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DeMelo happy to stay in Winnipeg

DeMelo: "It feels like my best years have been in Winnipeg."

By Jamie Thomas

With the Stanley Cup Playoffs officially over, the Winnipeg Jets took care of an important piece of business on the first day of the NHL's off-season.

Tuesday morning, the Jets signed defenceman Dylan DeMelo to a four-year extension with an AAV of 4.9 million dollars.

"It's huge to get it done. Definitely feels good. Just so happy to stay with Winnipeg, the fit has been fantastic. It feels like my best years have been in Winnipeg and it really feels like my best years are still ahead of me," said DeMelo.

"To be able to get it done with this organization and to be back with this group of guys, I'm so thrilled and I can't get wait to get started."

After the Jets dropped their first round series to the Colorado Avalanche in April, DeMelo was asked about what was important to him when it came to his next contract. The 31-year-old mentioned his role and fit with the team and the ability to win. Clearly, he feels he can do that with the Jets.

"When Scheif (Mark Scheifele) and Bucky (Connor Hellebuyck) re-signed, that really set the tone for the organization and we have the pieces. There's no doubt in my mind that we have the core guys and the group of guys to get this done. We just have to find a way to push it over the top," said DeMelo.

"I believe in this group and the big reason why I re-signed; I believe we have the makeup to win. It's on us now to find how that all works."

The Ontario product was also excited to hear the news that associate coach Scott Arniel was named the Jets coach following the retirement of Rick Bowness.

"It means a lot. Even just as a person, I know he's wanted to get back to being a head coach for a long time and I think to do it in Winnipeg is something special to him. Obviously being a player here, his wife is from here, he calls Winnipeg home in the summer even when he was with different organizations. I know on that level, it meant a lot," said DeMelo.

"But he's also very deserving to be the coach. When Bones had his leave of absence and things of that nature, Arnie was really good calming influence in a very hectic time where we didn't know when Bones was going to be back. He kind of kept everything together. He's got a little different approach than Bones and has a really good feel for the game."

Just last week, Arniel rounded out his coaching staff by bringing in assistant coaches Davis Payne and Dean Chynoweth. DeMelo has some familiarity with Payne as the two worked together during DeMelo's time in Ottawa and he was able to chat with Chynoweth on the phone shortly after the news came out.

“Honestly, we barely talked about hockey. We were just talking about life, and he seems like a guy that’s really going to be good for us,” said DeMelo.

“So, I’m looking forward to Scott taking the reins here. I think he’s going to do a fantastic job with our group, and we’ve had a taste of him being the head coach and him having that relationship with us and that open communication, I think that goes a long way.”

A former coach of DeMelo’s, Paul Maurice, along with the Florida Panthers won the Stanley Cup after a long hard fought seven games over the Edmonton Oilers. DeMelo admitted that watching the Final will provide motivation for him going into next season.

“Congratulations to Paul Maurice, Jamie Kompon, Kevin Stenlund and Dmitry Kulikov, former Jets that won. I wish we all got to win together in Winnipeg. But there’s that jealousy in me in that case but super proud of all of them, really good people. Paul has been in the game for a very long time chasing it,” said DeMelo.

“I mean you’re watching, and you wish that was you. You wish you were playing in the (Stanley Cup) Final, you wish you were the one hoisting the Stanley Cup. It’s tough to watch it, it really is. You want that to be you. I’ve been kind of able to unwind and get back on the ice, get in the gym and spend time with the family, which has been great. But when I think about it, it does tick me off, I think we should be using it as motivation coming into camp, motivation in our workouts and motivation when we are on the ice.”

With the new contract in hand, DeMelo will be looking to build off another impressive season in Winnipeg. He finished second in the NHL with a +46, Panthers defenceman Gustav Forsling led the way with +56. Jets fans can rest easy knowing the DeMelo will be doing everything he can to get better for the upcoming campaign.

“I was kind of annoyed I didn’t get +50. I know that’s kind of arrogant to say but that’s honestly how I feel. You want to up the ante on everything, I had three goals last year, I had six the year before and I want more than six goals. I had 31 points (in 2023-24), I want 35-40 points. Always trying to improve, always trying to up the ante,” said DeMelo.

