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<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2022/10/11/heinola-demoted-to-gain-experience>

Heinola demoted to gain experience

By: Mike McIntyre

BANFF – Rick Bowness says a tough conversation with young defenceman Ville Heinola was followed by some positive re-enforcement.

“What I told is him he’s a National Hockey League player,” Bowness said Tuesday following his club’s final practice in Banff, which didn’t include the organization’s top defensive prospect.

The words might have rung a bit hollow for Heinola. That’s because, at least right now, the 21-year-old is actually an American Hockey League player. Heinola was sent packing a day earlier, a long weekend of team bonding in the mountains cut short by yet another demotion to the Manitoba Moose.

Winnipeg’s 23-man opening-night roster includes eight blue-liners, and it’s a surprise to many — no doubt Heinola himself — that the 20th-overall pick from 2019 isn’t among them. To hear Bowness explain it, there’s not currently a role for Heinola in Winnipeg’s starting six, and having him healthy scratched wouldn’t be sound asset management.

“He’s too young to be sitting. He’s too good a player. He’s gotta play. He needs experience, and he’s not going to get the experience sitting in the press box. He needs to play,” said Bowness.

“He doesn’t need waivers so the best thing for him, as frustrating as it is for him I’m sure, is to go down and play. And then work on the things that we’ve given him to work on.”

Bowness said a trio of veterans – Josh Morrissey, Neal Pionk and Nate Schmidt – are offensive-minded defencemen who are ahead of Heinola on the power play depth chart. Morrissey quarterbacks the top unit, while Pionk and Schmidt are on the second.

“So it’s tough for him to get those minutes. Which goes back to now you’re a third-pairing D, and we need a penalty killer back there,” said Bowness.

Brenden Dillon and Dylan DeMelo will do plenty of heavy lifting while shorthanded, which is something Heinola hasn’t done at the NHL-level. That, according to Bowness, is why Logan Stanley, Dylan Samberg and Kyle Capobianco are the others still on the roster.

“We’ve got eight National Hockey League defencemen, which is frustrating for the guys that aren’t playing, but it’s a good situation for us to be in. You can never have enough defencemen in this league,” said Bowness. “We’re fortunate to have those three battling for that sixth spot.”

Unless, of course, you’re someone like Heinola who is on the outside looking in.

“Ville’s a young guy, he’s going to play in the National Hockey League. He needs a little more time to straighten out defensively a little bit and decisions with the puck when he’s under pressure,” said Bowness.

"The best thing for him is very simple: He's going to play in the league. He's a great kid, and he's going to be a really good player. Now is not the time. Go down, play those roles, play 24 minutes, play in every situation, run the minutes up, and it's going to help him."

Given that Morrissey, Pionk and Schmidt are all still under contract for multiple seasons, it's fair to wonder just when opportunity might come knocking. Heinola has 25 NHL games under his belt, including a career-high (so far) of 12 last year.

"When you are a high draft pick and the guys your age are out playing, it's hard," Schmidt, who was Heinola's partner in last Friday's final pre-season game, said Tuesday.

"I was undrafted. I watched guys that were my age play and I didn't play my first game until I was 22. I played 20 games or so, until I was 23 or 24 I never really got into the league (full time). You look around and it's really important to see the end goal and to earn it. It's really important to just remember that. There are guys that have had more games. You can't compare yourself to other guys. Everyone has a path. Ville is following the same path that Josh (Morrissey) did. It's difficult. He had a good camp, but (other) guys had some good camps as well. It wasn't just one thing. He'll be there someday."

Despite the demotion of Heinola, there's still one more roster move to make prior to Friday's season-opener against the New York Rangers at Canada Life Centre.

The Jets placed forward Mason Appleton on injured reserve retroactive to when he suffered an upper-body injury last week. That allowed them to add forward Alex Jonsson-Fjallby, obtained on waivers Monday from Washington, to the active roster. He's expected to join the team for practice on Thursday.

Appleton is expected to be activated prior to puck drop and play against New York. Whether the Jets cut one of the other 13 forwards on the roster or one of the eight defencemen remains to be seen.

"We'll have that straightened out by Friday," said Bowness.

The four days in Banff included two practices and plenty of off-ice bonding including fishing and golfing expeditions. Players believe the time together will ultimately serve them well during the rigours of an 82-game regular season.

"On all accounts, it was so much fun to be able to get into a situation where it was just us and you're with them all weekend long. There are no distractions. You come in and you get to talk about things that didn't go well and things you want to continue to do. I learned a ton over this last weekend," said Schmidt.

"I always think this is important. This is something I've done in a previous organization and I think it's huge to do before the year. It really puts everybody on the right foot moving forward."

