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Jets at Worlds - 05.13.24

Switzerland remained unbeaten with a 2-1 shootout win over Czechia

By Jamie Thomas

Nino Niederreiter and Switzerland beat Czechia 2-1 in a shootout at the 2024 World Hockey Championships on Monday at Prague Arena.

Kevin Fiala opened the scoring with a power play goal in the first period for Switzerland, Czechia's lone goal in regulation came from Matej Stransky, also on the power play.

There was no scoring in the third and overtime and it was Fiala and Stransky scoring in the shoot-out before Philipp Kurashev recorded the game winner.

Niederreiter played on a line with Ken Jager and former NHLer Sven Andrighetto and played 18:23 with two shots on goal. The Swiss are in first place in Group A after their shootout victory. Niederreiter and Switzerland will have Tuesday off before returning to action against Great Britain on Wednesday.

Winnipeg Free Press

Jets interview Berube as potential replacement for Bowness

Stanley Cup winner among bench boss candidates

By: Ken Wiebe

The candidates are beginning to emerge, though the process of finding the successor to Rick Bowness as head coach of the Winnipeg Jets remains in the early stages.

Tuesday included a zoom interview for former St. Louis Blues bench boss Craig Berube, who helped that organization capture the Stanley Cup in 2019.

Frank Seravalli of Daily Faceoff was first to report the news of Berube's interview with the Jets.

Berube was fired earlier this season after the team got off to a 13-14-1 start and has a lifetime record of 281-190-72 record (.584 winning percentage) to go along with a mark of 27-31 in the post-season (.466 winning percentage).

The Jets are quite familiar with Berube from his time within the Central Division and he's just two years removed from guiding the Blues to a record of 49-22-11, before they lost a second-round series in six games to the Colorado Avalanche, who won the Stanley Cup in 2022.

Berube's name has been linked to a number of teams and the Toronto Maple Leafs are believed to have significant interest in him.

Since Bowness announced he was retiring from coaching, the expectation is associate coach Scott Arniel is the front-runner for the Jets job, though it's obvious the organization is planning to go through a thorough process.

Given how the last coaching search went in 2022, it's no surprise the Jets would want to speak to a number of qualified candidates before coming to a final decision.

Speaking of people with Central Division ties who are drawing interest, former Minnesota Wild head coach Dean Evason has been linked to the Jets as well.

Evason, who was born in Flin Flon, has an NHL record of 147-77-27 (.639 winning percentage) but was 8-15 (.363 winning percentage) in four playoff appearances guiding the Wild.

He also spent seven seasons as an assistant coach with the Washington Capitals and six seasons as the head coach of the Milwaukee Admirals (the American Hockey League affiliate of the Nashville Predators) before joining the Wild as an assistant coach during the 2018-19 season.

Former Edmonton Oilers head coach Jay Woodcroft is believed to be on the list of candidates to be interviewed as well.

Woodcroft, who is currently serving as an assistant coach for Team Canada at the 2024 IIHF World Men's Hockey Championship, posted a record of 133-79-41 (.643 winning percentage) during his three seasons with the Oilers with a playoff record of 14-14 (.500 winning percentage).

Former Seattle Kraken head coach Dave Hakstol could be on the radar as well and there's a chance he would be under consideration to be the Jets' associate coach if Arniel is ultimately chosen for the head job.

Todd McLellan is another person True North Sports and Entertainment is familiar with, both from his extensive experience in the NHL but also dating back to the International Hockey League and AHL when he was behind the bench for the Cleveland Lumberjacks and Houston Aeros.

McLellan was most recently with the Los Angeles Kings and has 1,232 NHL games on his head coaching resume, including 88 in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

At the AHL level, Todd Nelson of the Hershey Bears could factor into the equation.

Nelson is a two-time Calder Cup champion and two-time United Hockey League champion with the Muskegon Fury as a head coach.

Nelson was the interim head coach of the Oilers in 2014-15 and he worked for Jets general manager Kevin Chevledayoff as an assistant coach when Chevledayoff was the Chicago Wolves GM.

Nelson also has a connection to Bowness, as they worked together for four seasons on the Dallas Stars staff.

Sheldon Keefe was recently fired by the Maple Leafs, but it looks like he could be in line to be the next bench boss of the New Jersey Devils, so that would take him out of the mix for the Jets' job.

From the present to the future

By: Mike McIntyre and Ken Wiebe

The offseason came earlier than expected for the Winnipeg Jets, whose Stanley Cup aspirations came to a screeching halt after just five postseason games.

Not surprisingly, talk quickly shifted around here from the present to the future.

That is reflected in this month's Free Press mailbag, where plenty of questions concern what needs to happen next — from coaching to players to systems — for this franchise to finally realize it's dream.

As always, hockey writers Mike McIntyre and Ken Wiebe are here to offer their two cents.

In your opinion, who are the top three candidates to be the next head coach of the Jets? –
STEVE

Mike McIntyre: Kenny did a great piece last week outlining a half-dozen potential candidates, so I'll weigh in with my take here.

I believe associate coach Scott Arniel is the heavy favourite, for a few reasons. Firstly, he knows the players and organization and system better than any candidate, and his fingerprints were all over the group that went 52-24-6 during the regular season and captured the Jennings Trophy as the stingiest squad in the land.

He's respected, has strong roots in Winnipeg (including playing junior hockey with Dale Hawerchuk, being part of Jets 1.0, captaining the Manitoba Moose later in his career and later coaching the squad), and we know how much True North values those elements. As well, I suspect Rick Bowness would provide a ringing endorsement, as would many of the current players on the team.

That said, the Jets would be wise to not rush into anything and keep their eyes and ears open. Personally, I'd have former Oilers bench boss Jay Woodcroft and former Minnesota Wild head honcho Dean Evason in my top three. Perhaps we see a scenario where Arniel ultimately gets the gig, but someone else with experience is brought in to fill his former role behind the bench. Woodcroft's brother, Todd, is a former Jets assistant, while Evason is no stranger to the Jets from the often-heated Central Division battles with the Minnesota Wild, and it probably doesn't hurt that he's from Manitoba.

