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***Chynoweth, Payne ready to dive into Jets special teams
"You want to have those open lines of communication."***

By Mitchell Clinton

WINNIPEG – It's too early to tell if new Winnipeg Jets assistant coaches Dean Chynoweth and Davis Payne will sit next to each other on the plane this season, but if they do, it won't be the first time they've been seat mates.

The first time might have been back in Boston during the 1996-97 season, when Payne was injured shortly after a call-up from Providence. Chynoweth helped get his teammate from point A to B.

"He helped take care of me. I wasn't able to drive because of my shoulder," Payne recalled. "That's when I first got to know Dean and we kept in contact as former teammates. I was pleasantly surprised when I heard his name was part of the staff that Scott Arniel was putting together."

Of course, that announcement became public on June 17 after a two-round interview process. Throughout those conversations Chynoweth – who has spent the last three seasons in Toronto – said Arniel's enthusiasm stood out.

"He's getting a second crack at being a head coach in the NHL after having to work his way back up to that position. I have a lot of respect for his path," said Chynoweth, whose NHL resume also includes time with the Carolina Hurricanes and New York Islanders (not to mention three years as a head coach with the AHL's Lake Erie Monsters and another with the San Antonio Rampage).

"When you have the longevity like he has, it says a lot about his character and the respect he has around the league," Chynoweth said. "From job position wise, the interviews were thorough, they were very in-depth, they were very fluid - which when you're going to work with somebody day in and day out, you want to have those open lines of communication."

The 55-year-old Chynoweth will focus on running the defence and the penalty kill. The Jets were 21st in that department last season (77.1 percent) after sitting seventh (82.4 percent) in 2022-23.

It was somewhat the same for Chynoweth and the Maple Leafs in 2023-24. Toronto was 23rd in the NHL on the penalty kill just one season after being in the top half of the league in 2022-23 (and eighth best in 2021-22).

Prior to Toronto, Chynoweth's work with the Carolina Hurricanes penalty kill saw the team finish eighth, fourth, and third from 2018-2021.

"The one thing we went away from in Carolina was, a lot of teams were consumed with the entry and preventing it. I wasn't," he said. "My philosophy was there are certain breakouts where we're not going to be able to deny the entry - whether that's due to speed or skill set - but we need to set the pressure as quickly as we can in zone. That's been a big difference."

Obviously personnel will dictate exactly which system the Jets use when the 2024-25 season begins. That decision will also be made based on Chynoweth's conversations with the staff and the players as training camp gets closer. He also looks forward to working with the Jets analytics team.

"At the end of the day, I always tell the players 'don't worry what percentage we're at,' Chynoweth said. "Does it win us the game or does it lose us the game? If it wins us the game, more often than not, you're going to be a top-10 team."

Another area the Jets would like to be a top-10 team is the power play. Injuries prevented the team's top unit from building the expected chemistry until later in the season, but there is still some room to grow.

That's where the 53-year-old Payne comes in. His NHL career has seen him hold positions of head coach (with St. Louis from 2010-2012), assistant coach (with Los Angeles from 2012-2017), and associate coach (with Buffalo from 2017-2019) before spending the last five seasons with the Ottawa Senators.

His relationship with Arniel goes back many years, but there is certainly a bond after they both had the opportunity to become head coaches in the NHL in 2010.

"We went up against them in 2014 in the Final, and happy to say I held the edge in that one," Payne said with a laugh. "We stayed in contact and when I saw Rick (Bowness) was retiring, I thought I'd reach out to him. It was basically the relationship between him and I that piqued my interest. Then I dug into the quality of the team, the success they've had recently, and looking at it from an offensive standpoint they have some very dynamic pieces."

Payne wants to see those dynamic pieces make their way back up the league's ranking on the power play. Similar to the penalty kill, the exact system won't be known until camp. One thing is for sure though, power plays have continued to evolve as Payne has been in the league.

He believes it all comes down to mindset.

"I think when you're looking at a traditional 1-3-1, you have a couple schools of thought," he said. "One operates under a precision formula, where it's about execution and working for your opportunity. Another element out of that 1-3-1 involves a little bit more volume, a little bit more attack, and a little less reset. It comes at you with more pace. It may not be as clean, but there is something to the volume and the mindset that goes with that."

In the last year or so, he's seen penalty killers get sick of allowing the constant one-timers from the flanks.

"They've come up with a way to reduce that," Payne said. "You have to be able to work quickly against it. I think that's why you've seen a little bit more spread stuff. From the spread you're going to end up with some looks that are a little more precision based and some that are more volume based."

The next couple months will involve meeting as a staff, trying to find places to live in Winnipeg, and spending time with family as the off-season rolls on.

But the excitement is noticeable from both assistant coaches, as they try to help the Jets reach the next step.

“Only one team can win,” Chynoweth said. “I’m looking at it as another opportunity to win the Stanley Cup.”

Winnipeg Free Press

Stanley Cup winning Maurice still rooting for Jets

By: Mike McIntyre

Paul Maurice is one classy champion.

It turns out reaching hockey’s ultimate summit — which he did in dramatic fashion on Monday night in Florida for the first time in his decorated career — isn’t the final item on his personal hockey bucket list.

“So if I could have one thing more, it would be for the Winnipeg Jets to win the next Stanley Cup,” an emotional Maurice told Sportsnet’s Kyle Bukauskas during the aftermath of a 2-1 Game 7 victory over the Edmonton Oilers.

That’s quite the shout-out to a former employer, one which quickly blew up on social media.

“I couldn’t believe it, my mouth dropped. What a show of absolute love for a city he so wanted to win in front of,” long-time Jets fan Bryan Leurquin told the Free Press.

“I got a chill — thanks coach! And congratulations!” said another, Jim Crick.

There were dozens of emails and Tweets sharing similar sentiments. Winnipeg clearly still holds a piece of Maurice’s heart — and vice-versa — despite the way things ended with the Jets in December 2021 with him announcing his sudden resignation with the club in a free-fall.

At the time, Maurice said he’d taken the group as far as he could, his message going stale following parts of nine years. The Jets reached the Western Conference Final in 2018, winning Game 1 before losing four straight to the eventual champion Vegas Golden Knights, but they never could replicate that kind of success under his guidance.

Maurice has gone on record many times as stating he was comfortable if that’s where his NHL coaching career ended. But the Panthers would come calling the next summer, fresh off a Presidents’ Trophy winning season which ended with a stunning first-round playoff exit and the firing of head coach Andrew Brunette.

Now, two years later, he’s won it all.

“It’s just brilliant. I’ve never hugged so many sweaty men in my entire life,” Maurice, ever the joker, told the nationally televised broadcast about what it feels like.

“You know what, it’s not what I thought it would be. It’s so much better. It’s the hugs, man.”

Maurice then got choked up as he mentioned the importance of family, which clearly extends to those in Jets organization. His parents and two brothers, his in-laws and “all of the people that suffered through 30 years of me losing and making excuses.”

That’s the thing about being in the game as long as Maurice has. You’re going to suffer plenty of setbacks, and his name sits on top of a somewhat dubious list — most losses by an NHL head coach (736).

Maurice had also been 0-for-2 in Stanley Cup Finals — including his first year in Florida when they lost to Vegas in five games, and an ugly 9-3 beatdown in the clincher.

It looked like he might complete a notorious hat trick this year after his Panthers blew a 3-0 series lead against the Oilers and were on the cusp of a historic collapse, getting outscored 18-5 in three consecutive losses.

Credit must go to Maurice, a master communicator and motivator who clearly found a way to get his group out of a funk and come up with a clutch performance at the biggest time and avoid joining the 1942 Detroit Red Wings in infamy.

“It was perfect Florida Panthers fashion. Nothing’s easy for us,” Maurice told reporter Emily Kaplan in another televised on-ice interview on ESPN. “So we needed to lose three in the finals to learn how to win four. The fact that it was so hard makes it so special.”

During the conversation, third-string goaltender Spencer Knight skated over to him with a special gift in his hands. Maurice bowed his head down towards the trophy, quietly said a few words, then raised it up high as the crowd inside Amerant Bank Arena exploded in cheers.

He gave it several kisses, then fittingly handed it off to assistant coach Jamie Kompon, who has been his right-hand man since joining the Jets staff in 2016.

Prior to Game 6 in Edmonton, the Free Press had asked Maurice about the bond he shares with Kompon, whose wife Tina has been battling cancer for many years.

“He’s an incredibly strong man. It’s real. The things they go through and yet he comes to work the exact same way every day is inspirational. You have a hard time walking in feeling sorry for yourself when you know what he and Tina are fighting every day for 10 years,” said Maurice.

“For me, we have different brains. He is hyper-disciplined in the way he thinks and the way he produces. I think we’re a great pair together. He’s just an incredible human being.”

As the Stanley Cup was further passed around, Kaplan asked Maurice if he wanted to share what he said to the trophy.

“I’ve been chasing that for a while. Some unkind words about how hard she was to catch,” he replied.

Now a coach who sits second all-time in games (1,848) and fourth all-time in wins (869) is part of an elite group of champions. And, perhaps, Maurice has also cemented his legacy as a future Hall of Famer whenever he ultimately decides to hang up his whistle.

“Hey Dad, your name is going up with your heroes,” Maurice told Bukauskas as he fought back tears. “Béliveau. Richard. Howe. Lindsay. Maurice.”

Jets, top prospect McGroarty appear to be at impasse over immediate future

By: Mike McIntyre and Ken Wiebe

Could the relationship between the Winnipeg Jets and top forward prospect Rutger McGroarty be over before it really even begins?

The Free Press has learned the two sides are at an apparent impasse over the direction of his career to the point the team may have no choice but to trade his rights or eventually risk losing him for nothing.

In that sense, it appears McGroarty has entered “it’s not me, it’s you” territory.

The 14th-overall pick of the 2022 NHL Draft made a somewhat surprising decision back in April that he was planning to return to the University of Michigan Wolverines program for his junior season this fall, rather than turn pro immediately and join the organization.

At the time, he made it clear it had nothing to do with the Jets or his future with the franchise. However, speculation has surfaced that McGroarty, 20, may not be willing to sign with the Jets whenever he comes out of school, which could force the hand of the organization.

Elliott Friedman of Sportsnet reported as much on his 32 Thoughts podcast posted early Saturday morning, saying general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff has discussed the prospect of trading McGroarty’s rights with other teams.

“He’s an NHLer. They will regret it,” a source said on Friday night of what moving the captain of the U.S. World Juniors team in January would mean to the Jets.

“It’s a business and Winnipeg will have to do that they have to do.”

According to sources, McGroarty believes he’s unlikely to crack Winnipeg’s roster immediately and would probably have to spend time in the American Hockey League honing his craft, maybe even a full season. And the Jets have conveyed as much to him given their current roster, which includes plenty of forward talent with the big club and on the farm.

