

## **The Athletic**

<https://theathletic.com/3579046/2022/09/12/winnipeg-jets-roster-trades-scheifele-wheeler/?source=emp-shared-article>

### ***Winnipeg Jets offseason review: Despite all that trade talk, familiar roster returns***

By Murat Ates

Winnipeg's 2022 offseason is a story of hope. Not the kind of hope that got realized, mind you — at least not in full.

The Jets began their summer hoping for a transformative coaching change and they got close to that. Rick Bowness comes with mostly positive reviews, Brad Lauer is fresh from a WHL championship, Scott Arniel has longstanding ties to the organization and Marty Johnston's media appearances convey a progressive thinker. No one on this staff is Barry Trotz but each is capable.

That is the extent of the good news. Winnipeg hoped for a long-term resolution with 24-year-old centre Pierre-Luc Dubois. Instead, Dubois signed his qualifying offer and is set to become a restricted free agent all over again next summer. If he files for arbitration, then Dubois will successfully fast-track himself to UFA status in 2024. If the Jets had Dubois locked up long-term, there is a chance that they would have shopped star scorer Mark Scheifele. Scheifele looked disengaged defensively last season and sounded deeply frustrated when the season was over. He's also set to become a 31-year-old UFA in 2024 and a pricey one at that, given that he's scored at least a point per game in each of his last six seasons.

The Jets need a plan for both of their top centres as well as for captain Blake Wheeler and netminder Connor Hellebuyck — all of whom are scheduled to become free agents in 2024.

Meanwhile, Winnipeg has eight NHL-calibre defencemen (Josh Morrissey, Neal Pionk, Brenden Dillon, Nate Schmidt, Logan Stanley, Dylan DeMelo, Johnathan Kovacevic, and Kyle Capobianco) who need to clear waivers. This means that their two top prospects (Ville Heinola and Dylan Samberg) could have the best training camps of their careers and still be sent to the Moose because they are waivers exempt.

Something has to give ... doesn't it?

And what's the plan in this city right now, anyway?

I'm back from vacation, training camp is on the near horizon and it's time we made sense of Winnipeg's goals for this season.

*Gagner signs; Could PTOs for other veterans be on the way?*

Winnipeg signed 967-game NHL veteran Sam Gagner to a one-year, \$750,000 contract on Sept. 2. Gagner is a smart, creative, undersized forward who is coming off a 31-point season for Detroit. He is also 33 and doesn't drive play particularly well — which is fine, because that won't be his job in Winnipeg.

The Jets' top six is likely accounted for by Scheifele, Dubois, Kyle Connor, Nikolaj Ehlers, Wheeler and Cole Perfetti. Mason Appleton doesn't project to be a dynamic top-six forward in the long run but is probably first in line to take those minutes in a pinch.

Instead, Gagner will be a bottom-six forward with skill and the team's fourth right-handed forward (along with Wheeler, Scheifele and Appleton.) He's played more right wing than centre in recent seasons but I could see him playing either position on the fourth line while contributing to the third line or second-unit power play in a pinch.

It's also worth noting that Gagner has been a thoroughly well-liked teammate throughout his career. My guess is that this moved him toward the front of Winnipeg's list when it came to veteran depth signings, as was the case with Matt Hendricks, Mark Letestu, Nate Thompson and other veteran signings before him.

The problem is that he is Winnipeg's biggest offseason acquisition. We're into professional tryout (PTO) contract territory now without a lot of marquee names still left on the board.

#### *On taking another swing with a playoff-missing roster*

On the first day of free agency, I was surprised by a joke that Kevin Cheveldayoff made about the difference between offseason expectations and real results.

Sportsnet's Sean Reynolds teed things up by asking Cheveldayoff about his comfort level with the existing Jets roster.

"It's interesting, eh?" Cheveldayoff replied in a tone that clearly implied humour was on the way. "Last year, we're sitting here at this time, we make the trades for the two defencemen, (and) everyone's already engraving the names on the Stanley Cup."

