folin

Prosser

Dubnyk

Stalock

With these plans in mind, it's on you. You've seen the targets, you know the market, you know what we've got and what we need, but the rest of it, the most of the work, is yet to come. You've got to sit down, take a look at what's on the paper and what offers there are, and get things *done*.

Because the Wild, and the State of Hockey, and the Wilderness itself, is counting on you.

So pick up your phone and...

Go Wild.