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2022/10/11/rejuvenated-jets-playoff-bound>

Rejuvenated Jets playoff bound

New coach, new approach, sour memories of last season motivate talented squad on eve of new campaign

By: Mike McIntyre

BANFF, Alta. — Perhaps it's the high altitude getting to my head. Maybe it was the tiring two-and-a-half hour hike up Sulphur Mountain, the relaxing soak in the hot springs or the breathtaking views everywhere you turned. Whatever the reason, I dare say I've had a bit of a reckoning over the past few days spent covering the Winnipeg Jets in beautiful Banff.

It says here the hockey team is going to make the Stanley Cup playoffs this season.

I know, I know, I've been critical in this space of general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff and a lack of roster turnover from the one that simply wasn't good enough to get it done last year. It wasn't for a lack of trying, but in a results-oriented business you don't get points for effort.

And yes, there are still plenty of question marks surrounding the Jets, not to mention holes in the lineup that could get exposed. Are they too top heavy up front? Where is the depth scoring coming from? How will the blue line hold up? Will Connor Hellebuyck be counted on to constantly bail out his teammates? Is all this talk of increased defensive awareness going to be proven cheap once the games start to count for real? Can they consistently win the special teams battle?

All that being said, it really does feel like change is in the air. And very much for the better.

When he spoke to us last month, Cheveldayoff called the hiring of Rick Bowness as the new head coach a "seismic" shift for the organization. That seemed like hyperbole at the time. But colour me impressed with what the 67-year-old has done since training camp began three weeks ago.

Stripping Blake Wheeler of the captaincy sent a hell of a message that it wasn't going to be business as usual. The practices have been long and intense, with all kinds of attention to detail. Bowness has screamed himself hoarse at times, with plenty of teaching to do and very little time to do it. He's vowed there will be "no free rides" this year, and that goes up and down the roster no matter the name on the back of the jersey or the size of the salary cap hit.

At exit meetings last spring, multiple players told Cheveldayoff they wanted more structure and more accountability. They certainly have it now.

It's not just about cracking the whip. This bonding session in Banff, where players were paired off with teammates they might not traditionally spend a ton of time with as they went fishing and golfing, was likely just what the doctor ordered for a group that appeared to come unglued at times last year.

Plenty of fun was had, but they also mixed pleasure with business.

It's silly to put a lot of stock into pre-season results, so Winnipeg's 4-1-1 record doesn't mean much. But the last two games, where the Jets faced pretty much the starting roster of the Calgary Flames in back-to-back games and won both by a combined score of 10-3, certainly opened up my eyes to this group's potential.

It wasn't just the final result, but little things that stood out. Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Nikolaj Ehlers noticeably busting their tails to backcheck. Forwards covering for pinching defencemen. Cleaner zone exits. Keeping opposition shots to the perimeter and limiting second, third and fourth chances.

It was far from perfect, of course. But it was progress. And the new systems Bowness and his staff have introduced, that put an emphasis on better puck movement and more aggression, are getting positive early returns.

Hellebuyck spoke with us media types in Alberta on Tuesday, and the focus and determination he projects is notable. He's already won the hardware for league's top goalie. There's another trophy the 29-year-old desperately wants. The fact he's also two years away from unrestricted free agency, just like teammates Scheifele and Pierre-Luc Dubois, adds another jolt of urgency to the situation.

It should also serve as motivation, just as the "chip on the shoulder" that gets referenced time and time again from those who went through last year's roller-coaster ride.

"I see a lot of guys hungry to learn and the motivation is there, the feel in the locker room is awesome — everyone is ready to be their best and there's not stress," Hellebuyck said.

I firmly believe the Jets got crushed under the weight of significant pressure last year. The trickle of COVID going through the team, one or two players at a time, a string of serious injuries to the likes of Wheeler, Scheifele and Ehlers, the shocking resignation of coach Paul Maurice and the awkward interim hiring of Dave Lowry all added up to disaster.

There appears to be no such high bar outside the locker room going into this campaign, which is just the way they like it.

"When you're coming into a season with expectations, you're constantly trying to live up to those expectations and you forget about the process. That's what kills you," said Hellebuyck.

I asked defenceman Nate Schmidt the other day what he thought of the fact his team is an afterthought when so-called experts start making predictions. "Perfect," he replied with a grin.

The Jets still have plenty of star power, and the top trio of Scheifele, Connor and Ehlers could truly be elite. All three did one-on-one interviews with media in Alberta earlier this week, and they're saying all the right things about how they need to play. Along with the likes of a determined Dubois, a rising young star in Cole Perfetti, a blue-line that believes it's a lot better than it showed a year ago and the presence of Hellebuyck who can single-handedly steal any game he's playing in.

