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[Barlow ready for next opportunity](#)

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG – On Wednesday, Winnipeg Jet 2023 first round pick Colby Barlow took part of his first practice with the Manitoba Moose at Canada Life Centre.

Barlow and the Owen Sound Attack had their season end on April 3 when the Saginaw Spirit finished them off in four games in the opening round of the OHL playoffs. The 19-year-old forward dealt with an upper body injury that kept him out for over a month and a half. But Barlow still managed to score 40 goals in just 50 games this season and has 118 career goals in 168 games.

“It had its ups and downs. I got injured there for a bit. But it was good, I learned a lot this year, battled through some adversity,” said Barlow.

“But excited to be here and start this new chapter for however long it is.”

Attack general manager Dale DeGray drafted Barlow eighth overall in the Ontario Hockey League draft in 2021. He has watched the Orillia product grow each year into the player that he is today and is confident that Barlow is ready for this next step.

“Obviously being our captain, he was certainly, he has always been a lead by example guy. He was injured a little bit this year, but he took the extra time when he was out to really focus on him and to get himself to a point where there was no hiccups coming back,” said DeGray.

“I know people will say ‘Well one year he got 46 (goals) and now he dropped to 40’. But when you figure it all out, it’s basically 46 after 46. That’s pretty darn impressive. He’s a true leader. I think he really took that upon himself this year to mature into that guy and to be accountable in all facets of the game. He was a guy that (Attack head coach) Darren Rumble relied on night in and night out.”

The Moose have five games left in their regular season and are nine points up on Chicago for the final playoff spot in the Central Division. They will host Iowa twice this weekend at Canada Life Centre and their magic number to clinch a playoff berth is four.

There are some familiar faces in the Moose dressing room as Barlow played with Moose regulars Nikita Chibrikov, Parker Ford, Brad Lambert, Henri Nikkanen, Tyrel Bauer, Simon Lundmark and Thomas Milic at the 2023 Young Stars Classic in Penticton in the fall.

“These guys they welcomed me right away when I walked into that room, every single one of them,” said Barlow.

“Like I said, it’s special and exciting to be here. Especially around playoff time, it’s just exciting times.”

While it is still unknown about what game or games Barlow will play in over the remaining five, he feels it’s special to be a part of the group.

"It's exciting. Whenever that chance (his first pro game) may be, I'm just going to be ready for it as best as I can be," said Barlow.

"Just do anything I can to help the team or contribute in any single kind of way I can."

DeGray has a lot of connections to the Moose organization having played for them in 1996-98. He played for Moose GM Craig Heisinger, was a teammate of Moose assistant coach Eric Dubois and Jets associate coach Scott Arniel. Like Barlow, DeGray is excited about this opportunity.

"Colby being a first-round pick and having some of the people in Winnipeg that I know that I've played for before or played against in Chevy's (Kevin Cheveldayoff) case. It's awesome when you get to see that kids play for guys that I know, and you wish them nothing but success," said DeGray.

"You just hope on my behalf it doesn't happen sooner or too soon, right? This is their dream, it's what they want, and this is the goal that you hope you can provide, and they get to do what they want and have some success doing it."

Winnipeg Free Press

[Barlow takes next step](#)

[Jets' prospect joins Moose after OHL season comes to an end](#)

By: Joshua Frey-Sam

Colby Barlow was known as "Captain" the last two years with his junior team.

He was "Rookie" on Wednesday.

The Winnipeg Jets forward prospect got his first taste of pro action as he skated with his new Manitoba Moose teammates for the first time since being reassigned from the Owen Sound Attack last week.

The puck moved faster, the bumps into the boards were a little heavier and the practice was a little tougher than what the 19-year-old was used to, he said.

Owen Sound was swept in the first round of the Ontario Hockey League playoffs by the Saginaw Spirit last Wednesday. Barlow, listed at 6-1, 195 pounds, received a call from the Jets organization on Thursday and spent a couple of days with his family before flying to Winnipeg on Sunday to join the American Hockey League team.

"It's bittersweet, ending with the team I've been with all year. I've got a lot of good friends on there, a lot of lifetime friends," said Barlow, a left-shooting winger. "Obviously, you want to go as long as you can with the team you're with but that ended and a new opportunity came, which is exciting.

"The last few days have been crazy: travel, get here and get to work. But I'm really stoked to be here."

Barlow, who hails from Orillia, Ont., endured the most uneven campaign of his hockey career this season. His coach, Greg Walters, was fired seven games into the season, despite the team having a 4-2-1 record. Winnipeg's first-round pick (18th overall) in the 2023 Draft suffered a back injury Nov. 8 that sidelined him until Dec. 30 and removed him from consideration for Canada's world junior hockey team.

The captain stood tall amid the chaos, leading the Attack to the playoffs while racking up 40 goals and 18 assists in 50 regular-season games, while adding one goal and two assists in four playoff games.