There's plenty of other intriguing candidates out there, too. Speaking of which...

Is there any truth to rumours of the Jets' interest in Sheldon Keefe? Or is it really just a formality Scott Arniel is the next head coach of the Jets?

Ken Wiebe: Elliotte Friedman mentioned on his 32 Thoughts podcast that he wouldn't be surprised if the Jets were interested in speaking with Keefe after he was fired by the Toronto Maple Leafs on Friday and that makes sense on a number of levels.

His regular season record is tremendous and Keefe fits the profile of someone who is expected to apply the valuable lessons learned in his first NHL head coaching job in his next stop. Keefe

won a Calder Cup with the Toronto Marlies in 2018 and his brother Adam was once a feisty winger with the Manitoba Moose of the AHL. So, the folks at True North would be familiar with Keefe's work and respect his ability.

It's not a formality that Arniel is the next head coach, as a full interview process is expected to transpire. But it is fair to say Arniel is the front-runner for the job, given his resume, which was boosted by the job he did filling in for Bowness during the past two seasons.

3. There is a lot of discussion regarding the personnel make-up of the Jets re playoff grit, experience etc. I've read many people say they need more playoff savvy veterans.

I'm under the impression that the opposite is required. An injection of youthful hunger should be on the menu.

A few hungry young guys (hopefully with sandpapery personalities, because I think the Jets lack 'mean' in their lineup) would not only help but also improve the salary structure for other additions.

What do you think? –ADRIAN

MM: First off, there's no question the NHL is getting younger, with plenty of youth thrown right into the mix and often enjoying success.

Look at Logan Stankoven of the Dallas Stars as one example. He was tearing up the AHL this year as a rookie, then got called up and is now a primary part of a club that is just two wins away from reaching the Western Conference Final. (He had two goals in Saturday's victory over the Colorado Avalanche).

That said, I don't think you can just toss a bunch of fresh-faced players into the lineup and expect them to have immediate success because they might be viewed as more "hungry." Spots have to be earned, and there's no doubt the Jets have a few promising kids knocking at the door.

Whether it's someone like Cole Perfetti, who I wish had been given more of a chance in the playoffs, to prospects like Ville Heinola, Brad Lambert and Nikita Chibrikov, who figure to push for work next season, there's plenty to be excited about. Other than Chibrikov, none of those players have any real "sandpaper" elements to their game, but I don't believe the Jets were ousted by the Avalanche because they weren't "mean" enough. It was more about not being able to stop their dynamic offensive players from doing as they please.

4. Would it be better to trade the likes of Nikolaj Ehlers for a good near ready prospect (given we are unlikely to get a top 4 experienced D in such a trade)? Much like picking up Gabriel Vilardi we received 'potential' in exchange for 'known'.

This may result in having a younger D core (fully expecting Ville Heinola to be in the top 6 and possibly Elias Salomonsson) but given we have no other near ready prospects this may be the right path. Then in 2 or 3 years we have mixed in the young forwards and let the younger D gain experience.

A lot of the D discussion to me comes down to the fact that our prospect pool in this area is quite weak. –ERIC

KW: The prospect of moving Ehlers is something the Jets may have to consider, given his contract status (going into the final season of his contract before having the ability to become a UFA in the summer of 2025), but trading him for a near-ready prospect isn't something I expect or would endorse.

The only way it really makes any sense to trade Ehlers (if he's not interested in signing an extension) is to get a bona fide top-4 D-man and potentially recoup some draft capital in any prospective deal. Any team acquiring Ehlers is likely going to need permission to see what he's looking for in an extension to maximize the return, if the Jets decide to go down that road.

As for the prospect pool, the Jets don't have an abundance of players pushing to be in the NHL next fall but not sure it's fair to call the defence prospects weak either. Salomonsson had an excellent season in the SHL (in Sweden), helping his club team capture a championship and is someone who will be pushing for NHL duty sooner than later.

It's true the Jets have more organizational depth in the prospect pool up front compared to defence. If Heinola can show he's ready to be an NHL regular and Salomonsson does the same in the next season or two, the defence corps has the potential to become a position of strength — especially if the Jets acquire a quality D-man in a trade for Ehlers.

5. In the final post-game interviews with Bones, Adam Lowry and Josh Morrissey, all mentioned play-off "intensity", or a lack of it. So, it appears that a level of intensity below 100 per cent can get the Jets through the long regular season but when other teams ramp it up for the post-season, the Jets don't respond.

Why would that be?

I suggest it is a lack of commitment to the team and the city. We all know Winnipeg is on most every NHL player's no-trade list. They do not want to come to Winnipeg.

Similarly, most (not all) of the current Jets players (and their wives/girlfriends) could care less about Winnipeg and would happily take a move to almost any other NHL city.

So when that extra playoff intensity is needed, most of the roster have no pride in the city or the jersey they are wearing, no motivation to "bust through the wall." Your thoughts? –GARY

MM: As for the idea the Jets didn't have the requisite intensity, that was certainly apparent at times. They were caught by surprise at just how hard the Avalanche came at them, and perhaps a 3-0-0 record in the regular-season provided a false sense of security.

However, I don't believe it has anything to do with the city the players are representing. Rather, it has everything to do with a savvy, Stanley Cup champion (2022) squad that absolutely schooled a more inexperienced Winnipeg group. Trust me when I say that this group of Jets took plenty of pride in wearing a Jets uniform, and their tremendous regular-season record reflects that.

They didn't just flip a switch when the hockey stage got bigger. Rather, it seems they suffered a bit of stage fright. In that sense, there's a chance for some valuable lessons to be learned out of this most recent disappointment, the way the Avalanche suffered some tough love prior to finally breaking through a couple years ago.

