

ABIE PARR | Associated Press file photo

Minnesota Timberwolves guard Mike Conley (10) celebrates after a basket made by center Rudy Gobert during the first half of a game against the New Orleans Pelicans on Nov. 8, 2023, in Minneapolis.

Larsen

Continued from B1

small-market wintry town. Since the inception of its club 35 years ago, Minnesota has made the second round just twice; the Jazz have done it 14 times in that period.

In order to swap places from those historical norms, the Wolves have worked for years to amass an enviable amount of talent.

The team's best offensive players are No. 1 overall picks — Anthony Edwards and Karl-Anthony Towns — the result of 19-win and 16-win seasons, respectively. The team had a third No. 1 pick in this era, Andrew Wiggins, who was eventually traded for DeAngelo Russell, who then was swapped for Mike Conley (and the Swiss Army Knife that is Nickell Alexander-Walker, another former Jazzman).

Then, the Wolves sent every future draft pick possible in exchange for Gobert — a much-criticized trade for Minnesota at the time that has since paid dividends. It's a nearly impossible path to follow. An inadvisable one, too. The Wolves are living off the NBA's lottery-pick generosity for a decade of past futility and the further mortgaging of a future decade.

Utah's front office, would, and should, like to avoid both. There are no lessons learned here to copy.

But while Minnesota is here and Utah isn't, there's a sense that the team up north deserves this moment more. By now, Jazz fans recognize the flaws that the late-era Quin Snyder teams possessed: a complete lack of perimeter defense, a too-rigid coaching staff, limited-to-no depth, and a star player who was talismanic on the offensive end and melancholic on the other. Minnesota's sacrifices have seen them fix these flaws wholesale — they're the team with competitive spirit and all-around talent across the roster in a way the Jazz never were.

Conley and Gobert are the beneficiaries here, finally getting the team that they, and their fans, always wanted. Yes, it's a shame that it's not happening in Utah, but Minnesota's team is so far superior that it's a stark reminder of just how far away the Jazz were then, let alone now.

In that context, and with that distance, it's easier to avoid the temptations of Schadenfreude. Instead, Jazz fans can see the joy of their former heroes and share in it, rooting them on to further success.

The Jazz's time is still years away, but the Wolves' time is now. We might as well enjoy it.

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Arango

Continued from B1

"What Gomez is doing has finally translated from the practice field to the game field — on the stage," coach Pablo Mastroeni said. The last time RSL lost a game came back in March to those same Rapids. But since then, the team has been on a tear.

RSL is in the midst of an 10-game league unbeaten streak. At 28 points, RSL is third in the Supporters Shield race behind Cincinnati (30 points) and Miami (31 points), and sits atop the Western Conference.

There are a few factors that can be attributed to RSL's meteoric rise. They all seemed to come together against Colorado, which held a 3-2 lead at America First Field as late as the 84th minute.

Mastroeni described the comeback win as "one of the most emotional games that I've experienced probably since [Damiir Kreilach's] last touch to get us in the playoffs in 2021."

"We talk about mental fortitude all the time, and the guys, after the

game, mentioned the same," Mastroeni said. "They feel like whether we're playing great or we're not playing well, whether we're winning or we're behind it, the people in this room have incredible mindsets."

RSL generally has the perception that it's a perpetual underdog, always punching above its weight. For years, the team embraced that position. But the team's current run of form not only has taken with MVP buzz, but it's starting to feel like RSL can make a deep run in the postseason.

"Since the start of the season, we've thought about it, we've dreamt about it and we wanted to work for it," Arango said when asked if the team ever thought it'd be in this position. "That's what we're doing. We're working on it. We know what we want, we know the objective. We're building something beautiful."

Arango added that the most difficult part of the season is upon RSL, and that it's going to take double the effort and a maintaining of mentality in order to keep moving forward.



BETHANY BAKER | The Salt Lake Tribune

Real Salt Lake forward Criche Arango holds up three fingers as he celebrates after scoring his third goal in RSL's 3-1 victory over St. Louis City on March 30 in Sandy.

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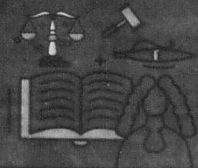
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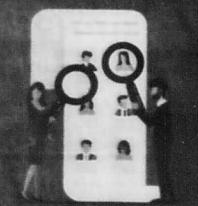
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