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Trio of Jets' first-rounders shine as prospect tourney comes to a close

By Scott Billeck

It was Brad Lambert's first chance to show the Winnipeg Jets what he could do in one of their uniforms and the 19-year-old Finn took full advantage of the opportunity over the weekend in Penticton.

Lambert's goal tally could easily have been doubled, if not more. He drilled the post in Winnipeg's 4-1 loss to the Vancouver Canucks' kids on Sunday, and nearly pulled off an incredible deke on Sunday for what would have been his second goal of the game.

Nevertheless, the 30th pick in the 2022 NHL Draft in Montreal back in July was easily Winnipeg's standout player of the tournament, blending his mix of speed and imminent danger with the puck on his stick.

His goal on Monday exhibited savviness off the puck, picking the pocket of a Flame trying to exit his own zone before working with Cole Perfetti to create a couple of chances, ultimately ending in Lambert sliding a puck into a gaping cage.

Every time Lambert had the puck in his possession, he was seemingly moving it up the ice. If someone else had it, he was trying to find a soft area where he could receive it. He drove to the net, and would make space for himself with the puck to get a chance on net when working tight areas.

For all that's been said about his tough season last year in Liiga, the way he fell down the draft order in Montreal, and possible dwindling conviction after being left out of Finland's starting roster for the gold medal game against eventual victors Canada at the world juniors last month, none of that was evident in Lambert's game this weekend.

He oozed confidence with and without the puck, and this is a player who hasn't played a lot on North American ice. He looked at home on the smaller sheet.

It remains to be seen where the Jets see Lambert playing this year. The options range from sending him back to Finland to the WHL, the AHL and even the NHL if his play at training camp beginning later this week warrants it.

The WHL seems less likely for a player that's played among men since the 2019-20 season. The AHL seems more apt, and if Lambert can harness what he showed in Penticton, he'll also be forcing himself into the conversation of some NHL time over the next few weeks.

Fellow first-rounders Cole Perfetti and Chaz Lucius also tallied on Monday. Lucius finished a nice one-timer in the slot after a slick feed from undrafted forward Tyler Boland in the second period.

The 2021 18th overall pick was fairly quiet in the first two games, hardly a surprise given he hasn't played any meaningful hockey since last winter due to injury. He finished with a goal and an assist.

Perfetti registered the same stat line for the tournament. He, too, hadn't played anything important since a shoulder injury, and subsequent back ailment ended his season back in February. Still, Perfetti put in three games of solid work, showing off his excellent vision and defensive skills while creating a number of scoring opportunities that just weren't buried.

For both Perfetti and Lucius, the tournament was simply about getting the pair back into game action.

Their 1-2 record won't be weighted too heavily either as the team is in the midst of a system change under new head coach Rick Bowness.

If anything, Winnipeg's pool of prospects played guinea pig for what Bowness will be looking to install when training camp kicks off on Thursday.

Meanwhile, among the undrafted contingent at the tournament, Boland stood out on the ice and on the scoresheet, scoring twice and adding an assist.

Boland, 26, played in the QMJHL for four seasons before spending the next four at the University of New Brunswick. Last season, he played 13 games for the Manitoba Moose, while also playing a further 19 in the ECHL.

Speaking of fellow Moose players, Greg Meireles had a pair of goals and a helper during the tournament. A sixth-round pick by the Florida Panthers in 2019, Meireles played 49 games with the Moose last season and is expected to feature once again for the farm club.

The 23-year-old could become a depth option for the Jets down the line.

The Athletic

<https://theathletic.com/3608585/2022/09/19/winnipeg-jets-kevin-cheveldayoff-focused-season/>

Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff Q&A: 'We're solely focused on this season right now'

By Thomas Drance

Over the course of the Penticton Young Stars tournament, The Athletic conducted one-on-one interviews with the four general managers from the Western Canadian teams.

On Monday morning, ahead of his club's final game at the prospect tournament, we caught up at length with Winnipeg Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff.

During a wide-ranging, on-the-record conversation, Cheveldayoff discussed changing the Jets captaincy, tough conversations with Mark Scheifele, his new-look coaching staff, pursuing Barry Trotz this offseason and his expectations for this upcoming season.

The following interview has been edited for clarity and readability.

What's your reaction to the return to the Penticton tournament, and how does your organization use it for player development?

It's great, especially in our cycle of development right now.

For a few years we traded away some draft picks and didn't have a lot coming into our system. Recently we had two first-round picks, and this gives us a chance to see some of the players we didn't get to see as often during COVID-19.

It's a good tournament to get that kick-off evaluation for our kids. And for some of them it will hopefully give them a bit of a leg up at training camp, since they'll have gone through some meaningful games before getting into camp next week.

What are your thoughts on the format of the tournament, or potential expansion of the tournament?

We like the potential of playing three games.

If we get it into a tournament format, sure, but we like that it's a three-game tournament. We'd be open to format changes, so long as it was three games, whatever fashion you wanted to have it.