"It had its ups and downs," Barlow said. "I got injured there for a bit but it was good, I got healthier and learned a lot through this year, battled through some adversity but I'm excited to be here and start this new chapter for however long it is."

Last September, Barlow signed a three-year, entry-level contract that has yet to kick in. However, under the NHL-CHL player transfer agreement, he is ineligible to join the Moose out of training camp next season and will need to return to Owen Sound for his fourth year of junior hockey.

That is, unless he cracks the NHL roster.

Barlow's time in the AHL this year still holds value. He joins the Moose at the most critical point in the team's calendar, with six games remaining on the fading regular-season schedule and a playoff berth in sight.

Manitoba (31-33-2-1) can clinch a playoff spot this weekend as they host afternoon contests against the Iowa Wild (24-36-4-3) Saturday and Sunday, their final two home games before finishing the regular season with three road games next week.

Head coach Mark Morrison said the club will ease Barlow into the lineup, but that the experience he gets will be crucial.

"It's valuable. We have to be careful about which situation we put them in and make sure that when we do put him in, he's set up for success and not failure. This is a critical time of the year and he's happy to be here right now and he's learning a lot and he's learning systems," Morrison said.

"He's going to learn a lot and he's a smart kid so he'll pick things up quick."

The Jets selected Barlow knowing he possessed great leadership qualities and a howitzer for a shot.

Ahead of the 2022-23 season, Barlow became the youngest player to be named captain of the Attack. He's also scored 116 goals over three years in Owen Sound.

That's exactly how he hopes to find his footing at the pro level.

"I think it's just keeping it simple. Don't try to do too much, know my strengths and stick to what makes me, me. I think just making sure I can contribute offensively, not be a liability in the defensive zone is a huge thing, personally, and I'm sure for the coaches, as well," Barlow said.

“Obviously, I want to do my best here, show the kind of player I am, but it is also a lot of learning. It’s going to be my first showing with pro and playing it, so it’s (about) getting the right footing right away and getting to that speed and how the game is played and how everything comes quicker — I think that’s going to be an adjustment that’s gonna be made and hopefully I make it fast and do what I do best.”

[National title McGroarty’s focus](#)

[Jets’ top 2022 draft choice looking to capture NCAA championship with Michigan](#)

By: Mike McIntyre

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Make no mistake: Rutger McGroarty is certainly happy to be here. In some ways, more than ever considering what he’s gone through this season.

The top prospect of the Winnipeg Jets is hoping his second trip to the Frozen Four will yield a different result than last year’s heartbreaker, when his Michigan Wolverines were defeated in the semifinal (by the eventual winners, Quinnipiac) and never got to play for all the glory.

“I feel like that’s the biggest difference from last year. Last year, at least for me personally, you just had the vibe in the locker room that, ‘Oh, we’re here, this is incredible, this is awesome,’” McGroarty told the Free Press on Wednesday following his club’s practice at Xcel Energy Center, which is hosting this year’s NCAA equivalent of the Stanley Cup.

“You don’t come to Michigan to make it to the Frozen Four. You come to win national championships. I feel like we have the team to do it. I can’t say enough amazing things about this school and the guys in this locker room. I feel like we can’t let this opportunity go to waste.

“We have 120 minutes left to play. Maybe extras. One-hundred and 20 minutes and we’re national champions.”

Up first is a Thursday night battle with Boston College (7:30 p.m., ESPN2), with the winner advancing to Saturday’s final to face either Denver or Boston University. Those squads play Thursday afternoon.

No school has won more national hockey titles than Michigan’s nine, but they are seeking their first since 1998. This could be the last hurrah for McGroarty, as the 14th-overall pick from 2022 could opt to turn pro rather than return for a third college season.

Although talks in that regard have been ongoing between the Jets, his adviser and his family, the focus right now is on the challenge ahead.

“They’ve been so respectful with the playoff push,” an appreciative McGroarty said of the Jets, who have kept a close eye on him, with general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff and assistant GM Larry Simmons taking in his last two games in person.

In that sense, McGroarty is hoping he doesn’t have to think about his “next step” until at least Sunday, rather than Friday.

“Selfishly, for this team, hopefully I can delay the decision as long as possible,” he said.

McGroarty, 20, will have a few hundred family members and friends cheering him on as he tries to put an exclamation mark on a most incredible season which included being stretchered off the ice last November, spending multiple days in hospital with a punctured lung and fractured rib, only to recover just in time to captain the U.S. World Junior team to a gold medal.

“I’m really proud of the year I’ve had,” said McGroarty, who was one of college hockey’s top point-per-game scorers this season with 52 points (16 goals, 36 assists) in 35 regular-season games.

“Production, just consistency, everything has been really good. I feel all-around I’ve increased my level of play. Power play, five-on-five, four-on-four.”