That’s seemingly a tough pill to swallow for McGroarty, who has seen many college teammates and opponents turn pro and immediately get NHL looks — including his two linemates last season with Michigan in Gavin Brindley (Columbus Blue Jackets) and Frank Nazar (Chicago Blackhawks).

“Winnipeg really needs to re-visit its development plan,” a source said.

Of course, it’s worth noting teams like Columbus and Chicago are in very different places right now than Winnipeg. They are in the early stages of re-building, while the Jets are in “win now” mode which was demonstrated by the addition of Sean Monahan and Tyler Toffoli at the trade deadline.

Those two ultimately forced a young Jets talent like Cole Perfetti out of the lineup for extended periods, including the first four games of the playoffs, despite the fact the 22-year-old just had a career-best 19 goals and 19 assists in 71 games this past year.

No doubt McGroarty and his camp took note of that, just as they would have seen 20-year-old Brad Lambert (2022 first-rounder) spend the entire 2023-24 season with the Manitoba Moose. (He did get called up to make his NHL debut in the final game of the Jets season, registering an assist).

The McGroarty situation is a significant development heading into the 2024 NHL Draft next Friday and Saturday in Vegas and is reminiscent of what happened with Philadelphia Flyers prospect Cutter Gauthier last season.

Gauthier, the fifth overall pick of the 2022 NHL Draft who was teammates with McGroarty on the World Junior squad, asked for a trade from the Flyers in March and ended up being dealt to the Anaheim Ducks for defenceman Jamie Drysdale and a second-round pick in the 2025 NHL Draft.

Can the Jets find a way to secure a similar package, or might they try to see if McGroarty and his camp might have a change of heart?

Over the years, Cheveldayoff hasn't panicked in these types of situations when a player seemingly wants out, exuding patience as he waits for trade offers that he finds palatable.

What that means in this case remains to be seen. McGroarty remains under team control for two years, but if moving him is inevitable then doing so sooner than later might be the best play to help the Jets in the present.

Perhaps the Blue Jackets might be calling, since they employ both Brindley and another one of McGroarty's former college teammates in 2023 third-overall pick Adam Fantilli (who is his best friend). Another option might be the Carolina Hurricanes, who could be looking to move forward Martin Necas during the coming weeks.

Although McGroarty has not suited up for an NHL game, he became a fan favourite during Jets development camp last summer as he posed for pictures with fans and showcased his trademark enthusiasm. The product of Lincoln, Neb. has a unique combination of character, compete and charisma.

McGroarty overcame a significant injury last season — he was stretchered off the ice and hospitalized for nearly a week after crashing hard into the boards in a November game — to make it back in time to suit up for the World Juniors and play a key role. He then helped the Wolverines reach the Frozen Four for a second consecutive season.

The Jets had close contact with McGroarty all season, led by director of player development Jimmy Roy who was present at many of his games — including the one where he got seriously hurt. The official diagnosis was a fractured rib and collapsed lung.

“What he's been able to do this year at the University of Michigan, I think it's just tremendous,” Roy told the Free Press in April. “And he's such a great kid. I'm happy for him. The whole organization couldn't be happier with Rutger overall. Everything. The whole situation.”

McGroarty had 16 goals and 52 points in 36 games for the Wolverines last season, adding five goals and nine points in seven games at the world junior hockey championship. He's got power forward potential, even though he needs to continue to improve his skating as he works toward becoming an NHL regular. He's continuing to do so with former Canadian Olympian figure skater Barb Underhill.

Just before his college campaign ended, McGroarty told the Free Press he was appreciative of the time and space the Jets gave him during his playoff run this past spring.

"Throughout the year we talked one, two three times a week. Just catching up, getting to know each other better. These people are investing so much money in you, you've got to get to know them as a person. I feel like we've grown our relationship," he said.

"Definitely in the second half it's picked up. More texts, meetings, Chevy coming to watch me. I feel like it's definitely increased. They've been so respectful with the playoff push. I have to give them so much respect."

His mother, Cindy, may have provided a window into his future line of thinking when she said her boy ultimately knows best when he's ready for the next level.

"We always told Rutger when preparedness intersects with opportunity, it's time to go," she said.

"Winnipeg knows when opportunity is there, Rutger knows when he's prepared. He won't put himself in a bad situation, and it's not like he's in a horrible situation for development. So, if someone says, 'No, you have room to grow before you're ready,' that's OK, too. He's prepared for just about anything."

McGroarty and his parents have not responded to requests for comment.

The Jets are holding their next development camp from July 3-7 at the Hockey For All Centre. Will McGroarty be there? Stay tuned.

[Oilers veteran 'Black Ace' Gagner contributes any way he can](#)

By: Mike McIntyre

EDMONTON — It's the morning of the biggest game day of the year and ex-Winnipeg Jets forward Sam Gagner is alone with his thoughts in a mostly empty Edmonton Oilers dressing room.

His 20 teammates who will suit up a few hours later with their season on the line have long since showered, changed and made their exit following a brief skate.

Gagner's fate is squarely in their hands and out of his immediate control. Such is life as a 34-year-old 'Black Ace' in the NHL, a veteran of 1,043 regular-season games but just 11 playoff games — and none this season — over a 17-year career.

"You just have to lean into what ever role you're in. Obviously everyone wants to play," Gagner told the Free Press in a wide-ranging one-on-one chat prior to Friday's pivotal Game 6 of the Stanley Cup Final inside Rogers Place.

"I still feel really confident in my ability. If I were to go in I'd be ready for it. In the meantime I think you just focus on keeping yourself ready and then trying to help out your teammates wherever you can. I've been really focused on that."

In that sense, Gagner is more cheerleader than competitor these days as the club that drafted him sixth-overall in 2007 battles without him on hockey's biggest stage. With the Oilers playing well and relatively healthy, there's simply been no room for him to draw into a crowded lineup.

Gagner, who puts in extra skating work on a daily basis with the other healthy scratches to stay ready just in case he might be needed for the first time since the regular-season finale on April 18, is perfectly fine with that at this stage of his life.

"For the guys that have kind of come in and out of the lineup and we're skating together, it's an opportunity for me to help them in whatever they're going through," he said.

"That's kind of how I've tried to look at it. I think there's opportunity for contributions to be made wherever you are in the lineup, or even if you're out of the lineup, and that's kind of been my focus. I'm just trying to help to the best of my ability."

That means talking to players such as Connor Brown, Dylan Holloway and Philip Broberg, who have also been on the outside looking in only to have their numbers get called, and being an open ear for anyone who might need it.

"When you go on a run like this, you're going to hit some adversity," said Gagner.

"It's a stressful time even though it's the best time of the year, there's a lot of pressure that comes with it. If I can be a guy that other players can lean on, that's what I'll do. I've got plenty of experience in the ups and downs at this level, so just trying to help wherever I can."

One player who doesn't need any help is Connor McDavid, who entered play Friday night with an incredible 42 points in 23 playoff games including back-to-back four point outings in Game 4 and Game 5. Gagner has been around a lot of star power in his career, but hasn't experienced anything quite like this.

"Everyone sees what's going on the ice, which is historical and incredible, really. But what he does in the room for us, the steps he's taken as a leader, I've just been so impressed," he said.

"He's the heartbeat of this team. He does so many things for us. He's really taken everything to another level. When you see the determination, he wills it for us a lot of nights."

Gagner spent his first seven pro seasons with the Oilers and still holds a piece of a prestigious franchise record — along with a guy named Wayne Gretzky — after putting up eight points in a February 2012 game against the Chicago Blackhawks.

He then had cups of coffee with the Arizona Coyotes, Philadelphia Flyers, Columbus Blue Jackets and Vancouver Canucks before returning to the Oilers for parts of two years starting in 2018-19. Two full years with the Detroit Red Wings followed, then a brief stint with the Jets last season in which he hit the 1,000 game milestone

Gagner's campaign ended after just 48 games (eight goals, six assists) due to serious injuries to both hips which required a pair of surgeries and appeared to be career-threatening. He signed a one-year league-minimum deal with the Oilers last summer as forward depth insurance while working his way back to playing shape.

His third stint in Edmonton began in style when he scored two goals against the Dallas Stars last November, when the Oilers were in the throes of a horrific 2-9-1 start that had them sitting dead last in the NHL. He ultimately played 28 games with the big club this year (five goals, five assists) while also appearing in 15 games in the AHL (three goals, six assists).

Considering where he was a year ago, not knowing if he'd ever play again following his time in Winnipeg, Gagner is just thankful for an extended lease on his hockey life regardless of what it looks like.

"This is what every player dreams of, to be in this situation and playing for the Stanley Cup. I think for me especially, having started my career here and Edmonton meaning so much to be, it's been a lot of fun," he said.

"The number one thing is the fans deserve it. I was here through some pretty tough years for the franchise, and they kept coming and kept supporting. It's an incredible market. I've loved my time here, all three stints. The people are so friendly and so supportive. I'm thrilled they get an opportunity to see something like this. Hopefully we can pull it out for them."

[Jets unveil six-game preseason schedule](#)

By: Ken Wiebe

The Winnipeg Jets will open the 2023-24 NHL preseason against a Central Division rival.

As part of a six-game set to prepare the regular season, the Jets will host the Minnesota Wild on Saturday, Sept. 21.

The Jets will travel to Edmonton on Sept. 22 to take on the Oilers before hosting the team captained by Connor McDavid on the 25th.

A return match with the Wild is set for Sept. 27 at Xcel Energy Center before the Jets close out the preseason with a pair of games against the Calgary Flames, at Canada Life Centre on Oct. 2 and at the Scotiabank Saddledome on Oct. 4.

Each of the Jets home games in the preseason will start at 7 p.m.

The regular season schedule is expected to be released next week prior to the 2024 NHL Draft.

[Los Angeles Kings cut losses on disappointing Dubois Enigmatic centre shipped to Washington for goaltender Kuemper](#)

By: Ken Wiebe

This was a branch of the trade tree that nobody saw coming.

While it no longer directly impacts the Winnipeg Jets, Wednesday's news involving Pierre-Luc Dubois still has tongues wagging in this market.

There had been some speculation earlier this spring Los Angeles Kings general manager Rob Blake might consider buying out the final seven years of the eight-year, US\$68 million contract Dubois signed with the Jets last June before he was dealt to Hollywood, that idea was kiboshed during a media availability in early May.

When the news of the deal with the Washington Capitals for goalie Darcy Kuemper came to light, it sent shockwaves around the NHL.

