

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2022/09/06/jets-d-man-was-a-big-brother-on-ice>

Jets D-man was 'a big brother on ice'

By: Mike Sawatzky

Morris Lukowich remembers Scott Campbell was like a big brother on the ice.

"He was huge in getting me out of trouble," said the former NHLer on Tuesday, days after the death of his friend and former teammate. "Being a small guy, a lot of times guys would take really advantage and really take good runs at me. One of the ways I would protect myself was I was OK with cross-checking some of these guys right across the face in order to slow them down. Well, they didn't take very well to that and Scotty would quite often come in and rescue me where I was definitely in over my head."

Campbell, 65, died Saturday after an 11-month struggle with cancer.

A swashbuckling 6-3, 205-pound defenceman during his playing days, Campbell was chosen first overall by the Houston Aeros in the 1977 WHA Amateur Draft and ninth overall in the NHL Draft by the St. Louis Blues. He joined Aeros after a superb junior career before moving to the Winnipeg Jets and a WHA championship in 1978-79. He then played for the Jets for two seasons after the franchise was absorbed by the NHL.

Chronic asthma forced him to retire from the pro ranks after the 1981-82 season.

"When he came to Houston in his first year, you could never tell you he was a rookie because what he did, what he said and how he handled himself was well beyond his age," said former teammate Terry Ruskowski by phone from his home in Dallas. "He was smart and he was quick in learning the systems that we had."

Lukowich, Campbell's teammate in Houston and Winnipeg, was staggered by the news of Campbell's death but he also remembered the good times.

"When he came to Houston, he and I were roommates — we shared a two-bedroom apartment — and so we just hung out so much," said Lukowich from Calgary. "We went to breakfast together, when out after games. Heck, I just have a huge smile on my face just thinking about some of the fun times that we had."

"He was a huge fan of the International House of Pancakes and we would be there all the time. Oh my gosh, he would have these pancakes with whipping cream and strawberries and he'd be piling up the syrup. I would ask him, 'How is this possibly healthy?' "

Jimmy Mann, Winnipeg's first-round draft choice in 1979, was always grateful for Campbell's guidance in the early years of his career.

"I was so young — I was 20 years old — and I was trying to figure out how everything would work and Scotty was always there to give you advice," said Mann from Trois Rivières, Que. "He

sort of took me under his wing. He was a very quiet guy, he wasn't a rambunctious but he was funny at the same time.

"It didn't take you long to be close to Scotty. He was a great team guy and you could lean on him and you felt really comfortable at the beginning when you got to know him."

Ruskowski recalled an encounter with Campbell when Winnipeg played Chicago shortly after the Blackhawks claimed Ruskowski from the Jets in the expansion draft. Ruskowski wacked Campbell with his stick and Campbell responded with a two-hander of his own, but the friends could leave the antagonism on the ice.

"He stopped me after the game — he's waiting for me — and he goes, 'What the hell were you doing?' " said Ruskowski. "I go, 'I have no idea but what the hell were you doing?' We laughed about that for a while but we were just close. Sometimes you can't explain how two people (bond). But we were just good friends and it was it was always good to be around him because he was smart and he laughed at my stupid jokes."

Ruskowski, who dubbed the skinny-legged Campbell as 'Chicken Legs' while they were teammates in Houston, admired Campbell's hockey savvy and his ability to see the humour in any situation. Campbell often joked about the Jets decision to protect him and Lukowich but not Ruskowski or Kent Nilsson for the expansion draft in 1979.

"We laughed about it — he goes, 'You know, they should have kept you,'" said Ruskowski. "I said, 'You know, Scotty I told you this before but I'm telling you right from the heart, they made the right decision. If I was if I was the general manager, I would've kept a young, aggressive, good skating defenceman.' And, of course, Luke was just a natural goal scorer."

In the last twenty years Campbell moved to Collingwood, Ont., to coach the Collingwood Blues Junior A hockey team while also working in IT. During this time, he wrote a regular hockey column for the Free Press, developed a prominent social media presence and was a frequent commentator on radio broadcasts.

Campbell is survived by his mother Dianne Campbell-Scobie. He was predeceased by father, Gary, and his younger brother, Brian.

Campbell-Scobie remembered Scott's love of the game blossomed when he was 12 years old.