To be perfectly clear, Cheveldayoff got more serious after this, saying that the Jets felt like they had a lot to prove. It was still a bit of a "Wait. What?" moment for me. I imagined for a moment that maybe — just maybe — there was a strange little grain of truth tucked inside Cheveldayoff's joke. What if the Jets had sincerely looked at their first-round sweep of the Oilers in 2021 and thought: "We were already good and now we've added Brenden Dillon and Nate Schmidt. We must be Cup contenders now."

Can you imagine?

Our offseason projections put Winnipeg as a probable playoff team — one that could qualify for the postseason but was unlikely to win a round. My guess is that this was closer to the leaguewide consensus that Cup contention would have been. And yes, Cheveldayoff was obviously joking about the name etchings. Wheeler put things more accurately on the final day of last season when he said the Jets can no longer call themselves contenders.

"I think we are one of those teams that is a fringe playoff team now," Wheeler said in May. "It's up to everyone involved to look in the mirror and say, 'Why? Why did we get to where we're at?' First and foremost, it's our responsibility as players to bring that quality of play to the ice that we have a chance to contend and compete for a championship."

I think two things can be true. First: Winnipeg was a better team — on paper — than it showed on the ice last year. A better season from that same group of players could theoretically result in a playoff spot.

Second, swapping Andrew Copp and Paul Stastny for Gagner and Morgan Barron is not an upgrade. Thus, improvement in the team's fortunes will depend on improved play by a number of individuals. There may be room for hope. There is also wisdom in Cheveldayoff's joke — preseason prognostications don't always match regular season performance.

But the only way the Jets get better this season is if multiple individuals buy in to Rick Bowness as coach in a way that they did not buy in to Dave Lowry or the tail end of Paul Maurice's tenure.

#### *More on Wheeler*

It is my understanding that the Jets tried to move Wheeler this offseason but his \$8.25 million cap hit through 2023-24 proved cumbersome.

It's not that Wheeler isn't still a useful, productive player at this stage of his career. He remains a middle-six scorer at five-on-five and a strong playmaker, particularly on the power play. These are remarkable feats for the 17th oldest skater currently signed to a contract in the NHL and should be celebrated as such.

That said, the NHL is cap-strapped to the point where Max Pacioretty was traded for future considerations despite being younger and more effective with a cheaper contract that expires one year before Wheeler's does. The Jets' roster stagnancy will earn criticism but I would understand if Cheveldayoff was offered so little for the still-productive Wheeler that he decided to take at least one more kick at competitiveness under his leadership — especially if the Jets were being asked to retain a large portion of his salary.

This is a problem if Wheeler is unable or unwilling to accept a reduction in prominence and minutes. There is no need for Bowness to play Wheeler like the elite, first-line right winger he used to be. One would expect that coach and captain have had whatever discussions they need to have to move forward together, even if it looked at one point like the captain could be moved.

One more bit of reflection: As much as Wheeler can drive me to confusion with his frequent insistence that Winnipeg struggles because it is a young team, he made an awful lot of sense throughout last season's end-of-year media availability. When I asked him why Winnipeg gave up so many chances from such dangerous areas, I thought Wheeler's response hit things exactly right.

"(It's) probably a combination of a lot of things," he said. "Trying to score a goal every shift. I don't know. When we're trying to play offence every time we're out there, you're going to give up a lot defensively. Certainly, we have a forward group that can put the puck in the net and sometimes the commitment 200-feet isn't always there."

Sometimes I wonder if I give too much credence to a player's ability to describe the truth of what's happening on the ice. There are plenty of brilliant, winning players who don't hit this level of precision or candour with the media. At the same time, I think you have to be able to name a problem to overcome it and looking back on Wheeler's words offers a bit of hope on that front.

Now let's hope he gives Winnipeg's young players more credit for the team's success.

#### *Scheifele speaks*

Scheifele spoke to Sara Orlesky prior to playing in the Manitoba Open this summer, taking a few pre-tournament swings at Jets media.

It was Scheifele's first media appearance since last season ended and it began with Orlesky asking about his end-of-season comments.

You'll remember that, when asked about his future by Scott Billeck, Scheifele took a moment to say he loves Winnipeg before speaking about his future in more hypothetical terms. It was the source of much offseason consternation — including here at The Athletic, where I shared Scheifele's quotes in full.