If expansion is expanded, great, but formats can get a bit murky when you add teams and we like the current format as it is.

You have one of the younger prospect groups at this tournament. For a player like Cole Perfetti, how do you evaluate what you see from him, with that in mind?

From our evaluation process with Cole specifically, this is all about him getting back into the games.

He missed so much time and it was unfortunate time too, because we had other injuries — like Mark Scheifele and at different points at time Blake Wheeler was down — and he was hurt at the same time too, where he could've benefitted from that opportunity.

So this was a good jumping-off point for him. He couldn't go to the world juniors this summer because he wasn't ready from an injury standpoint still, he was still ramping it up, but we knew he had this in front of him, to knock the rust off before training camp.

And in general, knowing that you have a younger group at this tournament, how much does that have to be weighed in context when you look at your group's performance this week?

It's watching each individual player, that's what you're trying to do. The wins and losses, so to speak, don't matter as much as competing as a team.

We're learning new systems, organizationally systems are changing, so you're not going to get a lot of time to gel, but what you are seeing is guys sitting at the table together and eating dinner. They're getting that bonding thing of being a Winnipeg Jet. That's an opportunity that these tournaments really allow, in terms of that kind of growth.

You've got Rick Bowness coming, you've got Scott Arniel coming back, you've got Marty Johnston moving up, Brad Lauer coming in. Lots of changes behind the bench. Are you able to explain who will have what portfolio and be responsible for what, and what you'll hope to get out of a new-look group?

Bringing Rick in was a big change for our organization. One of the first things that happened when we spoke with Rick, was that he wanted to bring in Arniel as an associate coach. Scott had interviewed really well for the head coaching position as well, and it became pretty clear that there was some good synergy between the two.

Scott is going to be running the defense and the penalty kill, and Lauer worked with Rick in Tampa Bay, so there's a good relationship there and a lot of familiarity. He'll be running the forwards and the power play, or at least the power play, while helping out with the forwards.

And Bones will contribute to every area and have the ultimate oversight, obviously, being the head coach.

Marty will be the eye in the sky, with the different portfolios that come with that. We have Wade Flaherty coming back as well, and him and Connor Hellebuyck have really good chemistry which is huge.

With Johnston moving up, is there anything fans can read into, in terms of implying that perhaps you want some more data-driven decision-making influencing tactics?

We have a lot of behind-the-scenes stuff on that, which people don't really know.

Matt Prefontaine runs a lot of the analytics stuff from a coaching perspective, and we have a robust system there. Marty isn't there as much from an analytics perspective, it's more about the video and tactical assistance. That's what I think Bowness wants from him.

Lots of murmurings around your club over the course of the summer, and connecting you with Barry Trotz. We're in the Okanagan, and in this part of the world, I have to ask about him. What are you able to share about your club's pursuit of Trotz and what transpired in terms of constructing your coaching staff over the course of the offseason?

When we made the change, and decided we needed change, we obviously looked at who might be available and what different opportunities there were.

Then shockingly Barry became available. And so I went and sat with him very early in the process and he made it very clear, at that point in time, that he was going to take his time. He was clear that he wasn't going to make a decision quickly, that it was a family decision that was going to drive him.

He said, "If you're still interested, that's just the way it's going to be."

We had lots of different conversations with him throughout the course of time and at one point he said "Look, I've decided I'm not coaching." When that happened, Bowness became the guy we targeted, and we went to finish it quickly.

You've got uncertainty on the horizon with a bunch of your star players — Mark Scheifele, Pierre-Luc Dubois and Blake Wheeler — all expiring in 2024. Does that impact your ambition for what your club needs to accomplish this season and next?

So we're solely focused on this season right now, I don't know that you can focus on two years down the road on anything. Things change very quickly.

One of the things I do believe this group has, is that they're a good hockey team. We underachieved last year.

There's a tremendous sense that they've got something to prove, because to a man, there was disappointment that we didn't achieve any of our goals last season.

At this point in time last year, the expectations were very high and justifiably so. This group is trying to justify that excitement from a year ago.

At the end of last season, Mark Scheifele said he needed to have some tough conversations with you. Did those conversations transpire?

Yeah they did. I don't remember if we met that day, or the next day at his exit meeting, but we had a great conversation. We talked a lot about a lot of different things and we needed to.

I think he's in a good head space right now, and I think Bowness and him have clicked really well. I think there's clarity on what Bowness expects from Scheifele, and obviously over the last couple of days here with the restructuring of our leadership group, it's about guys like Scheifele, who we're looking to see take that next step — as he is.

There's a real level of excitement in a player like Scheifele this season.

What were the conversations like with existing players, with Bowness and with management in deciding to change your formal leadership group?

Bowness and I had a lot of conversations, obviously, about different things.

Once Bowness took over from a coaching perspective, he had a lot of conversations with players, more than I did. You're trying to build that whole new family again for him. Everyone is new, everyone is getting to know him, everyone is trying to get a sense of his expectations, his demands, our systems are going to change, we're going to have a dramatic type of shift in how Bowness wants to play.