"All his life he hated mornings and he had to get up at six o'clock in the morning to take the Toronto Globe and Mail around to customers in order to make money," said Campbell-Scobie from Guelph, Ont. "We were quite poor. I'm a teacher. So we had the security of that but they weren't well paid that in those years and my husband was often ill. So we just didn't have the money. So he got up in the morning and delivered those papers and we managed to scrape enough money for him to have a week at the Bobby Orr-(Mike) Walton Hockey Camp. Well, that was the highlight. If he was interested before, that sealed it."

Eleven months ago, doctors found a malignant tumor in Campbell's esophagus. Unfortunately, the stage four-cancer had metastasized to his brain and he endured months of chemotherapy and radiation treatments. Last week, he decided not to continue treatments.

"There was never a good day, only days that were slightly better," said Campbell-Scobie. "In spite of all the 11 months of feeling so terrible, he was comfortable in those last hours because he was sedated."

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2022/09/02/jets-invited-gagner-along-for-ride>

Jets invited Gagner along for ride

By: Mike McIntyre

Sam Gagner has carved out an impressive hockey career since being drafted sixth-overall by the Edmonton Oilers in 2007. Now the versatile forward, just 33 games short of 1,000, is set to hit that milestone as a member of the Winnipeg Jets.

Gagner, 33, signed a one-year contract Friday which will pay him the league minimum of US \$750,000.

"There had been some mutual interest throughout the summer and talks got a little more serious the last few days," Gagner told the Free Press in a telephone interview from his Ontario home. "I see a fit. It's a team that wants to compete for a playoff spot and to be a contender, and that's exciting for me. It's something that I've wanted to be a part of and am looking forward to the opportunity."

Gagner checks off plenty of boxes. He can play both centre and wing and is a right-handed shot, which the Jets don't have much of up front.

"I think that I've evolved over the years. I was more of an offensive power play guy earlier in my career. And last couple of years, I've been tasked with a lot of penalty kill minutes and playing in more of a defensive role and I feel like I've done a pretty good job there," he said.

Gagner will also help fill the leadership/mentoring void left by the departure of Paul Stastny, who recently signed a deal with the Carolina Hurricanes.

"I do feel that I've gained perspective and experience over my years and I think I can help be another voice in the room to help lead," he said. "You know, I think the biggest factor in doing that is bringing your game on the ice and making sure that you're doing your job."

Gagner had 31 points (13 goals, 18 assists) in 81 contests last year with the Detroit Red Wings. His best offensive season came in 2016-17 when he had 50 points (18 goals, 32 assists) with the Columbus Blue Jackets. Overall, he has 505 career points (184 goals, 321 assists) in his 967 games.

"Whatever is needed from me, I'm willing to do. I want the opportunity to compete and the chance to win and I feel like I can help the group," he said.

This will be the seventh NHL stop for the son of long-time former NHLer Dave Gagner, who played 15 seasons in the league. Fun fact: He shares an Oilers franchise record along with Wayne Gretzky and Paul Coffey for points in a game, racking up eight (four goals, four assists) in a 2012 match against Chicago.

Gagner said he's excited to return to a hockey-crazed Canadian market.

"I understand the pressures that come with it. I also love the fact that hockey is number one," he said. "I love the game. I love to play it. I love to watch it. I love talking about it. And anytime you can be in a market like Winnipeg, where it's really important to everybody, that's very exciting. So, for my family, we're pumped to get there. We're pumped to be part of the community and looking forward to getting started."

In addition to Stastny, the Jets have also lost Kristian Vesalainen (to Sweden) and free-agent depth forwards Evgeny Svechnikov, Adam Brooks, Zach Sanford, Austin Poganski and CJ Sues this summer. Prior to inking Gagner, the club had only added forwards Kevin Stenlund, Saku Maenalanen and Alex Limoges. Stenlund has dressed for 71 career NHL games, Maenalanen for just 34, and Limoges is straight out of college and has yet to taste big-league action.

"I've learned to be effective in a bottom six role. I think for a lot of guys that can be a hard transition, to go from power-play minutes, top six minutes. You still have to find ways to be effective and find ways to produce," said Gagner.

"I think I can bring creativity to whatever line I'm on. I feel like I have good hockey sense. There's a lot of great players on the team, and I'm hoping to complement them and fill in wherever I can. Just help the Jets take another step forward. I know last year was a disappointing season and just talking to guys, they're looking forward to bounce back and I'm looking forward to being part of that."