6. Do the Jets need to replace the whole right side of their defencemen in addition to a 2nd (or 1st) line centre to make the next step towards the Stanley Cup? –GEORGE

KW: Replacing an entire right side of the defence corps is not something many teams do because of how difficult it is to rebuild. Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff had to try and do this as recently as the 2019-20 season and that was no easy task trying to replace all of Dustin Byfuglien, Jacob Trouba and Tyler Myers on the right side — along with Ben Chiarot on the left side for good measure.

The Jets' defence corps hasn't been the same since the departure of those players, so it's fair to say they need an upgrade on the right side to take the next step towards the Stanley Cup. Both Nate Schmidt and Pionk are entering the final season of their respective contracts before they can become an unrestricted free agent and Dylan DeMelo is set to become one on July 1, so change could be coming out of necessity.

Mark Scheifele is a No. 1 centre and his seven-year extension is about to kick in, so he's going to hold down that job for the foreseeable future. Keeping Sean Monahan or bringing in a suitable alternative as the second-line centre is a top priority. Brad Lambert could be a consideration, but he could be heading back to right wing if the Jets can find a way to have a more experienced option down the middle.

7. Are any players or coaches sticking around town this summer or all they all gone to various training facilities? –DAVID

MM: The majority of players and coaches head to their non-hockey homes, where family and friends typically remain and they can combine some personal rest and relaxation along with the all-important training. That's not a slight on Winnipeg, nor is it unusual for any NHL club.

For example, you'll find the majority of Manitobans currently playing in the NHL will spend the bulk of the next few months right here in River City, with many of them training and skating (and golfing) together at local facilities. At Bowness' retirement scrum last week, only Adam Lowry, Mason Appleton and Vlad Namestnikov were still around, less than a week after the season had ended.

A few players to have properties here in Winnipeg and will no doubt spend some time enjoying our wonderful but all-too-brief summer before the cavalry truly arrives in September prior to training camp.

8. Has Neal Pionk ever played forward? Seems to me he could be a massive pain to opponents with his skating and aggressive nature. –DALE

KW: During a conversation with Pionk, he shared that he grew up playing forward in minor hockey before shifting to defence. But he's enjoyed the switch to defence and won't be switching back anytime soon. His aggressive nature is a quality that would serve him well up front, but it's something that does the same when he's playing his best as a defenceman.

There's no doubt it was a tough opening round series against the Avalanche for Pionk, but that's not going to prompt a position change for him during the offseason. Pionk, who is going into the final season of his contract before he can become a UFA, is going to need to elevate his level of

play in order to maintain top-4 minutes. Otherwise, a shift to the third pairing could be on the horizon.

9. Do the Jets have different coaches for the penalty kill/power play and why, after all year, were both so bad? –DOUG

MM: Although the buck always stops with the head coach, NHL teams typically delegate special teams to various assistants. In the case of the Jets, Arniel was in charge of the penalty kill, while assistant coach Brad Lauer manned the power play. It's safe to say both fell short of expectations and were sources of concern throughout the season and into the playoffs.

Winnipeg's power play was 18.8 per cent during the season, which was 22nd in the NHL but dead-last among the 16 teams who qualified for the postseason. The penalty kill was 77.1 per cent which was 21st (fourth-worst among playoff teams). It's hard to pinpoint why it went south, considering the same coaches were at the helm a year earlier when the power play went 19.3 per cent during the season and the penalty kill 82.4 per cent.

To me, the PK is the bigger issue. The PP looked a lot better when Gabe Vilardi was in the lineup and I believe they already have the high-end talent to make it work. I'm not so sure about the PK. If Arniel ultimately gets the top job to replace Rick Bowness, at least one new assistant/associate coach will be hired (assuming the remaining staff stays intact).

I suspect someone with PK success on their resume would be a target. Same goes for roster tinkering this summer, either through trades or free agency. The Jets must address this obvious weakness.

10. What do you think the Jets have planned for Rasmus Kupari next year? –COLE

KW: Going into the season, former Jets head coach Rick Bowness made a point of saying the organization didn't really know what they have in Kupari and nothing that happened last season provided any clarity.

There were some flashes from Kupari and his blazing speed was evident at various points, but it didn't translate into much in terms of results. Kupari never got himself going after missing time with a shoulder injury he sustained in November in a game against the New Jersey Devils and he was relegated to healthy scratch duty with regularity down the stretch.

The Jets haven't lost faith in Kupari, who they've had interest in dating back to his draft year, but he finds himself in a situation where he's going to have to turn heads in order to ensure he has a regular spot in the lineup next season. Kupari might have to move from centre to the wing for that to happen. He's a tenacious forechecker, but the 20th overall pick in the 2018 NHL Draft has now gone 69 regular season games without finding the back of the net.

To take the next step in his journey, he's going to have to find a way to produce a bit more offence in a complementary role.

11. In seeing that Brad Lambert made the AHL All-Rookie Team, he joins a list of players that includes Sami Niku, who had quite the impact on the league as a freshman.

His star rose and faded very quickly and I sometimes wonder how that happened.

Niku will be 28 this fall. He's not old. Do you see a day where he might be back in the NHL? – JONATHAN

MM: Niku could be a cautionary tale for many young players that a modicum of success at one level doesn't guarantee anything at the next level. While it's true he had a productive rookie campaign with the Moose in 2017-18 (54 points in 76 games), he was only ever to turn that into 67 NHL contests — 54 with Winnipeg, 13 with Montreal — before ultimately returning overseas where he's spent the past three years playing in his native Finland.

Never say never, but I expect that's the last we see of him in North America. He's probably much more comfortable back home and able to carve out a good living. Niku had plenty in his tool kit, no doubt, but his biggest flaw was he simply wouldn't — or couldn't — put the desired work in to take the next steps.

In some ways, maybe such a strong first year was the worst thing that could have happened, providing a false sense of security that everything was going to come easy. Hockey history is filled with similar "flash-in-the-pan" examples. It's too bad, as on a personal level I always enjoyed chatting with Niku, who truly enjoyed his time in Winnipeg and even had purchased a house here to stay in the offseason.