Those are the types of conversations that have led, I think, to a lot of excitement for a lot of guys.

You've got a surplus of defenders going into training camp, it seems, is there any additional business you're hoping to take care of going into training camp or prior to the start of the season?

I think it's important that we give Bowness a chance to learn about these players. We've looked at PTOs and different things like that, but one thing we're trying to be mindful of is that every player is new for Bowness. He's coached against them, but these are new players for him and I

want to give him the best opportunity to make his judgment of our players. Then we'll go from there.

We're fortunate that we do have a good defense and depth on defense, and we just need to grow that. It's all about trying to find that right combination to win this year.

<https://theathletic.com/3607107/2022/09/19/canucks-flames-oilers-jets-young-stars/>

Canucks, Flames, Oilers, Jets: 8 observations from Penticton Young Stars

By Thomas Drance and Harman Dayal

The atmosphere at the Penticton Young Stars tournament this weekend was electric.

You could see Calgary Flames and Edmonton Oilers fans at games featuring the Vancouver Canucks and Winnipeg Jets. The Okanagan is hockey country, and the attendees are serious hockey fans.

The Athletic was there in Penticton this weekend chatting with prospects and executives and various tournament officials while taking in all six games. Here's our notebook featuring eight observations from the tournament, including a list of disappointments and standouts from the four Western Canadian teams involved.

1. Philip Broberg gets swole

Philip Broberg is overwhelmingly likely to be an everyday NHL player for the Edmonton Oilers this season. The opportunity awaits, and general manager Ken Holland is explicitly saving a spot on the roster for Broberg — or one of the organization's less heralded young defenders — to make the team.

A top-10 pick at the 2019 NHL Draft, Broberg was productive in the American League in his first season of North American professional hockey last season, and got into 23 games at the NHL level — and an additional Stanley Cup playoff game. That's a solid season for a 20-year-old defender, but for the win-now Oilers, they need a bit more from Broberg this upcoming season — especially in his own end.

Among all Oilers defenders that played at least 20 games last season, Broberg was on the ice for the highest rate of goals against at five-on-five last season. Now, a big part of that was bad cluster luck, as Broberg held an on-ice save percentage south of .880, but it's understandable that the club challenged him to get bigger and stronger and better at preventing goals this offseason.

"Last year was my first year over here and I learned a lot," Broberg told The Athletic prior to the tournament. "I really took this offseason to get better at stuff I really needed to get better at, I got stronger and I'm ready to go."

"I wanted to get more physical, stronger, and to be able to play a more complete defensive game," Broberg continued. "So I put on some pounds and got stronger, and I'm happy with my summer."

While summering in Stockholm, Broberg put on more than 10 additional pounds. And that meant lots of meals — four or five meals a day, depending on his workout routine — lots of sleep, and various on- and off-ice training sessions, with a physical training group that included New Jersey Devils forward Jesper Bratt and Alexander Holtz, in addition to recent Minnesota Wild first-round pick Liam Öhgren.

“A lot of training, a lot of good sleep and healthy, good food,” Broberg said of how he spent his offseason. “Lots of white fish, black rice and some potatoes.”

Bulking up comes with some sacrifice, particularly when it comes to taste.

“Black rice doesn’t taste like much, it just tastes like sandpaper,” Broberg said, of the item he ate this summer that was the most displeasing. “I just eat it with chicken, throw it on the grill, it’s good to go.”

For Broberg and the Oilers, part of the issue — they felt — with his defensive game was strength related. There’s hope internally that putting on some weight will itself help Broberg be less permissive as a defensive force at the NHL level next season.

Beyond that though, this was also a summer of study for Broberg. Watching film, critiquing his game, figuring out exactly how to have the impact the Oilers are going to require from their top blue-line prospect.

“I watched the games from last year,” Broberg said. “You watch your own games and see where if you might’ve been a bit quicker, or read the game faster, maybe you could’ve been there. It’s all that kind of stuff.”

“They want me to be a more complete player and I know I need to get better at the defensive part of the game. I really dug in on that this summer.”

2. Cole Perfetti’s competitiveness

If Broberg is the most likely player from this weekend’s Young Stars tournament to be an NHL regular next season, and that seems to be a fair assumption, then Winnipeg Jets forward Cole Perfetti is 1B.

Drafted at No. 10 in 2020, Perfetti is only 20 years old and has already starred at the international level — winning silver at the world juniors in 2021, and gold at the worlds in Latvia later that year — been productive across 18 NHL games and recorded 41 points in 49 American League games as a 19- and 20-year-old. Perfetti is one of the top rookies in the sport, on the fast track to NHL stardom.

That Perfetti’s individual quality stood out was apparent in Penticton this weekend, even as the Jets’ prospect tournament team struggled mightily.