With the 2024 NHL Draft just around the corner, it's worth noting just under one year ago Kevin Cheveldayoff sent Dubois to the Kings for a package that included forwards Gabriel Vilardi, Alex Iafallo and Rasmus Kupari and a second round draft choice that once belonged to the Montreal Canadiens and turns out to be the 37th overall next week in Las Vegas.

Now, this isn't meant to be a victory lap for the Jets and Cheveldayoff, who certainly did well under the circumstances presented to them.

Dubois wasn't willing to commit to the Jets as a restricted free agent one year away from being able to choose his destination, so he had to be moved.

Adding three forwards definitely was helpful in making the Jets' position group deeper, though Kupari never found his form after suffering a shoulder injury in a game against the New Jersey Devils in November.

Kupari still figures to be in the mix for a fourth-line job this fall and for a team looking to add speed to the lineup, he's a guy that can help in that department and perhaps bring a little secondary scoring despite his lengthy drought.

Iafallo played up and down the lineup last season, spending ample time up with Mark Scheifele and on the top power play when Vilardi was out with a knee injury. While his role focused more on checking and penalty killing as the season moved along, he still managed to hit double digits in goals for a sixth consecutive season after potting nine as a rookie.

Iafallo is an interesting case. With a contract that carries an AAV of US\$4 million, Iafallo could be seen as a luxury item if he starts where he finished last season (on the fourth line), though there could be opportunities to move up the lineup again as well.

Vilardi was and remains the centrepiece of the Dubois trade and his impact was definitely felt in his first season with the Jets.

Vilardi, however, suffered multiple injuries and was limited to 47 games in the regular season, notching 22 goals and 36 points.

He returned late in the campaign, and while he didn't have quite the same jump, he still put up four assists in five post-season games.

The feeling around Vilardi remains the same as when he arrived.

He's got game and if he can find a way to be in the lineup for 70 games or more, he's a guy who makes the power play much more dangerous, can play a top-line role and likely can surpass 30 goals with relative ease.

Vilardi still finished fourth on the Jets in goals and tied for seventh in points and his ability to generate offence from in front of the net and below the goal line on the power play, you can expect incoming assistant coach Davis Payne to lean on him when looking to spark the man-advantage.

That the Kings are cutting their losses less a one year after bringing in Dubois is an interesting development.

Last June, he was viewed as the power forward who brought incredible depth for a team that already had captain Anze Kopitar and Phillip Danault down the middle.

Although he went to the big-market team he desired and cashed in with his contract, Dubois had a wildly inconsistent season and saw a significant drop in his ice time.

There were far too many nights when his engagement level wasn't high enough and he finished with 16 goals and 40 points in 82 games.

Dubois was booed mercilessly in his two trips to Winnipeg from a fan base that welcomed him after he was acquired in the blockbuster that sent Patrik Laine and Jack Roslovic to the Columbus Blue Jackets in January of 2021.

There are plenty of folks praising Blake for getting out of the contract and not having to either buy out the seven years or attach a significant asset to moving on from him — and that take is understandable in a vacuum.

Perhaps it was never going to work with the Kings.

There is no doubt Dubois left the Kings wanting more — and that's been a feeling that multiple coaches had in his previous stops.

So what's in it for the Capitals?

They're a team in transition and finished eighth in the Eastern Conference in the first season under head coach Spencer Carberry before getting swept by the New York Rangers in the first round of the playoffs.

They're a team that was looking for an experienced pivot with potential after seeing Nicklas Backstrom sidelined by a hip injury and Evgeny Kuznetsov shipped to the Carolina Hurricanes prior to the trade deadline in March.

The thing with Dubois still comes down to his upside, some of which still stretches back to his playoff hat trick in the bubble series with the Toronto Maple Leafs in 2020.

When Dubois plays an assertive game, he can get under the skin of the opponent and draw penalties at a high rate — even if he takes some himself while straddling and occasionally crossing the line.

That the third overall pick in the 2016 NHL Draft is joining his fourth organization before he turns 26 is something that few people saw coming.

No doubt it's a red flag.

If it ends up being a wakeup call for Dubois, he could still grow into the No. 1 centre job and be a guy who helps Alex Ovechkin break the all-time goal-scoring record.

Dubois has exceeded 60 points on two occasions already and flirted with 30 goals by scoring 27 twice and 28 another time, so the talent level is there.

It's always been there.

Now it's up to Dubois to show that he won't be defined by the two exits he essentially forced and the one he couldn't have seen coming.

Winnipeg Sun

Maurice gives nod to Winnipeg Jets before lifting Stanley Cup

By Paul Friesen

Former Winnipeg Jets head coach Paul Maurice ended 25 seasons of futility with the first Stanley Cup championship of his career on Monday – and gave a nod to one of his former teams in the process.

Maurice's Florida Panthers survived a furious series comeback by the Edmonton Oilers with a 2-1 home-ice win in Game 7 for the franchise's first NHL championship in its 30-year history.

After the game, Maurice was asked about his chance arrival in Florida, which came after his decision to leave the Jets in the middle of the 2021-22 season.

"Just lucky," he said. "If I could have one thing more, it would be for the Winnipeg Jets to win the next Stanley Cup."

Maurice walked out on Winnipeg in his ninth season with the team, saying he'd taken it as far as he could, that players needed a new voice.

That off-season he took the job in Florida, guiding the Panthers to first place overall and the Stanley Cup final in his first season, but losing to Vegas in five games.

His return to the final this year, for the third time in his career, nearly ended in another heartbreak, as the Panthers watched a 3-0 series lead evaporate, the Oilers forcing a seventh and deciding game.

But his team returned to a smothering brand of defensive hockey on Monday and prevailed over Connor McDavid and the high-flying Oilers.

"It's brilliant," is how Maurice began his post-game comments on national television. "It's not what I thought it would be. It's so much better. I've never hugged so many sweaty men in my entire life."

While the result won't sit well with many fans in Canada, Maurice singled out a few who will be ecstatic – his family.

"It's for my mom and dad in Sault Ste. Marie," he said. "The people who suffered through 30 years of me losing, making excuses. Mom and dad especially."

Getting emotional, the 57-year-old mentioned other members of his family, before returning his focus on his father, Denis.

"Hey dad, your name's going up with your heroes," he said. "Beliveau, Richard, Howe, Lindsay, Maurice."

Joining Maurice as Cup champs are former Jets assistant coach Jamie Kompon, who also assisted Maurice in Winnipeg, defenceman Dmitry Kulikov, who played three seasons with the Jets (2017-2020), and forward Kevin Stenlund, who played 54 games for the Jets last season.

"It's not a good look": Jets may lose top prospect McGroarty

By Scott Billeck

A revelation on Saturday that the Winnipeg Jets are talking with other teams about trading Rutger McGroarty is shocking enough.

The potential reason for such a drastic turn for the team's 14th overall pick in 2022 only worsens it.

"It's not a Winnipeg (as a city) issue," a source with knowledge of the situation told the Sun on Saturday. "It's a development issue and a relationship issue."

The news regarding McGroarty first surfaced on the 32 Thoughts podcast on Saturday after hockey insider Elliotte Friedman reported Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff had been discussing the possibility of trading McGroarty's rights.

McGroarty, Winnipeg's top prospect in its pool, decided against turning pro after leading the University of Michigan to the NCAA national championship game in St. Paul, Minn., this past spring.

At the time, it appeared there was an issue between the club and the player over the next step in McGroarty's development path.

The team preferred McGroarty hone his skills in the American Hockey League. At the same time, the 20-year-old felt he was ready to make the leap to the NHL, similar to the one Michigan linemates Gavin Brindley and Frank Nazar, who signed with Columbus and Chicago, respectively, are making.

Another source, who also spoke to the Sun on Saturday, confirmed as much, citing concerns over McGroarty's developmental path and overall relationship with the club, including with the forward's advisors.

The source also pointed to how the team handled Cole Perfetti's struggles last season, including his lack of playing time in the first round of the playoffs.

They also suggested Ville Heinola's "painfully slow" path to the NHL after being a first-round pick in 2019 (20th overall) as a concerning issue for prospects beyond McGroarty.

"It's not a good look," they said.

A request for comment from the Jets and McGroarty has not been responded to.

If the Jets do, in fact, trade McGroarty, he would be the second draft pick they've dealt who wasn't expecting to sign with the club before completing their collegiate career. Nathan Smith (third round, 2018) is the other. That's a card college players have up their sleeves.

The tactic has been used sparingly in the past.

Still, it has been utilized by former Jets captain Blake Wheeler after being drafted fifth overall by Arizona in 2004 before signing as a free agent with Boston in 2008.

Adam Fox, the 2021 Norris Trophy winner Calgary took in the third round in 2016, was traded to Carolina in 2018 as part of a five-player blockbuster and then to the New York Rangers in 2019 after he wouldn't sign in southern Alberta.

Others include Hobey Baker winner Jimmy Vesey, a 2012 third-round pick by Nashville whose rights were traded for by Buffalo before he signed as a free agent with the Rangers in 2016.

Former Jets forward Kevin Hayes also makes the list after Chicago drafted him 24th overall in 2010 only to complete his college career and sign as a free agent with the Rangers in 2014.

Most recently, 2022 fifth-overall pick Cutter Gauthier forced his way out of Philadelphia by not committing to sign with the club last season.

Gauthier's case may be most relevant to the Jets regarding what they could get in return for McGroarty.

The Ducks sent promising defenceman Jamie Drysdale and a second-round pick in 2025 to the Flyers in the deal.

McGroarty, who captained Team USA to World Junior gold in January, will have no shortage of suitors on the trade market.

And while the team has often waited on players who have wanted out of the team, there may not be a better time than now for Cheveldayoff.

A deal struck over the next week leading into the 2024 NHL Draft in Las Vegas could be a ticket for the Jets to get back into the first round after they traded this year's pick to Montreal for centre Sean Monahan in February.

However, Winnipeg has more pressing needs than another draft pick, including a right-shot defenceman, something the Flyers got in Drysdale.

A Philly-Anaheim-type return would change the complexion of the current situation. Until then, it's a tough pill to swallow for the team and its fan base, the latter of whom have voiced their concerns with the club's direction in recent years with their wallets, including declining ticket sales.

Whatever happens, it's an interesting turn of events for McGroarty, who has always expressed his desire to sign with the Jets.

He praised the club for giving him space during Michigan's run to the Frozen Four.

"I gotta give them credit," he said. "They've been very respectful. They respect me at the University of Michigan, understanding the playoff push."

He was also grateful for the support from the team after a hit landed McGroarty in hospital last December.

"I just felt loved by everybody (in the organization)," he said.

NHL.com

[State Your Case: Bobrovsky, Demko or Hellebuyck for Vezina Trophy](#) [NHL.com writers debate which player deserves to be voted best goalie](#)

By NHL.com

The Vezina Trophy is given annually to the NHL goaltender voted best at his position by the NHL's 32 general managers.