12. What is your take on Rutger McGroarty ever becoming a Winnipeg Jet? The longer he takes to sign his pro contract, the less I believe he ever will be signing it with Winnipeg.

He said he's going back to college, which I find completely baffling. It's my opinion that if he doesn't sign a contract around training camp, he will wait out his time and go to UFA, signing elsewhere.

Should Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff trade his rights if he holds out past training camp? –TOM

KW: Mike has written extensively on McGroarty and his relationship with the Jets after attending the NCAA Frozen Four tournament at Xcel Energy Center, so I'd like to share some thoughts on the subject as well.

First of all, I'm not sure what's baffling about a 20-year-old wanting to go back for a third season of college hockey at a place he's playing a prominent role at a school that has a highly respected program. Especially when you consider the serious nature of the injury he suffered last season before his somewhat miraculous recovery to play in the world junior hockey championship, where he captained Team USA to a gold medal.

The journey for McGroarty is still in the early stages and the reality is that he's still got some work to do on his skating before he's going to be playing a top-6 role with the Jets. There's no guarantee he would have even been on the NHL roster this fall had he chosen to turn pro. The likelihood of him needing some seasoning at the AHL level was high and that probably played into the decision. That doesn't suggest a divide between the player and the organization.

It's worth noting that many of McGroarty's teammates with the Michigan Wolverines decided to turn pro, but most of them are going to non-playoff teams where more ice time is available. McGroarty spending his junior season at Michigan isn't going to stunt his growth, it will allow him the opportunity to continue to get better.

He's not able to become a free agent until the summer of 2026 (after his senior season) if it reaches that point — and I don't foresee a scenario where that happens. My expectation is that McGroarty enjoys a campaign where he's in the running for the Hobey Baker Award and then signs his entry-level contract with the Jets next March or April.

With that in mind, trading his rights to another organization this fall isn't something I see happening, nor is it necessary. And for clarification, the player isn't holding out. He can't sign a pro contract if he wants to maintain his college eligibility. McGroarty remains a top prospect in the Jets' organization and his size, skill, character and leadership abilities will be welcome when he's ready to take the next step in his career.

Thanks, Bones; you made a great night for my family even better

By: Niigaan Sinclair

The National Hockey League announced Friday that Rick Bowness is one of the three finalists for the Jack Adams Award, which goes to the coach of the year.

It's the first time Bowness has been up for the award and a fitting honour for the Winnipeg Jets bench boss, who announced his retirement three days later, after 2,726 NHL games as a head coach and assistant for eight franchises over 38 seasons and five decades.

Bowness, Tocchet, Brunette named finalists for NHL's coach of the year award

Winnipeg Jets head coach Rick Bowness joins Rick Tocchet of the Vancouver Canucks and Andrew Brunette of the Nashville Predators as finalists for this season

I don't have to wait for the NHL awards on June 27 to know who wins, though.

It's been well documented what "Bones" did since being hired by the Winnipeg Jets two seasons ago and how he changed the culture of the team.

Bowness intervened in what had been described as a toxic locker room. He rebuilt the team's identity and fostered an atmosphere of accountability and interdependence. He empowered a team that finished fourth overall and had the best defensive stats in the league.

I could go on, but I'd rather let my sports colleagues do that.

When I recall the 2023-24 season, though, I won't remember any of that.

I'll remember this.

As in the past six seasons, True North Sports and Entertainment held its annual WASAC Winnipeg Jets game in February honouring First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. Partnering with the Winnipeg Aboriginal Sport Achievement Centre, the evening puts the spotlight on Indigenous cultures, leaders and contributions.

This year my father Murray and daughter Sarah were recognized at centre ice in the ceremonial puck drop alongside other accomplished Indigenous athletes, elders and leaders.

Dad is, of course, Manitoba's first Indigenous judge, the former head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a former Canadian senator. Sarah is an activist, a musician and an emerging public speaker and leader in her own right.

It was a beautiful moment for my family, highlighted by the standing ovation the sold-out crowd gave to my father when he walked onto the ice.

Dad is getting older and it's increasingly difficult for him to appear publicly. He has spent a lifetime loving his home and witnessing it love him back was, in a word, emotional.

This story, though, begins when he and my daughter came off the ice.

At Canada Life Centre, people who make their way to centre ice have to walk through the home team bench gate via a small, cramped hallway under the stands.

There's not a lot of room and security keeps people moving through the area quickly. According to league rules, no one else is really allowed to get near the ice. Even Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew, who was there to offer greetings, wasn't permitted to get close.

When Dad and Sarah finished the ceremony and made their way back through the gate at the Jets' bench, they were quickly whisked away down the hallway to the spot where I was waiting for them.

According to NHL rules, a small amount of time is allotted after the ceremony — about 90 seconds — for TV commercials before the game begins.

So, as the three of us were being rushed away, I saw a man in a suit walking quickly down the hallway.

"Sir, have you got a moment?"

It was Rick Bowness, offering his hand.

My father turned and, seeing who it was, held out his hand.

"Sir, I want to tell you how much you mean to me and to all of us," Bowness told him. "What you have done for this community and this country is incredible. I thank you."

The two men then stood together and talked. The crowd above us started to cheer so I couldn't hear what was being said. I remember, though, how they both laughed at something and Bowness put his other hand on my father's shoulder.

They had never met before, but the warm exchange suggested they were old friends.

I admit to feeling a bit star-struck. I remember when Bowness became the coach of the original edition of the Jets in 1988, when I was a hockey playing 12-year-old.

Miigwech, Bones

Someone called out from down the hallway.

"Coach, we started!"

Bowness apologized, said hello to me and my daughter, and rushed back down the hallway to take his spot behind the bench.

The NHL season was frustrating for various reasons. I particularly hated how the league took a big step backwards with Indigenous communities — banning the presence of Indigenous-artist created jerseys, helmets and logos in pre-game ceremonies while continuing to allow divisive, racist and stereotypical images throughout games.

