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[Jets continue preparations for NHL Draft](#)  
[Winnipeg heads into 2024 draft without a first-round selection](#)

By Jamie Thomas

As the 2024 NHL Draft approaches, the Winnipeg Jets sit without a first-round pick for the second time since the team relocated to the Manitoba capital.

They traded their 2018 first round selection to the St. Louis Blues as part of the Paul Stastny deal. A year later, they sent their first-round pick along with Brendan Lemieux to the New York Rangers for Kevin Hayes. However, just before the 2019 NHL Draft, they got a first-round pick back from the Rangers along with Neal Pionk for Jacob Trouba.

Jets director of amateur scouting Mark Hillier says that despite the fact the team doesn't have a first-round selection, it doesn't change the way they are going to do business leading up to Vegas.

"We still have to be prepared for anything and there's always the possibility of adding a pick. So, you have to be prepared right from the start and right to the end. We do whatever range we're picking in or the picks we have at the present time, and we'll concentrate a little more on those and make sure we're crossing our T's and dotting our I's in that area," said Hillier.

"But we will be prepared for anything and if Chevy was able to add a pick before the draft, we have to be prepared, like we have a full complement of picks."

As Hillier mentioned, the Jets could add a pick in a variety of ways but as of this moment, the Jets will be picking early in the second round thanks to trade with the Los Angeles Kings at last year's draft. Winnipeg acquired the rights to Montreal's second round selection as part of the Pierre-Luc Dubois deal. Maybe - just maybe - a first-round talent could slip to Winnipeg into the second round.

"I mean you're talking about 32 picks now, right? Everybody's draft list is different and a guy that we have at 20 or 25 could be a lot different than what other teams have and so forth," said Hillier.

"So, I would fully expect with that pick, we'll get a player in the twenties on our list."

Hillier feels the strength is the defencemen at the high end of the draft.

"You just have to make sure that you're taking players with the high character that we want to add to our roster someday," said Hillier.

"Make sure that they check off all the boxes off the ice and they are going to be kids that put in the work and have good character. Hopefully we will be filling in spots on our depth charts to help us down the road."

That character seems to be building within the organization with players like Rutger McGroarty and Colby Barlow the last couple of drafts.

“I mean when it works out that way, great. So, we try to find the best players, but we also hope they have the character and the personality and that stuff as well,” said Hillier.

“It doesn’t always work out that way. We’re just trying to do our best in finding the best players.”

Last season, the Jets locked up Connor Hellebuyck for the next seven seasons. It appears they have a couple of future NHLers in Domenic DiVincentiis (7th round, 2022) and Thomas Milic (5th round, 2023). From an organization viewpoint, Winnipeg can check off goaltending as a strength.

“We put in as much work on goalies as everybody else and have a strong goalie list. We have Drew MacIntyre (developmental goalie coach) that works with us now that does a lot of work on that end,” said Hillier.

“So, it’s not something like we don’t have a weakness that we have to draft a goalie or whatever. But if we get to a point of the draft where we think the goalie is the best prospect, you’re also drafting an asset and we’ll make the goalie pick.”

## **Winnipeg Free Press**

### ***Salary cap spike creates space for Jets Backup netminder, two-way forward likely free-agent targets***

By: Ken Wiebe

The NHL’s salary cap is going up US\$4.5 million to US\$88 million, which is good news for teams that spend to — or close to — the ceiling.

What will that mean for the Winnipeg Jets?

It’s a little too early to tell, though we can safely project the Jets are more likely to be doing most of their shopping in the middle tier than the high-rent district.

Ville Heinola who is expected to be on the Jets’ blue-line next season, will need a new contract as a restricted free agent.

Seven-year extensions are kicking in for centre Mark Scheifele and Connor Hellebuyck, so that’s going to move both players from just over US\$6 million to US\$8.5 million.

Other raises, including possible retention of pending free agents, could gobble up the bulk of the available dollars.

According to Cap Friendly, the Jets have 17 players under contract for what should amount to just over US\$74.3 million on what should be a 23-player roster.

That number doesn’t include rookies who could earn a job and there could be fluctuations depending on potential trades or buyouts, but as of right now, the Jets have just under US\$13.7 million available to spend to fill six spots.

Before we dig into players who could be on the radar, a quick look at the bottom line is the priority.

With the ceiling now set at US\$88 million, let's take a closer look at what the Jets are already committed to spending for the 2024-25 season:

*Goalies: One for US\$8.5 million*

The Jets have expected Vezina Trophy winner Connor Hellebuyck under contract for the long term, which gives them a leg up on many contenders.

Connor Hellebuyck

Age: 31

2024-25 salary: US\$8.5 million, with seven years remaining, then UFA.

What it means: The Jets have the expected Vezina Trophy winner under contract for the long term, which gives them a leg up on many contenders. With Laurent Brossoit expected to depart as a pending UFA, finding a backup from outside the organization is a priority, though finding someone in the range of US\$1-to-2 million is the most likely outcome.

*Defence: Four for US\$19.475 million*

The Winnipeg Jets have defenceman Josh Morrissey locked up for four more seasons.

Josh Morrissey

Age: 29

2024-25 salary: US\$6.25 million, with four years remaining, then UFA.

Nate Schmidt

Age: 32

2024-25 salary: US\$5.95 million, with one year remaining, then UFA

Neal Pionk

Age: 28

2024-25 salary: US\$5.875 million, with one year remaining, then UFA.

Dylan Samberg

Age: 25

2024-25 salary: US\$1.4 million, with one year remaining, then RFA.

What it means: The Jets are in a great spot with Morrissey locked up for four more years and becoming a constant in the Norris Trophy discussions. Samberg could be ready to move into a shutdown role on the second pairing, though the playing time for Pionk and Schmidt remain less clear. With Brenden Dillon and Dylan DeMelo among the pending UFAs, the Jets could have some major minutes to replace on the back end. Bringing back at least one of them remains a top priority. You can expect the Jets to make their best offer before July 1 arrives. For players, if they've waited this long already, it stands to reason they would at least want to listen to what is available elsewhere without locking in before that happens. Logan Stanley also needs a new deal as an RFA, so the defensive corps could look decidedly different this fall. Now that he's no longer exempt from waivers, Ville Heinola should find himself in the mix here, though he needs a bridge deal as a pending RFA. Elias Salomonsson is coming over to play in North America, though he could use some additional seasoning in the American Hockey League with the

Manitoba Moose. Whether it's through a trade or free agency, a good chunk of the available finances are likely to be spent on revamping the defence.

*Forwards: Twelve for US\$43.622 million*

C Mark Scheifele

Age: 31

2024-25 salary: US\$8.5 million, seven years remaining, then UFA.

LW Kyle Connor

Age: 27

2024-25 salary: US\$7.143 million, two years remaining, then UFA.

Much of the what happens with the Jets forward group will be determined by Nikolaj Ehlers, who is an unrestricted free agent at the end of next season.

RW/LW Nikolaj Ehlers

Age: 28

2024-25 salary: US\$6 million, one year remaining, then UFA.

RW/LW Nino Niederreiter

Age: 31

2024-25 salary: US\$4 million, three years remaining, then UFA.