After the first game in particular, Perfetti had been the most electric individual player on the ice by far, and yet he’d turned over a puck that led indirectly — there were multiple bad luck bounces involved, and a divot on the ice surface that played a crucial role too — to the game-winning goal for the Oilers prospects.

We'd hoped to chat with Perfetti, just generally, about the way that he sees the game. To watch him play is to immediately notice that his anticipation and his playmaking ability are nothing short of special. He's the rare player who seems to see the ice the way Deep Blue sees a chess board.

The young Jets forward, however, was too dialed in on the result. Too competitive, too wrapped up in a giveaway that no scout or hockey operations staffer or coach (or media member, for that matter) would even note as anything but bad luck, to really discuss anything else.

"First things first, I want to win," Perfetti said. "I haven't played hockey in so long, you want to compete, you want to battle, you want to come out on top, you want to be the winner.

"Personally this weekend I want to prove that I'm healthy, that I'm in a good spot, that everything is great and that I put the work in this summer, that I'm ready to play at the next level full-time ... For 95 percent of the game I thought I was doing that, then there's a mental error and it bites you in the butt.

"So yeah, I was happy how the game went until that giveaway," Perfetti continued. "You can make 20 nice plays all game, but the giveaway is what they remember. No matter what else you do, you can't make that play. It's a play that I make 100 times, I can make it asleep, you don't even think about it, but then it's an unfortunate bounce. You just can't do that."

Honestly, we came away impressed. Intensity and perfectionism and having high expectations of oneself, hating to lose maybe even more than one likes to win, can be a driver of excellence. Particularly in a sport like hockey, where individuals exert such fleeting control over on-ice outcomes.

And it paid off for the Jets' burgeoning star, who took over the third period of Winnipeg's final tournament game on Monday, willing the winless Jets prospects group to at least one victory in Penticton.

Perfetti has the skill level to play in the NHL this season. He has the will, however, to be special.

3. Carter Savoie's summer glow up

Carter Savoie was all over the ice in Edmonton's first game, easily the standout player from both teams. He thoroughly impressed with his high-energy work closing on pucks, forcing turnovers and sticking out as a thorn in Winnipeg's side all game. Anyone watching Savoie for the first time on Friday night would have concluded that this Energizer bunny style was ingrained in his DNA and must be one of the biggest strengths of his game.

That's ironic because when Savoie met with the Oilers this summer, that's exactly what they told him his game was lacking. They knew Savoie was a gifted one-shot scorer, fresh off an electric sophomore campaign with 23 goals and 45 points in 39 games for the University of Denver in the NCAA, but to excel in pro hockey he needed to be more than a one-dimensional scoring threat.

Savoie's performance to start the tournament made a huge statement that he means business in that regard.

“That’s my next biggest step in what I need to work on right now,” Savoie said about his play away from the puck. “To get to that next level, I think that’s gonna push me through.”

“Obviously I lacked a little bit in school (NCAA) pressuring pucks at times, but I think if I put my mind to it and stay consistent, keep growing routines on the ice, it should help out my game a lot and it gives me a lot more chances on the ice to allow my skill to take over as well.”

The last line in that quote is interesting. It proves an understanding that disrupting plays on the forecheck and improving defensively will also give him the puck possession necessary to take games over with his offensive skill set. Young players sometimes struggle to understand why they need to work tirelessly away from the puck when they’re so gifted offensively. It’s extremely taxing and definitely not a fun part of the game. Plus, they’ve probably never been held accountable for it the same way at lower levels when they could dominate regardless. But when a player fully grasps that their two-way effectiveness can give them more offensive chances, it’s a lot easier and more motivating to bolster those areas.

Savoie’s stock has climbed significantly since being drafted in the fourth round in 2020. He signed an ELC with the Oilers late last spring and is primed for a jump to the AHL. When you’re an elite college player, it’s easy to underestimate how challenging the American League jump can be. Savoie’s two-game AHL cameo was a really positive, eye-opening experience.

“Pro hockey is kind of in a world of its own, college doesn’t compare, junior doesn’t compare,” said Savoie. “It’s a lot faster in the American League compared to college. For me to gain that experience last year and bring in that confidence this year into camp was really big.”

Savoie understood that it was time for his game to mature. No more lack of engagement away from the puck. No more cheating for offense. Time to become fitter, faster, stronger and more committed defensively.

“My conditioning was a big thing for me this summer,” said Savoie. “Getting in game shape, making sure I can play full games and not get tired out there.”

Savoie was quieter through the rest of the tournament and it’s going to take time for his game to fully mature and round out, but he already seems to have taken important steps.

4. How the Canucks lured Nils Åman to North America

Young Stars was the first chance for the Canucks to officially welcome Nils Åman and Linus Karlsson, a pair of Swedish prospects arriving from the SHL. Both are versatile in being able to play wing and centre and as older prospects with abundant pro experience, they could become viable depth options for the big club this season.

