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MEDIA

'Mirage of Destiny'

Local author dives into the 1990-91 North Stars team that made it to the Stanley Cup Final.

by  Heather Rule February 20, 2024



Award-winning writer Kevin Allenspach sold and signed his "Mirage of Destiny" book near the Hockey Lodge at Xcel Energy Center on Feb. 17, 2024. (MHM Photo / Rick Olson)

Much is made among Minnesota professional sports fans about the lack of championships, or even championship appearances, for the state's MLB, NFL, NBA and NHL teams. The Minnesota Wild have never been to a Stanley Cup Final in the 20-plus years as a franchise.

But the North Stars were there in 1990-91. It's a season and a story that Minnesota sports writer and author Kevin Allenspach thinks is worth documenting. So, he wrote his newly released book "Mirage of Destiny: The Story of the 1990-91 Minnesota North Stars." The book includes very detailed accounts of the North Stars and their, as Allenspach called it, "miracle, Cinderella run" to the Stanley Cup Final in the spring of 1991.

Throughout most of that hockey season, the North Stars were among the worst teams in the league, and attendance was abysmal, too. But things turned around in February and March when the North Stars started winning some games.

Allenspach dives deep into the journey of the team with the worst regular-season record in any of the four major North American sports leagues that advanced to play for a modern championship, even though Minnesota lost the series in six games to the Pittsburgh Penguins.



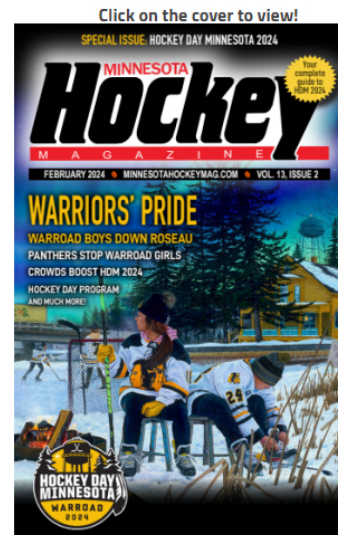
"That team is unique in all of pro sports history," Allenspach said. "If you look to modern sports, there's never been a team that had that bad of a regular season, yet got to a championship, to play for a championship."

Of the big-four men's

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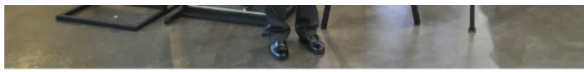


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Kevin Allenspach tells the stories of the exhilaration, heartbreak and real lives of many 1990-91 North Stars players in his book "Mirage of Destiny." (MHM Photo / Rick Olson)

professional sports leagues, only the 1938 Chicago Blackhawks had a worse regular season but still wound up winning the Stanley Cup, Allenspach said. Of course, at that

time they only needed seven games, not 16 victories, to accomplish the feat.

It would be like an NFL team going 7-9 in today's regular season and then winning a Super Bowl, or like the three NBA teams in history that reached the NBA Finals with a losing record, Allenspach cited as examples.

"That, to me, is why this team is unlike any other," Allenspach said, of those 1990-91 North Stars. "And it'll never happen again. In the modern NHL, you'll never have a team with a losing record probably make the playoffs, let alone go all the way to the finals.

"It's unique in history."

Up-close look at the 1990-91 team

Allenspach was a college student and PR intern for the North Stars during the 1990-91 season, which was also the first year the team was under Norm Green's ownership. Minnesota was up two games to one in the finals, "and the thing goes poof," as Allenspach put it. Even then, Allenspach thought to himself that someone needed to tell the Cinderella story of that North Stars team, even more so when Green moved the franchise to Dallas a couple of years later.

Working as a sportswriter for the St. Cloud Times for many years, Allenspach never really had an opportunity to sit down and write this tale. Then the pandemic hit in 2020 and, like many people, he was at home with not as much to do. So, he decided to write the book to "have something to show for my time during the pandemic."

Allenspach relied on his own research, knowledge and pack-rat habit – "I kept game programs and game notes and anything that wasn't locked down that didn't belong to the team" – from his time with the team to help write the book. He also looked at a lot of microfilm during his time, and afterward, while working at the Pioneer Press.

All about the players and their stories

His goal was also to reach all of the North Stars players from that team, as well as coaches, anybody he worked with in the front office and media members; he also relied on the beat writers from that season Gary Olson (Pioneer Press) and Rachel Blount (Star Tribune) for help with the diary portion of the book in the first half. He touched base with more than 40 sources on his list of 60 names, starting with Hall of Fame player Mike Modano. There are only three players who played in the Stanley Cup Final that he wasn't able to interview for the book.

As important as it was for Allenspach to tell the story of the 1990-91 North Stars season, the stories of what's happened to many of those players in the decades since then were really what intrigued him as well. Those valuable stories are found in the later parts of the book. Unlike today's NHL landscape where players can be set for life financially, the North Stars players of the early 1990s often went into second careers.

"So, when I would talk to them, I was always surprised at how many of them said, 'Jeez, thanks for dredging up these memories,'" Allenspach said. "That's probably the part of the book that I'm most proud of."

Some of the players, like Modano, went on to win a Stanley Cup after that 1990-91 season. But most of the others never got another chance to play for one. Stew Gavin, for instance, told Allenspach that he still thinks about what could have been with the 1990-91 team.

"Yet, at the same time, you've got to move on a little bit, too, and you've got to be able to put it behind you and sort of stand on whatever your reality was," Allenspach said. "I guess that's kind of my takeaway. You have to appreciate that you were even there."

Allenspach's book is published through North Star Press in St. Cloud. The 366-page book includes a forward written by Modano and afterword by Star Tribune columnist Patrick Reusse. The book is \$35 and can be found wherever books are sold. There's a launch party for the book at Tom Reid's Hockey City Pub tonight, Feb. 20, and Allenspach will also have a booth at the Let's Play Hockey Expo during the boys' state high school hockey tournament in March.

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Heather Rule



Heather's love for watching hockey started when the Minnesota Wild came to town in 2000. Before that, she caught a few Minnesota Moose games as a youngster, and more recently she's kept up with the Austin Bruins and Fargo Force. She's a writer, freelance journalist and blogger who previously worked as a news reporter in Austin and Fergus Falls, Minn. She enjoys watching sports and closely follows the Wild, Minnesota Twins, IndyCar Series, tennis and prep sports. Heather keeps up her sports blog [Thoughts from the Stands](#). You can follow her on Twitter/X [@hrule](#) or Instagram [@hrule](#).

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