However, the product of Lincoln, Neb., believes he has another level to get to, especially after what he described as an “unacceptable” personal performance in a 5-2 win over arch-rival Michigan State on March 31 which got them to this stage. He also wasn’t fond of his effort in a 4-3 victory over the University of North Dakota to advance in the opening round of the 16-team field.

“I pride myself on being a playoff hockey player, and I’ve always played well in those big games. These last (couple) games I haven’t played my best,” said McGroarty, who was held without a point in both victories.

“Thank goodness we’re here and I can turn it around and try to be great for this team and do whatever it takes.”

McGroarty is a left-shot who prefers to play on the right side, but is currently skating on the left along with Frank Nazar (drafted 13th overall by the Chicago Blackhawks in 2022) and Gavin Brindley (drafted 34th overall by the Columbus Blue Jackets in 2023).

“Honestly, we’ve got nothing to lose. We’re going to leave it all out there,” Nazar said of the Wolverines, who at one point a couple months ago looked like a longshot to even make it to the NCAA playoffs before they got their game in order.

“Guys have stepped up and put us in this position we’re in now. We were able to put some games together and come together as a team. I feel like we’re in a good spot. The way we’ve been able to come together at the end of the year is really awesome. I’m really proud of everybody on this team, and love these guys.”

It’s not a coincidence McGroarty’s return to form after his serious injury has played a major role in Michigan’s march to the promised land.

“Just a leader,” is how his coach, Brandon Naurato, described him Wednesday. “One of those guys that bring energy to every room he walks into. Always positive, smiling, making you smile. And obviously a great player on the ice. Rutger and that sophomore class, all these guys, are just a really good example of good people and what Michigan is all about.”

[Jets still a work in progress](#)

[Inconsistency in OT win over Predators sign team still looking for chemistry](#)

By: Ken Wiebe

DALLAS — A template game it was not.

Sure, there were elements of the qualities that have allowed the Winnipeg Jets to flirt with 50 wins for just the second time in franchise history.

That is no small feat and it is not to be discounted going into Thursday's game against the Dallas Stars (7 p.m. CT), who sit atop the Central Division standings.

However, a 4-3 overtime victory over the Nashville Predators on Tuesday night in Music City featured a few things that were out of tune — and definitely out of character.

A team doesn't need to apologize when a goalie stands tall and steals a point or two in a game against a hungry division rival. That's part of the job description and can be filed under the category of other duties as assigned, as Connor Hellebuyck is most definitely aware of his lengthy tenure as the backbone of this hockey team.

Without Hellebuyck making 45 saves and reinforcing his status as the front-runner to win his second Vezina Trophy, the Jets don't even get this game to overtime, let alone win it.

Outplaying the goalie in the crease at the other end of the rink is often an essential quality when the Stanley Cup playoffs begin.

Since the Jets feature one of — if not THE best — partnership in the NHL with Hellebuyck and Laurent Brossoit, it's one of the reasons the Jets should feel good about their chances in the post-season.

For all of the talk about Mark Scheifele going nine games without a goal after his eighth career hat-trick March 19 against the New York Rangers and needing to look for his shot more, the Jets' top centre had his fingerprints all over this game.

His quick puck movement to Gabriel Vilardi for the winger's highlight-reel, between-the-legs goal on the power play got the ball rolling and evened the score in the first period.

A turnover created by Tyler Toffoli at the offensive blue line allowed Scheifele to walk in alone and bury a beautiful backhand, making it 2-1 for Winnipeg.

Then Scheifele capped the night by making a perfect pass to Kyle Connor on a two-on-one rush during overtime to help the Jets improve to 48-24-6 and remain two points back of the Colorado Avalanche in the race for second in the Central.

It's true Scheifele was on the ice as the Predators evened the score in the third period on a goal by Ryan O'Reilly. That's also going to happen when you're on the ice against high-end players.

This was an important step forward for Scheifele, a play driver who had recorded only one shot on goal during the previous three games. Scheifele has never been a high-volume shooter and favours quality over quantity.

He's going to need to be on top of his game during the coming weeks and maybe months, especially with a series on the horizon with Nathan MacKinnon and the Avalanche.

Figuring out who is riding shotgun with Scheifele and Vilardi remains a storyline.

Nikolaj Ehlers had one of his toughest outings of the season. He saw his ice time reduced to a season-low 9:37, and he didn't have a shift during the final 10 minutes or so of the third period.

His turnovers were a byproduct of trying to do too much and, while you don't want to stifle the creativity of the skilled Danish forward, one of those miscues led directly to the opening goal of the contest by Tommy Novak.

Again, coughing up the puck happens to almost all players and this isn't to suggest Ehlers was the only guilty party on this front.

As the Jets have been more prone to poor puck management, there's been a rotating cast of characters that need to make better decisions at both blue lines and in the neutral zone.

These are correctable errors, provided the Jets are committed to "playing the right way." That can't just be a slogan on a motivational T-shirt but must become part of the mentality the Jets bring to the rink on a daily basis.