Karlsson ended up on the wing, while Åman was slotted at centre. Åman was glad he’s gotten a chance down the middle — it’s a rarer position that could enhance his odds of playing NHL games at some point given that the club doesn’t have a ton of depth centre options.

“When you’re playing centre, there’s a little bit more responsibility in the defensive zone and that’s what I like, being a two-way centre, playing at both ends,” said Åman. “It’s tough to play centre in the NHL so it’s good to be able to (have the versatility to play it).”

Åman was an unsigned 2020 sixth-round pick of the Avalanche. Prior to signing with Vancouver, he said in an interview that he'd rather play in Sweden rather than the AHL. That's changed — Åman is totally on board with spending the season in Abbotsford if he can't crack the NHL roster.

How were the Canucks able to lure Åman?

Allvin spent a long time with the Leksands IF organization as a player, the same club Åman played for. Between Allvin and the Sedins, the Canucks were able to relate better to Åman and make him feel comfortable in a way few other organizations could.

"It just felt good when they called me. I talked to Allvin and the Sedin brothers — they're Swedes so I got a good connection and it just felt right to sign in Vancouver," said Åman. "Of course, the Swedish connection made it more comfortable, you can speak a little bit more at your own language."

The Sedins' shift to the player development department means they'll be spending a lot more time in Abbotsford, which was a really sweet bonus as well: "It's a great opportunity for me, they're two Hall of Famers and two of the greatest players of all time, so it's going to be great to work with them."

5. Welcome to the Brad Lambert show

The Jets had another pair of first-round picks on display in Brad Lambert and Chaz Lucius.

Lambert was one of the most electrifying players to watch out of all four teams. Nobody was able to use their speed to consistently get behind defenses the way he was.

What makes Lambert so special is he combines his blistering speed with lightning-quick hands. High-end straight-line skaters are a dime a dozen, but when you combine that pace with elite hands, it's a nearly unstoppable combination. It's why Lambert is such a daring one-on-one attacker. He created chances off the rush but he's also slippery at spinning off checks and attacking the middle.

He hit a post in Sunday's game as well.

Lambert showed some areas to improve on, too. His commitment away from the puck could use work and he's a bit dependent on teammates to get him the puck in dangerous spots. The most glaring weakness, however, was his vision and decision-making with the puck. Below, you'll see a rush where Lambert was fed a pass on the entry, cut back and then made a spinning backhand pass right to an Edmonton Oiler with no teammate even close. He literally just threw the puck away.

There's tons of time for Lambert to work out those kinks in his game. He made a strong impression overall which is quite impressive considering he's only 18. Lambert has such a dynamic offensive tool kit, the Jets should be thrilled that he somehow fell all the way to No. 30.

Lucius, on the other hand, was quieter. He never really seemed to find his rhythm. He was fighting the puck a little bit and had a couple of bad turnovers as well.

In Lucius' defense, his defenders and wingers weren't able to get him many touches with the puck in space. There were occasional flashes of skill and he looked more comfortable in the final game where he scored. It wasn't quite the tournament performance he would have hoped for overall, though.

6. Arshdeep Bains' hockey sense shines

Sometimes it takes a while to surface, other times you see it right away. For Arshdeep Bains, you could see the vision and smarts from the moment he stepped on the sheet of ice for practice at the South Okanagan Events Centre.

Bains' way of seeing the ice, quickly processing his offensive options and always making the right play was immediately noticeable just from the club's rush drills. He can find his teammates in space and when there isn't an obvious option, he's crafty enough to change speeds and angles or stall to buy time for new lanes to open.

Give Bains time and space and he'll find the dangerous seam to set up a scoring chance.

The challenge for Bains will be finding time and space to make plays as his skating definitely lacks a separation gear. Right now, there aren't enough dynamic qualities in his game. Still, the potential was evident with his hockey sense and crisp passing.

Bains already turns 22 in January so he needed to leave some kind of impression to prove there's upside. He wasn't able to dominate or take over, but he was solid through the tournament which was a positive sign.

With family in attendance, his first goal in Canucks' colours must have meant something special too.

7. Disappointments

We wanted to empty our notebook after watching every game at the tournament this past weekend and share a thorough but incomplete list of the standouts and disappointments that stood out to us from the six viewings we had at Penticton Young Stars. Note that we graded on a bit of a curve, so a standout performance from a 23-year-old was more likely to be omitted than one from a 19-year-old player, and visa versa.

Jakob Pelletier, C, Calgary — Really underwhelming in the first two games and much better in the third. Hockey IQ and skill set is evident, he connects play really well. Had probably the highest-end pass in the tournament in Calgary's third game, an absolutely sick backhand saucer pass off of the rush which should've resulted in a goal. Might be the sort of player poorly suited to this sort of scrumbly half-junior level/half-pro level tournament environment, particularly as his wingers and Calgary's defenders just struggled to combine with him on team-level moves. Productive straight-line player, always around the puck, but not particularly flashy. Was at his best when put on a line with Zary for a stretch in the second game and for the entirety of Calgary's third contest.

