

SPORTS

NFL DRAFT

'TO ME, IT'S NOT
NECESSARILY ABOUT
THE NUMBER OF
PICKS. IT'S ABOUT THE
IMPACT OF THE PICKS
THAT YOU HAVE.'Vikings GM Kwesi
Adofo-Mensah

Photo by ANTHONY SOUFFLÉ • Star Tribune

VIKINGS INSIDER BEN GOESSLING

The term "competitive rebuild," which Kwesi Adofo-Mensah coined last year, gave a slogan to what might be the trickiest element of the Vikings general manager's job: How to care for both the short- and long-term interests of a franchise that's frequently been competitive, but rarely great.

Since the Wilf family bought the team in 2005, the Vikings have lost double-digit games just four times, and haven't done so since 2013. They have won 58.5% of their games since that last 10-loss season, and their 2022 NFC North title took them to the playoffs for the fourth time in nine years.

"We want to be super-competitive every time we

Neither Vikings GM Kwesi Adofo-Mensah nor coach Kevin O'Connell seem naive about the roster challenges ahead despite winning 13 games last season.

step on the field every season," co-owner Mark Wilf said at the NFL owners' meetings last month. "And we feel we're going to be strong; of course, division winners, and we're going to be strong. We know there's strong teams in our division now, and we have to never take anything for granted. I think that's why they're working every single day to turn over every stone to keep getting better."

But the Vikings have hosted just three playoff games in that time, and are 2-4 in the playoffs during that stretch. In the Wilfs' 18 seasons of ownership, they've celebrated just three playoff victories.

It all serves as backdrop for the Vikings' approach in the first night of the 2023 NFL draft, where a team

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NFL draft: Thursday (round 1, 7 p.m.), Friday (rounds 2-3, 6 p.m.) and Saturday (rounds 4-7, 11 a.m.). **TV:** ABC, ESPN and NFL Network.

Vikings picks: 23rd overall (first round); 87th (third round); 119th (fourth); 158th (fifth); 211th (sixth) • **Inside:** Mark Craig's first-round mock draft, **C5**

WOLVES

10-step recipe for
growth of Wolves

JIM SOUHAN



In their past three games of the playoffs, the Timberwolves offered hope.

Anthony Edwards became a superstar. Karl-Anthony Towns and Rudy Gobert were efficient and productive. The Wolves tested the best team in the West despite playing without Jaden McDaniels, Naz Reid and, in Game 5, Kyle Anderson.

Here's how the Wolves can win big next year:

Make Target Center the Ant Hill: Edwards became an All-Star this season, and proved against Denver he's one of the league's best players. If he continues to improve and mature, Edwards will elevate the entire franchise.

Looking for the next Mr. Jones: The most obvious personnel upgrade should come at backup point guard. Michael Conley fits as a starter. Jordan McLaughlin has become more endearing than effective. The Wolves need a version of former Wolf Tyus Jones to complement Conley.

Not too late: Gobert is 30. Why can't he improve at this stage of his career?

For all of the consternation about the trade the Wolves made for him, Gobert wound up having a representative season and was better at the end than at the beginning. If he were slightly

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AARON LAVINSKY • aaron.lavinsky@startribune.com

Even after the Wolves acquired Rudy Gobert, rebounding was still a problem area.

Unfinished experiment

Towns-Gobert pairing gets incomplete grade after uneven season.

Story by CHRIS HINE • chine@startribune.com

DENVER - With 3 minutes, 39 seconds to play in the Timberwolves' 112-109 season-ending loss to Denver on Tuesday, Nikola Jokic put up a contested shot in the lane against Karl-Anthony Towns with the Wolves down 97-96.

Jokic missed the shot, and what happened next said everything about what the Timberwolves thought this season was going to be and what it ended up being.

The ball bounced left, where Rudy

Gobert was standing. Behind him was Nuggets forward Aaron Gordon. The Wolves brought Gobert in to partner with Towns because of his defensive prowess, but also because he could help resurrect a team that finished 28th in defensive rebounding percentage last season.

The Wolves lost their playoff series last spring against Memphis largely because they couldn't get a rebound,

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Beyond injuries,
immaturity hurt

CHIP SCOGGINS



Anthony Edwards' shot bounced off the rim, the young All-Star ran directly to the locker room and thus concluded the least enjoyable Timberwolves season since Jimmy Butler went scorched earth on the organization.

The offseason begins at a crossroads for basketball boss Tim Connelly, who staked his reputation and the team's future on a gamble that fell flat in Year 1, at least if based on Karl-Anthony Towns' own "championship or bust" declaration last summer at the dawn of the BIG experiment.

Every option should be in play for Connelly right now. Major changes. Minor tweaks. Something in the middle.

The lone motivation with every decision should be Edwards and how to surround the dynamic guard with the best roster possible. Nothing or no one supersedes that mission.

The temptation will be to blame this turbulent season on injuries, and those disruptions certainly were a factor. But the injury excuse also conveniently ignores an underlying issue that cuts to the heart of their maddening ways.

The Wolves are just an immature bunch.

Coach Chris Finch raised that point once again Tuesday night after the Game 5 elimination loss. Finch applauded his team's competitive fight

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