"You watch playoff hockey and a lot of times, it can be boring. It's not trying to lull them to sleep, but just making consistent plays and managing the puck at our line and our blue line,' said Jets right-winger Mason Appleton. "Not giving them free offence. We're a sound defensive team when we play that way."

Back to Ehlers. Just like the Jets need Scheifele and Kyle Connor to operate at a high level, they also need Ehlers to be rolling at peak efficiency. He's a game-breaker.

Despite not being on the top power-play unit, Ehlers is also an important driver. If that means playing him with Sean Monahan, so be it.

This is not to ignore the history that shows Scheifele and Connor can give up more offence than they actually produce. There is an argument to be made that having a healthy version of Vilardi on that line could provide the missing link to success.

A recent stretch suggests otherwise, as they were outscored by a wide margin as a trio, but Vilardi was coming back from a 15-game absence and trying to re-establish his footing.

Given the timing of the injuries to Connor and Vilardi, they've been playing catch up when it comes to chemistry and given their skill sets, there is potential for them to do damage together.

Besides, Scheifele and Ehlers just don't seem to be on the same wavelength right now. Cohesion is lacking, and there are times when one puck doesn't seem to be enough for both of them.

Perhaps keeping them together and seeing if they can find some of that December magic is worth attempting.

Maybe playing Ehlers and Connor with Monahan might yield better results, which would leave Scheifele with Vilardi and one of Toffoli or Cole Perfetti.

While it's always good to have options, not having a better grasp of what the top teams' lines will look like in Game 1 is problematic.

The expectation for a top line should not be to break even.

On the flip side, that the Jets were able to reset and find a way to win Tuesday after coughing up a two-goal lead is an important club to have in the bag.

Even if it's one a team doesn't want to rely on all that much either.

"We're going to play in some tough buildings here hopefully going on a long playoff run, so you've got to be able to manage your emotions, manage the game," said Jets defenceman Dylan DeMelo. "There's going to be ebbs and flows, so when things happen like that, just try to get back to the basics and get back to our game."

The Jets will attempt to avoid being swept in the season series by the Stars on Thursday and getting back to basics will be essential against a team that's playing extremely well and has made them look ordinary on several occasions already.

The Stars haven't allowed the Jets to get to the blue paint very often during the previous three meetings, they've poked holes in the defensive structure and they've won the special teams battle handily.

This is an opportunity for the Jets to try and show that they can provide an answer against a potential playoff opponent as they continue to jockey for position in the Central Division standings.

Winnipeg Sun

[Jets' Stanley earning consistent work with fresh perspective](#)

By Scott Billeck

Most people don't get to see the other side of Logan Stanley. It's a long way to look, after all.

A 6-foot-7 behemoth on the ice, Stanley is becoming known for bone-crunching hits and fists that will freely fly if you challenge him.

But this past week, while sitting in his locker-room stall, Stanley used those massive mitts to keep his daughter steady on his lap, pausing an interview on a couple of occasions to fetch the ball she was playing with.

Steadying is somewhat of a theme for Stanley, who's finally carved himself out a consistent role in Rick Bowness's lineup.

Not long ago, reports suggested Stanley had requested a trade. Not seeing much ice time, it wasn't all that surprising.

Frustrations poured over during an injury-riddled 2022-23 campaign, but Stanley didn't want to talk about it too much then.

He kept his head down through the summer months and continued to do so during large swaths this season, where he sat in the press box.

“The little one helps,” he said, looking his daughter’s way with a smile stapled to his face. “Last year was tough. I was hurt, and there were a lot of other things going on.”

Parenthood has offered a welcomed distraction to the rigours of the NHL. A return to health, meanwhile, has returned opportunities.

“The injuries from last year nagged on until the summer,” he said. “I wasn’t very comfortable on the ice whenever I had my skates on.”

The 25-year-old Waterloo, Ont. product featured in just 19 games, a steep decline from the 58 he played a season earlier.

This season came with a different mindset.

Being healthy has helped, but so has being on a good team. There’s a good energy within that, he said.

“And we haven’t had a lot of injuries,” Stanley said, knocking on wood. “To be that healthy on a blue line has been almost unheard of.”

At first, you might think that would be to Stanley’s detriment.

Injuries suck. But for players sitting on the bubble, they offer opportunities.

Stanley’s mindset has helped him make the most of it. The ice time he’s gotten and the 21 games he’s played have all been earned. And it’s helped with the confidence, too.

“You have to earn everything you get in this league and you want stay in this league and earn my job for the future and also help the team win,” he said.

Stanley’s no Josh Morrissey on the scoresheet. He has just a single goal and one helper through those 21 games.

But the Jets aren’t looking for offence as much as they are searching for a consistent defensive game.

That’s something Stanley has brought with him to the table this season.

He’s been on the ice for more shots for than against. More goals, too.