This season, Sergei Bobrovsky of the Florida Panthers, Thatcher Demko of the Vancouver Canucks and Connor Hellebuyck of the Winnipeg Jets are the finalists.

The award will be given to one of these goalies during the NHL Awards at the Fontainebleau in Las Vegas on Thursday (7 p.m. ET; ESPN, SN).

While we wait to find out the winner, staff writer Bill Douglas, columnist Nicholas J. Cotsonika and senior director of editorial Shawn P. Roarke debate the merits of each finalist in this Awards edition of State Your Case.

Sergei Bobrovsky

The Florida Panthers goaltender's numbers were right there with finalist Connor Hellebuyck's. He went 36-17-4 with a 2.37 goals-against average and .915 save percentage, and he tied for the NHL lead with six shutouts. It's remarkable that at age 35, Bobrovsky got back to doing what he did at 24 and 28, when he won the Vezina Trophy with the Columbus Blue Jackets in 2013 and 2017. After signing a seven-year contract with the Panthers on July 1, 2019, Bobrovsky had four pedestrian seasons in Florida. But he found his game in the Stanley Cup Playoffs last season, when the Panthers made a run to the Stanley Cup Final, and he carried that into this season. – Nicholas J. Cotsonika, columnist

Thatcher Demko

The Vancouver Canucks had a turn-around season and it was because of their goalie. Demko missed a large portion of the 2022-23 season, playing in 32 games, and Vancouver went 38-37-

7 and missed the playoffs by 12 points. This season, Demko was healthy, for the most part, and brilliant, playing in 51 games. He went 35-14-2 with a .918 save percentage, 2.45 GAA and five shutouts. He finished sixth in wins but played at least four fewer games than any of the five goalies ahead of him. Among goalies with at least 50 appearances, nobody lost fewer games than Demko. So, the Canucks went 50-23-9 this season, winning the Pacific Division. They did so because Demko gave them a chance and gave them confidence each time he started. – Shawn P. Roarke, senior director of editorial

Connor Hellebuyck

For my money, the Winnipeg Jets goalie was the best and most consistent goalie during the regular season and is worthy of winning the Vezina Trophy for the second time (2019-20) in his NHL career. Hellebuyck went 37-19-4 with a 2.39 goals-against average, .921 save percentage and five shutouts in 60 games for Winnipeg. He was second in the NHL in wins, second in save percentage and fourth in goals-against average. He also made the second-most saves (1,656) this season behind Nashville Predators goalie Juuse Saros (1,672). The 31-year-old from Commerce, Michigan won the William M. Jennings Trophy, presented annually to the goalies who play a minimum of 25 games for the team that allows the fewest goals during the regular season. The Jets allowed an NHL-low 199 goals and finished second in the Central Division (54-24-6). – William Douglas, staff writer

CBC Manitoba

[Paul Maurice, basking in Stanley Cup glow, wants Winnipeg Jets to next win hockey's Holy Grail](#)

By Darren Bernhardt · CBC News

Paul Maurice is in the Sunshine State, revelling in the rays of the Stanley Cup, but part of his heart clearly remains in Winnipeg.

Mere moments after his team won the NHL championship trophy on Monday night, the Florida Panthers' head coach turned his thoughts to the team he left behind.

"If I could have one thing more, it'd be for the Winnipeg Jets to win the next Stanley Cup," he told Sportsnet's Kyle Bukauskas as music echoed through Amerant Bank Arena in Sunrise, Florida, and players celebrated with the freshly-polished silver cup.

The Panthers leapt to a 3-0 lead in the best-of-seven Stanley Cup final series against the Edmonton Oilers before collapsing over the next three games as Edmonton tied the series, leading to Monday's winner-take-all game.

And it was Florida who took it, 2-1.

Maurice, who is second on the NHL's all-time games coached list, had never before won Lord Stanley's mug, though he had been in the final dance.

He got Carolina to the title series in 2002, but the Hurricanes lost in five games to the Detroit Red Wings.

Oilers fall short of history as Panthers win Game 7 to capture 1st Stanley Cup title

Maurice joined the Jets in January 2014, replacing the fired Claude Noël as head coach, and led them the following season to their first playoff appearance since relocating from Atlanta.

In 2017–18, Maurice guided the Jets to the furthest they have ever been in the post-season, taking them to the Western Conference Finals before they lost to the Vegas Golden Knights.

Maurice stepped down in December 2021, telling reporters at a news conference that he loved the team but it was time to move on.

"I've pushed as long and as hard as I can here. I love these guys. They need a new voice, and I know that," he said at the time.

He holds the franchise record for games coached (600) and wins (315). He posted a 315-229-62 record during his Jets years.

Maurice was introduced as the Panthers' coach in June 2022. But he literally left part of his heart behind: his daughter, Sydney, still lives in Winnipeg.

"It will always be a special place," he said in a story posted on the Panthers website when Maurice brought his Panthers to town in December 2022 — his first time back since handing in his Jets ID.

"My kids came here at a young age, and they became who they are in Winnipeg."

The Athletic

[Rutger McGroarty, Nikolaj Ehlers and what I'm hearing about the Winnipeg Jets as NHL Draft week begins](#)

By Murat Ates

The Winnipeg Jets can't seem to approach an offseason without at least a little bit of player uncertainty. This year is no different: Nikolaj Ehlers is in play via trade and the Jets need to sign Brenden Dillon, Dylan DeMelo or their replacements and decide if they should bring back Sean Monahan or find a suitable solution at second-line centre.

None of those items constitute a surprise, though. Instead, it's 2022 first-round pick Rutger McGroarty's desire to begin his NHL career outside the Jets organization that's thrown the summer into disarray — and just in time for NHL draft week in Las Vegas.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. A clear-eyed accounting of Kevin Cheveldayoff's history reveals several examples of success navigating circumstances more complex than the ones in front of him today.

In the 2022 draft, the Jets took McGroarty at No. 14 and Brad Lambert at 30. They followed Lambert with Elias Salomonsson in the second round and Salomonsson has developed into Winnipeg's top defensive prospect. Lambert, Salomonsson, Thomas Milic and roster player Morgan Barron are all part of the organization because of Cheveldayoff's work trading Andrew Copp, who hadn't planned to re-sign in Winnipeg as a UFA.

Gabriel Vilardi, Alex Lafallo, Rasmus Kupari and whichever prospect the Jets take at No. 37 will be a part of the organization because of Cheveldayoff's work moving PL Dubois under plenty of duress.

The Jets have the tools to handle the problems they're dealing with now.

What are they going to do about it? Here's what I'm hearing.

The McGroarty situation

Winnipeg's development program is going to come under fire the moment McGroarty is traded.

I don't think this is a Cheveldayoff issue so much as the Jets have been passed in terms of the resources and care they provide for prospects as they develop. Winnipeg isn't a high-profile UFA destination and Cheveldayoff's success managing key trades has kept the Jets competitive in recent years; however, it was the team's success at the draft table that first helped Winnipeg emerge as a Stanley Cup contender in 2018.

The Jets need high-end youth outperforming their cap hits, whether on their first or second contracts. McGroarty could have become that, depending on his ability to adapt his dominant collegiate game to the professional ranks. Instead, the relationship between player and club doesn't appear reparable at this time. Thus Winnipeg's biggest hope lies in getting strong value from McGroarty via trade.

McGroarty is a blue-chip prospect who's held in great esteem around the NHL after finishing seventh in NCAA scoring as a sophomore and returning from a gruesome injury to captain Team USA to gold at the world juniors. He's also a recent first-round pick who has spent two years progressing like you'd hope the No. 14 pick would progress. At 20, his future is far from known but his first two post-draft years have been a success. That has value.

At the moment, Winnipeg doesn't have a first-round pick in 2024. McGroarty could have appeal to any team that has a first-round pick to spare, including the teams who have multiple first-round picks:

- San Jose (Nos. 1 and 14)
- Chicago (Nos. 2 and 18)
- Anaheim (Nos. 3 and 31 or 32, depending on Edmonton's final placement)
- Montreal (Nos. 5 and 26)
- Ottawa (Nos. 7 and 25)
- Calgary (Nos. 9 and 28)
- Philadelphia (Nos. 12 and 31 or 32, depending on Florida's final placement)

Those aren't the only teams that could — or should — have interest in McGroarty, nor is it a guarantee that Winnipeg is seeking draft capital in exchange. McGroarty should be able to return an established player that can help the Jets

Still, it's easy to understand the appeal of picks at 14th or higher. It seems unlikely that a McGroarty-for-pick trade would be instantly celebrated by fans, given the excitement that had developed from his 2023 development camp to now.

And what about Ehlers?

I've previously assumed Ehlers would be the Jets' one big-ticket trade to make prior to the draft. I'm under the impression that Ehlers isn't likely to sign in Winnipeg when his contract is up in 2025 and, while I don't think there's pressure, demands or restrictions beyond his 10-team no-trade list, I've expected the Jets to act expediently to get value from Ehlers this summer.

Nikolaj Ehlers trade destinations: If the Jets move him, what can they get?

McGroarty's situation doesn't automatically mean an Ehlers trade is delayed. I wonder if Cheveldayoff's success trading Copp as a midseason pending UFA makes it more likely that he's willing to risk starting the season with Ehlers on the roster but without Ehlers signed to an extension. However, a league source indicated that as draft week begins, Ehlers' name is still very much out there.

If a trade does materialize, there are some natural fits available that could entice the Jets.

Hurricanes forward Martin Necas is a 25-year-old restricted free agent who has scored at 57 points per 82 game pace over his past three seasons. Ehlers is 28 and has scored more often than that, posting 67 points per 82 games while receiving less ice time. Adding Necas would help Winnipeg absorb Ehlers' loss but finding the right price could be difficult, given Necas' RFA status compared to Ehlers' 2025 UFA rights. Necas is eligible for arbitration this summer and his earliest UFA eligibility is in 2026.

Senators defenceman Jakob Chychrun would provide a substantial upgrade to Winnipeg's blue line. Chychrun is like Ehlers in that he's one year away from UFA rights while providing a lot of value relative to his position.

If the Jets move Ehlers and McGroarty, I can't imagine both of them going for future assets like draft picks and prospects. The Jets are in a competitive window and Josh Morrissey, Mark Scheifele and Connor Hellebuyck will all be 30 or older by the end of next season. Winnipeg will want to win its next playoff round before those key veterans slow down.

The draft isn't a hard and fixed deadline for determining Ehlers' future, though, no matter what I interpret about the Jets' plans.

Will Monahan re-sign?