It's almost as if the NHL forgot whose lands their teams play on and the relationships every single franchise, arena and fan shares with the first peoples of this place and so, what happens to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples happens to all.

I know one coach, though, who didn't forget. He made it a part of his job.

Miigwech, Bones. Even if it was just for a little while, you gave us all a lot.

You're my coach of the year.

Winnipeg Sun

Berube? Keefe? Arniel? Options aplenty as Jets search for next bench boss

By Scott Billeck

The Winnipeg Jets are doing their due diligence.

They held a Zoom call with 2019 Stanley Cup-winning head coach Craig Berube on Tuesday and have expressed interest in former Toronto Maple Leafs bench boss Sheldon Keefe since he was let go in Toronto last week.

While current Jets associate coach Scott Arniel may be the frontrunner for Rick Bowness's vacated post as head coach of the Winnipeg Jets, the team is doing their due diligence in the open market that's currently flush with quality.

Anything else would be a dereliction of duty, and immediately hiring Arniel likely wouldn't sit well with a fan base that's experienced back-to-back first-round playoff exits.

Ticket buyers want the team to explore every nook and cranny, and with names like Berube and Keefe, among several others, it's essential to cast a wide net.

When Bowness retired last week, Arniel made it clear that he wanted to succeed him.

"They know my intentions, they know what I want, they know what I'd like," Arniel said moments after Bowness announced his coaching career was over. "We'll talk more. It really is in the early stage."

He's been groomed for this moment ever since he was installed as Bowness's associate coach two seasons ago—a choice the organization made.

It made sense at the time, especially considering the Jets' decision to bring Bowness out of semi-retirement in 2022. With his age and tenure in the game, it was clear he wouldn't be a long-term fixture.

The 61-year-old former Manitoba Moose bench boss could be viewed as a lateral move rather than a step forward. He filled in admirably when Bowness was away with COVID two seasons ago and again this year when Bowness was on leave tending to his ailing wife.

You can credit him for running Winnipeg's defensive corps. He's also responsible for the team's woeful penalty kill.

Let's examine the available candidates. Nearly a dozen options are listed, including veteran bench bosses, Stanley Cup winners, and the next generation.

The Frontrunner

Scott Arniel

Age: 61

Head coaching experience: Two seasons (2010-12)

Record: Regular season: 45-60-18

Last with: Current Jets associate coach

Arniel hasn't been a head coach in the NHL for more than a decade, spending parts of two seasons with the Columbus Blue Jackets between 2010 and 2012 before being fired midway through the latter campaign.

On paper, he makes the most sense for the Jets. He won't break the bank, something the Jets have been reluctant to do in the past. He has a good grasp of the situation in Winnipeg, and he's familiar with the players, the culture, and the system they've played for the past two seasons.

A long-time NHL assistant, Arniel has worked with the Rangers, Capitals and Sabres.

He's got history in this town dating back to his playing days with Jets 1.0, who drafted him 22nd overall in 1981 and was behind the bench as the head coach of the Mark Chipman-owned Manitoba Moose in their run to the Calder Cup final in 2009.

Arniel led the Moose for four seasons, making the playoffs in each of those years, and spent one season with the Chicago Wolves in the same role.

The Jets have a reputation for being extremely loyal, something that hindered them when Paul Maurice showed signs of fatigue the summer before walking out on the team in 2021.

Getting this one wrong wouldn't be viewed with forgiving eyes from the fan base, who are likely to view any failure as a self-inflicted wound at a time when they could have gone for a more prominent name.

The Top Contenders

Sheldon Keefe

Age: 43

Head coaching experience: five seasons (2019-2024)

Record: Regular season: 212-97-40 (.665); Playoffs: 16-21 (.432)

Last with: Head coach, Toronto Maple Leafs

One person's rubbish could be another's treasure.

It's one of the conversations being had around the league regarding Keefe, who handled the pressures of Toronto well but ultimately fell short when it mattered the most in the playoffs.

Who's to blame for that? For years, Toronto neglected their blue-line and crease, electing to sink about half of their cap space into what's affectionately known in Leaf-land as the "Core Four" — Auston Matthews, Mitch Marner, John Tavares and William Nylander.

Keefe, who won a Calder Cup in 2018 as head coach of the Toronto Marlies, put up impressive regular-season numbers, but his teams rarely raised their level in the playoffs.

If the Jets feel Keefe was handcuffed by Leafs management and the salary cap, they offer him a world-class netminder and a much better defensive team than Toronto.

Keefe has shown an ability to handle the brightest lights and some of the biggest names in the league. He's a solid coach who some around the league feel his best days lay ahead of him away from the melting pot of Toronto.

Craig Berube

Age: 58

Head coaching experience: Eight seasons (2013-15 Philadelphia; 2018-2023, St. Louis)

Record: Regular season: 281-190-72 (.584); Playoffs: 27-31 (.466)

Last with: Head coach, St. Louis Blues

Berube is reportedly one of two options to succeed Keefe in Toronto (the other being Todd McLellan).

Known as a no-nonsense, direct guy with an ability to extract the best out of what he has, Berube led a last-place Blues team to the Stanley Cup in 2019.

Speaking with the Toronto Sun earlier this week, former NHLer-turned-analyst Kelly Chase said Berube is the type of coach who is "going to ask you to play hard or you won't play. And that (controversy) only has to happen a couple of times in the winter for it to be understood by every player come spring."

It's a coaching style that can inspire the hell out of a team, but it can also lead to a team tuning out pretty quickly.

Todd McLellan

Age: 56

Head coaching experience: 16 seasons (2008-2015 San Jose; 2015-2018 Edmonton; 2019-2024 Los Angeles)

Record: Regular season: 598-512-134 (.581); Playoffs: 42-46 (.477)

Last with: Head coach, Los Angeles Kings

There's nobody with more NHL experience on this list, having coached 1,144 games over 16 years.

He led the Sharks twice to the Western Conference Final and won a Calder Cup with AHL Houston back in 2003. He was an assistant to Mike Babcock with the Detroit Red Wings, winning the Stanley Cup in 2008.