A year ago at this time, yours truly and plenty of other pundits had the Jets pegged not just as a playoff squad, but a bonafide championship contender. I'm certainly not going that far this time around. Colorado looks to again be the cream of the Central Division crop, and Minnesota might not be that far behind. Nashville, St. Louis and Dallas should also be competitive, while lowly Chicago and Arizona will likely be left in everyone's dust by Christmas.

Batting for third place or one of the Western Conference's two wild-card spots is likely the best-case scenario for Winnipeg. But a fresh approach and a clean slate, combined with an impressive core and arguably the best goalie in the world, should be reason for optimism.

I may be on a bit of a Rocky Mountain high, but I feel grounded in reality in predicting the Jets are going to be playing meaningful hockey next spring.

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-goalie-connor-hellebuyck-eager-to-get-season-going>

Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck eager to get season going

By Scott Billeck

BANFF, Alta. — It was one of the quotes of the pre-season from the Winnipeg Jets.

“Expectations are what kill teams,” Connor Hellebuyck said shortly after a question was broached in late September regarding last season, being considered a Stanley Cup contender and if there was a collective chip on the shoulder of the team’s returning contingent after falling so woefully short.

A few weeks on, the Jets haven’t spoken much about expectations for the coming year. With a new head coach, a new system, and new personnel, it’s difficult to peg what the Jets will be.

And while every player and every team enters a new year with Lord Stanley top of mind, the Jets are keeping their aspirations close to the vest.

“When you’re coming into a season with expectations, you’re constantly trying to live up to those expectations and you forget about the process. That’s what kills you,” Hellebuyck said inside a cozy dressing room he shared with his backup, David Rittich, in Banff on Tuesday. “When you come in hungry and ready to prove yourself then you don’t really worry about the expectations and the end result and you work every day and the end result ends up happening by just the process.

“The process is very important and I think that’s what this whole getaway in Banff is part of, it’s a good start to the process.”

Indeed, to a man, the Jets very much enjoyed their four-day getaway amongst the Rocky Mountains in southwestern Alberta.

The team bonding experience was a welcomed bridge between Winnipeg’s pre-season finale last Friday and their season opener this Friday against the New York Rangers.

“Coming into it, you don’t really know what to expect — you’re just getting a little vacation,” Hellebuyck said. “There are a lot of good things that happened this week. The team came together very well, the on-ice is looking really good, our communication is opening and becoming really motivating in the room. A lot of good things happened this week.”

From fishing to golfing, a couple of nights out on the town and a pair of two-hour-long practices on Monday and Tuesday, the Jets ushered in a new season by eliminating some of the stress that’s normally baked this time of year.

"We're ready to just go play and enjoy this process," Hellebuyck said. "And we have a new system, we're all hungry to learn the systems and figure out the new reads. We're all doing it together, which is great. It's not one guy trying to figure something out, we're all doing it together. I mean this trip was huge for that. Leaving here, we're going to be more of a team."

Hellebuyck could use that after a string of seasons where he was left on a lonely island, asked to withstand a barrage of opposing offences as his team struggled to hold the fort in front of him.

The 29-year-old Michigan product was brilliant during the 2019-20 season, eventually being rewarded for all the abuse he suffered as he pushed, pulled and dragged the Jets into a position to enter the bubble later that summer.

His numbers have fallen out of the elite category over the past couple of years (his .922 save percentage in 2019-20 was followed up by a .916 the following year and a .910 during the most recent campaign) as the Jets failed to implement anything to stop the onslaught.

It wouldn't be fair to lay much of the blame at his feet, especially last season where he appeared no fewer than 66 times in 82 games.

Under new head coach Rick Bowness, Hellebuyck could conceivably feature in as many as 11 fewer games this year as Bowness aims to better manage his workload.

"You're always looking at your top goalie playing 55-60 games, in that range," Bowness said Tuesday. "You want to make sure if you need him more down the stretch that he's not tired, so you don't want to burn him out that first half of the year and all of the sudden you're scrambling for a playoff spot, if that happens, and you need him to play more, you have to make sure he's not burnt out."

"We'll monitor that very closely."

No goalie in the NHL has seen more shots (4,162 at 5-on-5), made more saves (3,846), or seen more Grade-A chances against (1,173) than Hellebuyck over the past three years.

In each of those categories, the gap between Hellebuyck and his nearest contemporary is significant. It's not even close.

And, yet, Hellebuyck has the fourth-best goals-saved above-average statistic in the NHL at 28.51.

A combination of a lessened workload and a better team in front of him could do wonders going forward. And that's something that seems to have Hellebuyck excited.

"I don't want to give too much away but I think we're going to be more aggressive and I think guys are going to understand their reads more, which helps me understand my reads and makes my life a lot easier and makes their life a lot easier," he said. "It should translate to more offence, but in the NHL, sometimes, you have to play defence to win a game. I think this team is prepared for that and we're looking forward to it."