I'm under the impression that Monahan is considering his options as July 1 approaches, including the possibility of a return to Winnipeg. Evolving Hockey projects a three-year, \$5.2 million AAV for Monahan; I'd think of it as a decent stopgap for the Jets if the 29-year-old is retained.

As I wrote earlier this month, Monahan is slow by NHL standards, limiting his rush offence and hurting his transition defence. His hands are still good, though. Monahan has scored 30 or more goals three times, cleared 60 points four times and scored at a 29-goal, 66-point pace last season. He's great at faceoffs and excels in the bumper position on the power play. Against Colorado, when most Jets with a breakout attempt on their mind were overwhelmed by the Avalanche's speed, Monahan kept his wits about him and generated zone exits. Those exits didn't add up to much, with Monahan generating a single assist in five games, but his read of the game stood out at a time when Winnipeg was overwhelmed.

If Monahan returns beyond three years or too far beyond \$5 million, one begins to wonder about the Jets' commitment to a slower player as he approaches the wrong side of 30. Scheifele,

Monahan and Adam Lowry have a diverse collection of skills but would still represent an average or below average centre trio.

Don't expect a reunion with Tyler Toffoli (not that you were), but Cole Perfetti, Lambert and Ehlers if he is retained could all be options on Monahan's wing. If Monahan is not signed, then Perfetti could be reunited with Vladislav Namestnikov in a duo that largely worked or Winnipeg could turn to the market for other options. I think most of Chandler Stephenson's value comes from his work alongside Mark Stone, but he won't be the only option.

The Jets were interested in Elias Lindholm at the trade deadline; I think a UFA contract is wishful but it's clear that Lindholm is headed to the market after finishing last with Vancouver.

Dillon and DeMelo: Who comes back?

I expect that Dillon and DeMelo are in similar positions to Monahan — aware of the Jets' contract offer and curious to see what July 1 brings them. Dillon expressed some frustration during his exit interview — he seemed to wish that the Jets had locked him up long before July 1 — but I expect he'll have lots of suitors, including his hometown Canucks.

Evolving Hockey projects two years at close to a \$3 million AAV for Dillon, which would be a team-friendly deal. He has a unique blend of physicality, positional play and enough puck skill to keep up with the modern game, but turns 34 in November. The projection for DeMelo is more expensive — four years at \$4.9 million per — and, while I'm leery about that figure, DeMelo scored two fewer points than Neal Pionk did last season while providing superior defence. The Jets have leaned on him heavily and he became a 30-point-per-82-game player under Rick Bowness and Scott Arniel. He's earned a substantial raise from the \$3 million he made last season.

If the roster shuffle leaves the Jets without enough right-handed defencemen to provide cover, one move I wonder about is a reunion with Tyler Myers. That would be intriguing from a storytelling perspective; not only does Myers have a long history with Winnipeg but he (and Ben Chiarot) signed for more money elsewhere the last time Winnipeg arrived at its offseason with multiple veteran free-agent defencemen.

The buyout window will open 48 hours after the conclusion of Monday night's Game 7. If the Jets use it to buy out Nate Schmidt or any other player, they'll have a clearer sense of their cap space for July 1. Buying out Schmidt would save \$3.2 million in cap space next season while costing \$1.6 million in cap space in 2025-26.

What I'm hearing about why Winnipeg Jets top prospect Rutger McGroarty is in trade talks

By Murat Ates

The Winnipeg Jets' 2022 first-round pick, Rutger McGroarty, is likely to be traded, a league source told The Athletic on Saturday.

This confirms and adds to Elliott Friedman's report on the 32 Thoughts podcast that McGroarty's name "has come up in trade discussions" and that "the Jets have discussed trading and other teams have discussed acquiring McGroarty's rights."

The league source indicated that McGroarty's view of his long-term future with Winnipeg changed since the conclusion of his NCAA season.

Winnipeg wanted to sign McGroarty to a professional contract in April but was unwilling to promise a path to playing time. Whereas McGroarty's University of Michigan teammates Frank Nazar and Gavin Brindley signed with Chicago and Columbus, respectively — and played NHL games, like McGroarty's former Michigan teammates Adam Fantilli and Luke Hughes did last season — the Jets were focused on their upcoming playoff run.

Sometimes a collegiate player will sign and step right into the NHL, helping the team in the playoffs. Matthew Knies did this for Toronto in 2023 and Cale Makar's first games were played for Colorado during its 2019 playoff run.

The Jets didn't view McGroarty as ready to make that kind of impact, nor were they ready to guarantee him a roster spot in the NHL next season. McGroarty could sign and come to training camp but risked being demoted to the AHL instead of trying to lead his Michigan team to a national championship.

Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff characterized McGroarty's decision to return to Michigan instead of signing with Winnipeg this way.

"We made it very open to him at the onset that we were more than willing to sign him, more than willing to turn him pro. But in the same token, we need him to make that decision for what he feels is best for his development," Cheveldayoff said in May. "I think Rutger is looking for an even bigger role where he can help lead a team to greatness and help his development there."

So what happened between now and then? Why are the Jets suddenly exploring a trade of a top prospect with top-six forward potential and proven leadership abilities?

This isn't a situation where the player wants out of Winnipeg because of his views on the city. Instead, there appears to be a disconnect between how Winnipeg's player development viewed and communicated its plan with McGroarty and McGroarty's view of his own future. The desire to play in the NHL played a big role in McGroarty's decision not to sign in April; put simply, he viewed himself as more ready than the team did. At first, this difference in opinion didn't appear to necessitate McGroarty's exit from the organization. The relationship has changed since the start of McGroarty's offseason, though. He no longer believes his future is with the Jets.

There's no onus for the Jets to comment on a speculative situation and they did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

It does appear that is a situation where a good relationship between a prospect and his club became untenable. McGroarty is said to have enjoyed Winnipeg as a city and appeared to have a brilliant time at Jets development camp in 2023. His dad was seen wearing a Jets cap at the world juniors in Sweden and McGroarty was willing to sign a few months ago if NHL time was in the cards.

The league source tells The Athletic that McGroarty feels his path to the NHL is best suited in another organization.

It seems like a perfect storm emerged — that the Jets' patient, long-term approach to player development combined with McGroarty's NHL ambitions in a way that led to differing opinions

that could not be overcome. McGroarty put together an excellent season, won gold at the world juniors and has watched — sometimes in person — as a handful of teammates played their first NHL games. It seems as though his determination is that his road to the NHL is brighter and potentially more immediate with another organization than it is in Winnipeg.

It's possible that the Jets were right not to guarantee playing time to any prospect — even one as impressive as McGroarty. Their 2024 playoff focus was so extreme that Winnipeg left Cole Perfetti's 19 NHL goals on the bench for the first four games of the playoffs. Winnipeg has always slow-played its prospects, preferring them to over-ripen instead of doing their development in the NHL. It's also possible that McGroarty is wrong in his self-assessment or wrong to view his future as brighter outside of Winnipeg.

Still, it's easy to wonder if the approach with McGroarty was so old-fashioned that it cost the Jets a quality player. Winnipeg's developmental approach used to be discussed as among the best in the NHL — as it warranted, given the organization's early success in turning draft picks into NHL players. The Jets haven't had a lot of high picks in recent years — or a lot of draft picks, period — and they're graduating fewer NHL impact players than they did in their early years. A McGroarty trade would come with much higher stakes than slow-playing Ville Heinola, taken 20th in 2019, or losing prospects Declan Chisholm or Johnathan Kovacevic to waivers so as to keep more experienced players. It would force a reconsideration of the Jets' organizational approach to their top young players at all levels.

This isn't to say Cheveldayoff would automatically lose a McGroarty trade. He's shown tremendous patience dealing from similar situations and McGroarty is a blue-chip prospect held in tremendous esteem. Winnipeg may be able to use McGroarty to acquire a first-round pick — and a high one at that — or an older, more developed prospect who the front office views as ready to make an immediate NHL impact. McGroarty is also so substantial of a trade asset that he might be used to bring back a top-four defenceman or packaged to find an upgrade at second-line centre.

Either way, I'm under the impression that a trade is coming — and soon, likely before the draft.

[Winnipeg Jets mailbag: Paul Maurice's evolution, Mark Scheifele's talent level and more](#)

By Murat Ates

Paul Maurice could win the Stanley Cup, PL Dubois is now on the Washington Capitals, the Winnipeg Jets have hired Dean Chynoweth and Davis Payne as assistant coaches, and their fans have all kinds of interesting offseason questions.

How does Mark Scheifele stack up to recent Cup winners? How has Maurice changed since stepping down from the Jets?

Do I see a way for the Jets to win a Nikolaj Ehlers trade — and, if I do, what does it mean for next season's roster?

Add a deep dive into Winnipeg's draft and development record, a roster analysis that compares the Panthers and Jets to Cup winners since 2006 and cap efficiency thoughts from the team's 2018 run that offer some optimism about the years ahead.

Part 2 of this month's Jets mailbag starts now.

Note: Submitted questions may be edited for clarity and style.

Is there an example in recent history of a Cup-winning team having as low end of a No. 1 centre as Scheifele? If so, what kind of supporting cast would those teams have had around them to make up for the lack of elite No. 1 centre? — Grant P.

This is a good and frightening question.

Odds are high that we can add Aleksander Barkov to the list (and if it's not him, then it's Connor McDavid). Either way, you probably have to go back to Rod Brind'Amour in 2006 to find a player I wouldn't trade for Scheifele today. (Carolina supplemented the 35-year-old Brind'Amour with 20-year-old emerging star Eric Staal and veteran offensive force Doug Weight, but I'm sorting by playoff ice time.)

Scheifele is a solid first-line centre but doesn't hold up against 1Cs on championship teams. This shouldn't come as a shock to consistent readers.

Recall that, when I put together Winnipeg's Stanley Cup contender checklist earlier this season, Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Neal Pionk were the only players who fell below the Cup-winning standard for their position in the depth chart. Some people revolted at this — Scheifele and Connor are really good players — but it's not an insult to their quality so much as a recognition of Cup-winning greatness. Last year's Cup-winning No. 1 centre, Jack Eichel, had Mark Stone as his top winger — a player who nearly matches Connor's offence but who is also among the league's elite defensive forwards. In a league that talks about increased offence from defencemen and a still-growing impact of second- and third-wave attackers on the rush, there is a disproportionate defensive gap between the league's best and worst wingers.

Don't mistake my insistence on better backpressure and more committed board battles from Connor in particular (and Scheifele, at times) to mean I don't value their overall impact.