RW/LW Alex Iafallo

Age: 30

2024-25 salary: US\$4 million, one year remaining, then UFA.

RW Gabriel Vilardi

Age: 24

2024-25 salary: US\$3.438 million, one year remaining, then RFA.

C Adam Lowry

Age: 30

2024-25 salary: US\$3.25 million, two years remaining, then RFA.

RW Mason Appleton

Age: 28

2024-25 salary: US\$2.167 million, one year remaining, then UFA.

C/W Vladislav Namestnikov

Age: 31

2024-25 salary: US\$2 million, one year remaining, then UFA.

LW Morgan Barron

Age: 25

2024-25 salary: US\$1.350 million, one year remaining, then RFA.

C/RW Rasmus Kupari

Age: 24

2024-25 salary: US\$1 million, one year remaining, then RFA.

RW/LW Axel Jonsson-Fjallby

Age: 26

2024-25 salary: US\$775,000, one year remaining, then UFA.

What it means: The Jets finally became a four-line hockey team last season and the ability to get production from throughout the lineup was an important development. There were 13 forwards in double digits for goals. There aren't a lot of spots available on the Jets' roster, outside of trying to keep Sean Monahan in the fold as the second-line centre or moving on to a suitable replacement. There is a case to be made for changing the mix a bit within the top-six, that will be happening to a degree with pending RFA Cole Perfetti ready to solidify this spot. David Gustafsson also needs a new deal as a pending RFA, but that's likely to be in the US\$1-to-1.5 million AAV range. Niederreiter's lengthy goal-scoring drought came at the worst possible time, but he's a proven scorer. Brad Lambert is the best bet for promotion, though it's still too early to tell if he's going to be used at centre (where he excelled in the AHL this season) or the wing. Some of that could be determined by what happens with Nikolaj Ehlers. If Ehlers isn't interested in an extension, he will either be moved (possibly at the 2024 NHL Draft) or potentially kept as a self rental. The Jets aren't likely to be looking to make massive changes up front. However, they could be in the market for a penalty killer who plays with speed and brings some edge. Vancouver Canucks winger Dakota Joshua is someone who is expected to draw massive interest on the open market if he gets there on July 1. Joshua, 28, is someone who plays a robust game, has some finishing ability and could check a lot of boxes for the Jets.

### *Wheeler uncertain about future*

By: Ken Wiebe

Blake Wheeler was non-committal about his future, so the possibility exists the former Winnipeg Jets captain may have played his final NHL game.

As the New York Rangers met with the media Tuesday morning, Wheeler didn't use the word retirement when asked if he's thought about what comes next, but he also wasn't ready to declare he was coming back again either.

"I was so just focused on getting healthy and with everything that was going on with the team and trying to win, that's been the focus," Wheeler said in New York. "Now, I'll just, sort of, re-evaluate and go from there."

Do you want to play again next season?

"I don't know," said Wheeler.

Whether it was the rawness of the recent playoff elimination or the arduous rehabilitation process Wheeler had to go through in order to make it back to suit up in Game 4 of the Eastern Conference final against the Florida Panthers, it was clear that the contemplation period is merely beginning.

"I have three kids, an 11 year old, an 8 year old and a 6 year old. My 11 year old is going to be in middle school next year," said Wheeler. "When you come to make those decisions now, I still love the game, I still love to play, but I want to be around for their childhood too. Those are the things you weigh."

Wheeler, who turns 38 on Aug. 31, had nine goals and 21 points in 54 games with the Rangers this season.

He suffered a significant leg injury on Feb. 15 in the first period of a game against the Montreal Canadiens and at the time, there was serious concern that his season — and career — could possibly be over.

Wheeler's high pain threshold and dogged determination was on display as he worked his way back to earn a spot in the lineup last Tuesday.

Wheeler was banged up and scratched for the final two games of the Rangers playoff run.

His pursuit of the Stanley Cup has been a driving force for Wheeler and it's not like his enthusiasm for the sport has waned.

"If anything, coming back from that (injury) re-lit the fire a little bit," said Wheeler. "The sense of purpose in getting back out there. You're able to find the love for it."

Asked if he'd ever answered a question about his future in hockey with this level of uncertainty, Wheeler leaned on his trademark dry sense of humour before digging into the answer.

"Well, I don't know," quipped Wheeler, who inked a one-year deal worth \$800,000 with the Rangers on July 1 after becoming an unrestricted free agent. "I think it's different when you're on a longer contract or you still have term. It's hard to think about that. Now, obviously, not having that, it changes how you think a bit. Like I said, every year I continue to play, my kids get a little bit older."

With that in mind, you can expect Wheeler to take some time to reflect and discuss the future with his wife Sam before making his final decision.

The Minnesota product has suited up in 1,172 games over 16 seasons and he's racked up 321 goals, 622 assists and 943 points, adding 45 points in 66 playoff outings.

Twelve of those seasons were played with the 2.0 version of the Jets after he was acquired by the Atlanta Thrashers from the Boston Bruins in February of 2011.

Winnipeg is where Wheeler played his best hockey of his career and blossomed into a first-liner, delivering consecutive 91-point seasons in 2017-18 and 2018-19, when he was among the best right-wingers in the NHL.

The fifth overall pick in the 2004 NHL Draft is the Jets' franchise leader in multiple categories (including games played, assists and points) and though the final year of his contract was bought out, Wheeler left an imprint on the organization and is likely to have his number retired by the organization at some point down the road.

### *Baumgartner departs*

It turns out there will be a coaching vacancy with the Manitoba Moose along with the two open spots on the Jets' staff after Nolan Baumgartner departed to join the Ottawa Senators.

The Senators made the official announcement Tuesday morning, with Baumgartner reuniting with Travis Green.

Green and Baumgartner spent nine seasons on the same staff, including five with the Vancouver Canucks and another four with the Utica Comets of the American Hockey League.

Mike Yeo also joined Green's staff, along with incumbents Daniel Alfredsson and Ben Sexton.

Baumgartner, a former Moose captain and AHL Hall of Famer, spent the past two seasons with head coach Mark Morrison and fellow assistant Eric Dubois with Manitoba.

## **Winnipeg Sun**

### **What levers can the Winnipeg Jets pull given their cap situation?**

By Scott Billeck

Kevin Cheveldayoff has his work cut out for himself this summer, even if the salary cap is seeing its biggest increase since the pandemic.

The general manager of the Winnipeg Jets just can't run it back.

They can't afford to, even with the cap increasing by \$4.5 million to \$88 million. And there's no sense in trying to ram a square peg through the round hole again after another swift first-round exit.

They're also all-in, they say.

Mark Scheifele and Connor Hellebuyck's extensions kick in this fall, and the clock starts ticking on a window to win with them.

Time is of the essence.

#### ***THE CAP SITUATION***

CapFriendly currently projects the Jets to have \$13.7 million on July 1.

That may seem like a decent-sized number, but there are a few points to consider, including that the cap increase is already taken up by those raises to Scheifele and Hellebuyck.

Cole Perfetti is due a raise from the \$894,167 cap hit he had on his entry-level deal.

A two-year bridge seems likely, and AFP, an analytics consulting firm that provides contract projections for players, projects the cap hit at \$3.1 million when rounded off.