Training camp is set to begin on Sept. 22, with the first of six pre-season games going on Sept. 25 in Edmonton. Winnipeg will drop the puck on the 2022-23 regular campaign on Oct. 14 when the team hosts the New York Rangers at Canada Life Centre.

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/former-jets-captain-avco-cup-champion-scott-campbell-passes-away-after-battle-with-cancer>

Former Jets captain, Avco Cup champion Scott Campbell passes away after battle with cancer

By Scott Billeck

Scott Campbell, a former first-overall pick in the World Hockey Association, and a first-round pick in the National Hockey League, has died after a courageous 11-month battle with cancer.

He was 65.

Born in Toronto but raised in Guelph, Campbell, a burly defenceman, played three seasons with the London Knights in the old Ontario Major Junior Hockey League before getting drafted first overall by the Houston Aeros of the WHA in 1977. In the same year, the NHL's St. Louis Blues drafted Campbell ninth overall.

Campbell chose to play in the WHA with the Aeros in their final season. The Jets purchased Campbell's contract after the Aeros folded, and he went on to win the Avco Cup with the Jets during the 1978-79 season. Campbell, along with Morris Lukowich, were protected by the Jets

in the 1979 NHL Expansion Draft, as the team moved from the WHA to the NHL. He would be named captain of the club for the 1980-81 season, succeeding Lars-Erik Sjoberg.

Campbell was traded to the Blues in the summer of 1981 but would be forced to retire the following year due to chronic asthma. He finished with 11 goals and 55 points in 149 WHA games, and another four markers and 25 points in 80 NHL games.

Campbell went on to coach the Collingwood Blues Junior A hockey team, while working in IT for the local Home Building Centre. Campbell remained a prominent member of the Jets' social media community, and penned regular columns on the team.

Last Thanksgiving, a tumour was discovered on Campbell's brain. He underwent brain surgery to remove it, but his cancer, which began in his esophagus, had metastasized and was at Stage 4.

Speaking to the Winnipeg Sun on Tuesday, Campbell's mother, Dianne Campbell-Scobie, said her son had "fought for all he was worth and so courageously."

"I had seen (people) fight longer, but never saw anyone fight as hard," said Dianne, a former volunteer hospice worker. "He never had a comfortable day."

Dianne said Scott wished for quality of time over quantity of time following his diagnosis.

Every day was a battle, but Campbell, she said, rarely complained about his circumstances despite dealing with bi-weekly chemotherapy and radiation treatments, and fighting off several infections during his illness.

A celebration of Scott's life is being planned for next June.

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-land-gagner-on-minimum-salary-deal>

Jets land Gagner on minimum-salary deal

By Paul Friesen

The Winnipeg Jets took a late dip into the free-agent pool, emerging with 15-year NHL veteran centre Sam Gagner.

Gagner was most recently in Detroit, where he scored 13 goals and 31 points last season, his second with the Red Wings.

He's averaged 12 goals and 33 points per season over his career.

His best seasons produced 18 goals: with Edmonton in 2011-12 and Columbus five years later.

His biggest night was a four-goal, four assist outburst – the NHL's only eight-point night in the last 33 years – for Edmonton in 2012.

The 5-foot-11, 197-pound product of London, Ont., was the Oilers first-round pick, sixth overall, in 2007.

Gagner could reach the 1,000-game mark in a Jets uniform. He's currently at 967 regular-season contests.

The playoffs haven't been very familiar to him, though, as he's played just 11 games over two playoff seasons.

Gagner has yet to score a playoff goal, picking up four assists.

A right-handed shot, he could play the wing. In either position, he's most likely in a bottom-six role, helping to offset the loss of Paul Stastny (21 goals) to free agency.

As a junior, Gagner helped Canada win the World Junior Championship in 2007.

NHL.com

<https://www.nhl.com/news/2022-23-winnipeg-jets-season-preview/c-335489038?tid=290471364>

Inside look at Winnipeg Jets

Bowness hired with hopes of playoff return after one-year hiatus

by Darrin Bauming / NHL.com Independent Correspondent

NHL.com is providing in-depth roster, prospect and fantasy analysis for each of its 32 teams from Aug. 8-Sept. 8. Today, the Winnipeg Jets.

The Winnipeg Jets have a new coach and a different direction heading into the 2022-23 season.