And he’s injecting some energy in the physical department, dropping the gloves now in three of his past four games.

“It’s a little bit heat of the moment, but it’s also a little bit I don’t want to sit out and watch anymore,” he said. “I want to play. I don’t want to lose. I’m just trying to do anything to help the guys win.”

"I'm not the big goal scorer in that sense. But I can block shots, be physical and play good D and try and bring good energy."

Stanley's play has caught the eye of Bowness, who has been more than happy to play him.

"This is his best hockey, for sure," Bowness said. "He's physical and he's moving, he's very confident with the puck.

"We wanted him playing more last year but the injuries set him back. He missed a lot of time and then he came back, got hurt again. So, last year, you can blame it on the injuries.

"This year, it was the depth and he worked hard and there came a point where we said, 'We're not going to let you sit for long,' because he's earned that right to play."

Stanely said Bowness has been great with him during the tumultuous times.

"Our relationship has grown," Stanley said. "I'd say it's always been good. He's a very honest person, and if you want to talk to him, his door is always open. In that sense, it's been good.

"And it's not easy for him to tell guys they're not playing. It's part of the job, and sometimes it's a cruel business. But overall, he's been great."

It's all been a part of Stanley's maturation process.

"When you're young, you think you're going to play in the league right away," he said. "But then you see how good everyone is, and you also see the new young guys coming up who are also good, so there are a lot of good players. It makes you appreciate how lucky you are to be here."

With that, it was time to retrieve that ball one more time.

There's only so long you can make a toddler wait.

[Whiteout looms as Jets announce return of popular street party](#)

By Scott Billeck

The streets of downtown Winnipeg will be painted white later this month, with the Winnipeg Jets Whiteout street parties back in business.

A return of the popular tradition coinciding with Jets home playoff games was announced by Truth North on Wednesday.

Whiteout street party tickets go on sale on April 17 for \$10 each, with \$5 from each ticket sale going to United Way Winnipeg.

"There is a whiteout coming," Kevin Donnelly, a senior vice-president of TNSE, said during a news conference at Canada Life Centre. "We know the playoffs are an exciting time for our city and fans want to be in good company to take it all in."

The parties will once again engulf Donald Street between Portage Avenue and Graham Street, and 5,000 people are expected to watch the game on three large screens set up along that stretch of road outside the arena.

The parties, which began in 2018 as the Jets marched to the Western Conference Final, have attracted more than 155,000 fans.

A couple of Jets fans pose for a selfie with mascots Benny and Mick E. Moose during the Winnipeg Whiteout Street Party on Saturday, April 22, 2023, outside Canada Life Centre in Winnipeg prior to the start of Game 3 of the Jets-Vegas Golden Knights NHL playoff series.

Those with tickets to playoff games can also enjoy the street party and will not need a separate ticket to attend. Playoff tickets for the first round go on sale on April 15.

Gates to the street party will open two hours before puck drop.

Food trucks and other concessions will be set up outside for food and beverage purchases, and live entertainment will also be on hand, along with prizes and giveaways.

Organizers are also bringing back the Party in the Plaza at True North Square. Tickets for this event, which go on sale simultaneously with the street party ones, will cost \$25, with \$5 going to United Way.

The proceeds of the 2019 and 2023 street parties raised more than \$212,000 for community agencies, including N'Dinawemak – Our Relatives' Place, Main Street Project, Velma's House, Astum Api Niikinaahk, and the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre.

This year's proceeds will go to agencies whose work is centred around supporting those in our city experiencing homelessness, addictions and mental health challenges.

The province is kicking in \$75,000 per round to support the parties, while a partnership with Economic Development Winnipeg will see a further \$50,000 contributed from their special event tourism fund.

"Our government is excited to be able to help bring back the energy of Jets Whiteout Parties to downtown Winnipeg," Premier Wab Kinew said. "Not only do whiteout parties benefit downtown businesses and raise money for housing and mental health supports, they're a fantastic way to come together as a community. I look forward to joining in and cheering the Jets on to victory."

The Jets booked their ticket to the Stanley Cup playoffs last week when they trounced the Calgary Flames 5-2 at home.

Winnipeg is currently third in the Central Division, two points back of second-place Colorado — their likely opening-round opponent.

The Jets are riding a four-game winning streak after surviving a third-period scare in Nashville on Tuesday to win 4-3 in overtime, thanks to Kyle Connor's 32nd of the season.

The team is in Dallas on Thursday to play the first-place Stars before travelling to Denver for a critical matchup with the Avs on Saturday.

[High-flying Jets still not on opponents' radar](#)

By Paul Friesen

One year, 48 wins and 102 points later, the Winnipeg Jets still aren't getting much respect.

The latest survey by the NHL Players Association isn't exactly a ringing endorsement of the progress the Jets have made over the last 12 months, or a reflection of their lofty place in the standings.