Winnipeg's two other NHL RFAs are David Gustafsson, who is projected to sign his qualifying offer at \$813,750 and Logan Stanley at \$1 million.

When tallied up, that's \$4.9 million between the three restricted free agents, cutting Winnipeg's cap space to \$8.8 million.

Next, the Jets must figure out what they're doing with their unrestricted free agents.

Brenden Dillon is going to test the open market, and the Jets won't be re-signing Tyler Toffoli.

They are looking to re-up Sean Monahan and Dylan DeMelo.

Monahan's cap hit last season was \$2 million. That's going up after the 30-year-old centre proved it on a one-year prove-it deal.

AFP projects a four-year deal for Monahan at \$5.3 million per annum, a \$3 million-plus raise. DeMelo, who made \$3 million last season, is projected to be paid the same over the same term.

The Jets already lack the money to make that work, with both contracts totalling \$10.6 million, leaving them \$1.8 million over the cap.

A reminder: These are projections.

Monahan's deal coming in around the \$5 million range feels right, but it's possible that DeMelo's is slightly lower. He likes his situation in Winnipeg and has a young family here, including his second child on the way this summer.

Does it translate to taking a little less?

#### *PUTTING IT TOGETHER*

As of publication, the Jets have 12 forwards at \$43.6 million, four defencemen at \$19.5 million and one goalie at \$8.5 million.

If the Jets re-sign Monahan, DeMelo, and their RFAs, they look like this heading into 2024-25.

#### *Forwards*

Kyle Connor-Mark Scheifele-Gabriel Vilardi  
Nikolaj Ehlers-Sean Monahan-Cole Perfetti  
Nino Niederreiter-Adam Lowry-Mason Appleton  
Morgan Barron-Vladislav Namestnikov-Alex Iafallo

Extras: Rasmus Kupari, David Gustaffson

#### *Defencemen*

Josh Morrissey-Dylan DeMelo  
Dylan Samberg-Neal Pionk  
Logan Stanley-Nate Schmidt

#### *Goalie*

Connor Hellebuyck

That's not a Stanley Cup-contending blue line. There's still no backup in goal. And the Jets are already over the cap.

So what gives?

Buying out Schmidt's contract and not qualifying Stanley would free up around \$4.2 million, leaving the Jets with a \$2.4 million surplus.



If they move Ehlers, as rumours suggest they're considering, it would free up another \$6 million, assuming no NHL contracts are sent Winnipeg's way.

With that, Winnipeg is now working with \$8.4 million to reinforce its defensive corps and sign a backup.

If the Jets move Ehlers, filling his vacant spot with Brad Lambert seems likely.

Whether they get picks and/or prospects in return or a guy like Brandon Carlo from Boston or Jakob Chychrun from Ottawa, Lambert fills the Ehlers vacancy for a fraction of the price.

Lambert's cap hit is \$886,667, leaving the Jets with about \$7.5 million to work with (assuming Carlo or Chychrun aren't Jets in this example).

If Ville Heinola is ready on defence, he comes in and takes his qualifying offer at just under \$900,000, further reducing Winnipeg's cap space to \$6.6 million.

The Jets need at least one solid blue-liner, and a backup now.

#### *WHO FITS THE BILL?*

The Jets won't be shopping on Rodeo Drive come July 1 with just \$6.6 million to work with.

That means the likes of Brandon Montour, Brady Skjei and Brett Pesce are out.

Right-shot defenceman Matt Roy makes more sense, although Winnipeg might have to do more finagling to make him fit. The 29-year-old is projected on a five-year deal at \$5.8 million per year.

He's big (6-foot-2, 210 pounds), kills penalties and is efficient defensively—all things the Jets need in an upgrade. Sean Walker is also out there, can play both sides of the blue-line, and is projected cheaper at \$4.6 million.

As for goalies, I'm curious if the Jets look Eric Comrie's way again. He'd only cost them a league minimum of \$775,000, and goalie coach Wade Flaherty, who was retained on Scott Arniel's coaching staff, worked wonders with him before he left for Buffalo.

Other options include Casey DeSmith, projected in the \$1.6 million range, on the higher end, or someone like Antti Raanta and Martin Jones, veterans projected under \$1 million. Laurent Brossoit, at \$2.2 million, is too pricey.

The Jets could do Roy and Comrie, for instance, and remain cap-compliant if they re-signed DeMelo in that \$4.5-\$5-million range.

#### *THE RESULT*

##### *Forwards*

Connor-Scheifele-Vilardi  
Perfetti-Monahan-Lambert  
Niederreiter-Lowry-Appleton  
Barron-Namestnikov-Iafallo

Extras: Rasmus Kupari

### *Defencemen*

Morrissey-Roy  
Samberg-DeMelo  
Heinola-Pionk

### *Goalie*

Hellebuyck  
Comrie

It doesn't scream Stanley Cup just yet, but it's better.

Perhaps the Jets would consider trading Lafallo and replacing him with Nikita Chibrikov. That would net just over \$3 million, allowing them to bolster their defence further or look for a bigger forward (Michael Amadio or Yakov Trenin, as examples).

A \$4 million fourth-liner isn't ideal, and the Jets leveraging their draft-and-develop philosophy may be the route to go.

Maybe they trade Pionk. It's a long shot, but it would free up nearly \$6 million to continue to re-work their defence.

## ***BILLECK: Another big off-season awaits for Winnipeg Jets***

By Scott Billeck

It feels like every summer is a big one for Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff.

Maybe that comes with the territory after his team fell short, again, in the opening round of the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Losing exposes the soft underbelly, and the Jets, despite their impressive 52-win regular season, weren't built to compete when it mattered most.

They weren't big enough to handle Colorado's physicality, fast enough to match their speed, nor experienced enough to overcome their inadequacies against the 2022 champs.

The worst thing the Jets could do is stay the same. They tried running it back last season, only to end up with the exact same result.

Cheveldayoff has already appointed his fourth head coach, Scott Arniel, who was promoted from the associate's chair to the throne to replace the recently retired Rick Bowness.

It was the first of several critical decisions the tenured GM must make over the coming weeks and months.

We look now at five storylines that will define Winnipeg's summer:

### *1. What do the Jets do with Nikolaj Ehlers?*

A report from David Pagnotta of The Fourth Period earlier this week suggested Ehlers won't be willing to sign a long-term extension with the Jets.

A source close to Ehlers wouldn't confirm that to the Sun, only saying he's got one year left on his deal and they'll see where it goes. They added there's constant dialogue with Cheveldayoff.

Perhaps Arniel is different in that regard. He pledged to hold an analytics summit this summer with the organization, so the best course of action could be to keep Ehlers, elevate his role, and make it work.

Ehlers has consistently, analytically, primarily produced first-line numbers while playing a second-line role. When he's been on the top line, it's almost always been positive, yet Rick Bowness, with Dave Lowry and Paul Maurice before him, never gave it a lengthy runway.

If Arniel isn't willing to do the same, you may as well cut bait.

But what is his trade value?

He played 82 games this past season, apparently while still dealing with his nagging neck issue. But he's not the most durable player. His analytics are great, and he produces on offence, but he's gained a reputation with his disappearing act in the playoffs.