“As soon as you kind of lay off and settle in this league, in life, you’re going to get passed by. I wouldn’t be doing my job if I wasn’t trying to explore all options to get better, not just for myself, but for this group. I re-signed here, obviously it’s a great contract, making good money. I owe it to this organization and to my teammates to be the best player I can be. It’s my mindset and trying to do what I can to try to push this team forward.”

Winnipeg Free Press

[DeMelo signs four-year contract extension with the Winnipeg Jets](#)

By: Ken Wiebe

Dylan DeMelo was quick to put his cards on the table.

As he spoke to reporters last month on exit interview day, the Winnipeg Jets defenceman professed his willingness to stick around before becoming an unrestricted free agent on July 1, just like many players have before him.

DeMelo turned those words into actions on Tuesday morning, agreeing to terms on a four-year extension which includes an average annual value of \$4.9 million.

“It was my first choice,” DeMelo said in a telephone interview. “It feels like home here. The comfort factor of knowing my role, knowing the guys, knowing the city, the coaching staff. It just feels right. It’s a group of guys I want to win with. That’s my goal, to continue to push our group forward and try to chase the Stanley Cup.

“To get it done now is a huge peace of mind, too. Not having to worry about free agency or any of that stuff.”

It’s a tidy raise from the \$3 million AAV from the last four-year pact he signed with the Jets back in October of 2020.

It’s also an important development for an organization that figures to be in the middle of plenty of discussions over the course of the coming days, leading into Friday’s first round of the 2024 NHL Draft in Las Vegas.

Locking down a top-pairing guy who has provided stability to playing partner Josh Morrissey is something the Jets needed to get done, especially when you consider the uncertainty surrounding a defence corps that is now likely to be losing Brenden Dillon to free agency once it opens.

There’s no doubt that’s a significant development in itself, but the prospect of losing both Dillon and DeMelo was looming large, with unrestricted free agency just around the corner.

Since DeMelo got so close to hitting the open market, there was some temptation to see what else might be out there.

But when taking stock of the situation as negotiations intensified during the course of the past week or so, DeMelo realized he was getting exactly what he wanted in the place he wanted to be.

“When you find a place that’s really good, on and off the ice, you want to hold onto that feeling,” said DeMelo. “The longer it went here and the closer it got to July 1, for sure there was some thought to what is out there. It’s human nature. It wasn’t a matter of let’s put Winnipeg on the back burner, but if for whatever reason it doesn’t work in Winnipeg, there was that little bit of curiosity. Sometimes the grass isn’t greener on the other side.

“You see it happen all the time, where guys sign and they get the payday that they want, but it’s not the right fit. For me, fit was probably the most important of all of it. You don’t get to be a free agent too many times and you don’t want to leave money on the table. This is life-changing money for not just yourself but for your family. I achieved all that I wanted with this contract negotiation.”

Paying a 31-year-old close to \$5 million for the next four seasons will be considered a risk to some observers, but it’s the cost of doing business.

Right-shot D-men are at a premium, the cap is going up and DeMelo’s game is still getting better, even as he prepares for his 10th NHL season.

DeMelo's ability to help the Jets exit the defensive zone and transport the puck efficiently are among the many valued qualities that he brings to the table.

And don't discount the importance of maintaining the pairing with Morrissey, who saw a revolving door of partners since the departure of Jacob Trouba in the summer of 2019 before settling in alongside DeMelo.

DeMelo is part of the expanding leadership core and recently revealed that he and his wife are expecting a second child in August, which means he's the latest player that's committed to raising a young family in this market.

"My four years here have been amazing," said DeMelo. "It checks a lot of boxes for me. You kind of have to do the song and dance a little bit with the negotiations. But I always knew it was going to get to this stage. Obviously, I would have loved for it to have been done quicker. But sometimes you have to wait your turn and just be patient."

Morrissey was kept in the loop by DeMelo during the past several weeks and is thrilled to know his defence partner is sticking around.

"He's worked really hard to earn a really nice contract and he's done it the hard way," said Morrissey. "To get your biggest deal at 31 is a big testament to his perseverance in the game and his commitment to trying to try and improve and work on your game. That's definitely what he's done. I'm happy to see him get rewarded.