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/snapshots-heinola-needs-more-time-bowness-says-schmidt-hails-purposeful-weekend>

SNAPSHOTS: Heinola needs more time, Bowness says; Schmidt hails purposeful weekend

By Scott Billeck

BANFF — Ville Heinola will be an NHLer at some point in the future. But that time is not now.

That was the crux of the explanation from Winnipeg Jets head coach Rick Bowness as to why the 21-year-old skilled Finnish defenceman was re-assigned to the Manitoba Moose on Monday as the Jets trimmed down their squad before the NHL's roster deadline.

There was more to it than just that, however.

While Heinola didn't have a stellar camp, it wasn't a poor one either, arguably in lockstep with the other defencemen he battled with for two weeks trying to lock down an opening-night roster spot.

In some cases, it came down to a numbers game. In others, the need for more seasoning at the American Hockey League level.

"He's a power-play guy and right now we have three veterans ahead of him on the power play, so it's tough for him to get those minutes," Bowness said, pointing to Josh Morrissey, Neal Pionk and Nate Schmidt. "Which goes back to now you're a third-pairing D and we need a penalty killer back there."

Heinola was used sparsely on the penalty kill during training camp, with Bowness preferring both Logan Stanley and Dylan Samberg above the young Finn.

Stanley and Samberg weren't without fault, respectively. It's one of the reasons the decision took as long as it did.

"Ville's a young guy, he's going to play in the National Hockey League," Bowness said. "What I told him is he is a National Hockey League player. He needs a little more time to straighten out defensively a little bit and decisions with the puck when he's under pressure. If he works on those things, he's got National League skating, legs, hand, head. He just needs more experience, it's as simple as that.

"Not everyone steps in and plays. Some guys need a little more time and for the role that he plays to be there for him. Right now, with the three guys we have ahead of him on the power play, it's just not there."

Schmidt, who spent Winnipeg's team fishing day in Banff on Saturday in a boat with Heinola, had a chat with Winnipeg's top defensive prospect after the news came down Monday.

"I said this yesterday, it's not the first 100 games, it's the last guy to play the last 100 games," Schmidt said. "When you are a draft pick and the guys your age are out playing, it's hard. I was undrafted. I watched guys that were my age play and I didn't play my first game until I was 22. I played 20 games or so, until I was 23 or 24 I never really got into the league (full-time).

“You look around and it’s really important, to see the end goal and to earn it. It’s really important to just remember that. There are guys that have had more games. You can’t compare yourself to other guys. Everyone has a path. Ville is following the same path that Josh (Morrissey) did. It’s difficult. He had a good camp, but (other) guys had some good camps as well. It wasn’t just one thing. He’ll be there someday. I’m happy for how he’s going to start the year. He’s going to have a good start to the year.”

Winnipeg will enter the season with eight defencemen, including Morrissey, Schmidt, Stanley, Samberg, Neal Pionk, Brenden Dillon, Dylan DeMelo and Kyle Capobianco.

SCHMIDT ON SECLUSION

Schmidt enjoyed the team’s bonding trip in the Rockies.

“I really liked all the things we did,” he said.

“I felt everything had a purpose. Between fishing and golfing and our team-building activity, it wasn’t what you would think it was.

“On all accounts, it was so much fun to be able to get into a situation where it was just us and you’re with them all weekend long. There are no distractions. You come in and you get to talk about things that didn’t go well and things you want to continue to do.

“I learned a ton over this last weekend. I always think this is important. This is something I’ve done in a previous organization and I think it’s huge to do before the year. It really puts everybody on the right foot moving forward, and feeling that they can talk to each other more than we have. That’s something that, when you look at a weekend like this — or a couple of days — you come out of it feeling like, ‘Oh man I actually bonded with this player,’ more than previously because you got to spend a little more time with them.

“When you’re on the road, sometimes it’s a bit more difficult because you’ll go have a beer, have dinner, then go home. This was a dunk. You dunk the boys in and don’t let their heads come up until Tuesday afternoon.”

Canadian Press

https://www.chrisd.ca/2022/10/11/rick-bowness-winnipeg-jets-head-coach-season-preview/?utm_campaign=twitter&utm_medium=twitter&utm_source=twitter

New Coach Bowness Brings Fresh Approach to Winnipeg Jets This Season

By Judy Owen, The Canadian Press

WINNIPEG — A big smile crossed Nate Schmidt’s face as he described the fresh approach and one fun surprise during a practice at Winnipeg Jets training camp.

New Jets head coach Rick Bowness had players scrimmaging with opposite-handed sticks, plus goalies Connor Hellebuyck and David Rittich manned the creases without sticks.