Pagnotta's report listed a number of teams that would be interested in Ehlers, which makes sense. Just because the Jets haven't found a way to properly integrate an analytical darling into their lineup doesn't mean another team wouldn't.

Boston is one rumoured suitor, as are Seattle, Ottawa, Columbus, Carolina and New Jersey, among others.

Is there a trade that brings the Jets a right-shot defenceman?

We can't see the Jets finding a way to bring rearguard Brandon Carlo here, and it would take more than just Ehlers and his expiring deal. Carlo is hitting the books at a team-friendly \$4.1 million AAV. He holds a 10-team no-trade, and Winnipeg is likely on that list, if history holds true.

Mason Lohrei impressed this year and is Boston's top blue-line prospect. He's shown he can play at this level.

Seattle could be an interesting proposition if Adam Larsson was in the mix. Like Ehlers, he has one year remaining on his deal before hitting UFA status. Larsson's been a solid defender and is sturdy at 6-foot-3, 209 pounds.

Ehlers to Ottawa for Jakob Chychrun gets tossed around. In the same vein as Larsson, Chychrun has one year left on his current deal, and would add size (6-foot-2, 205 pounds) and offence (14 goals and 41 points last season) to Winnipeg's back end. If the Jets lose Brenden Dillon to free agency — and they likely will — they could fill the void on the left side with the American.

If Ehlers isn't willing to do a sign-and-trade now and would rather bet on himself next year to increase his earning potential before his last big ticket as a UFA in 2025, it limits the return to picks.

That doesn't scream win-now, and Winnipeg's window to do so with Mark Scheifele and Connor Hellebuyck beginning their identical seven-year extensions this fall is limited.

It's hard to bet against Cheveldayoff here, though. Look at the wizardry he pulled off on Rob Blake in Los Angeles in last year's Pierre-Luc Dubois heist. He may need to pull another rabbit out of the hat.

### *2. What's available in free agency?*

There's a best-of-both-worlds scenario where the Jets get a decent pick for Ehlers and go out in this summer's open market and make a big splash on their blue-line.

Brandon Montour and Brett Pesce are right-handed, with Montour providing solid offence and Pesce a penalty-killing shutdown machine. Brady Skjei is also set for UFA status.

Skjei is a left-handed option who, like Pesce, comes from Carolina's defensive juggernaut. And Matt Roy resembles Pesce in his defensive acumen and penalty-killing abilities playing in Los Angeles. The Jets also found out how good Colorado's Sean Walker was playing against him in the first round of this year's playoffs. Nashville's Alexandre Carrier is also a UFA.

Guys like Montour and Skjei are projected to make north of Josh Morrissey's \$6.25 million cap hit. Is that something Winnipeg is willing to do?

We know Dillon is likely moving on, so there's an opening on the left side. Ville Heinola should be in the mix, otherwise he's likely to be traded with his waiver exemption gone this fall.

The Jets are trying to re-sign Dylan DeMelo and Sean Monahan, and if they trade Ehlers, they'll need top-six help unless they plan on promoting Brad Lambert to that position next season. This would save the team around \$5 million in cap space that could be spent elsewhere.

The Jets could look past Monahan and at two-time Cup winner Chandler Stephenson. He will be due a healthy raise on his expiring contract, which was paying him a paltry \$2.75 million per year.

As for more depth options, perhaps a guy like the Avalanche's Yakov Trenin would help Winnipeg get bigger and more physical up front. We'll get into those names closer to July.

### *3. Is another buyout a possibility?*

Watching Dillon and his \$3.9-million hit leave town helps with the cap, but the Jets are still handcuffed by what they can do on the blueline with Nate Schmidt and Neal Pionk.

Both have a year left on their respective deals, and both are making close to \$6 million.

Trading Schmidt feels like a pipe dream, so he's the buyout candidate. But it comes at a cost, especially for 2024-25. Added to the \$2.75 million of dead cap space still left on Blake Wheeler's buyout from last summer, that number would increase to \$5.46 million for the coming season. That effectively wipes out the \$4 million salary cap increase and then some.

Pionk is the easiest of the two to trade. He struggled most of this past season and visibly had issues with his skating later in the year.

He's rugged, for sure, and plays the right side, so he's a valued commodity. And if the Jets want to retool their defence at all, moving on from Pionk seems like a must, coupled with a Schmidt buyout.

Maybe the Jets don't qualify Logan Stanley if they can't find someone to give up a late-round pick for the 2016 first-rounder they traded up for to take him. Even when it was looking better, it failed in the playoffs. Time to move on.

The bottom line was Winnipeg's defence wasn't good enough. Morrissey is top-notch and re-signing DeMelo covers off Morrissey's top pairing partner until Elias Salomonsson is ready to go.

Outside of that, the Jets should explore every avenue to upgrade from Schmidt, Pionk and Stanley and replace Dillon.

It's a tall order, but what other option do the Jets have? Running it back this year produced the same results. What more evidence is needed?

#### *4. How does Scott Arniel round out his coaching staff?*

There's a saying, paraphrased, that suggests a person should always surround themselves with people smarter than them.

Adapted to hockey, you could say that a head coach should employ assistants who are smart hockey minds.

Perhaps in that regard, Arniel looks to round out his two vacant assistant roles, including his associate coach, with a couple of guys who have stood in his position behind an NHL bench.

Jay Woodcroft comes to mind. So does Dean Evason. Currently, at least, both of those guys don't appear to be getting head-coaching gigs in the NHL for next season.

Both had solid records in their last stops.

Woodcroft did brilliantly to lead the Oilers to the Western Conference final after taking over mid-season in 2022-23, and helped the Oilers to 50 wins a year later. He succumbed to an atrocious start for the now-Stanley Cup finalist Oilers this past season.

Evason hails from Flin Flon and spent seven seasons behind the bench as an assistant in Washington before moving on to head-coaching gigs in AHL Milwaukee before being an assistant-turned-head coach in Minnesota. He did well there, with a .628 winning percentage or better in each of his three full seasons. He was let go this past year, with the Wild handcuffed by \$14.7 million in dead cap space.

Perhaps Todd Reirden is another name. Arniel worked under Reirden in Washington before Peter Laviolette took over. Reirden was on Pittsburgh's bench for the past few seasons as Mike Sullivan's associate coach, but was let go after the Penguins missed the playoffs.

Another name to include here is Dave Hakstol, most recently as the head coach in Seattle.

#### *5. Other business*

Cole Perfetti is up for a new contract. He will become a restricted free agent on July 1 as his entry-level deal expires. A two-year bridge deal seems like a slam dunk here.

Perfetti was tremendous through the first 40 games, with 14 goals and 29 points. Then he hit a wall, going 23 games without seeing the scoresheet while falling out of favour with Bowness.

You'd expect Perfetti to bet on himself with the bridge, maximizing his earning potential on his first long-term deal a couple of summers from now. Expect somewhere in the \$3-\$3.5 million range.

David Gustafsson is the other RFA on the roster. The 24-year-old will have arbitration rights. Heinola is also an RFA, as is fellow defenceman Simon Lundmark and goalie Oskari Salminen.