After missing the Stanley Cup Playoffs for the first time in five seasons, the Jets are hopeful they can turn things around quickly. Following an exhaustive search that featured at least five candidates, Rick Bowness was hired as coach July 3. The 67-year-old began his NHL coaching career as an assistant with the Jets in 1984-85 and holds the record with 2,562 games in the League as a head or assistant coach. He led the Dallas Stars to the 2020 Stanley Cup Final and was 46-30-6 with them last season.

"I wasn't interested in going to a rebuild," Bowness said. "This team has a great young goalie in Connor [Hellebuyck], a good defense, we've got some great offensive forwards. Are there some things we're going to have to change? Absolutely."

Paul Maurice resigned as Jets coach 29 games into the 2021-22 season Dec. 17. Winnipeg was 13-11-5 at the time. Dave Lowry replaced Maurice on an interim basis and went 26-22-6.

"When we played them last year, there was something missing; you could feel it and you could see it," Bowness said. "I'm not getting into it because I wasn't here. It just got derailed a little bit. But if you go back and you look at the roster, how competitive they were for a while, it's there."

"They know they're better than they were last year. The players I've spoken with are very excited to get back on the ice and prove they're a better team than they were last year."

The Jets lost center Paul Stastny to the Carolina Hurricanes as an unrestricted free agent, but they are expecting an injection of talent from their prospect pool.

Winnipeg sees a chance for Cole Perfetti, a first-round pick (No. 10) at the 2020 NHL Draft, to secure a top-six forward role. Perfetti had seven points (two goals, five assists) in 18 games as a rookie for the Jets in 2021-22 before a back injury ended his season.

"We're excited to see him at training camp this year," Jets director of amateur scouting Mark Hillier said. "Hopefully the injury is behind him and he can establish himself in that offensive role with the team and really give us that shot in the arm of skill on those top two lines."

Defenseman Ville Heinola, selected in the first round (No. 20) of the 2019 NHL Draft, could also emerge. The 21-year-old had five assists in 12 games for the Jets last season, and 26 points (five goals, 21 assists) in 41 games with Mantioba of the American Hockey League.

"I hope this year is a breakout year for him," Hillier said. "He's put his time in in the American Hockey League and has been a really good player there, and I think it's his time to make the jump and really see what he's got this year."

Winnipeg signed veteran goalie David Rittich to a one-year contract July 13, hoping to balance the workload. Hellebuyck started the second-most games in the NHL last season (66) and led the League in shots against (2,155) and saves (1,962).

Forward Sam Gagner enters his 16th NHL season after the 33-year-old signed a one-year contract Sept. 2 to add scoring depth to the bottom six. He had 31 points (13 goals, 18 assists) in 81 games for the Detroit Red Wings last season.

Cheveldayoff wasn't able to sign forward Pierre-Luc Dubois to a long-term extension, instead agreeing to a one-year contract with the restricted free agent. Forwards Evgeny Svechnikov (San Jose Sharks) and Kristian Vesalainen (Malmo in the Swedish Hockey League) have departed, and goalie Eric Comrie signed a two-year contract with the Buffalo Sabres.

So, with the majority of the roster returning, it's up to Bowness to find a way to get the Jets back in the playoffs.

"Rick is a guy that is going to come in here, and it's not a 'my way or the highway,' but it's a strong approach to getting this team back on track," Cheveldayoff said. "Rick is the type of guy that is up for this challenge."

<https://www.nhl.com/news/winnipeg-jets-prospect-watch/c-335488878?tid=290471364>

Top prospects for Winnipeg Jets Perfetti, Heinola expected to vie for full-time roles in NHL this season

by Darrin Bauming / NHL.com Independent Correspondent

NHL.com is providing in-depth prospect analysis for each of its 32 teams from Aug. 8-Sept. 8. Today, the top five prospects for the Winnipeg Jets, according to NHL.com.

1. Cole Perfetti, F

How acquired: Selected with No. 10 pick in 2020 NHL Draft

Last season: Winnipeg (NHL): 18 GP, 2-5-7; Manitoba (AHL): 17 GP, 6-9-15

Perfetti (5-foot-11, 177 pounds) was called up to the NHL twice in 2021-22, including a 16-game stretch when the 20-year-old played top-six and power play minutes before a back injury ended a promising rookie season.

"A great mix of skill and hockey sense, that's what's going to make him a great player," Winnipeg director of amateur scouting Mark Hillier said. "He can adjust his game to play with good players, play in different situations, play either center or wing. He's a power play-type player who is really creative with the puck and has great instincts. Give him time, and he just does some special things on the ice that very few players at any level can do."