"It was amazing. I loved it," said Schmidt, who's entering his 10th NHL season. "Variety is the spice of life and you add new things in your life, I think it just makes everyone a little more well-rounded."

"I think when you have new staff come in, it does bring that change of perspective of what you're looking at in the game. Every time you come to the rink and practise knowing there's new drills, new this, new that, it kind of keeps you on your toes. I like that."

The Jets need a little levity considering how last season panned out.

Bowness was hired in July after Winnipeg (39-32-11) missed the playoffs, finishing eight points behind Nashville for the final Western Conference wild-card spot.

The season took a downturn after Paul Maurice resigned as head coach in mid-December and Dave Lowry took over on an interim basis. The campaign ended with players expressing frustration and pointing to problems with accountability.

Bowness is the eighth coach Schmidt, 31, will play under. So far, the veteran defenceman is impressed.

"I think Bones is kind of a no-nonsense coach," Schmidt said, calling Bowness by his nickname. "He loves the game, loves the guys and I love it."

"I love his type of style because I know that as a player that's what we want. You like knowing that when you come into the rink you know where you stand."

Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff didn't make any blockbuster moves in the off-season like many NHL clubs did, relying instead on Bowness motivating players to reach their potential. He even described Bowness's hiring as a "seismic change."

The former Dallas Stars head coach is aiming to ramp up Winnipeg's speed, have the defence flash their offensive skills and improve special teams.

The Jets reaped some reward from that blueprint with a 5-0 pre-season victory over the Calgary Flames last Wednesday, including a trio of power-play goals and a penalty kill that stymied Calgary's six chances.

"I think everybody in the league now wants to play fast," centre Pierre-Luc Dubois said. "There's teams that actually do play fast and there's teams that think they are."

"We want to be a team that every shift, even if we're not scoring, that we're just going at you and we're in your face and we're on the forecheck."

ADAPTING TO CHANGE

Bowness is optimistic players are listening to a new voice and buying into his vision.

"I find the players have been very, very receptive to what we're doing, accepting it and learning it and adjusting a little bit of how we want to play the game – a little faster, a little bit more pressure and things like that," Bowness said before Wednesday's win.

"I think their practice habits have been really good... They've had great attitudes coming into training camp and now we have to continue to keep it moving forward."

CAPTAIN BY COMMITTEE

Bowness made a big change prior to training camp by removing the captaincy from Blake Wheeler in favour of a cast of alternate captains he'll reveal before the regular season. Centre Mark Scheifele and defenceman Josh Morrissey were alternates last season.

DEBUTING A NEW TOP LINE

Forward Kyle Connor, who won the Lady Byng Trophy last season as the player who best combines sportsmanship, gentlemanly conduct and ability, led the Jets in scoring last season with 93 points. He set career-highs for goals (47) and assists (46) and only had four penalty minutes in 79 games – the fewest among the NHL's top 100 scorers.

His prowess with the puck will be showcased on a new top line with Scheifele and speedy left-winger Nikolaj Ehlers. Each of them fired in power-play goals in the shutout over the Flames.

"We see the potential that we have all three of us together so it's exciting," Connor said. "I think we bring a lot of speed to the table and skill."

Scheifele recorded 29 goals and 70 points in 67 games last season, while Ehlers had 28 goals and 55 points in 62 games.

SECOND LINE OF ATTACK

A talented youngster is being given a big opportunity to start the regular season on a new second line.

Cole Perfetti, a 20-year-old left-winger out of Whitby, Ont., has skated with Dubois and Wheeler.

The 10th overall pick in the 2020 NHL draft is pumped after getting a taste of the NHL last season. He contributed a pair of goals and five assists in 18 games before a season-ending shoulder injury.

"Mentally where I'm at, I feel I can contribute on that line," Perfetti said, adding his health is back to normal.

"Obviously, playing with guys like that is pretty special... If that's the line to start the season, it has potential to be really, really good so I'm super excited about it."

NET GAIN

Hellebuyck will get the bulk of work again with Rittich ready to fill in. The veteran starter played 66 games last season (29-27-10), one short of his career-high, and posted a .910 save percentage.

Rittich, who made 37 saves in the shutout versus Calgary, was signed as a free agent to replace Eric Comrie (Buffalo Sabres). Rittich, 30, played 17 games for Nashville last season, including 12 starts, and wants to rebound to the all-star form he displayed with the Flames in 2019-20.

Global Winnipeg

https://globalnews.ca/news/9190096/jets-fans-ranked-12th-most-dedicated-in-nhl-according-to-ontario-based-survey/?utm_medium=Twitter&utm_source=%40globalwinnipeg

Jets fans ranked 12th-most dedicated in NHL, according to Ontario-based survey

By Sam Thompson Global News

The Winnipeg Jets have the NHL's 12th-most dedicated fanbase, at least according to a recent survey by an Ontario-based gambling site.