## **Global Winnipeg**

### ***ANALYSIS: Are we in a calm before a storm of Winnipeg Jets' off-season moves?***

By Paul Edmonds CJOB

Is it the calm before the storm? Or is the silence so deafening right now that it's a harbinger of what's to come on or before Canada Day?

In just under three weeks, the NHL will be in full off-season mode, a new Stanley Cup champion crowned, the annual entry draft complete, and the ability for unrestricted free agents to sign with a team of their choice — and for that matter, the teams themselves an opportunity to court them — fully underway.

But in between now and then, teams with UFAs still have an opportunity to re-sign those players on expiring contracts. In the case of the Winnipeg Jets, there are seven players in need of new agreements prior to July 1, otherwise they'll almost assuredly be plying their trade in other markets next fall.

In particular, the status of defencemen Dylan DeMelo and Brenden Dillon and centreman Sean Monahan are of primary interest. As we understand it, all three have been tabled contract extensions, meaning the Jets would like to retain them, but thus far nobody has signed, and one questions whether anyone is talking as the July deadline nears.

For the trio in question, all of which are uniquely valuable to the team, you wonder if the ship has sailed and a heading to free agency now the charted course at this stage of the game.

After all, with the salary cap going up by \$4.5 million and all three into their 30s by the time next season starts, they may feel that chasing the money somewhere else this close an open market might be the shrewdest move to make at this point of their careers.

Now, could an 11th hour deal be struck with one, two or all three players for the Jets to retain their services? Of course! But as the business of hockey quickly moves toward July 1, and with eerie hush surrounding all sides, optimism is starting to wane.

But again, this could be the calm before a storm of signings prior to July 1, or as it currently stands leading up to Canada Day, a continuation of the deafening sound of silence.

## *ANALYSIS: Jets need to acquire mental strength to be Stanley Cup calibre*

By Kelly Moore Global News

ANALYSIS: Jets need to acquire mental strength to be Stanley Cup calibre - [imageView image in full screen](#)

The Conference Finals are over and we have a Stanley Cup Final matchup set to start on Saturday between the Edmonton Oilers and Florida Panthers.

The acquired mental strength both teams have developed to get to where they are is something the Winnipeg Jets have been clearly missing the past two postseasons.

Avoiding severe injuries, especially to key players, is right up there with clutch goaltending for any team with Stanley Cup championship aspirations.

And while it's likely every regular on the Oilers and Panthers is dealing with some kind of physical impediment, players on both teams have managed to successfully battle through it.

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But what has really stood out has been each of these teams' ability to handle the mental adversity that is so much of the playoffs.

We're talking about in-game responses, as well as rebounding from a loss in the previous outing — that "refuse to lose" mentality, an unwavering belief from top to bottom.

Winning board battles to extend an offensive zone shift at one end of the ice, and getting the puck out, and into less dangerous territory in the other.

Resisting the temptation to make a "hope" pass, the one that often results in a transitional opportunity for the opponent.

Understanding the importance of when — but especially when not — to retaliate.

Move your feet instead of reaching with your stick.

The razor-sharp focus required to consistently make tape to tape passes that create clean zone exits, and to attack with speed.

The competitiveness to win a faceoff, or at the very least prevent a clean draw for the opponent.

The courage and commitment to take away shooting lanes.

The sum of all, or at least a majority of those parts on a consistent basis contributes mightily to the confidence to minimize, and then overcome lapses that cost games, and ultimately series.

Aside from bridging the analytics gap between themselves and teams that contend on a perennial basis, I would argue the biggest obstacle for Winnipeg to accomplish all of this exists between the ears.

There are enough physical assets in the toolbox, but these Jets need to discover the mental moxie to complement those skills. Just like Edmonton and Florida have.

## [ANALYSIS: How should the Winnipeg Jets handle Cole Perfetti's contract situation?](#)

By Kelly Moore Global News

ANALYSIS: How should the Winnipeg Jets handle Cole Perfetti's contract situation? - [imageView image in full screen](#)

The first NHL buyout window, the entry draft, and then free agency all come into play over the next two to three weeks.

But it will be interesting to see how a non-time sensitive item plays out on Kevin Cheveldayoff's to-do list.

I could be wrong, but with the busiest stretch of the NHL's business seasons fast approaching, it would seem to make sense that finalizing Cole Perfetti's second contract is not among the priorities on the radar of the Winnipeg Jets GM.

But it will be an important negotiation to determine whether it's in the best interests of both parties to go long-term or agree on a bridge deal before camp starts in the fall.

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While an argument could be made for either arrangement, I'll throw my two cents worth in on the latter being a more likely outcome.

Perfetti did score 19 goals this season, almost doubling the combined total of his first two injury-shortened years.

And another positive is that the 22-year-old forward was available for all 82 games for the first time, even though he was healthy scratched on 11 occasions.

But 14 of those 19 goals were scored in the first 40 games. A 23-game dry spell to start the second half of the schedule, which included just two assists over that stretch, certainly played a part in Cheveldayoff making the deals to acquire Sean Monahan and Tyler Toffoli.

So why wouldn't Perfetti and his advisers be more comfortable with a contract along the same lines as the two-year, \$6.875-million deal Gabe Vilardi agreed to last summer? As opposed to a long-term deal that looks good now, but attaches considerable risk to being "team friendly" two or three or four years down the road?

Spend the next two seasons improving the resume and expanding the body of work, then both team and player have a clearer vision of how to chart a path over the following eight years.

Because there should be a lot less grey area approaching the summer of 2026 than there is in the here and now.

**[The Athletic](#)**

**[NHL rumblings: Trade talk heats up on Laine, Necas, Ehlers and more, plus latest on Cooper-Canada](#)**



By Pierre LeBrun

EDMONTON — As the Stanley Cup Final churns away, now arriving here in Oil country, the business of the game isn't waiting with the 30 other NHL front offices.

In fact, it's not even stopping for the teams in the Cup final. The Florida Panthers held their pro scouting meetings in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., over the past week, while the Edmonton Oilers are doing theirs this week with Games 3 and 4 in town.

After checking in with sources around the league, here's what I'm hearing is happening as the draft and free agency near.

#### *Laine fresh start*

My understanding is that the Columbus Blue Jackets intend to work with Patrik Laine's camp, led by agent Andy Scott of Octagon, to find the star winger a fresh start with a new team.

Laine remains in the NHL/NHLPA player assistance program, having sought help in January. He also recently had a minor shoulder cleanup procedure, but that's not expected to be an issue. The expectation is that he'll be ready to go for next season.

The 26-year-old 2016 No. 2 pick has two years left on his contract at an \$8.7 million cap hit, and given his offensive struggles in Columbus, it may not be a huge market for him. On the other hand, there's the allure of a potential bounce-back season for a star player energized by a fresh start. Depending on the acquisition cost, a team might see itself picking up a 40-goal scorer at a reduced price.

Laine has a 10-team no-trade list, so his camp will have some say in things, but again, the idea is that new Jackets general manager Don Waddell and Laine's agent want to work on this together to find a new spot for the player.

#### *Cooper expected to coach Team Canada*

Jon Cooper was spotted hanging out at the IIHF World Championship in Czechia last month. For good reason, as it turns out.