As mentioned, he's reportedly one of two frontrunners for the Maple Leafs vacancy.

McLellan is known for his defensive zone work on the teams he's coached, yet it hasn't translated into much playoff success in his most recent head coaching stints. Even going back to his days in San Jose, they never got past the third round.

He'd be well-versed with Gabriel Vilardi, Alex Iafallo and Rasmus Kupari, whom he had in L.A.

Jay Woodcroft

Age: 47

Head coaching experience: Three seasons (2021-23 Edmonton)

Record: Regular season: 79-41-13 (.643); Playoff: 14-14 (.500)

Last with: Head coach, Edmonton Oilers

Woodcroft is an interesting candidate.

He arguably got the best out of Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl of any coach that has worked with Edmonton's two nuclear weapons (both had career years in 2022-23, with McDavid having 153 points and Draisaitl 128). But when goaltending went to crap this season, even those two couldn't save Woodcroft's job after the Oilers started the season 3-9-1.

Woodcroft is still just a season removed from leading the Oilers to 50 wins, and helped Edmonton to the Western final in 2021-22 after becoming the head coach midseason.

He's an AHL champ with the Bakersfield Condors, and a Stanley Cup champ as a video coach in Detroit in 2008.

Todd Nelson

Age: 54

Head coaching experience: One season in the NHL (2014-15 Edmonton)

Record: 17-22-7 (406-222-77 in 10 AHL seasons)

Last with: Current head coach, Hershey Bears

An assistant alongside Bowness in Dallas when Jim Montgomery was head coach, and then an assist to Bowness when the latter took the reins after Montgomery was let go.

Prior to that, he had a cup of tea with the Edmonton Oilers, taking over after the team fired Dallas Eakins during the 2014-15 season.

Nelson also worked as an assistant coach under Cheveldayoff with the Chicago Wolves.

The 54-year-old is currently the head coach of the Hershey Bears in the AHL. who begin the divisional finals later this week.

He was named AHL coach of the year for 2023-24.

Gerard Gallant

Age: 60

Head coaching experience: 11 years (2003-07 Columbus; 2014-2017 Florida; 2017-2020 Vegas; 2021-23 New York Rangers)

Record: 369-262-4-70 (.576); Playoffs: 31-29 (.517)

Last with: Head coach, New York Rangers.
It's tough to get a grasp on Gallant.

He worked wonders in Florida but was left on the side of the road one day. He then led an unlikely group of misfits in Vegas on their storied run to the Stanley Cup Final in 2018, only to be let go two years later. He then put up back-to-back 100-point seasons with the New York Rangers, but couldn't get the team past the first round last season and was gone again.

Gallant seems to be solid for two to three seasons. There's not a lot to glean from after that.

Given Winnipeg's likely Stanley Cup window of three to four years, which coincides with the first half or so of the Mark Scheifele and Connor Hellebuyck contract extensions that kick in this fall, it could make some sense.

Dean Evason

Age: 59

Head coaching experience: Five seasons (2019-2023)

Record: Regular season: 147-77-27 (.639); Playoffs: 8-15 (.348)

Last with: Head coach, Minnesota Wild

The man from Flin Flon comes with some local flair, but he also led the Minnesota Wild to a franchise-best points percentage in 2021-22, just before the organization's massive dead cap hit handcuffed its ability to get better.

Similar to Keefe, Evason did well with what he was given to work with. Perhaps even more so, given Minnesota with a single superstar in Kirill Kaprizov.

Evason doesn't lack competitiveness and is known for his hard-nosed coaching style.

The Dark Horses

David Carle

Age: 34

Head coaching experience: None in the NHL

Last with: Current head coach, University of Denver

Carle is on record suggesting that any NHL team would have to make it worth his while to pull him away from the collegiate game, where he just led Denver to their second national title in three years, both coached by the 34-year-old.

The right situation would be top of his list, along with a generous paycheck. He's also slated to be the head coach of Team USA for the 2025 World Juniors, something he'd have to give up if he was to take an NHL gig. He led the Americans, captained by Jets prospect Rutger McGroarty, to gold in 2024.

Don't let his youth fool you – Carle is considered by many in hockey as one of the brightest up-and-coming minds in the game.

You'd think he's quite open to putting youth in positions to succeed at the NHL level, too. The Jets have several players who fit that bill.

Ryan Warsofsky

Age: 36

Head coaching experience: None in the NHL (105-47-18 in three AHL seasons)

Last with: Current assistant for San Jose Sharks

Like Carle, Warsofsky is the next generation of head coach in the NHL.

He led the Chicago Wolves to an AHL title in 2022 and has been an assistant in San Jose for the past two seasons.

Warsofsky interviewed for San Jose's vacant head coaching position last week. He was passed over for the job when the Sharks hired David Quinn in 2022, with Warsofsky accepting an assistant role at the time.

Last hurrah for the 1975-76 Avco Cup-champion Winnipeg Jets

The most important and trailblazing hockey team in Manitoba hockey history is gearing up for one last hurrah.

Eleven members of the 1975-76 Winnipeg Jets of the World Hockey Association are in town to celebrate their Avco Cup victory and so much more.

Led by the Hot Line of Bobby Hull, Anders Hedberg and Ulf Nilsson, this squad not only was the first team in North America to win with a European core but its impact continues to be felt to this day.

This potent lineup featured seven Swedes — Hedberg, Nilsson, captain Lars-Erik Sjoberg, Willy Lindstrom, Thommie Bergman, Mats Lindh and Curt Larsson — plus two Finns, Veli-Pekka Ketola and Hexi Riihiranta.

They tore through the playoffs, losing just one game in three series, sweeping Gordie Howe and the Houston Aeros in the final.

This ground-breaking season occurred one year after the Jets missed the playoffs, even though the team had been bolstered by Hedberg, Nilsson, Sjoberg, Larsson, Ketola and Riihiranta.

Critics called for an end to the European experiment, but the Jets held firm.