For the second straight year, the only member of the Jets to get a mention is goalie Connor Hellebuyck, and even that came with some reluctance.

Hellebuyck may be on his way to a second Vezina Trophy as the best goalie in the loop, but he's not even close to being the guy players would want between the pipes in a must-win game.

That honour, once again, goes to Tampa Bay's Andrei Vasilevskiy, as 47% of players polled chose the Lightning stopper.

Until Hellebuyck does it in the playoffs, he'll apparently remain scrambling for the crumbs in this department.

For the second straight year he finished fourth, this time with 5% of the votes, behind Igor Shesterkin of the Rangers (6.5%) and Ilya Sorokin of the Islanders (6.2%).

Outside of the crease, this annual poll continues to shut out the Jets.

One forward you'd want in a must-win game?

No mention of Winnipeg's leading scorer Mark Scheifele.

Connor McDavid of the Oilers ran away with this one, followed by Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby, Colorado's Nathan MacKinnon, Nikita Kucherov of the Lightning and New York's Artemi Panarin.

Hard to argue with those.

A defenceman for the same purpose?

No Josh Morrissey in the top five.

More than half of the 622 players who voted named Colorado's Cale Makar, with Tampa's Victor Hedman, Nashville's Roman Josi, Quinn Hughes of Vancouver and the Rangers' Adam Fox fighting for the rest of the spoils.

You'd think Morrissey's ever-expanding box of tools would garner more votes than at least one of those.

Kyle Connor didn't make the cut as one of the best stick-handlers, deked off this list by McDavid, Detroit's Patrick Kane, Jack Hughes of New Jersey, Kucherov and MacKinnon.

Categories like most complete player (Crosby), best breakout passer (Makar), best play-maker (Kucherov) and most dependable faceoff man (Nashville's Ryan O'Reilly) also ignored the playoff-bound Jets.

Friendly Manitoba's NHL team doesn't have a player that opponents hate playing against, either.

Boston's Brad Marchand has both his smelly gloves on that title, with Florida's Matthew Tkachuk and Tom Wilson of the Capitals putting up an argument and a high elbow.

There wasn't even a hat tipped Winnipeg's way for the player with the best sense of fashion. Time to step outside that conservative box of suits, fellas.

Winnipeg's only other top-five mention came in a category we're all too familiar with: Making ice.

So a nod of the tuque to the crew who prepare the surface at the downtown barn, which once again ranks third in the NHL, behind Montreal and Edmonton.

As for the notion Winnipeg is one of the toughest places to play because of its raucous fans, we're sorry to report that's ancient history, along with the years-long string of sellouts.

Rinks in Vegas, Raleigh, Boston, Denver and Montreal really put the edge in home ice, according to those who lace 'em up.

Unlike last year's survey, this one didn't ask players for their favourite city in which to enjoy an off-day. Perhaps the 'Peg missed out on that.

Yeah, right.

When the results of this poll came out a year ago, it perfectly reflected where the Jets were at the time: in the middle of their free-fall from apparent Stanley Cup contender in the first half to wildcard playoff seed headed for an early exit.

That NHLers haven't changed their view can mean only one thing: the Jets are more than the sum of their parts.

Either that, or an NHL player in Winnipeg is only slightly more conspicuous than one in Arizona.

Maybe it's a little of both.

Barring the drafting and development of another McDavid, Crosby or MacKinnon, there's only one thing that'll change all that: a long run at the Stanley Cup.

The names on that thing make up the ultimate opinion poll.

NHLPA Player Poll

One game, which goalie?

Andrei Vasilevskiy, TB, 46.9%

Igor Shesterkin, NYR, 6.5%

Ilya Sorokin, NYI, 6.2%

Connor Hellebuyck, WPG, 5.0%
Juuse Saros, NASH, 4.9%

One game, which forward?

Connor McDavid, EDM, 48.7%
Sidney Crosby, PIT, 11.6%
Nathan MacKinnon, COL, 6.6%
Nikita Kucherov, TB, 5.3%
Artemi Panarin, NYR, 2.6%

One game, which defenceman?

Cale Makar, COL, 56.4%
Victor Hedman, TB, 10.5%
Roman Josi, NASH, 4.5%
Quinn Hughes, VAN, 4.0%
Adam Fox, NYR, 2.4%

Best stick-handler

McDavid, EDM, 35.5%
Patrick Kane, DET, 20.9%
Jack Hughes, NJD, 8.1%
Kucherov, TB, 7.9%
MacKinnon, COL, 4.0%
Panarin, NYR, 4.0%

Most complete player

Crosby, PIT, 38.4%
Aleksander Barkov, FLA, 14.6%
Anze Kopitar, LAK, 8.2%
McDavid, EDM, 7.8%
MacKinnon, COL, 6.6%

If you need to win a faceoff

Ryan O'Reilly, NASH, 14.5%
Crosby, PIT, 13.6%
Claude Giroux, OTT, 7.6%
Luke Glendening, TB, 6.0%
Jordan Staal, CAR, 6.0%