My understanding is that the two-time Stanley Cup champion coach of the Tampa Bay Lightning is expected to be named head coach of Team Canada not only for next February's 4 Nations event but also for the 2026 Milan Olympics.

An announcement is expected to come after the Stanley Cup Final.

What's most interesting is not so much that Cooper appears to be the choice. He was always the obvious front-runner, given his body of work and that he was supposed to coach Team Canada at the 2022 Winter Olympics in China before the NHL and NHLPA pulled the plug on participation over COVID-19 concerns.

No, the more interesting aspect of Cooper taking on both the 4 Nations and Olympic duties is that Hockey Canada originally had toyed with the idea of making those gigs separate assignments — or at least giving the Olympic decision more time, even if it did end up the same coach.

They went with different general managers for the events: Doug Armstrong is the Olympic GM and Don Sweeney the 4 Nations GM, with Jim Nill as his assistant GM. Both Sweeney and Nill are also part of Armstrong's Olympic management staff.

It appears after more consideration, Team Canada decided to give Cooper both gigs instead, as USA Hockey did with Pittsburgh Penguins coach Mike Sullivan. And, I mean, does a guy like Cooper really need to audition?

It will be interesting to see who fills out the coaching staff. Andre Tourigny has coached Canada in a couple of world championships, and I would imagine he will get consideration. Paul Maurice might win the Stanley Cup this month. I've got to think he's someone who would be of interest. Jared Bednar, Pete DeBoer and Rod Brind'Amour are other obvious candidates.

Five Canadians making their case for the Olympics and 4 Nations teams at worlds

#### *Latest on Necas*

The Carolina Hurricanes have heard from nearly every team in the league on forward Martin Necas and, from the sound of it, have narrowed the market to five to seven potential matches.

That doesn't necessarily mean things will end up in a trade. The Hurricanes, with interim GM Eric Tulsky leading the conversations, have set a high price on what they feel is a star-caliber player.

I don't believe those five to seven teams have yet to produce an offer that would get it done, but the Canes will keep working on it because they also don't feel there's a time crunch on any of this.

The Winnipeg Jets, Chicago Blackhawks, Montreal Canadiens, Calgary Flames and Boston Bruins are among the teams that have shown general interest. Whether they are among the five to seven Carolina sees as matches, I'm not sure.

At the end of the day, if Carolina can't bring a team to the threshold it needs to move the 25-year-old Czech forward, so be it. The Canes have told teams they are ready to keep him.

In that scenario, what will be interesting to see is how Necas, a restricted free agent July 1, reacts if he's not moved. It is beyond a doubt he wants a change of scenery.

#### *Jets taking calls on Ehlers*

My TSN colleague Darren Dreger had a Nikolaj Ehlers update during our Insider Trading segment on Wednesday, suggesting that the Jets are definitely taking calls on the 28-year-old winger while at the same time keeping the door open if an extension makes sense. Ehlers, 28, has one more year on his deal at \$6 million before being eligible to be an unrestricted free agent on July 1, 2025.

Dreger also reported a potential trade fit with Carolina on Ehlers tied to the Necas trade talks.

#### *Blackhawks needs*

Chicago GM Kyle Davidson continues to make his calls around the league, and it's clear from what we're hearing from other front offices that he's looking around for a top-six forward and perhaps a middle-six forward, too.

There's a desire to upgrade the group and give Connor Bedard more offensive support.

There was a rumor floating around that the Hawks were considering taking a look at suspended star forward Valeri Nichushkin from the Colorado Avalanche, but I'm told they're not interested. Just too much unknown and risk for their liking.

But as mentioned above, Necas is among the many possibilities on the trade market. The Hawks have also targeted some UFAs on the July 1 market. They've got the salary-cap room to be aggressive, but at the same time, I think they want to be careful they don't do something that gets in the way of having room to take care of their younger core in a few years. So, similar to Utah and all its cap room, the Chicago plan seems to be more geared toward shorter-term contracts for UFAs with perhaps the allure of a higher AAV than most teams can afford under the cap.

That's also something the Habs, I believe, have talked about internally: short-term UFA fits on the July 1 market.

The tricky thing with wanting to do that is that UFAs tend to want longer-term deals. For many of them, this is their one shot at the free market. So it's not everyone that's going to be willing to sign two-year deals, even if the AAV is higher than what most teams would offer.

### *Breaking down 3 key Winnipeg Jets decisions and contracts that will define the offseason*

By Murat Ates

Now that the NHL has announced an \$88 million cap maximum for 2024-25, we can zoom in on Kevin Cheveldayoff's offseason workload with a greater degree of clarity.

Today, we dig into the Winnipeg Jets' pending UFAs (Sean Monahan, Brenden Dillon, Dylan DeMelo, Laurent Brossoit, Tyler Toffoli and Colin Miller) and how they might impact the team's roster projection and cap outlook.

I believe that DeMelo is a likely returnee, while Dillon is open to signing in Winnipeg but interested in what the UFA market has in store. Sean Monahan is a particularly interesting case, too.

The single most pressing item on Cheveldayoff's plate will be sorting out the defence corps, even if they manage to retain DeMelo and Dillon. Josh Morrissey, Dylan Samberg, Nate Schmidt and Neal Pionk are the only defencemen under contract for next season. Elias Salomonsson is an option — he signed his entry-level contract last summer — as well as Ville Heinola, who needs a new RFA contract (and will need to clear waivers if the Jets demote him).

The Jets need more help than that.

In the most basic sense, Winnipeg has approximately \$14.4 million with which to sign Cole Perfetti, David Gustafsson, Logan Stanley, two more defencemen and Connor Hellebuyck's backup goaltender. With this roster as a starting point, however, I would expect the Jets' offseason to be busier than it is basic:

It's possible that buyouts to Pionk or Schmidt open up cap space — and that a Nikolaj Ehlers trade changes the foundation — but it's clear that the Jets need to go shopping.

Behind Mark Scheifele, the role of second-line centre is left to Perfetti, Gabriel Vilardi or Vladislav Namestnikov. Behind Morrissey, the role of top-four defenceman goes to two veterans likely to be outmatched in the role and Samberg, 25, whose next season playing top-four minutes will be his first. (Samberg has crushed third-pairing minutes, mostly with Schmidt, but don't underestimate the increased level of difficulty between that and a top-four role.)

So what will Winnipeg do?

#### *Monahan and the trickle-down*

Monahan has already played 11 seasons in the NHL, emerged as a star scorer, experienced multiple injuries (and multiple surgeries as a result). He's been lauded, he's been written off; he's been cast aside entirely; he's been packaged with a first-round pick to convince a team to trade for him at all. Most impressively, Monahan has successfully resuscitated his career, re-emerging from castaway status to score 59 points in 73 games last season.

I think Monahan's multi-chaptered, twisting, turning, 764-game career is why people forget that he's 29. Monahan is younger than Scheifele, Hellebuyck, Adam Lowry, Nino Niederreiter, Namestnikov and Alex Lafallo and less than six months older than Morrissey — yet the discourse treats him like it would be impossible for a team to get value from his next contract.