The OntarioBets study used two types of criteria for its ranking, "game day commitment" and "fan engagement," which measure arena capacity percentage and local online ticket searches, as well as social following growth, respectively.

Finishing at the top of the heap were the Chicago Blackhawks, with a weighted score of 62 "dedication points." The top five was rounded out by the Pittsburgh Penguins, Toronto Maple Leafs, Montreal Canadiens and Boston Bruins.

The Jets were the next-highest Canadian team on the list with 37 total points, followed by the Edmonton Oilers (13th place), Vancouver Canucks (14th), Calgary Flames (17th), and Ottawa Senators (27th).

The team ranked dead last at 31st — the Seattle Kraken is too new for all 32 teams to be ranked — is the Arizona Coyotes, with a paltry score of three total points.

The Jets, who finished the NHL pre-season with a 4-1-1 record, play their first regular season game Friday against the New York Rangers.

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/how-jets-coach-rick-bowness-could-unlock-the-full-potential-of-nikolaj-ehlers/>

How Jets coach Rick Bowness could unlock the full potential of Nikolaj Ehlers

By Adam Vignan

Since debuting for the Winnipeg Jets in 2015, Nikolaj Ehlers has delivered solid numbers, scoring at least 20 goals in each of the past six seasons.

It feels like the 26-year-old forward still has more to give, though. If the Jets are to get back on track after missing the playoffs last season, they will need Ehlers to level up.

There is a lot to like about Ehlers' game, specifically in transition. Out of 388 forwards who received 500 minutes of 5-on-5 ice time last season, Ehlers finished third with 24.5 possession-driving plays per 20. His 6.8 carry-ins per 20 were second behind New Jersey's Jack Hughes.

Ehlers regularly turned those controlled entries into scoring chances for himself and his teammates. He had a hand in 97 chances following a successful carry-in, fifth most in the NHL among qualified forwards.

Despite those successes, Ehlers was not positioned as a go-to guy under previous Jets coaches Paul Maurice and Dave Lowry. Ehlers' average ice time per game at 5-on-5 and on the power play were fifth and sixth among Jets forwards last season, respectively.

The key to getting more production from Ehlers might be as simple as giving him more playing time.

While in Dallas, new Jets coach Rick Bowness watched second-year forward Jason Robertson break out in a big way, leading the Stars with 41 goals.

Bowness' decision to stick Robertson with Joe Pavelski and Roope Hintz all season played a big role in that. Their 795:34 of even-strength ice time as a unit ranked second league-wide.

Meanwhile, Ehlers bounced around the Jets' lineup. He spent the most time with Mark Scheifele and Paul Stastny (132:20), followed by Scheifele and Andrew Copp (110:25).

Bowness, hoping to recreate what he had in Dallas, is loading up the Jets' top line with Ehlers, Scheifele and 47-goal scorer Kyle Connor.

That combination has plenty of potential. Like Ehlers, Connor is dangerous off the rush, and Scheifele is a skilled passer who can feed them the puck in the right spots.

"We're going to give (Ehlers) that opportunity," Bowness said recently. "That's why that line's together. Every strong team in this league has a clear No. 1 line, a dominant line. We're going to give that threesome a good chance to become that, and Ehlers is going to be a big part of that."

A changing of the guard is underway in Winnipeg. In stripping Blake Wheeler of the captaincy after six seasons, Bowness signaled that there will be opportunity for other players to take the lead.

Ehlers is at the top of that list.

"When you get to watch him every day," Bowness said, "you learn to respect and appreciate more his speed and his skills and his vision when he does have the puck."

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/with-last-season-behind-him-jets-hellebuyck-poised-to-expand-leadership-role/>

With last season behind him, Jets' Hellebuyck poised to expand leadership role

By Ken Wiebe

BANFF, Alta. — Connor Hellebuyck is well past the reflection phase and to be perfectly honest, he's done talking about last season.

Now entering his eighth NHL season — and his seventh as the full-time starter for the Winnipeg Jets — Hellebuyck looks like a man on a mission.

For as much as goaltending can be among the most difficult things to predict, his body of work, coupled with having nearly five months between meaningful games, means that Hellebuyck

finds himself in a perfect headspace heading into Friday's season opener against the New York Rangers.

"Definitely. Especially when we have a hard season like last year. I'm trying to put that behind me for the remainder of my media, and I already have," Hellebuyck said after wrapping up practice at Fenlands Arena in Banff. "I'm not going to speak too much about previous years, but I think having a long summer helped me A) rest, and then B) mentally get ready for the season and enjoy the summer, get a little more fishing in and family time and do the things I need to come here and be ready to grind."