Projected NHL arrival: This season

2. Ville Heinola, D

How acquired: Selected with No. 20 pick in 2019 NHL Draft

Last season: Winnipeg (NHL): 12 GP, 0-5-5; Manitoba (AHL): 41 GP, 5-21-26

The 21-year-old already has four pro seasons under his belt, three in North America. Heinola (5-11, 178) has impressed in three World Junior tournaments, including most recently in 2021 when he was one of two defensemen selected to the Media All-Star Team.

"I have high hopes for Ville," Hillier said. "His hockey IQ is his best asset. He's got a lot of skill. I think he can potentially run a power play one day. In today's game, it's all about going back getting pucks and moving it up the ice, and that's what he does really well. He can escape pressure really well and makes a great first pass."

Projected NHL arrival: This season

3. Chaz Lucius, F

How acquired: Selected with No. 18 pick in 2021 NHL Draft

Last season: Minnesota (NCAA): 24 GP, 9-10-19

Lucius (6-1, 185) has battled injuries over the past two seasons, including an ankle that required surgery in February that ended his freshman season with the University of Minnesota.

The 19-year-old has options this season. Lucius is eligible to play for Portland in the Western Hockey League, Manitoba in the American Hockey League, or he could potentially play for the Jets.

"There really hasn't been a lot of time the last two years to put a lot of time in the weight room with his injuries, so that's a thing he can improve on," Hillier said. "The instincts and the skill and all those things are there."

"He'll be at training camp. If they think he's ready to play pro, he'll play pro. ... It's just important he plays a lot of games, a lot of important and critical minutes in offensive situations where he's

a top-two-line guy and a power-play guy. His training camp will determine where he's ready to play."

Projected NHL arrival: 2024-25

4. Rutger McGroarty, F

How acquired: Selected with No. 14 pick in 2022 NHL Draft

Last season: USA U-18 (NTDP): 25 GP, 15-18-33

McGroarty (6-1, 200) is the first player from the state of Nebraska to play for the USA Hockey National Team Development Program. Named the most valuable player of the 2022 BioSteel All-American Game, McRoarty impressed the Jets during the draft interview process.

"He plays the game hard, and he answers the questions hard," Winnipeg general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff said. "It's one of those things that again, as an organization, drafting a player with those kinds of attributes is exciting."

Projected NHL arrival: 2024-25

5. Dylan Samberg, D

How acquired: Selected with No. 43 pick in 2017 NHL Draft

Last season: Winnipeg (NHL): 15 GP, 0-5-5; Manitoba (AHL): 32 GP, 0-12-12

Samberg has the size (6-3, 190), strength and toughness every NHL GM covets in a defenseman. He has a skillset that complements a simple and straightforward style of game, but the 23-year-old finds himself among a deep pool of defensemen prospects in the Jets' system.

"When he played last year, he was quite confident and actually even looked better maybe in a Jets uniform than he did in a Moose uniform, which is interesting," Hillier said. "There's players ahead of him and that's going to sort itself out in training camp."

Projected NHL arrival: 2023-24

<https://www.nhl.com/news/2022-23-jets-breakdown-key-factors/c-335489056?tid=290471364>

Three questions facing Winnipeg Jets

Bowness impact, struggles on defense among concerns

by Darrin Bauming / NHL.com Independent Correspondent

NHL.com is providing in-depth analysis for each of its 32 teams from Aug. 8-Sept. 8. Today, three important questions facing the Winnipeg Jets.

1. Is Rick Bowness the new voice the Jets need?

When Paul Maurice stepped down as Jets coach with 53 games remaining last season, he said they needed "a new voice."

Enter Rick Bowness, who was hired as coach July 3.

The 67-year-old, who was hired as Jets coach on an interim basis in 1988-89, brings a wealth of experience in his second tenure with them. And he knows exactly what identity he expects the Jets to have this season.

"When you're hard to play against, you're skating, you're pressuring them, you're not giving up much, you're in their face, you're in on top of them all over the ice," Bowness said. "Be creative with the puck, keep the puck as much as you can and then when you don't have it, the old hockey cliché; take away time and space. We want to be on top of them. And if you do those things, you're going to spend a lot less time in your zone, you're going to be a lot better defensively."

2. Will they improve defensively?

The Jets have long struggled in defensive metrics and the concerning trend continued in 2021-22. They allowed the 13th-most goals (253) in the NHL, seventh-most shots (33.2 per game) and were 29th in penalty-kill percentage (75.0%).