Chaz Lucius, C, Winnipeg — Like Pelletier, there were a few centremen at this tournament that we think were hard done by as a result of the quality of their linemates and defenders, and Lucius was among them. Very quiet in the first game but didn't have many opportunities to carry

the puck. He made a couple of clumsy decisions when he had the chance. Ways away still, but the skating and work rate showed.

Jérémie Poirier, D, Calgary — Jérémie Poirier really struggled with his decision making throughout the tournament. Good skill and offensive instincts, but he struggled to hold the blue line and the structural elements of his game — including his skating — looked very raw.

Nils Åman, C, Vancouver — Like Lucius and Pelletier, this particular level of hockey didn't do him any favours. Some flashes where the professional polish and details in his game showed through with the puck. Åman's frame and skating make him feel like a very safe bet to play NHL games in the near future, but he was quieter at this tournament than we'd have expected considering his experience.

Daniel Torgersson, LW, Winnipeg — Jets 20-year-old second-round pick from 2020 struggled mightily to control the puck throughout the tournament. Big frame, good wheels, but very raw. Fought the puck to the point where we're suspicious — even after just a couple of viewings — that his skill level is high enough to challenge for an NHL job in the next couple of years, which is very disappointing considering his draft cost. Was a particularly poor fit in the bumper spot on Winnipeg's first power-play unit in Game 1, was dropped down the lineup and off the power play entirely in the second game.

Dustin Wolf, G, Calgary — One of the best goaltenders outside of the NHL, but didn't have his best outing this weekend. Was much better in the first game he played, although the Canucks began to challenge his rebound control in the third period — which resulted in the game-winning goal. Played back-to-back and struggled in his second outing, as he was beaten cleanly on low percentage rush wrist shots on two occasions.

8. Standouts

Dylan Holloway, LW, Oilers — Holloway had a quiet first game but quickly took over the tournament and was easily the best player on the tournament's top team. Holloway was particularly good in the bumper spot on the Oilers power play, and seems to have a knack for finding space. Broadly built with plus wheels, Holloway looked NHL ready throughout the tournament.

Cole Perfetti, C, Winnipeg — Winnipeg's most consistently dangerous and reliable forward in the tournament. Supported the breakout really well, did an excellent job carrying the puck through the neutral zone with pace. Confident and assertive with his shot and was unlucky not to have scored more considering how much he generated. Consistently created chances off the rush and drew penalties. Tracked very well on the backcheck to apply pressure, steal pucks away.

Danila Klimovich, RW, Vancouver — Still needs a lot of work defensively. Clearly working hard still to acclimatize. Saw it as a big step that he was able to do media without a translator. Love hearing that he's working with an English tutor. Good sign of off-ice maturity, which he's going to need because there are still a lot of holes in his game. All the skill in the world and NHL-ready size, but his pace needs to improve, his shot needs to be more accurate and while he's a wizard with the puck, he doesn't seem to get around checkers as easily as you'd think he would considering his raw puck control talent.

Connor Zary, LW, Calgary — Super competitive. Got openly, visibly frustrated with the Flames losing a second consecutive game with some of the puck-handling decisions of his linemates, which I personally didn't mind, because he was right when it happened. Went full tilt in that second game with the team struggling, running the goaltender and trying to do too much. Pace has long been the knock on Zary and while it's still a work in progress, his skating looked nearly NHL-ready to me. He might not be a burner, but the way he gets around reminds me a bit of Canucks forward Brock Boeser, who is certainly fast enough to be extremely productive in the NHL. Zary is just a lot to handle with the puck on his stick. At this level, he bull-rushed through checkers with apparent ease. Had a couple of shots that he probably should've taken but passed off of, including a really egregious non-shot on the PP in the game versus Vancouver. Clearly has a high hockey IQ, but the three games felt almost like he was a goal or a bounce away from having it click and the bounce just never really came.

Carter Savoie, RW, Edmonton — Impressive motor away from the puck, much better than how scouts have described it in years past. Closed defenders quickly on the forecheck, won battles along the wall and retrieved pucks. Shot had lots of zest to it, clearly a strong weapon. Displayed good vision on the power play. Quiet in Game 2 but the best player from either team in Edmonton's first game.

Adam Klapka, RW, Calgary — The 6-foot-8 forward was particularly impressive for the discipline with which he just attacked the blue paint. Absolutely lived in the crease, went there whenever he had the chance to, but would stay high when it was appropriate, which I think speaks well to his hockey IQ. Surprisingly quick, exceptional puck control considering his size, and enough of a mean streak that he laid out Tristen Nielsen after objecting to a hit on his teammate. Calgary has an interesting project on their hands.