There's an alarming tendency to want to get rid of players who are really good but not good enough to lead their teams to the Stanley Cup. You can see it in the fan discourse around Ehlers right now, with many fans willing to accept a trade because he hasn't scored very much in the playoffs despite his quality as a player. This is the opposite tendency of Cup-winning teams who overpay ineffective players for being part of a championship — because "they know how to win" — and it is equally inefficient. The moment you remove Connor or Scheifele (or Ehlers) from this roster is the moment you miss them. (Cheveldayoff's on a tear, trade-wise, so I'll understand if there's opposition to my opinion.)

Back to your question. If Scheifele isn't Barkov, McDavid or Eichel, then what is Winnipeg to do?

Josh Morrissey is more than good enough and Connor Hellebuyck should be more than good enough to help a playoff team win. The Jets need more two-way quality at the top of the roster to match Cup-winning teams — or they need an elite power play, or they need a little improvement on both fronts. The good news is that power play improvements are attainable — the Jets haven't been in the top half of the league's power play table since 2020-21. The bad news is that modest improvements to defensive play don't turn either star into a Selke candidate. Winnipeg needs to supplement their strengths with better two-way players — who

can keep up, mind you; I'm talking more about Artturi Lehkonen or Nino Niederreiter than Matt Hendricks.

The other opinion I have is that the next time a player like Chris Tanev or Mattias Ekholm becomes available, Winnipeg needs to win that battle. There are defencemen who move at each deadline and managers try to talk them up like difference-makers; some players' impacts match their reputation. I don't know that Tanev would have stemmed the flood against Colorado all by himself but he had a heck of a playoffs for Dallas and that outcome was easy to predict.

Finally, some optimism. The Jets have key holes but meet a lot of Cup contender criteria, too.

Red X: Misses the model's range for that slot

Light grey check: Below average but within the range

Black check: Average for the model's range in that slot

Gold check: Above average for the model's range in that slot

This is where the Jets stood after the trade deadline. Put Cole Perfetti in Tyler Toffoli's place, grind your teeth a bit about the Jets' UFA predicament, worry about Ehlers' future and consider Brad Lambert as a potentially impactful first-year player. Beyond that, it's up to each individual person, from Hellebuyck through the skaters through Cheveledayoff, to chart a path back to contender status — and beyond, if fans' dreams are to come true.

I don't see Winnipeg acquiring a Cup-caliber No. 1 centre out of thin air. One advantage the Jets do have, however, is a pipeline that is ready to graduate Lambert, promote Perfetti and then build with Elias Salomonsson, Nikita Chibrikov and Rutger McGroarty. This isn't the same thing as running Ehlers, Patrik Laine and Connor for \$3 million plus bonuses in 2017-18 — on a team that paid peak Blake Wheeler \$5.6 million and Morrissey / Jacob Trouba less than \$4 million. It's still a potential source of strength, with Alex Lafallo, Pionk and Nate Schmidt's contracts soon to come off the books. If the Jets can get through this summer in a position of cap strength, there's plenty of hope for future efficiency at a Cup-contending level.

But that's just my opinion.

Is the Paul Maurice we're seeing on the Panthers bench different from the Maurice who gave up coaching the Jets? — Andywpg

A part of me wants to joke that the key is somewhere in his increased tirades-per-60 but Maurice had plenty of profanity-laced moments in Winnipeg, too.

The truth is that Maurice is on the cusp of the Cup, pending some form of McDavid-led miracle. History is going to write a new story about him now. It will be about how he learned great lessons following his departure from Winnipeg and applied them to lead the Panthers to glory. Whatever led him to step down in Winnipeg was one heck of an inciting incident; storytellers love epics that start with an obvious fall.

If I'm writing the Maurice epic, this is a list of non-negotiable themes:

- Maurice is a good, above-average NHL coach — and was in Winnipeg, too;
- Maurice stayed in Winnipeg too long and was the architect of some of his own problems, outlasting his shelf-life by multiple seasons;
- Roster quality goes much further toward winning than coaching does;

- Maurice has been a great fit in Florida, where the Panthers have plenty of prime-aged players.

I'm not trying to present these contention checklists as the end-all, be-all, but they are a good birds-eye look at the two-way talent on a team. Consider Florida's lack of Jets-sized holes at any point in its lineup:

Red X: Misses the model's range for that slot

Light grey check: Below average but within the range

Black check: Average for the model's range in that slot

Gold check: Above average for the model's range in that slot

I think Maurice is great at getting veterans and elites to buy into his game plan.

To go full candour, here is my response to a colleague in May 2023 when asked if Maurice's success in Florida was a surprise to me:

"Not so surprised. I don't think he's a great coach or an awful coach. Maybe slightly above average. Good at taking best practices from other coaches a few years after they're new ... Which makes him effective when he has the horses and when they believe in him. I think he stayed too long at the fair in Winnipeg, though, his time had passed a couple of years back.

"He could have been the wrong guy (in Winnipeg) and a capable coach. He was just here for so very long and the guys he counted on had grown ineffective (Wheeler) or went on their own program (Scheifele) ... And he couldn't seem to find his way through that. I believe coaches have shelf lives and I believe he had outlasted his."

Looking back, I agree with past me.

Lots of chatter about an Ehlers move this offseason. Is there an Ehlers trade to be made where the Jets are better in the 2024-25 season because of it? — David W.

No.

If Winnipeg is better in 2024-25 than it was last season, it will be because it upgraded its defence, pulled off a massive surprise or had a special teams season for the ages. Forget about style: Ehlers drives goal differential. That's a fact whether you love his speed or hate his zig-zagging. Over the past three seasons, no Jets forward has scored more points per minute at five-on-five. No Jets forward has scored more primary assists per minute at five-on-five, either, and the only player to score more goals per minute of five-on-five play is Connor.

He's not brilliant in his own zone but Ehlers' transition strength helps him stay out of it. At five-on-five, he has not been on the ice for more goals against Winnipeg than goals for Winnipeg in a single season of his career. Last year, the Jets outscored teams by 29 goals during his five-on-five minutes. Whether that's because he's a good hockey player or just a guy who holds up a magic rock that keeps tigers away Winnipeg in the offensive zone, Ehlers has pulled off the "outscore his opponents by a dramatic amount" trick for so long that I don't care how many confusing routes he takes. Whatever he does is working.

A league source indicated that Winnipeg's position on Ehlers is that the Jets have other work to do first — first, the coaches and now handling their free agents — but will listen to offers. I think

there's more to it than that — that an offseason deal is more likely than not — and tend to view the draft as a date by which the Jets would like certainty.

If the Jets get a Jacob Trouba type return (say, a young forward with top-six potential and a pick close to 20th) then there's no way to win, short term, even if the long-term dividends are scorching. Consider the Andrew Copp trade, wherein everything bounced Winnipeg's way and it got Morgan Barron, Lambert, Salomonsson and Thomas Milic. The long-term payoff looks brilliant; in the short term, only Copp and Barron are in the NHL.

There is lots of room for me to be wrong here. Cheveldayoff is on that aforementioned tear, trade-wise, while Ehlers is not putting the same kind of pressure on Winnipeg to move him that Trouba did so long ago. You've also heard Scott Arniel tell Daily Faceoff, "I want him. I need him. I need that offence. I need that speed." The head coach values the player and there are ways for Winnipeg to chart an as-of-yet uncharted full-season, first-line course. There may be player-for-player trades to make, too, which I can't see from my writer's chair.

My best guess and current belief, like I mentioned above, is that any Ehlers trade results in short-term pain.

How would you grade Winnipeg's amateur and pro scouts? — John B.

I love this question and am going to zoom in on the amateur side, with the draft coming up next week.

I'm also going to start by borrowing a chart from Dom Luszczyszyn. If you're the type to look at charts and quietly rage to yourself, fear not. My only point here is something you don't need a chart to tell you: Not all draft picks share the same value.

Argue with Dom's methodology if you like but, for our purposes, we can all agree that the pick Winnipeg used on Rutger McGroarty (14th, 2022) had a higher value than the one it used on Tyrel Bauer (164th, 2020.) That's not too much to ask, right?

The part we care about — how good each player is in the NHL — depends on a lot of things. You're asking about the work of Winnipeg's scouts and that's a big factor but it's possible that Winnipeg's player development is better or worse than average. Or that success is random. Or that post-draft conditions like a player's willingness to put the work in, the Jets' organizational depth or unique situations like what Ville Heinola went through on the Jets' 2021 taxi squad play a role.

All of these are true, to a degree. The single biggest predictor of success is still the quality of pick. To that end, Stephen Burtch put together a 2015 study that estimated the likelihood of any given pick playing at least 100 NHL games. Burtch used data from the 1997 through 2005 drafts to inform his results, meaning that one more potential flaw we're dealing with is the possibility that scouting staffs have gotten better — or worse — at identifying talent in recent years.

The reason I love to cite Burtch's study is that he included his formulas. I ran those formulas through the picks Winnipeg made from Scheifele in 2011 through Bauer in 2020 — to estimate the number of players that should have played at least 100 games.

The model says Winnipeg "should" have drafted 18 such players. The Jets actually drafted 19: Scheifele, Trouba, Adam Lowry, Copp, Ehlers, Morrissey, Connor, Hellebuyck, Laine, Jack

Roslovic, Mason Appleton, Jansen Harkins, Nicolas Petan, Tucker Poolman, Samberg, Johnathan Kovacevic, Perfetti, Logan Stanley and David Gustafsson. Heinola and Declan Chisholm represent the Jets' best bets to add to that total — each is within one 82-game season of crossing the 100 GP threshold.

I like this kind of analysis because I hear people criticize the Jets' recent drafting record without comparing the number — and quality — of picks involved. The Jets drafted more players in 2013 than they did in 2019 and 2020 combined. I think that gets overlooked.

Winnipeg's recent work has been the least impressive — as it should be, based on the Jets' picks. Winnipeg's four drafts with the smallest expected returns are 2018, 2020, 2019 and 2017, in that order. You can point to individual missteps but Winnipeg's biggest procurement problem has been a lack of draft capital, with picks heading out the door in a big way between 2017 and 2020.

What comes next? Winnipeg made four total picks in 2021, with Chaz Lucius, Nikita Chibrikov, Dmitry Kuzmin and Dmitry Rashevsky added to the organization, before the Copp trade return helped the Jets make eight picks in 2022. McGroarty, Lambert and Salomonsson are the favourites to make 2022 another banner year. Winnipeg made five picks in 2023, headlined by Colby Barlow, and is currently slated to make five picks in Vegas next week.

The Jets haven't been an elite draft and develop team for a while now, but they're doing just fine for the number and quality of picks they've gotten to make.

Global Winnipeg

ANALYSIS: What's happening with Jets prospect Rutger McGroarty?

By Kelly Moore Global News

There are multiple reports — none confirmed thus far by the two parties involved — that Rutger McGroarty has told the Winnipeg Jets he will not sign with them because of differing views on the path he'll take to the NHL.