Bowness has had success implementing solid defensive schemes throughout his 33-year coaching career in the NHL. The Dallas Stars ranked in the top-half of the League in shots allowed (13th; 31.0 shots allowed per game) and goals against (tied for 14th; 2.98 goals against per game) with Bowness as coach last season. In 2019-20, when he began the season as an assistant before being promoted to coach, the Stars had the second-best goals-against average (2.52) in the NHL.

"In talking to Rick and listening, this isn't a 'I think he can implement these things.' I know he can," Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff said. "I've seen it. I've seen his teams play. I've seen the structure. I've seen the hardness. I've seen the different times. You don't take a team to the [2020] Stanley Cup Final just by luck."

3. Can the Jets take advantage of their window to win?

The Jets have an impressive core of players. Connor Hellebuyck won the Vezina Trophy as the top goalie in the NHL in 2019-20 and remains one of the best at his position. The top-six forward group includes Kyle Connor, who set NHL career highs in goals (47) and points (93) last season, Mark Scheifele (70 points in 2021-22), Pierre-Luc Dubois (28 goals), captain Blake Wheeler (60 points) and Nikolaj Ehlers (28 goals).

Add in a talented defense corps led by Josh Morrissey, Nate Schmidt, Neal Pionk, and Brenden Dillon, and the Jets should contend for a spot in the Stanley Cup Playoffs this season after finishing eight points behind the Nashville Predators for the second wild card in the Western Conference in 2021-22. But can they make a run at a championship?

With 12 player contracts set to expire in either 2023 or 2024, including Hellebuyck, Wheeler, Scheifele and Dubois, the window for Winnipeg to win is still open.

"Whatever happens in the future, we're focusing on the present here now," Cheveldayoff said. "If you're trying to, in this game, look too far ahead, you're going to fall off the deep end, so to speak. We're focused on right now. Rick is here. He's in with both feet and I think it's going to be good for our organization."

Hockey News

<https://thehockeynews.com/news/nhl-hot-seat-radar-winnipeg-jets>

NHL HOT SEAT RADAR: WINNIPEG JETS

BY ADAM PROTEAU

This is the final file of the THN Hot Seat, a series of THN.com columns where we've identified one member of each NHL team who'll be dealing with a notable amount of pressure in the 2022-23 season. Our pick for the Hot Seat can be an NHL player, head coach, team owner, or GM.

In this file, we're focusing on the Winnipeg Jets.

JETS HOT SEAT: KEVIN CHEVELDAYOFF, GENERAL MANAGER

WHY: It wasn't all that long ago when the Jets were seen to be a team on the rise; four years ago, they'd made it to the Western Conference Final, before falling in five games to the Vegas Golden Knights. As a result, GM Cheveldayoff received deserved acclaim. But since then, the Jets have, for the most part, been an example of the law of diminishing returns, and they bottomed out this past season, first suffering the indignity of head coach Paul Maurice walking away from his job, then missing the playoffs for the first time since 2017, and finishing sixth in the Central Division, ahead of only Chicago and Arizona.

So, since he received fair praise for their growth as a team, Cheveldayoff is now facing fair criticism for the setbacks the Jets have suffered. While Central teams around them made significant additions to their roster this summer, the Jets have done next to nothing – other than signing journeyman forward Sam Gagner to replace a better player in Paul Stastny, and adding veteran backup David Rittich to serve as Connor Hellebuyck's understudy – in an attempt to improve. Cheveldayoff still has approximately (and per CapFriendly.com) \$5.5 million in salary cap space, but there aren't difference-makers available to invest that money in.

Cheveldayoff also has a brand new head coach in former Dallas bench boss Rick Bowness, but again, there's the sense Winnipeg settled on their second choice, with Manitoba native Barry Trotz preferring to stay on the sidelines rather than take the Jets' job. It's not that Bowness did a horrible job with the Stars last season; it's the fact that Winnipeg waited and waited on Trotz before he forced them to go in another direction that takes the shine off the Bowness signing.

Worse still is the depth – or lack thereof – in Winnipeg's group of forwards. Winnipeg had a mediocre offense last season (tied for 14th overall at an average of 3.05 goals-for per game), and a sub-par defense (tied for 16th overall at 3.09 goals-against per game), and neither area appears to be on the upswing in 2022-23. The Jets have a solid-enough top-two forward lines, but the dropoff after that is quite severe. Similarly, their defense corps has keepers in Josh Morrissey, Neal Pionk and Nate Schmidt, but their other three top defenders aren't needle-movers.