My opinion is that Winnipeg can win Monahan's next contract if it's short enough, cheap enough, and if the Jets are realistic about his strengths and limitations. Monahan is positionally sound, committed down low in his own zone, and capable of finding space to attack with during extended offensive zone cycles. He's slow by NHL standards, limiting his rush offence and hurting his transition defence. His hands are (still) good: Monahan has scored 30 or more goals three times and cleared 60 points four times, while scoring at a 29-goal, 66-point pace last season. He's great at faceoffs and excels in the bumper position on the power play.

If Winnipeg pays him from age 29 to 33, keeping the cap hit at close to \$5 million, while Scott Arniel and his staff complement Monahan with speed and smarts on the wing, the Jets can sign a perfectly sound second-line centre whose injury-addled seasons of misery are behind him. The signing would instantly improve the roster while removing enough pace to change the way at least one of Winnipeg's lines would need to play.

It would also leave Winnipeg with a problem: Scheifele isn't a top-10 first-line centre. Monahan would not be a top-10 second-line centre. Winnipeg would need to make up for this on the wing, where Ehlers' long-term outlook is elsewhere and Kyle Connor gives up a lot by way of poor defending. It's also possible that the Jets could replicate some of Monahan's offence through systemic improvements to their power play or steps forward from Perfetti, Vilardi or even Brad Lambert. Winnipeg ran a second line of Perfetti, Ehlers and Namestnikov for a successful stretch, winning on the scoreboard and shot clock alike; perhaps there are cost-effective ways to move forward without Monahan.

My general philosophy on these things is "get good players, keep good players," so I have time for Monahan's imperfections and lack of speed if the Jets get value elsewhere on their roster.

One little problem: One of Winnipeg's most efficient contracts is likely headed out the door.

### *Those Ehlers rumours*

Ehlers scores more points per minute of play than star scorer Connor does; Ehlers has done so for so many years the fan base is sick of me repeating it. Ehlers, Scheifele and Vilaridi dominated the NHL en route to Winnipeg's first-place position in the standings; Winnipeg couldn't help itself from demoting Ehlers to second-line duties once Connor returned to health.

The discourse tends to pit Connor and Ehlers against each other but it's also worth noting that Connor, Scheifele and Ehlers were united for one period of postseason play in Colorado and they excelled, spending almost the entire third period of Game 3 against Colorado in the Avalanche zone. There is a world in which the Jets excel — and Jets fans rejoice — wherein Connor and Ehlers are more than the subject of fan debate: they and Scheifele make great linemates.

I think all of this is moot.

I continue to be under the impression that the Jets are prepared to shop Ehlers in advance of the draft in Vegas. I don't believe that Arniel's promotion changes his long-term outlook: I believe that a clock has started ticking that will run now, intensify at the draft, and run through next season's trade deadline if necessary. We've taken an early look at possible Ehlers trade destinations, recognizing that he has a 10-team no-trade clause.

I think the Jets move Ehlers prior to the draft. My guess is that the trade return focuses on futures: perhaps a first-round pick and a good, non-elite young player if that first-round pick isn't close to the top 10. My guess is obviously not a guarantee, but I expect that Ehlers has made his frustrations with his ice time clear through the appropriate, internal channels, and I expect Winnipeg to move him.

If they do, it will completely reshape Winnipeg's salary cap outlook. Ehlers' \$6 million AAV is substantial; moving it could open up space on the blue line that reduces the pressure to buy out Pionk or Schmidt's contracts.

What might the Jets' blue line look like, then?

### *The defencemen*

This offseason reminds me of 2019, in a way: Winnipeg lost Jacob Trouba to his desire to play elsewhere, then watched Tyler Myers and Ben Chiarot sign for more money in other markets than it made sense for the Jets to pay.

In this case, Ehlers isn't applying nearly the same pressure for a trade that Trouba did but he can stand in for the sake of the analogy. DeMelo seems likely to be re-signed, although that's not a guarantee, while Dillon might be the Myers or Chiarot type player who gets paid much more on the open market than the Jets are willing to offer.

To be clear, my understanding is that Dillon came to love his time in Winnipeg and the door is not officially closed on a Jets return; I think he wants to see what's out there on the UFA market.

Dillon was unique on the Jets in terms of his physicality and leadership, and felt appreciated as such. At 32, he arrives on the UFA market after delivering quality top-four results and strong underlying numbers for two seasons. If I were him, I'd want to cash in on that with as much money and term as a grit-hungry team was willing to offer. I wonder if Vancouver is the team to step up, looking for more of what Nikita Zadorov brought them during the playoff run.

DeMelo turned 31 in May and may be in a similar position, looking for security and stability, and has scored at a 30-point pace from the top pair for two straight seasons. This production is the result of quality exit passes that keep the Jets moving north more than DeMelo's dynamic play in the offensive zone, so I'm not as sure that he gets paid in accordance with his uptick in offence.

If Winnipeg does re-sign DeMelo — say, three years at \$4 million per — while Dillon gets picked up somewhere else, then the Jets' defence corps needs a ton of work.

For ease of math, we've split \$9 million between Monahan and DeMelo, leaving \$10.6 million to sign Perfetti, two defencemen and a backup goaltender. That's more than enough money to get the job done but not so much it's easy to see the Jets' path to obvious upgrades.

I think it's possible the Jets buy out Schmidt's contract. (It would cost the Jets \$1.6 million in cash this season and next, thus saving \$3.2 million in cap space this season and costing \$1.6 million in cap space in 2025-26.)

I don't see the Jets buying out Pionk's contract. (It would cost the Jets \$2 million in cash this season and next, thus saving \$4 million in cap space in 2024-25 and costing \$2 million in cap space in 2025-26.)

Either one would open up enough space to sign Dillon or somebody like him, while promoting Salomonsson, Heinola and Lambert as needed.

#### *UFA signing*

It's all fantasy hockey at this point but a \$4.5 million UFA defenceman, a \$3.5 million Perfetti and a \$1 million Stanley or Heinola would give the Jets approximately \$3 million to re-sign Brossoit (or a lesser backup goaltender). In such a scenario, it would be easy to see them building cap space throughout the regular season and making further additions at the trade deadline.

How good is the roster, though? I see a bubble playoff team as opposed to a group that's likely to surpass last season's heights. I can see the veteran stability and the integration of youth like Perfetti, Lambert and Salomonsson, but Cheveldayoff will need to outperform my projected summer to create a greater sense of postseason confidence. I suspect one lesson the Jets will have learned from the playoffs is the need for physical, competitive forwards like Niederreiter (or Arturri Lehtonen or, when available, Valeri Nichushkin.) If so, then perhaps they try to spend money on UFAs like Jordan Martinook or Dakota Joshua or seek out roster players as opposed to draft capital in an Ehlers trade.

#### **Daily Faceoff**

#### **[New Jets head coach Scott Arniel assesses where the team fell short this season \(AUDIO\)](#)**

By Daily Faceoff

Winnipeg is turning to Scott Arniel to get them over the hump. Frank is joined by newly named Jets head coach Scott Arniel to discuss his relationship with Rick Bowness (5:00), understanding where the team fell short this season (7:45), what he's picked up since his last

head coaching job (11:00), the importance of Adam Lowry (15:00), and the future of Nikolaj Ehlers (20:15).