Orlesky began this summer's interview by saying she didn't know if Scheifele would be back based on the comments he made. She then asked if he was confident that he'd return.

"I was, until I saw the media disaster that came from it. When I was saying my comments, it was kind of strange how so many people took it in such a different way. First of all, I started off the question that I was asked by saying I love it here, I've been here for 10 years, it's been an amazing community, it's been amazing to me, and I want to be a Winnipeg Jet — and then everyone seemed to just start recording after I said that."

Scheifele went on to say he knew he wanted to ask management some tough questions about the team's future but that he was always confident he'd be back in a Jets jersey.

"It was the way media takes things but that's life. I was probably a little too honest. I'm usually just the cliché monster when it comes to the media but I'm a guy that loves to talk hockey."

I'm sure you've already watched the interview but I've embedded it below. It is, in my opinion, a simply excellent piece of public relations and my guess is that it moved the dial of fan perception a great deal in the intended direction.

Even if you view this interview through a cynical, PR-focused lens, Scheifele is clearly focused on putting last year's struggles behind him. He gave Orlesky a terrific interview, brimming with optimism about the upcoming season, and remains a foundational part of the Jets who creates scoring chances at a rate that few other players can match. I expect another productive season full of superlative scoring and below-average defending.

### *Orlesky joins the Jets*

There's more to say about Orlesky's move to the Jets content team than simply commenting on her interview with Scheifele. She'll still make regular appearances during Jets games on TSN but you can expect more exclusive interviews like the one she's already put together. From a strategic standpoint, it's a great move by the Jets. Orlesky will ask important questions as she did with Scheifele and do so in a comfortable, team-controlled environment where Winnipeg can finely tune its messaging. It will be up to independent media outlets like The Athletic or the local papers that have more freedom to offer criticism to use video, analytics and quotes to discuss the negative aspects of Winnipeg's play as well as celebrate the positive parts.

Saying this isn't meant to be a criticism in and of itself. It's just an acknowledgment of the changing media landscape. My belief is that there is enough room in Jets media for all good work to find an audience and Orlesky has covered the Jets since the moment they came from Atlanta.

I'd expect more teams in the NHL and in other leagues to take big swings at high-end local talent.

Meanwhile, it was special to see the Bombers honour Orlesky at the Banjo Bowl this weekend.

### *Perreault retires*

The best UFA signing of Jets 2.0 history has announced his retirement. Mathieu Perreault spent seven seasons winning battles in all three zones for the Jets, scoring 230 points in 455 games.

Perreault scored 143 goals and 210 assists for 353 points in 708 career regular season games while adding 16 points in 51 games of playoff action.

He'll be remembered for his sparkplug-style energy, his ability to improve any line the Jets played him on and for his deep love of the fans.

In fact, he gave a shoutout directly to Jets fans in his retirement announcement.

"To the city of Winnipeg and the Jets organization, thank you for giving my family and me seven amazing years," Perreault wrote. "Winnipeg will always hold a special place in our hearts."

He will join TVA Sports as a broadcaster for the upcoming season.

### *On Scott Campbell*

We end on a sad note, with the death of Jets WHA and NHL 1.0 legend Scott Campbell. Campbell, 65, died on Sept. 3 after an 11-month battle with cancer.

Campbell was the first pick in the WHA (1977) and ninth pick in the NHL that same year. He played his junior hockey for the London Knights, developing a mean streak to match his two-way play. The defenceman won an Avco Cup Championship with Winnipeg in 1979 and, along with Morris Lukowich, became one of just two protected players for the Jets' transition into the NHL.

The following is an excerpt from our story about the 1979 Avco Cup championship.

Terry Ruskowski: A quick story about Scotty. When Tom McVie took over, he worked us so hard. A morning day practice — a warm-up was like an every day practice with any other team. That's how it was. It was just unbelievably hard. And when we had off days, we just practiced and practiced. He worked us hard — but you know what? He did every drill with us. You couldn't complain about it because he did it too. You had to keep on going with it.

I remember Scott had migraine headaches and he didn't know what the migraine headaches were caused from. They thought maybe it was a tooth, so they pulled the tooth, that didn't work, they tried something else. Then he got his jaw broken and he was missing a tooth. And I remember Tom was skating him so hard and Scotty was just out of it and he started getting sick. There was no place for it to go except for that one tooth.