It's not all bad news for Winnipeg. They still have an elite goalie in Hellebuyck, who is coming off his worst season in five years, and who should rebound if he gets more support from his teammates. But there's the rub: are we really expecting the Jets to surge in the standings? Yes, it's accurate to point out the injury bug took a serious chomp out of Winnipeg's lineup last season – star forwards Blake Wheeler, Nik Ehlers all missed at least 15 games – but many

other teams were able to absorb injury blows because of their depth. The Jets, at this point, do not possess enough NHL-level talent to withstand more serious injuries this season. And you have to ask yourself, which of the Central teams that finished ahead of them last year will they be better than in 2022-23? The Stars? Possibly. The Nashville Predators? Also possibly. The St. Louis Blues, Minnesota Wild, and Stanley Cup-champion Colorado Avalanche? Almost certainly not. And when you factor in the fact the Pacific Division is improved and likely will take back one of the playoff berths they lost to the Central last year, it feels like a playoff spot is even less of a possibility for Winnipeg.

So, if the Jets do stumble out of the gate and/or miss out on the post-season for the second consecutive year, what justification does Cheveldayoff have to keep his job? He's been the only GM Winnipeg has had since June of 2011. Eleven years in the job is a great run for any hockey executive, but while there's something to be said for the loyalty of team owner Mark Chipman, the reality is it's time for a new architect for the Jets. They can't continue accepting mediocrity in the hope one of these years will feature a deep playoff run for them.

Cheveldayoff can't blame any further failures on the coach. He also can't deal away relative greybeards like Wheeler and Schmidt and expect the Jets will suddenly reverse their current trajectory. It may not be time for a full-on rebuild, but it's also not advisable for them to stay the course.

Something has to give.

www.winnipegjets.com

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/gagner-feels-winnipeg-is-a-perfect-fit/c-335459762>

***Gagner feels Winnipeg is a perfect fit
"I feel like I have a lot of game left."***

by Mitchell Clinton @MitchellClinton / WinnipegJets.com

WINNIPEG - At 33-years-old, Sam Gagner knows he has plenty more in the tank, and he's looking forward to proving that with the Winnipeg Jets this season.

But it's not just him that thinks that way.

The father of three also has the full support of his family, and he wouldn't have signed on the dotted line in Winnipeg if the fit wasn't right.

"I've heard great things about Winnipeg, the community, the fan support, and the team. It was a pretty easy decision," said Gagner, shortly after signing a one-year deal with the Jets. "There are different things you have to weigh with family and where I'm at in my career. I'm really happy with the decision. I think we're going to have a good team. There is opportunity, and I'm looking forward to getting there and getting to work."

The forward has played 15 seasons in the NHL, racking up 967 career games for six different teams - Edmonton, Arizona, Philadelphia, Columbus, Vancouver, and most recently Detroit.

"I'm excited. I think it's a great opportunity," said Gagner. "I look at the roster of the team and the expectations and everything that goes with being in a market like Winnipeg - I'm excited about it. I think it's a great fit and I'm looking forward to getting there and getting to work."

Gagner had 31 points in 81 games with the Red Wings last season. He also recorded a career milestone, his 500th career point, on April 6, 2022. It was part of a two-goal effort that produced a Red Wings win - against the Jets at Canada Life Centre.

A grin comes across the face of the London, ON product when he looks back on it. And now, the sixth overall pick in the 2007 NHL Draft sits just 33 games away from another milestone - 1,000 games played.

"I've played in a lot of different situations, up and down the line-up, on rebuilds, on teams that have made the playoffs," he said. "So I think I have a lot of different experience and good perspective because of the amount I've played. It's a matter of bringing your game on the ice and I feel like I have a lot of game left."

The 1,000-game mark is something Gagner's father, Dave, never reached during his incredible NHL career. In fact, the younger Gagner surpassed his dad's 946 career games during the 2021-22 campaign.

Dad still holds the edge in career points with 719, and has been a constant source of advice throughout Sam's career.

"Between him and my mom, my sister, my upbringing was fantastic," Gagner said. "My dad is someone I've always leaned on throughout my journey as a kid going up through the ranks and over the last 15 years as an NHL player. It hasn't really changed. The fact he played for a long time allows me to bounce a lot of different things off him and lean on his experience. There is no way I'm where I'm at without his support and his guidance."