Arshdeep Bains, LW, Vancouver — There's some work to be done on his pace, but we doubt it holds him back even if it doesn't improve because of how quickly he processes the game. We'd heard him described by scouts as a smart player, but you really have to see it to understand it. Excellent decision-making at the defensive half-wall, making sure to get pucks out and usually got pucks out that his linemates had a chance to contest. NHL-level anticipation. That sort of defensive awareness and intelligence will give him the versatility to play bottom-six minutes at the NHL level, even if his playmaking and offensive skill set don't play up in the NHL. Collection of spins and overall craftiness both with control and in contested battles was wildly impressive. If that translates to the professional game, there's a real chance he's a player.

Michael Kesselring, D, Edmonton — Strong, physical presence and a pretty good skater considering that skill set. I'd imagine he impressed Oilers brass with his mean streak, first pass and overall reliability throughout the tournament.

Xavier Bourgault, RW, Edmonton — Quiet tournament for the most part, but showed in flashes the sort of puck control in traffic that made him a first-round pick. Needs more seasoning and wasn't quite as creative as you might prefer him to be, but he manufactured opportunities with his skating and puck handling. An intriguing prospect with a couple of NHL-ready skills, which bodes well for a 19-year-old skater.

Tristen Nielsen, LW, Vancouver (AHL contract) — Absolute pest. Looked like he has low-end, NHL-level puck-control ability. Strong skater. Could be an American League breakout candidate and may challenge to be converted to an entry-level deal at some point this season. His straight-line game was a very good compliment for Klimovich and was a significant driver of Klimovich's Game 2 breakout.

The Hockey News

<https://thehockeynews.com/news/brad-lamberts-speed-and-skill-are-well-suited-for-the-nhl>

BRAD LAMBERT'S SPEED AND SKILL ARE WELL-SUITED FOR THE NHL

BY CAROL SCHRAM

PENTICTON, B.C. - As he begins his transition to North American hockey, Winnipeg Jets prospect Brad Lambert is a step ahead of most of his European peers.

Born and raised in Lahti, Finland, Lambert came up through the Finnish hockey system. But Saskatchewan is the home base for his father's family, and visits were frequent.

"Before I started school, I spent almost half of my time there," said the 18-year-old forward after practice Saturday at the Young Stars Classic. "Then, when I started going to school, I spent the winters in Finland for the school year there and then spent the summers in Saskatoon."

Culture shock can be an issue when European players make the jump to North America to begin their NHL careers. After being drafted 30th overall by the team that's just 500 miles east of his Canadian home base, Lambert's adjustment so far has been silky smooth.

"I was in Winnipeg once before," he said. "I was about 10 years old, so I didn't remember much. But when I landed in Winnipeg, it felt a lot like home. You know, it's a lot like Saskatoon, a bit bigger, but it felt a lot like home."

The NHL-style game could also be a good fit for Lambert's toolkit, which includes soft hands and high-end speed which earned him a pro contract in Finland's Liiga at just 15 years old.

"As far as the playing structure goes, it's a little bit different," he said of his first taste of Winnipeg Jets hockey. "I think it's a faster pace, harder on the forecheck and stuff like that. The Finnish system was to sit back quite a bit, play a trap."

"Here, we go quite a bit, which I actually like playing with."

His skills have been on display in Penticton, where he made a strong first impression with the Jets.

Friday night, he opened the scoring and tallied an assist in Winnipeg's 3-2 loss to the Edmonton Oilers.

On Monday, he connected again in the first period of Winnipeg's 5-3 win over the Calgary Flames. The goal was an easy tap-in, but Lambert started the play by forcing a blue-line turnover to set up a quick-strike 3-on-1 that put the Flames' defenders on their heels.

Lambert's Penticton experience has also included a touch of the familiar. He roomed with 21-year-old Henri Nikkanen, his teammate from the Lahti Pelicans in Finland's Liiga last season. A fourth-round pick by Winnipeg in 2019, the 6'4" center is also at his first NHL training camp after finishing out last year with a handful of games with the AHL's Manitoba Moose.

The Jets' Young Stars roster also includes 22-year-old Finnish goaltending prospect Oskari Salminen, who was signed as a free agent last May.

"It's nice to have a few guys to speak Finnish to," Lambert said. "Everyone's been awesome. I've gotten to know a lot of the guys. They've been great, so it's been a lot of fun."

For years, Lambert was regarded as one of the top prospects for the 2022 draft. Injuries and illness put a drag on his production last season, limiting him to just 10 points in 49 games with two teams in Liiga. At season's end, he was ranked 10th among international skaters by NHL Central Scouting. On draft day in Montreal, he slipped to 30th before being snapped up by the Jets.

Undaunted, he's aiming high as he begins his NHL journey.

"I'm going to try to do everything I can in training camp to earn a spot on the team," he said. "Just go out there and do everything I can do here (at Young Stars) and then at training camp. We'll see, after that, where they put me."

His versatility is a strength. Listed as a center when he was drafted, he lined up at left wing in Penticton on Monday, showing good chemistry and those trademark wheels on a line with Cole Perfetti and Greg Meireles.