The argument can easily be made that without the success of the '76 Jets that Winnipeg wouldn't have won a single AVCO Cup — the Jets also won in '78 and '79 — or been invited to merge into the NHL in 1979. Without the Manitoba Moose being brought in to replace the Jets in 1996, the NHL most certainly wouldn't have welcomed the city back in 2011.

Riihiranta was in Boston in the fall of 1974 hoping to land a spot with the Bruins but when Ketola told him that the Jets were embracing Europeans, he decided to follow his countryman to Winnipeg.

"I knew the Swedes and what kind of players they were. I played many times against Sjoberg, Hedberg and Nilsson in the Finnish league and the world championships," he said.

Riihiranta has many fond memories of his time in Winnipeg but one stands out — an 8-6 win by Team Finland over Team Sweden at the Canada Cup, the only game in the best-on-best competition played at the Winnipeg Arena.

“It was a very important game for us. We hadn’t won any games. We played very well. We gave up six goals against but we scored eight. It was something special for us. It was a nice game to win,” he said, before adding with a laugh. “Ask Ulf.”

The 11 players included Nilsson, Riihiranta, Peter Sullivan, Bobby Guindon, Lyle Moffat, Duke Asmundson, Mike Ford, Joe Daley, Perry Miller, Bill Lesuk and Norm Beaudin.

About 120 fans will celebrate the team at a gala dinner at the Fort Garry Hotel on Saturday night.

Hull was the driving force behind the decision to maintain the Jets’ European influence and Nilsson says he is most definitely missed this weekend. Hull died in January 2023 after several years of failing health.

“Bobby had the guts to leave Chicago Blackhawks and start the World Hockey Association in 1972. He created so many new jobs. When we came over in 1974, he was so tired of carrying the team and the league for two years. He was so happy that Anders, me and Sjoberg were going to come over. He said it was going to be so much fun,” he says.

“Bobby said to so many people that we gave him four extra years on his career but he gave us so much at the beginning of our North American careers. He had such a great philosophy — when you work hard in practice, the games are easy. It’s simple advice but not everybody does it.”

Peter Sullivan, who joined the Jets from the Montreal Canadiens’ farm team, was very impressed with Europeans’ fitness, which rubbed off on all of their teammates.

“When Lyle Moffat joined us from the Cleveland Crusaders partway through the year, he said he thought he was going to die five minutes into his first practice. He had never seen the pace in practice the way we practiced. Other teams weren’t up to our level,” he says.

Norm Beaudin, the first player signed by the Jets in 1972, hadn’t seen some of his teammates in 48 years.

“We had the best line in hockey, the Hot Line. They showed everybody how the game should be played. Our goaltending was superb and our defence was second-to-none. We could have beaten any NHL team that year,” he says.

The Hockey News

[What Moves Can the Jets Make to Go From First-Round Exits, to Stanley Cup Champions?](#)

BY ADAM PROTEAU

The Toronto Maple Leafs have come to a crossroads, but there’s another Canadian team that, like the Leafs, have been a solid regular-season squad that just can’t get the job done in the Stanley Cup playoffs. And their name is the Winnipeg Jets. For the past six years, the Jets have failed to win a single second-round post-season game, and for the second straight season,

they've won just one first-round game before getting knocked out in five games. So, what's the fallout going to be in Winnipeg?

It's a cloudy picture at best. For starters, star goalie Connor Hellebuyck isn't going anywhere. He just signed a seven-year, \$59.5-million contract extension that kicks in next season. Hellebuyck did not have a stellar playoffs, posting a 5.23 goals-against average and .870 save percentage, and his new deal has a full no-trade clause for the first three years. Teams would be lining up to take him off Winnipeg's hands, but that's just not happening.

Similarly, star center Mark Scheifele signed an extension identical to Hellebuyck's. Scheifele has made a commitment to the Jets – and he probably would've received an even better deal if he hit the open market as a UFA – so he's almost certainly going to be back in Winnipeg next season. But might it be time to investigate what veteran winger Nik Ehlers could bring back in a trade? The 28-year-old failed to score in the 2024 playoffs, and he's heading into the final season of his contract. This isn't to suggest Ehlers is a bad player, but something has to give, and there's a case to be made that his salary cap hit of \$6 million could be better spent elsewhere. Would Leafs winger Tyler Bertuzzi be a better fit in the top-six group of forwards? He'd bring more grit and spunk than Ehlers offers, and he'd be in that same cap-hit range.

After that, things get less clear. To be sure, the Jets have foundational pieces on the back end – most notably, defensemen Josh Morrissey and Neal Pionk – and up front, youngsters Cole Perfetti and Gabe Villardi are likely to stick around alongside veterans Kyle Connor, Adam Lowry and Nino Niederreiter. There's a foundation that Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff will double down on, but intriguingly, there are a slew of soon-to-be-UFA's that Winnipeg could move on from.

For example, forwards Sean Monahan and Tyler Toffoli were helpful hands this season, but both of them had relatively tiny cap hits. Does Cheveldayoff break the bank to try and bring them both back, or spend that cap space to give the forwards a different look? And on defense, veterans Colin Miller, Dylan DeMelo and Brenden Dillon are all UFAs this summer. Maybe one or two of them come back to Winnipeg, but what about spending more cap space to bring in, say, Hurricanes D-man Brett Pesce? To be clear, Pesce will be one of the most pursued blueliners on the UFA market, but if Cheveldayoff can convince him he's part of a flourishing group of defensemen, and the money is as good as it would be anywhere else, there's a chance Pesce could come to Winnipeg.

Of course, the first big change is the retirement of coach Rick Bowness. Whoever replaces Bowness will have an impact on the roster, which is why Jets fans should expect a hiring behind the bench before free agency begins. What doesn't seem palatable is running it back with the same group that simply cannot convert regular-season success into post-season glory, even with the incoming coaching hire on the horizon.