3:30 – The emotions of getting another chance to return to head coaching, and to do it in Winnipeg

5:00 – The special relationship with Rick Bowness

7:45 – Diagnosing where the team fell short in the playoffs this season

9:20 – Studying trends that emerge with successful teams in the playoffs

11:06 – Learning from his last tour of duty as head coach

13:20 – Veteran coaches around the league who've been helpful along the way

15:05 – The importance of Adam Lowry stepping up as captain

20:15 – The future of Ehlers

### *Winnipeg Jets prospect Jacob Julien is taking an unorthodox path to the NHL*

By Colton Davies

Jacob Julien's road to the OHL, let alone the NHL, has been anomalous.

The London, Ontario native spent part of the 2022-23 season with the GOJHL's London Nationals while also going to school for engineering.

But all along, he wanted to make hockey work. It was his competitive level and tenacity that got the attention of Knights head coach Mark Hunter, who called Julien one afternoon to let him know that the Knights were watching. London took Julien No. 43 overall in the 2021 OHL U-18 draft, a process that gives undrafted prospects a second chance.

"I was playing for the Nats last year and going to school for engineering when Mark gave me a call," Julien told Daily Faceoff. "He just said that they liked what I was doing and that I was being called up, so I was balancing Junior B, OHL and engineering school at the same time."

Julien finished his draft season with 14 points in 47 OHL games, with his pure persistence being a selling point in helping him earn some attention from NHL scouts.

"He's a big part of our team," said. "He's getting better every time. That's what we look for from players, that they keep getting better every year, he's definitely done that."

Getting to play for the Knights was special for Julien. He grew up watching the Knights, with a big highlight coming when he witnessed the 2015-16 team win the Memorial Cup with Mitch Marner, Evan Bouchard, Matthew Tkachuk, and more future NHLers.

"I remember for the 2016 one I was with my Dad and a couple of his buddies on a big screen TV," Julien told Daily Faceoff. "Everyone was just jumping and cheering every time they scored and it was very exciting when they (London) won it."

Earlier this year, Julien got to experience a moment that many junior hockey players don't get to live out – winning a championship with their hometown team. The Knights swept the Oshawa Generals in four games, with Julien finishing the postseason with 18 points in 19 games.

"Being from London and winning the championship this year was a dream come true," Julien said. "You never expect that and to have all the fans support us was great."

The Winnipeg Jets selected Julien in the fifth round, No. 146 overall in the 2023 NHL Draft. Julien admits he didn't watch the NHL Draft last year – it was actually Knights forward Easton Cowan who broke the news to him.

"I was playing cards with my family that night," Julien said. "Cowan texted me saying, 'Hey congrats bro,' and I said, 'Oh, for what?' and Cowan said 'You got drafted' and I was just like 'oh cool, thanks, bro.'"

The 19-year-old's offense exploded this season, notching 29 goals and 49 assists for 78 points. Getting "bigger, stronger, faster" was the message sent from the Jets brass, and it seemed to work out.

"Yeah, I just wanted to get quicker and faster. Stick speed, getting out of the zone, just stuff like that," Julien said. "Playing with those two (Denver Barkey and Cowan), they're fantastic and great players, they're smart, and it makes it easy to work with them on the ice."

Cowan was quick to acknowledge the complete 200-foot game that Julien has to offer.

"He's come so far over these last two years with us," Barkey said. "The big thing with him is how smart he is. I think we read off each other really well. He always makes high-IQ passes and plays, and makes my job easy sometimes. Super fortunate to have him on my line."

Julien is well aware of his hockey IQ and his size. He's one of the most tenacious players on the ice, and someone who will hound you for the puck. One OHL scout said he's, "A guy you want on your team, but hate to play against."

Julien attested that playing other sports growing up really helped him become a better overall athlete, allowing him to think the game at a higher level.

"I grew up playing different sports," Julien said. "So I think finding ways to move the ball around or puck around in different situations helped me be a team player and get the job done."

One OHL scout said, "He reminds me a lot of Adam Lowry." But Julien, like a lot of kids growing, he's a Sidney Crosby fan. And while Julien probably won't be a Sidney Crosby-esque player, the Jets prospect has all the tools in the bag to carve out a potentially long NHL career. He'll be counted on as a leader next year as the Knights look to challenge for another Memorial Cup before embarking on the next stage of his career with the Jets sooner rather than later.

## **The Hockey News**

### **[Winnipeg UFA Laurent Brossoit Drawing Interest Around the League](#)**

BY CARTER BROOKS

The Winnipeg Jets and goaltender Laurent Brossoit are likely heading for a split.

Despite the 31-year-old's strong performance in his second tour with Winnipeg, Brossoit will probably not be a name on the team's roster come opening night in October.

Why, you ask?



Well, he was good. Actually too good.

So how is this a problem?

When a team like Winnipeg has a starting goaltender like Connor Hellebuyck - who will likely run away with the Vezina Trophy next week - it doesn't have much more to offer in terms of salary compensation to a backup goaltender.

And the other part of the equation: playing time.

When the best goaltender in the world is your team's starter, you as a backup probably aren't all that happy - despite what you tell the media following your few starts.

Only suiting up in 23 games for Winnipeg last season, Brossoit performed exceptionally well for the Jets. He finished the year with a 15-5-2 record to go alongside an even 2.00 goals against average, a .927 save percentage and three shutouts.

Despite what anyone says otherwise, Brossoit would be a bonafide starter on 20 of the league's 32 teams, should he be given a fair chance.

After leaving Winnipeg to join Vegas - where he ultimately eliminated the Jets and won the Cup two seasons back - Brossoit opted to rejoin Hellebuyck and Co., and vie for another shot at Stanley Cup glory. He had a stellar season and earned every penny of his one-year, \$1.75 million contract.

The issue for Winnipeg was the fact that his deal was only for one season.

Sure, when he signed, Connor Hellebuyck was not under contract for more than just the remaining 2023-24 season. Should he and Mark Scheifele not have agreed to their monster extensions last fall, Brossoit could very well have become the Jets' No. 1 man late in the season and taken over those duties this offseason on a lengthy, big-money deal.

But of course, we all know how that worked out, and Hellebuyck will be the man between the pipes until Thomas Milic and Dom DiVincentiis take over on the reins.

So, in order to remain cap compliant, the Jets will need to find a replacement for Brossoit, who has most certainly earned a hefty raise from last season's money. With just over \$10 million to his name in career earnings Brossoit will likely sign somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$3-4 million annually.

Teams that have reportedly shown interest in his services for next season (and possibly beyond) include the Toronto Maple Leafs, the Ottawa Senators, the New Jersey Devils and the Los Angeles Kings, among others.

With LB all but signed his walking papers, Winnipeg will need to quickly assess its goaltending market and lock down a backup before the market completely saturates and the team is forced to use one of its youngsters far too early.

A name that has repeatedly come up in conversation with various sources is that of Manitoba product and current Edmonton Oilers backup, Calvin Pickard.

Although in the middle of the Stanley Cup Final and not paying any attention to his expiring contract, the 32-year-old Pickard reportedly would have interest in returning to Winnipeg - the place he attended his primary school and played minor hockey - if an appropriate deal could be struck.