If he doesn't make the big club, he could return to Finland. Because he was drafted out of Europe, he's also eligible to play in the American Hockey League. Canadian major junior could also be a possibility, but seems unlikely: other than national team play at the World Junior Championship, Lambert hasn't played at the U-20 level since the 2019-20 season.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/video/mclennan-stripping-wheeler-of-captaincy-is-an-indictment-on-jets-leadership-group~2524397>

McLennan: Stripping Wheeler of captaincy is an indictment on Jets' leadership group (VIDEO)

The Jets started the season with some noise by stripping Blake Wheeler of his captaincy. That's Hockey discusses the message Rick Bowness is sending to his new club, and some players that need to step up.

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/jets-discuss-leadership-change-heading-into-new-season~2524176>

Jets discuss leadership change heading into new season (VIDEO)

Blake Wheeler says losing the Jets' captaincy won't change anything about his approach to the team and says it even pours a little gas on the fire. New head coach Rick Bowness explains why Winnipeg wanted to start fresh with the team's leadership.

www.winnipegjets.com

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/jets-end-young-stars-classic-with-victory-over-flames/c-335643562>

Jets end Young Stars Classic with victory over Flames DiVincentiis makes 44 saves; Perfetti, Lambert, and Lucius score in win

by Mitchell Clinton @MitchellClinton / WinnipegJets.com

A battle between two teams looking to end the Young Stars Classic tournament on a high note went in favour of the Winnipeg Jets on Monday.

The three first round picks in the Jets line-up - Cole Perfetti, Chaz Lucius, and Brad Lambert - all found the back of the net in a 5-3 win, while Dominic DiVincentiis put up an incredible 44-save performance.

Besides being a back-up in Sunday's loss to Vancouver, Monday's tilt was the first time DiVincentiis had put on a Jets jersey with his name on it since being selected in the seventh round of the 2022 NHL Draft - and he made sure he'd have a good memory to go with it.

"It was a surreal moment when I walked in the room yesterday and saw my jersey hanging up. I was kind of in shock," said DiVincentiis. "I think it was definitely a team effort. They battled hard for me here. Throughout the week here, that was what the coaches designed here - have compete in every single game and sacrifice for each other."

The rest of the Jets offence came from Tyler Boland and Greg Meireles.

In a tournament all about compete, head coach Mark Morrison liked what he saw from his group.

"I thought they competed well all three games, especially today with back-to-back and three in four," said Morrison. "We out competed our opponent and we won the game."

Chris Sedoff opened the scoring for the Flames 6:55 into the first period when his wristed from the top of the right circle got through some bodies in front of Domeniic DiVincentiis.

But the Jets got that one back late in the opening frame. Tyrel Bauer's point shot was stopped, but Greg Meireles was there to pop the rebound into open ice on the left side of the net. That's where Lambert, Winnipeg's 30th overall pick in the 2022 NHL Draft, was waiting. Lambert made no mistake, potting his second goal of the tournament to even things up at one through 20 minutes.

The goal itself may have been a tap in, but Lambert forced a turnover deep in the Calgary zone earlier in the shift which allowed the Jets to continue that offensive zone percentage. With Lambert's assist later in the game, he earned his second multi-point game of the tournament.

"We finally found the net on some five-on-five goals," said Morrison. "They came at us hard. A little bit of fatigue in the back-to-back games, but I thought our goalie did a great job. He did a great job in weathering the storm a little bit. He gave us time to get our legs under us."

Lucius helped the Jets get their first lead of the game by burying a drop pass from Boland in the slot and ripping it past Daniil Chechelev 5:46 into the second.

The 2021 first-round pick had a couple chances on Sunday, but said Monday's win over Calgary was the best he's felt all tournament.

"The biggest thing was getting my legs under me," Lucius said. "Getting the first two games under my belt, I felt a little sloppy and a little rusty. This third game I felt it really came together and I was playing a 200-foot game."

Calgary's Jakob Pelletier tied the game in the opening minute of the third, but Perfetti answered right back for Winnipeg with a perfect wrister from the left circle. The response came 28 seconds after Pelletier's goal.

The seesaw continued when Emilio Pettersen's snap shot from the top of the circle got past a screened DiVincentiis just before five minutes had expired in the final period.

That was the last puck to get past the Jets goaltender though.

"It's a new game speed for me, every shot for me was slow it down and see it as slow as I can," said DiVincentiis. "Even in situations where I had to make some saves for the team, that was stuff they battled for and made some big saves, and they got some big goals for me to get this win."

Just past the midway mark of the third, the Jets took the lead for good when a falling Meireles got a stick on a point shot from Simon Lundmark to make it 4-3.

To seal the deal, Lucius won a late face-off with an empty net, which led to Boland's empty netter.

"Them believing in me in that situation, it was nice to win it and get out of the zone and get the goal on the empty net," Lucius said. "I was really happy with it."

He's going to try and use that momentum when he arrives for Jets training camp in just a couple days.

"There is more to build off of in my game," said Lucius. "This is a great start and I feel like I really got my feet under me here. I'm going to give it my best shot."