The Jets aren't the only team facing this kind of problem, but Winnipeg fans have seen enough of the current group to know it's time for significant roster alterations. Now it's about chemistry, all-around depth and producing at the right time of the season. Returning the same lineup and expecting better results is not ideal, and for that reason, the winds of change are a-blowin' in Winnipeg.

[Sportsnet.ca](https://www.sportsnet.ca)

[Could Winnipeg be destination for Keefe, or maybe quieter market? \(VIDEO\)](#)

NHL insider Elliotte Friedman joins Jeff Marek to discuss whether he could see Sheldon Keefe get right back into coaching in a different market right away, or take some time off, and whether Winnipeg might take a look at him for their vacant gig?

Global Winnipeg

ANALYSIS: Finding replacement for retired coach a process for Winnipeg Jets

By Paul Edmonds CJOB

When Rick Bowness retired from coaching last week, the Winnipeg Jets organization was very careful to ensure his announcement stood alone, and wasn't overshadowed by any discussions at the same time about his possible replacement.

Now, over a week later, the search for the team's new head coach is ultimately in full swing, and the next step in the process — and it's important to note, the next few weeks will be just that, a process — has now begun in ardent fashion.

Just as they did just two short years ago prior to Bowness being hired, the Jets will provide their due diligence into their search, anointing no one but considering many, including one of their own.

Yes, Scott Arniel, the team's associate coach the past two seasons, a Winnipeg resident and former Jets player, has long been considered the heir apparent and could very well have the inside track on the job, especially since the club performed so well under his guidance when Bowness took time away from the team twice during his tenure.

But before the fifth head coach in franchise history is named, the team wants to explore all of its options, which is understandably prudent in today's corporate landscape.

And as the resume shopping unfolds, there's a bountiful list of candidates, from those with their names on the Stanley Cup like Craig Berube and Claude Julien, to others like Sheldon Keefe, Todd McLellan, Dean Evason, and Dave Hakstol, all of whom coached in the league this past season.

Ideally, the Jets would like this process completed, and an announcement to happen before month's end, thereby allowing the new coach time to be consulted on possible transactions prior to the amateur draft and leading up to July 1 free agency.

But at this point, there is no rush and the next two weeks will allow for the process to unfold and the naming of Rick Bowness' replacement not to be overshadowed by haste.

ANALYSIS: How different will Jets look when puck drops on 2024-25 season?

By Kelly Moore Global News

ANALYSIS: How different will Jets look when puck drops on 2024-25 season? - [imageView](#)
[image in full screen](#)

How different will the Winnipeg Jets look when the puck drops for the start of the 2024-25 season? Some of that depends on how many — or how few — prospect players are inserted into the lineup.

We know for sure there will be a new head coach behind the bench, but that's where 100 per cent certainty ends, and the guessing game begins.

If the Jets are indeed ready to move on from Nikolaj Ehlers, and if a deal can't be done to retain pending unrestricted free agent Sean Monahan, a "kid line" could be one of the many possibilities that fall into the category of "nothing is off the table."

Is Kevin Cheveldayoff tempted to go with a potential combination of Cole Perfetti, Brad Lambert and Nikita Chibrikov up front?

The other three forward lines could remain intact, unless there's a decision to go with a hybrid of youth and experience.

Monahan could be re-signed, or the versatility of Vlad Namestnikov and Alex Lafallo comes into play. Then maybe it's one of Lambert or Chibrikov who gets promoted, based on what they show at training camp and the preseason.

If Ehlers is traded, do the Jets get a top-six forward, top-four calibre defenceman, or draft picks in return?

On the blueline, I can't help but think common ground will be found to keep Dylan DeMelo in a Winnipeg uniform. Is Dylan Samberg in line for a promotion to the top four? Does cap space get cleared with a buyout of Nate Schmidt?

Carolina's Brady Skjei and Brett Pesce are both pending UFA right shot d-men. As are Brandon Montour, Sean Walker, and Matt Roy.

And who will be Connor Hellebuyck's new backup? Laurent Brossoit deserves to be a starter, but as we know, life isn't always fair in the NHL.

Thomas Milic probably needs at least another year with the Moose. And there will likely be multiple veteran options at that position come July 1 to fill that need.

So many questions. And seriously, who really has all, or even some, of the answers?

ANALYSIS: Jets' post-playoff feeling vastly different from angst in Toronto

By John Shannon CJOB

The news Thursday that Sheldon Keefe had been dismissed in Toronto came as no surprise to anyone in the hockey world. The moment David Pastrnak put that overtime goal in the net in Game 7, the coach was being changed for the Maple Leafs.

Quite a contrast, really, with how the season ended for the Jets. And yes, I know Winnipeg lost in five games to Colorado. And yes, I know the Jets are looking for a new coach as well. But the feeling in and around the two teams is vastly different.

Both teams expected to go much further than the first round. But the similarities end there. As both teams lick their wounds, you get the feeling the Jets are on the right path of success in pursuit of the ultimate goal.

Rick Bowness's departure with a smile on his face and a jump in his step is quite a contrast to Keefe's departure. And while Bowness took responsibility for not getting his team over the hump, coaches, you see, rarely leave their position of their own volition. Bowness leaves knowing he did his part in rebuilding the culture of the Jets' dressing room and helping build a solid foundation for management and the new coach to build on.

Everyone is pulling together in the right direction.

In Toronto, Keefe also took responsibility for not getting his team over the hump, deflecting the blame from the players — who, by the way, took no responsibility for the four losses in the post-season. The fan base in Toronto wants blood, more than the coach — from the roster, and maybe even more than that.

And with a new CEO at Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, many people are ducking for cover, hoping to survive.

And while the Jets do not have the goal-scoring prowess of Auston Matthews, they do have a great deal more depth among the forwards, and certainly can boast a quality number-one defenceman in Josh Morrissey and quality goalie in Connor Hellebuyck, who I expect to be even more focused next season than the last one.

So, all is not lost in Winnipeg. The pain of being eliminated far too early in the Stanley Cup playoffs is palpable. But there is consolation. Just know, there is more pain, more bitterness, in Toronto, among Maple Leafs fans.