This completely unexpected turn of events doesn't seem to fit the profile of the Jets' 2022 first-round draft pick.

You had to be there that evening of July 7, 2022, in Montreal during round one of the NHL entry draft at the Bell Centre.

The daily email you need for Winnipeg's top news stories.

An ear-to-ear smile seemed to be permanently etched on Rutger McGroarty's face after being selected 14th overall by Winnipeg.

This was just to be the first step. There was much to learn — and earn — to get to the ultimate destination.

He spoke of training sessions with the legendary Barb Underhill to improve on his skating, which was not listed as one of Rutger McGroarty's strengths on the various scouting reports.

You could have also been at Hockey For All Centre this past July, when the teenager from Lincoln, Neb., endeared himself to Jets fans, through his words and actions, beyond what any Winnipeg prospect has since the franchise relocated from Atlanta more than a decade ago.

In short, this was a young man who gets it. His character, maturity and selflessness led to talk of him becoming the captain of the hockey club one day.

Which is why the reports of McGroarty not being onside with marinating in the minors feels like a round peg in a square hole.

And to be 100 per cent clear, I am not questioning the reporting of my colleagues on this story for one second. But what the heck just happened here?

For every young prospect who takes a direct path to the NHL, there are just as many or more examples of those who benefitted from a few months, or even years, in the minors.

Other than Nikolaj Ehlers, every Winnipeg-drafted player currently on the roster has spent time in St. John's or with the Moose.

Yes, the Jets were not as deep back when the Scheifeles, Morrisseys, Hellebuycks and Lowrys were playing their way into the fold.

But I would argue Winnipeg became a better team, and so did every one of those players, because of time invested in preparing for the next step.

It is being reported Rutger McGroarty and his advisors view development as a detriment in carving out a long and successful career, a path they're not willing to travel.

If a parting of the ways is indeed the way this eventually plays out, as is being speculated, to be determined is whether this will work out for both, one, or none.

ANALYSIS: Interesting draft ahead for Jets, with no first-round pick

By Paul Edmonds CJOB

It will be an interesting week leading up to next Friday's NHL Entry Draft for the Winnipeg Jets. Unlike years past, the team does not currently possess a first-round selection — and as the June 28 and 29 festivities near, own just one pick in the first three rounds.

For every NHL team, the annual selection process is the lifeblood of their organization, a mechanism that can certainly shape and mould a franchise for many years, good or bad.

Of course, it's not an exact science, but there are no shortcuts to its execution, as it's both exciting and duly important.

Locally, the Jets, through their draft, develop and retain model, certainly understand this vividly. In their 13 seasons to date, they've held at least a single first-round pick in all but one of those years. In the year they didn't, they were able to grab current rostered forward David Gustafsson with their first pick of 2018, in the second round.

So as draft day closes in and with the Jets devoid of a first-round pick for only the second time in franchise history, one wonders if acquiring one between now and then is actually a priority for the organization, especially when you consider what it might cost in a draft year that isn't considered deeply rich with talent.

In fact, many in the industry believe this year's crop does possess quality players, but as one executive said recently, it's a "fielder's choice" — meaning teams will either really like a player or really won't.

However, as the old saying goes, if something lands on the lap of the Jets and presents itself as a too-good-to-pass-up upgrade that includes a first-round selection, then that attitude would assuredly change. But don't bet on that happening.

Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, it will be an interesting week leading up to next Friday's draft for the Jets — not likely because of their pursuit of acquiring a first-round draft pick, but rather who they'll select with their only pick in the first three rounds.

Sportsnet.ca

Jets Draft Preview: Winnipeg in position to trade back into first round

By Ryan Dixon

Despite the fact they do not currently own a first-round pick, the Winnipeg Jets have suddenly become a real team to watch at the 2024 NHL Draft.

Winnipeg jettisoned its first-rounder this year to the Montreal Canadiens ahead of the trade deadline in exchange for centre Sean Monahan. And before we go any further, let's just point out that Monahan's performance — he put up 13 goals and 24 points in 34 games with the Jets — combined with the fact there's a decent chance the 29-year-old will ink a contract to stick around as the second-line centre in Manitoba make surrendering what turned out to be the 26th-overall pick for his services look like a wonderful decision by GM Kevin Cheveldayoff.

Now, the question is whether Cheveldayoff might pull off another deal that would see the Jets re-enter the first-round conversation — possibly in a spot where they could get a serious prospect.

Winnipeg Jets' upcoming draft picks.

In the weeks leading up to the draft, momentum seems to be growing around the idea that 2022 first-rounder Rutger McGroarty will be moved by the team because, for whatever reason, the player and the club won't be able to hammer out a contract that would see the University of Michigan winger leave school for pro hockey next fall.

And that's only the most recent source of trade speculation in Winnipeg because there's a strong sense lifetime Jet Nik Ehlers — with one year to go before he can hit the open market as a 2025 UFA — is more likely to be dealt by the squad than ink an extension with it this summer.

If a 28-year-old winger with 30-goal capabilities is available, people are going to come calling.

While the Ehlers speculation is interesting, the potential for a McGroarty trade is fascinating because — unlike the former — the latter could conceivably fit with a contending team, a

rebuilding team and basically every club in between. What team wouldn't at least make a call on a strong, six-foot-one player drafted 14th overall who's 20 years old and will be on a cost-capped entry-level deal when he joins the NHL four-to-16 months from now?

A quick peek at the draft board shows two teams that seem like viable dance partners for Winnipeg in the New Jersey Devils at 10th overall and the Buffalo Sabres one slot later at No. 11.

The Devils are almost certainly looking to add a young forward, so would they look long and hard at McGroarty as a guy who will surely be ready to make an NHL contribution sooner than anyone New Jersey could draft on Friday? As for the Sabres, yes, Buffalo is already prospect-rich, but the organization might jump at the chance to get its hands on a more rugged type like McGroarty, especially after selecting the likes of Zach Benson and Matthew Savoie in recent drafts. The Sabres' perfect-world scenario might be swapping the pick for instant, significant help, but given McGroarty's profile — which includes being captain of the gold medal-winning Team USA squad at the 2024 World Junior Championship — maybe they'd be willing to do the deal.

Meanwhile, from the Winnipeg side of things, sliding into the first 11 picks could represent a chance to walk away with an extremely enticing prospect. We haven't seen a draft with this much uncertainty after the first selection in years and that anarchy could be an opening for Winnipeg. Even if you delete McGroarty from the prospect pool, the Jets already look pretty good up front with 2023 first-rounder Colby Barlow and Brad Lambert — who's coming off a strong AHL debut this past season — in the pipeline. Should the dominoes fall just so in this defenceman-heavy draft, who knows, maybe Winnipeg could wind up with Zayne Parekh, Sam Dickinson or Carter Yakemchuk in their midst.

And even if there's a run on the D-men early on, you could easily see a world where young forwards like Tij Iginla, Berkly Catton or mega-riser Beckett Sennecke wind up being fantastic top-six finds for Winnipeg over the long haul.

And what about Ehlers? As much as you can imagine a wider variety of suitors for McGroarty, you could certainly see a playoff team in search of scoring (New York Islanders, 20th overall; Boston Bruins, 25th overall; Carolina Hurricanes, 27th overall) or a non-playoff team desperate to get in there (Minnesota Wild, 13th overall; Detroit Red Wings, 15th) feeling things out to see if there's some kind of deal to be struck.

Of course, Cheveldayoff is no stranger to big moves around the draft. Five years ago he traded Jacob Trouba to the New York Rangers with the understanding that the defenceman would not ink long-term to stay in Winnipeg. And it was just 12 months ago the Jets moved Pierre-Luc Dubois to the L.A. Kings for Gabe Vilardi, Alex Iafallo, Rasmus Kupari and a 2024 second-rounder in a swap so rank from the Kings' side of the equation that they got out of the Dubois business at the first (and possibly only) opportunity to do so by sending him to the Washington Capitals last week.

Cheveldayoff has certainly done some of his best trade work at this often-dizzying time in the NHL calendar. By the look of it, he could be called upon to do so again.

[Scout's Analysis: What could Jets get in Rutger McGroarty trade?](#)

By Jason Bukala

As we enter NHL draft week, followed closely thereafter by free agency on July 1, there is a lot of noise surrounding Winnipeg Jets prospect Rutger McGroarty.

"I'm gonna be really careful here because there are a lot of answers I don't have. His family advisor is not talking and the Jets are not talking but the one thing I can tell you is that I have heard his name has come up in trade discussions," Elliotte Friedman said about McGroarty on the 32 Thoughts podcast Saturday.

"The Jets have discussed trading and other teams have discussed acquiring McGroarty's rights...And again, I'm not gonna guess on anything here, but I'm simply going to say that I've heard his name has come up in trade conversations. So we'll see where this all goes over the next couple of weeks. He's a good player and he would be coveted."

As I run around trying to get organized for my early morning flight to Vegas on Monday, I wanted to drop a quick analysis on what I believe McGroarty's value is in relation to the current draft class. I also feel it's important to provide an example of what I would be looking for in return if I were trading McGroarty to another team.

THE CUTTER GAUTHIER COMPARISON

Assuming the Jets are taking calls on McGroarty, the immediate comparison to draw upon is the situation the Philadelphia Flyers found themselves in with top prospect Cutter Gauthier.

Gauthier was selected fifth overall in 2022. He and the Flyers had some sort of falling out and Philly decided to move him to the Anaheim Ducks for defenceman Jamie Drysdale and a second-round pick in 2025.

The Jets selected McGroarty 14th overall in the same draft.

Here's how both prospect's stats compare over the course of two seasons since they were drafted:

On balance there are certainly some similarities between the two players statistically.

They both played top-six roles for their college teams and contributed to Team USA's success at the World Juniors. McGroarty doesn't skate as well as Gauthier, but he extends more plays out front of the net and has shown he can be used in a variety of roles, including the penalty kill.

Gauthier leans natural shooter more than playmaker. His skating is consistently better than McGroarty as well, although McGroarty's agility has definitely improved over the course of two seasons.

TRADE VALUE

I'm comfortable trading McGroarty for one of the following players on my 2024 draft list:

- Sam Dickinson
- Beckett Sennecke
- Jett Luchanko
- Carter Yakemchuk
- Konsta Helenius

Since the Jets have invested two years of development in McGroarty and he might end up in the NHL next season, I would also ask for a third-round pick in 2025, a middle-six forward prospect, or a mid-range defence prospect.

Since I have roughly five attainable names on my draft list that I'm really comfortable acquiring in a trade for McGroarty, I'd wait to make the deal on the draft floor. I need to see how my list is falling into place before making the call.