Although nobody is asking Hellebuyck to put the team on his back and carry them by himself, there's no doubt that he's the individual with the opportunity to have the biggest impact on the end result for the Jets.

He's a guy who has established himself as an elite goalie and covered up a lot of the Jets defensive shortcomings over the years.

While the raw numbers (.910 save percentage, 2.98 goals-against average) weren't what folks were used to seeing (.916 career save percentage and 2.69 career GAA) last season, Hellebuyck still fared well in goals saved above average despite facing the highest volume of high-danger chances (468 according to Natural Stat Trick).

Hellebuyck, 29, is one of the many goalies who thrives on being busy in the crease, especially if he has a pretty good idea of where the shots are coming from.

But the Jets' renewed commitment to defending better should help matters for the masked men, including backup David Rittich.

"I see a lot of guys hungry to learn and the motivation is there, the feel in the locker room is awesome — everyone is ready to be their best and there's no stress," said Hellebuyck. "We're ready to just go play and enjoy this process. We're all hungry to learn the systems and figure out the new reads. It's not one guy trying to figure something out, we're all doing it together. I mean this trip was huge for that. Leaving here, we're going to be more of a team."

"I don't want to give too much away, but I think we're going to be more aggressive and I think guys are going to understand their reads more, which helps me understand my reads and makes my life a lot easier and makes their life a lot easier. It should translate to more offence, but in the NHL, sometimes, you have to play defence to win a game. I think this team is prepared for that and we're looking forward to it."

Jets defenceman Nate Schmidt knows a thing or two about what a high-level goalie looks like, having played with Marc-Andre Fleury with the Vegas Golden Knights and seeing the emergence of Thatcher Demko during his lone season with the Vancouver Canucks.

Schmidt already knew how much talent Hellebuyck had as an opponent, but being around him on a daily basis has provided an opportunity to monitor his growth in the leadership department, something that's been even more noticeable during the training camp this fall.

"It's been awesome watching guys come out and take charge of this team now. He's been one of those guys," said Schmidt. "Our so-called young guys that have been young guys for a long

time, they've really taken a step here. Connor (Hellebuyck) is one of them. They're no longer the young guys. It's time to take control of the team and lead us.

"We as veterans understand how important that is. For Connor, he's done an awesome job pushing himself into that role, I think outside some of his comfort zones a bit."

Jets head coach Rick Bowness was an assistant coach with the Canucks when Roberto Luongo was team captain and eventually was replaced by Henrik Sedin, so it's not all that surprising that Hellebuyck is being encouraged to spread his wings in the leadership department — even if there won't be a letter on his jersey.

"Everything I had heard about him prior to coming in was very, very positive. His work ethic, his character, being a great teammate," said Bowness. "That being said, he's also a great goaltender as well. An elite goaltender. We've got to make sure we're playing better in front of him so he can do his thing. He is a leader on this hockey club, he's vocal, works hard in practice. He's having fun in practice."

"He's great around the guys, you watch that, and you watch how he mingles with the guys. He just fits right in with them and he's very, very positive in every aspect of the game. Being a good teammate, man, he's wonderful. And he makes the guys work, he's not giving up any freebie goals in practice."

The topic of Hellebuyck's workload is something that almost always generates some debate, with some believing he was overworked last season when he started 66 of 82 games.

As someone who thrives on getting into and staying in a regular rhythm, Hellebuyck figures to remain among league leaders in starts and minutes played.

However, one would expect that number to decline slightly this season, though 60-plus appearances still seems reasonable.

"Listen, you're always looking at your top goalie playing 55-60 games, in that range," said Bowness. "You want to make sure if you need him more down the stretch that he's not tired, so you don't want to burn him out that first half of the year and all of the sudden you're scrambling for a playoff spot, if that happens, and you need him to play more, you have to make sure he's not burned out. We'll monitor that very closely."

Hellebuyck is past the days of saying he wants to play every single game, graduating to a more stock response about remaining ready rather than declaring what he might feel is an optimal figure for starts.

"I haven't and I don't really want a number. I think things come and go and change every season," said Hellebuyck. "My job is to be ready whenever my name is called and I'm leaving it at that."

JETS NOTES: The Jets placed RW Mason Appleton on injured reserve on Tuesday, retroactive to Oct. 5 when he suffered an upper-body injury against the Calgary Flames. C Pierre-Luc Dubois was back on the ice Tuesday, skating with Cole Perfetti and Blake Wheeler. Bowness said he expects both Dubois and Appleton (who was skating in a non-contact jersey with Adam Lowry and Morgan Barron) to be in the lineup on Friday. For the second straight day, Logan Stanley was used on a pairing with Schmidt, which suggests he's a good candidate to be in the

opening day lineup ahead of Dylan Samberg and Kyle Capobianco. The Jets fourth line featured a rotation with David Gustafsson, Sam Gagner, Saku Maenalanen and Dominic Toninato. Bowness said he expects F Axel Jonsson-Fjallby to have his visa issues taken care of and to be on the ice for practice on Thursday. Once Appleton is activated from IR, the Jets will need to make a corresponding move to fit him on the 23-man roster, likely involving one of the forwards.