Scott Campbell: You try throwing up in that scenario — it's not good!

Ruskowski: It was squirting out! So I was helping him off the ice and Tom was there. Tom was all gruff. "Hey! You alright Scott?"

Campbell McVie's standing there saying, "Do you want to skate any more?" and that's when I skated off. Roscoe helped me up and was skating me by him, saying, "You've had enough." But that's when I couldn't resist.

Ruskowski

And Scott looked up at him — still puking — and said, "Is that the best you can do!?"

Campbell

"Is that all you've got?!" But it was more like, "Madlfhadfhaldfm mlaadfm!?"

It's an intense story in a way but I like it because it shows Campbell at his hardest-working and most competitive, with a terrific sense of humour. I had the opportunity to get to know Campbell and his mom Dianne, trading emails among the three of us for a little while, and grew to admire him quite a bit. His last message to me was after the Jets swept Edmonton in 2021.

"Happy to put those guys to bed," he wrote. "Feeling a bit grateful for the good fortune too, as that result could easily be flipped. Want to keep the hockey gods on side."

A gamer through and through. Rest in peace, Soupy. You will be missed.

<https://theathletic.com/3588016/2022/09/13/nhl-training-camp-biggest-questions/>

### ***Every NHL team's biggest question heading into training camp***

By The Athletic NHL Staff

NHL training camps open next week, the preseason kicks off Sept. 24 and regular-season games are coming Oct. 7. After a long summer, the wait for the 2022-23 season is almost over.

Has your team addressed all it needed to during the offseason? What concerns remain? To find out, The Athletic asked the reporters who know the teams best what the biggest question is facing each heading into training camp.

Here's what they said.

#### ***Winnipeg Jets***

Can a change in attitude upgrade Winnipeg's aptitude? Winnipeg is returning a virtually identical roster to the one that missed the playoffs last season. Instead of addressing the team's glut of defensemen, upgrading the forward group, or making other transformative roster moves, the Jets are hoping the same players can put last season's disappointment behind them. There is plenty of room for the group to play better than it did last year, but even "better than last year" doesn't guarantee a playoff spot. This team's stars need to prevent goals in addition to scoring them, and the hope is for Rick Bowness and his new staff to generate team-wide buy-in in a way that last season's coaches couldn't quite do. — Murat Ates

#### **TSN**

<https://www.tsn.ca/video/will-the-jets-youngsters-take-a-step-forward-this-year~2519066>

## ***Will the Jets' youngsters take a step forward this year? (VIDEO)***

Is this the year youngsters Cole Perfetti, Ville Heinola and Dylan Samberg take the next step for the Jets? That's Hockey takes a closer look at Winnipeg's young players and what they can bring to the team this year.

**Sportsnet.ca**

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/one-thing-to-remember-about-each-nhl-team-heading-into-2022-23-training-camps/>

### ***One thing to remember about each NHL team heading into 2022-23 training camps***

By Rory Boylen

Just two and a half months ago, the Colorado Avalanche were lifting the Stanley Cup, triumphant over the back-to-back champion Tampa Bay Lightning in a thrilling final.

We'll forgive you if you spent the warm months outside touching grass, and are just beginning to return to a hockey mindset. We're just beginning to ramp up again, after all. This week will bring the opening of rookie camps, with full training camps looming next week.

So with hockey set to return, we're sharing one thing to remember about each team to refresh your memory.

*Winnipeg Jets: Neither of their top two centres seem all that jazzed about staying long term*

The Jets were one of the biggest disappointments in the league last season, from missing the playoffs, to watching their head coach step down mid season. Even more troubling, though, was that both of their top two centres were lukewarm about their long-term prospects here. While Pierre-Luc Dubois indicated his interest in testing unrestricted free agency when he becomes eligible in 2024 (he'll be an RFA in 2023), a frustrated Mark Scheifele's first reaction to the end of the season was to ponder if he was still a fit here. Those comments were walked back somewhat in mid-summer, but what happens if things still don't go right in 2022-23?