I would make McGroarty available to New Jersey (10), Buffalo (11), Philadelphia (12), Minnesota (13) and San Jose (14), knowing full well that the Flyers are very likely to pass on the player given their recent experience with Gauthier. In my opinion, any pick after San Jose at 14 provides more risk of diminishing return from this draft class. If a deal can't be made, the Jets can wait until next season and have McGroarty return to school for another year to find a more appropriate trade.

Two possible trade destinations for Winnipeg Jets' Nikolaj Ehlers

By Ryan Dixon

Nikolaj Ehlers has never scored 30 goals in a season.

It's one of those things that, at least from afar, kind of catches you off guard.

The speedy Dane has looked like such a dangerous scoring winger at times during a decade-long career that it just feels like there should be a 36 and a 33 somewhere in that Hockey Reference goal column.

He's certainly come close, notching 29 goals in his age-21 season as a third-year NHLer who appeared on his way to becoming — at worst — a regular 35-goal man. Of course, he also buried the biscuit at a 37-goal pace in both the pandemic-shortened 2020-21 campaign (21 goals in 47 games) and the next season, an injury-plagued showing in 2021-22 when he netted 28 in 62.

Both the injuries and that gnawing sense there could always be a little bit more production with Ehlers are factors to consider as we contemplate where this player — with one year remaining on his contract — might skate next year if, as all indications seem to be, there isn't an extension to be worked out in Winnipeg.

Then again, how easy will it be for teams in need of scoring to look at those tantalizing stretches of Ehlers' career and wonder if a guy who is still entering just his age-28 season could put it (and keep it) all together in a new location — especially if signing to stick around that new burgh for the next half-decade or so is part of the equation?

If Ehlers' time on the only team he's ever known is limited, no shortage of clubs will be calling the Jets to get a handle on what it would take to land him. Here, then, is our shot at a couple deals that could kick off the next chapter of Ehlers' career.

Winnipeg receives

F Josh Anderson
D Jayden Struble

D Justin Barron
F Owen Beck

Carolina's 2024 second-round pick

Carolina receives
F Nikolaj Ehlers
D Jordan Harris
26th overall pick from Montreal, previously acquired from Winnipeg

Montreal receives
F Martin Necas

Why the Jets do it: There's no one fantastic piece coming back, but if things break the right way you could conceivably fill a lot of holes. Anderson is coming off a positively miserable year and you could argue Montreal would need to pay somebody to take the three years remaining on his contract at a cap hit of \$5.5 million per season. But this is a fast power forward hockey executives might find hard to quit and Winnipeg has historically embraced acquiring guys with a little term. Anderson, who just turned 30 in May, has had trouble staying healthy, but he was basically a 20-goal guy in a six-foot-three banger's frame the two previous seasons before this past one.

Jayden Struble is a bull-strong defenceman who moves well and showed real NHL potential as a rookie this year, while Justin Barron is a coveted right-shot D-man who's flashed decent NHL stretches. Put the 2020 first-rounder on a team with his brother, Morgan, and hope he finds his best self at the still-young age of 22.

Owen Beck is coming off an MVP showing at the Memorial Cup and screams valuable pro. If the Jets are lucky, he might become a top-sixer after a little seasoning.

Why the Hurricanes do it: Carolina is perpetually in need of scoring and Ehlers could provide that. After some ups and downs in Manitoba, you have to think Ehlers — if things go well in Raleigh — would seriously consider putting down roots in a quiet, warm locale with a solid squad.

Jordan Harris's name may not jump off the page, but he's shown himself to be a very smart D-man in Montreal who can basically be trusted in all situations. His floor is that of an overqualified third-pair guy who can play both sides of the rink and his ceiling is ultra-reliable No. 4 guy on a competitive squad.

Carolina would also now hold the 26th and 27th selections in the draft; perhaps it could bundle them and move up the board to select an enticing prospect.

Why the Canadiens do it: It's a lot going out the door from Montreal, but nothing that feels like a back-breaker. Montreal is loaded with young defence and blue line prospects, so losing three young D-men with NHL experience — even one as sturdy as Harris — is palatable. Beck is a great prospect, but the Canadiens are bringing in a 25-year-old, in Necas, who would eat up a top-six slot for the next half-decade, at least.

The Canadiens have a lot of quality young pieces; if their rebuild lacks something it's high-end talent and Necas possesses that.

Winnipeg receives
Utah's 2025 first-round pick, top-five protected
Utah's 2025 second-round pick
Florida's 2024 second-round pick, previously acquired by Utah

Utah receives
F Nikolaj Ehlers

Why the Jets do it: It's a bit of a kick-the-can play; acquire draft futures that can be turned into bodies down the road. Winnipeg isn't typically a free-agent destination for top-end talent, but there are a number of workmanlike UFA defencemen available this year the Jets could pursue. Try to bolster the blue with Ehlers' \$6 million cap hit off the books and liquidate the Utah picks (or don't) before the 2025 deadline as you see fit.

Why Utah does it: Because it literally has 10 second-round picks from 2024 to '26. Surely the plan all along — whether in the desert or mountains — was to turn many of those into bodies and the time has come. Bring a new player with goal-scoring chops to your new market, hope he thrives and maybe the fit works long-term.

The Hockey News

"I'm Really Excited About These Two Guys" - Scott Arniel on Chynoweth and Payne
Scott Arniel lands on Dean Chynoweth and Davis Payne as new assistant coaches for 2024-25.

BY CARTER BROOKS

The Winnipeg Jets have officially rounded out their coaching staff for the 2024-25 season.

Having named former associate coach Scott Arniel as the team's bench boss just under a month ago, the new head coach acted swiftly to get his ducks in a row for the coming year.

"I wanted to make sure that I was real thorough in this search process, and I'd like to think I was," Arniel told The Hockey News.

"At the end of the day, the hardest part was that I was competing against seven other teams that were looking for coaches. So, that was why I had to get going on it right away. But at the end of the day, I'm really excited about these two guys."

In landing on Dean Chynoweth and Davis Payne, Arniel has two veteran coaches at his wings that will bring about past experience and a new flavour to the bench.

Chynoweth will focus on the team's defensive structure and its penalty kill, while Payne will turn his attention to the offence and Winnipeg's power play.

"Both Davis and Dean, they've been in the game a long time at all different levels," Arniel expanded. "They've both been head coaches and assistant coaches. They've done a lot of things over their careers: they've won, they've had success, they've been developers, they've

worked with young players and they've worked with veteran players to create great relationships."

Although not knowing either individual personally, Arniel said the reviews came back extremely positively for both candidates from his near 20-person queue.

"I have heard nothing but awesome things about each guy," he said. "Whether it came from players that played for them or coaches that worked with them. Management did a lot of digging on not just those guys, but everybody.

"I got some great things back on those guys and it really helped me feel confident that I was making the right choices. I am really happy and excited that they chose Winnipeg as well, because they, too, could have gone somewhere else."

Having interviewed over a dozen possible leads, Arniel settled on the duo of Chynoweth and Payne, who will join the current coaching staff consisting of Marty Johnson (assistant coach), Wade Flaherty (goaltending coach) and Matt Prefontaine (video coach).

The process of sitting down and talking about the Winnipeg Jets with other like-minded individuals gave Arniel a fresh outlook on how outsiders may view his team - something he rather enjoyed.

"I talked to a ton of guys and got a lot of different opinions, a lot of different ideas and a lot of different thoughts from some candidates. You know, some of the guys talked about our team and their thoughts of some of our players - and they're guys that are in the league or have been in the league - so it was a really interesting experience. It was great to talk to those guys and really get a good feel for people."

With the NHL Awards, the NHL Draft and the first week of the NHL's official free agent signing period set to begin all within the coming two weeks, Arniel is expected to have a busy start to his first offseason in charge of the Jets. But for now, it's a couple days of rest and relaxation at his family cottage in Lake of the Woods.

[*Jets Prospect Rutger McGroarty Rumoured to be Unhappy with Organization The Winnipeg Jets and prospect Rutger McGroarty appear to be at odds.*](#)

BY CARTER BROOKS

On Saturday, Sportsnet's Elliott Friedman dropped a bombshell his weekly podcast, 32 Thoughts.

The biggest tidbit of interest to fans of the Winnipeg Jets is that of his piece on prospect Rutger McGroarty.

Selected 14th overall in the 2022 NHL Draft by the Jets, McGroarty has spent the past two seasons at the University of Michigan, and recently announced his decision to return for the 2024-25 season.

"So, I am going to be really careful here, Jeff, because there are a lot of answers I don't have," Friedman shared on his podcast.

"His family advisor is not talking, and the Jets are not talking, but the one thing I can tell you is that I have heard his name has come up in trade discussions... The Jets have discussed trading him, and other teams have discussed acquiring McGroarty's rights.

"Now, you'll remember a few months ago after the NCAA season, McGroarty announced he was going back to Michigan for his junior year. The Jets have his rights for two more years. Again, I'm not going to guess on anything here but I'm simply going to say that I've heard his name has come up in trade conversations.

"So, we'll see where this all goes over the next couple of weeks. He's a good player and he would be coveted."

The news comes as a bit of a surprise, but also a revelation that some may have seen coming - based on past experiences with certain youthful Jets prospects.

Cole Perfetti - a fellow first round pick - was yanked from the every day lineup in favour of older, veteran players even through the postseason, despite strong offensive performances.

Defenceman and fellow first round pick, Ville Heinola, has been buried in the minors or the Jets' press box since making his brief NHL debut back in 2019.

According to those familiar with McGroarty's situation, the decision to stick with Michigan for the coming season is one made due to decisions stemming from Jets management on various prospects' development paths.

Whether or not Winnipeg's rumoured trade offerings - involving McGroarty - are due to an impasse between the team and player, the 20-year-old is certainly not comfortable with where/when the Jets plan to use him in their lineup going forward.

Things appear to have gone off the rails with Winnipeg hoping McGroarty would begin his professional career in the American Hockey League with the Manitoba Moose, while the youngster expected to make the jump directly to the NHL.

Winnipeg, which owns McGroarty's signing rights for two more years, would like to either come to an agreement with its top prospect, or ship him off for the best return as early as possible.

Last season, the Philadelphia Flyers and Anaheim Ducks teamed up for a trade involving 2022 No. 5 overall selection Cutter Gauthier, who had no interest in signing with the Flyers. He was dealt to Anaheim for stud defenceman Jamie Drysdale and an early pick.

Should Winnipeg be able to garner as much of a return for McGroarty, the answer appears to be written in the sand on the future of another troubled American forward.

Should he have no interest in following the Jets' developmental path, now would be the best time to cut bait.

Other recent college hockey holdouts include that of Jimmy Vesey, Kevin Hayes, Adam Fox and a bit further back in time, Blake Wheeler - each of whom had no desire to sign with their drafting teams.