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Practice Notebook - Oct. 11, 2022

Jets reflect on four days in Banff: "It really puts everybody on the right foot moving forward"

by Mitchell Clinton @MitchellClinton / WinnipegJets.com

Even after his second two-hour practice in as many days, Winnipeg Jets defenceman Nate Schmidt still has a smile on his face.

It's hard not to when the two previous days were spent on the water and on the links, but make no mistake - the Jets put in some strong workdays in Banff as they prepare for Friday's home opener.

"When you have this many days between your first game, you have to work this hard, you have to expect that," Schmidt said. "When you know it's coming and guys can expect it, they have a little more fun with it. They enjoy that grind."

While the four hours of on-ice instruction accomplished what the Jets needed to get done in terms of systems work, all the off-ice activities were exactly what the team needed after a long training camp.

"It's huge to do before the year. It really puts everybody on the right foot moving forward, and feeling that they can talk to each other more than we have," said Schmidt. "That's something that, when you look at a weekend like this - or a couple days - you come out of it feeling like 'oh man I actually bonded with this player' more than previously because you got to spend a little more time with them."

One of those people Schmidt got to hang out with a bit more is Connor Hellebuyck. The two have hunted together before, but Schmidt feels closer to the 2020 Vezina Trophy winner after four days in Banff, and the team-building activities the group participated in.

"It's been awesome watching guys come out and take charge of this team now. He's been one of those guys," said Schmidt. "Our so-called young guys that have been young guys for a long time, they've really taken a step here."

The 29-year-old Hellebuyck works with defencemen like Schmidt game in and game out.

"The team came together very well, the on-ice is looking really good, our communication is opening and becoming really motivating in the room," Hellebuyck said. "A lot of good things happened this week."

Speaking of good things, Pierre-Luc Dubois hit the ice for Tuesday's final practice in Banff.

He missed Monday's session with the lower-body injury that forced him out of last Friday's preseason finale victory over the Calgary Flames.

Dubois was a full participant, taking up his usual centre spot between Cole Perfetti and Blake Wheeler.

The reported Jets line rushes looked like this:

Connor-Scheifele-Ehlers
Perfetti-Dubois-Wheeler
Barron-Lowry-Appleton
Maenalanen-Gustafsson-Gagner/Toninato

Morrissey-DeMelo
Dillon-Pionk
Stanley-Schmidt
Samberg-Capobianco

Head coach Rick Bowness remains optimistic that Dubois will be good to go for opening night.

"We're a little cautious with some guys, for sure," said Bowness. "There's a lot at stake and we just want to make sure when Friday night rolls around, we're 100 percent."

TOUGH CONVERSATIONS

As much as there is elation for some players who crack the opening day roster, there is an equal amount of disappointment for those who won't be on that list - despite the fact they could play NHL games later on, possibly even in the same season, as has been the case every single season.

Bowness had two tough conversations over the last couple days with Jansen Harkins and Ville Heinola, who were reassigned to Winnipeg's American Hockey League affiliate, the Manitoba Moose.

For Harkins, who played 77 games in a Jets jersey last season scoring seven times.

"I had a great talk with Harks. Just made sure that he still knows he's still part of this team, even though he cleared waivers. He's an important part of the family," said Bowness. "He's got National Hockey League skating. We just got to make sure we get the right role for him. He's got a great work ethic, a great attitude, and he's just got to keep working until he gets his way back."

In Heinola's case, it also comes down to role and the players ahead of him.

"Ville's a young guy, he's going to play in the National Hockey League," said Bowness. "He's a power play guy and right now we have three veterans ahead of him on the power play, so it's tough for him to get those minutes."

So the 21-year-old Heinola will play a big role on the Moose instead of potentially being in and out of the line-up early on in the season.

"The best thing for him is very simple: He's going to play in the league. He's a great kid, and he's going to be a really good player," said Bowness. "Now is not the time. Go down, play those roles, play 24 minutes, play in every situation, run the minutes up, and it's going to help him."

NEW GUY

When the 23 player roster was announced, Winnipeg's list had 24 names on it.

Axel Jonsson-Fjallby, claimed on waivers Monday from the Washington Capitals, is officially listed as that 24th player, currently holding a non-roster position, pending a work visa.

It's something Bowness believes will be sorted out by Thursday.