Which brings Gagner's story right back to where it began, with family.

There are still a couple weeks left for the Gagner family to enjoy their cottage in Muskoka in Ontario before they make another move as a family.

"My wife (Rachel) is incredible," said Gagner. "The support she's given me allowing me to chase my dreams and play as long as I've had, we've had to move a lot since we had kids. That can sometimes be challenging for a family. My wife handles it all. She's so supportive and I'm so thankful to have that support. We're looking forward to getting to Winnipeg and being a part of the community there."

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/jets-prospect-zhilkin-launches-mental-health-awareness-program/c-335451766>

***Jets prospect Zhilkin launches mental health awareness program
Zhilkin's Vision will benefit athletes and local mental health organizations***

by Mitchell Clinton @MitchellClinton / WinnipegJets.com

Putting an emphasis on his mental health has been critical for Winnipeg Jets prospect Danny Zhilkin, and now he wants to help other athletes do the same.

The 18-year-old, selected by the Jets in the third round of the 2022 NHL Draft, announced on his Twitter feed the start of a new program called Zhilkin's Vision, which will help raise mental health awareness for athletes while also helping local mental health organizations at the same time.

"From my own experience, I think every hockey player battles mental health struggles at some point during their career. It doesn't matter if you're 12 or 13 in minor hockey, or if you're a professional hockey player," Zhilkin said. "I wanted to do this with Lauren, we can share our experiences as well as raise awareness. Mental health is almost 80 percent of any sport, not just hockey, it's a touching subject and something people don't think or talk about as often as they should."

Lauren Shoss, Zhilkin's girlfriend, is helping him with the project. She attends Boston University's Sports Psychology and Counselling program.

"We wanted to get into the community ever since my first OHL season," said Zhilkin, who is preparing for his third season with the Guelph Storm. "Being captained by Cam Hillis who has his own Hillis Foundation, and Garrett McFadden - who was the captain a couple years back - what he did with McFadden's Movement really touched me."

As did working with a sports psychologist last summer, ahead of one of the biggest hockey seasons of his life - his draft year.

"It helped me tremendously," said the product of Burlington, ON. "In my draft year I struggled. I was hard on myself with points. I understood that points weren't everything and just focused on doing the right things well."

The Jets took notice of Zhilkin's 55 points in 66 games with the Storm in 2021-22, a feat that is arguably more impressive considering the 2020-21 Ontario Hockey League season was wiped out due to the pandemic.

Of course, facing challenges isn't anything new for Zhilkin.

He and his family moved to Canada from Russia when he was nine years old, shortly after a hockey coach noticed Zhilkin at a camp in 2013.

He didn't know any English, but his teammates on the Toronto Junior Canadiens helped him out and eventually, he was part of the Canada's gold medal winning U18 team - beating Russia in the final.

When it was time for him to leave his family home in Burlington for his first OHL season in Guelph in 2019, he was faced with the challenge of being away from his family for an extended period of time.

"I was 15 at the time, my mom didn't want me to go away fully," Zhilkin said, adding that the drive between the two cities may only be 40 minutes, but the team's travel schedule made it difficult to make as much family time as he'd enjoyed previously.

"It's hard not to see your family for almost eight months of the year. It depends how long you go in the playoffs, it could be almost nine months for some players," he said. "You can only see them at Christmas. So that's really hard when you're away from home and you don't get to see your mom and dad and siblings. That was something that I struggled with a little bit too."

These are just two examples of why programs like Zhilkin's Vision are important. More details on the program, including a website and donation information, are expected to come soon. Zhilkin is excited for what's to come, and is thrilled to not only help athletes, but also local mental health organizations as well.

"They're the main streams that do all the research and raise awareness. They're the big dogs behind this," said Zhilkin, who has been overwhelmed by the support since the program launch on August 30.

"There were somewhere between 500 and 1000 accounts reached out on Instagram in 24 hours and almost 1000 shares on Twitter and Instagram," Zhilkin said. "The support has been tremendous and we're hoping to launch the website soon with the donation link, so that will be awesome as well."

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/video/feature--schmidtys-warehouse/t-277437442/c-12588412>

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Jets defencemen Neal Pionk brings us back to the place where he learned to play hockey: Hermantown Arena

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Jets defenceman Neal Pionk tours us around his childhood home — featuring a baseball field in the front yard!