Best style

David Pastrnak, BOS, 15%
William Nylander, TOR, 12.2%
Auston Matthews, TOR, 10.5%
Kucherov, TB, 2.5%
Hughes, NJD, 2.5%
Kane, DET, 2.5%

Toughest arena as a visitor

Las Vegas, 31.4%
Raleigh, NC, 16.3%
Boston, 16%

Denver, 7.9%
Montreal, 4.7%

Best ice

Montreal, 34.5%
Edmonton, 14.5%
Winnipeg, 11.1%
Minnesota, 9.8%
Las Vegas, 5.1%

The Athletic

[Winnipeg Jets player poll, part 1: Most underrated, funniest, best dressing room DJ and more](#)

By Murat Ates

One of our more popular annual projects at The Athletic is our NHL players' poll, where players from around the league share their thoughts on big-ticket issues.

Winnipeg's players contributed heavily to this year's edition of that poll, showing personality, humour and a great deal of insight.

We've spent the past couple of months going right back at the Jets with more questions — this time with a focus on local flair. As in the NHL poll, we allowed the players to remain anonymous as we grilled the Jets about the best pranks, worst chirps and that time somebody stuffed a bunch of airplane silverware into Nate Schmidt's bags at the airport, causing quite a stir.

The Jets players were so gracious with their time, taking on so many of our questions, that we've broken their responses into a multi-part series.

Who's the most competitive player off the ice?

Nobody makes it to the NHL without some amount of competitive streak, but what happens when you get a bunch of freakishly competitive people in a room with cards or ping pong or poker or even Settlers of Catan? Mark Scheifele might be the obvious choice and he did receive multiple votes ... But he's not Winnipeg's champion of "compete."

Mason Appleton	23.1%
Dominic Toninato	15.4%
Dylan Samberg	15.4%
Nate Schmidt	15.4%
Mark Scheifele	15.4%
Cole Perfetti	7.7%
Kyle Connor	7.7%

"What comes to mind right away is Appy during football season," said one teammate. "He's such a passionate Green Bay Packers fan. He gets pretty intense on NFL Sunday."

"He thinks he knows football," said another, "So he always claims he's the best fantasy football GM."

So how did Appleton do?

“He finished fourth, I believe, and we finished second: Me and Pionk.”

If you can guess who Neal Pionk’s most likely fantasy football teammate would be, you know the source of the fantasy football sass.

There was also the matter of Appleton’s relentlessness for debate.

“He thinks he knows everything on every topic,” one teammate said, while another added: “Mason is the sort of guy that has to be right about everything. He could argue that two plus two equals five and completely commit to it.”

All of the sass was good-natured: Appleton’s teammates agreed that in addition to his hard work in the corners — and stubbornness as a fantasy football GM — he’s a sharp and funny friend who teammates feel like they can count on when the going gets tough.

For what it’s worth, Appleton pointed to Scheifele.

“No matter what it is, he wants to be the best. He’s competitive with everything he does in the gym, everything he does at home and the way he studies the game.”

If you’re looking for a secret way in which Scheifele is hyper-competitive, a number of teammates pointed to a lengthy obsession with Settlers of Catan that — mercifully, in some of their eyes — came to an end a couple of years ago.

Who’s the most underrated player?

Winnipeg isn’t Toronto which, in addition to being one of my favourite things about Winnipeg, means that Jets players don’t automatically make national headlines every time they play a great game. It’s easy to fly under the radar here.

Jets players are aware of that, too, and for the most part, it suits them fine ... But here are the Jets Winnipeg’s own players think should be getting more love:

Vladislav Namestnikov	44.4%
Dylan DeMelo	22.2%
Adam Lowry	22.2%
Alex Iafallo	11.1%

“We’ve got a lot of guys that deserve more credit than they get,” said one forward. “I’ll go with Vladdy, just because I’ve played with him and now I understand how he sees the game. He’s so smart — I don’t think people give him enough credit for how smart he is.”

It was a common sentiment.

“Vladdy Namestnikov, that guy is unbelievable,” said a Jets defenceman. “He’s so good at everything. He can play anywhere in your lineup. It’s a blessing and a curse. The blessing is he can actually play anywhere in the lineup. The curse is that now he’s playing on the fourth line. There are guys in the league or great, talented players in the AHL that can’t do that as well as he does.”

Namestnikov wasn't the only answer, of course. A few Jets players don't think the world has realized how good Adam Lowry can be — and that's saying something, given the shutdown role the Jets captain has played for years.

"I would say Lows is underrated, just because of what he brings to this team," said one of Winnipeg's several 20-goal scorers. "I think it's overlooked sometimes. Everyone looks at numbers and yeah, it's not 60, 70 points, but what he brings to this team is underrated. Lows sets the standard every game. He would be my best choice."

"I think Adam has got really good hands. I feel like he surprises himself, almost," said a different one of Winnipeg's several 20-goal scorers. "He's got underrated hands — they come out of nowhere. He holds on to pucks and he's very patient and sometimes it's like whoa."

Dylan DeMelo recently hit the 30-point plateau for the first time in his NHL career. The love he got for this answer was about what he does at the other end of the rink.

"I just think that he's very easy to play with. He makes players around him better," said one player whose numbers have always been better with DeMelo on the ice (and whose identity you should be able to guess).

Who's your funniest teammate?

You're probably not surprised by the player who ran away with the No. 1 spot in this response. A few players tried to take a minute and think about it, not wanting to give "the obvious answer." Nate Schmidt ran away with it anyway, as you'd expect.

It was difficult for teammates to share specific jokes or moments of Schmidt's hilarity, though. Most of them just pointed to his infectious enthusiasm, sharing mild, loving barbs like: "Schmidty loves to tell stories. I don't know if he's the best one but he loves to tell them."

Mind you, one player did share a classic — and fun-sounding — Nate Schmidt date.

Nate Schmidt	55.6%
Josh Morrissey	11.1%
Gabriel Vilardi	11.1%
Vladislav Namestnikov	11.1%
Sean Monahan	11.1%

"Schmidty is always looking for an arcade — always," said a Minnesotan. "He and his wife will go to the arcade one night a week, pick five games, play all five, and keep a running tally. I think it's a great idea and I think I'd want to try that with name redacted."

I thought that was very sweet.

Stay tuned, though: In our next edition of this poll, we've got a great story about a time that Schmidt was part of a Jets prank gone wrong — featuring a well-known ex-Jets forward, a star player, and some hilariously timed reconnaissance. Schmidt features heavily in a lot of the pranks, come to think of it, but he didn't win top spot in that poll.

Which Jets player do you think will win the next major award?

Connor Hellebuyck ran away with this poll and it was not close. I think he's a deserving Vezina Trophy candidate as the NHL's top goaltender, he leads our in-house projections, and it would not shock me in the slightest if he receives Hart Trophy votes, too.

It was also nice to see some love for Josh Norris-sey:

Connor Hellebuyck	91.7%
Josh Morrissey	8.3%

One player said he wanted to vote for Kyle Connor just to respect Connor's spot in the Rocket Richard standings prior to his December injury. Despite the considerate deliberation, his vote ultimately went to Hellebuyck.

Who controls the dressing room music?

The answer to this classic question depends on what's happening in the Jets' lives that day. Neal Pionk and Brenden Dillon get practice days, Morrissey gets home games, and Hellebuyck takes over on the road.

Practice	Neal Pionk Brenden Dillon
Home gameday	Josh Morrissey
Road gameday	Connor Hellebuyck

What's each player's musical wheelhouse?

"Dilly and I like '70s rock, classic rock, Eagles, Fleetwood Mac, and then once in a while you've got to flip it," says Pionk. "I've played Christmas music. I've played Counting Crows. The other day I played Lukas Graham because Fly (Nikolaj Ehlers) likes him. My fastball is Eagles, Fleetwood Mac and all of that old-school stuff."

At this, a younger teammate called out, "It's really T-Swift and One Direction." I've been in the Pionk living room in Hermantown, though, and I know that Neal gets his spelling from Minnesotan hockey legend, Neal Broten, but that part of the inspiration was Winnipeg's Neil Young.

Otherwise, Hellebuyck leans more country while Morrissey plays EDM (electronic dance music) as pump-up music.

Whose music do the Jets like most?

"J-Mo," said an EDM-loving Jets forward. "Don't tell Bucky. J-Mo plays a lot of EDM and mashups."

"J-Mo, by leaps and bounds," said another. "I like Bucky's music but I feel like he's seven years late to everything. The songs that he plays are all songs that were popular seven years ago."

"Neal's classic rock is good, too, but not right before games," said one of the newer Jets.

One of the wryest answers was delivered in exactly the right tone.

“J-Mo’s is more like European club music and I think it gets everyone going.” the forward explained. “J-Mo’s music gets you going. I think Bucky’s gets him going but ... Helly likes country remixes. Goalie things, you know?”

Whatever keeps the pucks out, I guess.

Also, since I couldn’t help but look up Winnipeg’s first-period records at home and on the road to see if we could use bad science to prove one or the other player had the best pump-up music: In first periods at home, Winnipeg has outscored its opponents by a total of 34-18. In first periods on the road, Winnipeg has been outscored 37-26. I hate to consider taking anything away from Winnipeg’s most valuable player, particularly given the barrage of pucks the Jets have asked him to deal with of late, but ... is there something here? Have we just discovered the true nature of Winnipeg’s slow starts on the road?

Stay tuned for more of this deep, investigative journalism fun look into the Jets players as people, behind the scenes, coming up in Part 2.