"He's a fantastic player. He does so many little things right in the game and complements my game perfectly and I think vice versa. We're going to continue to push one another and find new gears and new levels."

So what's next for the Jets?

There have been some rumblings that the Jets are making some progress on an extension for veteran centre Sean Monahan.

For a team that is in win-now mode, securing a No. 2 centre for multiple seasons is near the top of the to-do list.

But it's far from the only front-burner issue to take care of, especially after the buzz that's been created surrounding the possibility of 2022 first-rounder Rutger McGroarty being on the move if the right deal presents itself.

The list of suitors figures to be a long one for the guy with power forward potential and the big question now seems to revolve around whether or not the Jets will be looking to get back into the first round of this draft or looking for a package that includes more NHL ready talent or fellow top prospects.

Or might McGroarty find himself in the middle of a bigger package that turns it into a blockbuster deal?

Might there be clarity on teams that could be pursuing speedy forward Nikolaj Ehlers in a trade?

That remains to be seen, though a multitude of moves could be on the horizon.

For the time being, the Jets have just under \$9 million available to them according to Puck Pedia, with 18 of 23 roster spots spoken for.

Further improvements to the defence corps are still required and changing the mix of the forward group are other options that will be examined.

But as the Jets look to make the improvements required to take the next steps in this journey, the hard work and critical decisions are just beginning for general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff.

Goalie carousel spinning fast Trades involving Markstrom, Kuemper, Ullmark could impact next landing spot for Jets' Brossoit

By: Ken Wiebe

The spinning of the goalie carousel was on full display during the past week, as previously open starting spots begin to get filled.

In this high-stakes game of musical chairs, the three trades involving Jacob Markstrom, Darcy Kuemper and Linus Ullmark could have a direct impact on the next destination for soon-to-be former Winnipeg Jets netminder Laurent Brossoit.

Brossoit is coming off the best season of his NHL career and is set to become an unrestricted free agent on July 1

Without viewing his list of preferred destinations, three teams that were in the market for a No. 1 guy made moves, eliminating the New Jersey Devils, Los Angeles Kings and Ottawa Senators from the list of potential suitors.

The link between Markstrom and the Devils goes back to before the NHL trade deadline, while the Kuemper move was more of a surprise.

The Kings are expected to roll with Kuemper, who lost his starting job to Charlie Lindgren last season but helped the Colorado Avalanche capture the Stanley Cup in 2022.

Kuemper will share the crease with another former Jets backup, David Rittich, who had an excellent bounce-back campaign and re-upped with the Kings.

Meanwhile, the Ottawa Senators acquired Linus Ullmark from the Boston Bruins on Monday in a package that sent Joonas Korpisalo to serve as the backup for Jeremy Swayman.

So where does that leave Brossoit?

There are still enough teams that are looking for an upgrade, whether that's as a bona fide No. 1 job or more of a job share that looks more like a 1A and 1B situation.

The belief within the industry is that the Nashville Predators are going to find a way to extend Juuse Saros, so that eliminates another team — though Barry Trotz could make things

interesting if he chooses to move top goalie prospect Yaroslav Askarov in an effort to add scoring.

The Pittsburgh Penguins appear to have solidified their tandem by re-upping Alex Nedeljkovic on a two-year deal, extending the partnership with Tristan Jarry.

With that in mind, here are several situations that still make sense for Brossoit:

Toronto Maple Leafs

There's been a bit of a revolving door at this position during the past several years, with a mix of results. But by only advancing past the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs once since 2004, the expectation is that this is the summer the position becomes a higher priority. There's been some talk of pursuing Ullmark, but it seems unlikely the Bruins would send him to an Atlantic Division rival. Joseph Woll, when healthy, looks like he's the goalie of the present and the future but his starts have been limited the past several seasons. That's why bringing in Brossoit makes a whole lot of sense for the Maple Leafs. There would definitely be competition, but this job share could allow both players to raise their games played totals while supporting one another. It looks like a win-win situation. Brossoit has the type of demeanour required to deal with a high-pressure environment like the one in the centre of the hockey universe.

Vegas Golden Knights

The Golden Knights captured the Stanley Cup in 2023, with Brossoit providing five of the 16 wins required to reach the top of the mountain before he was sidelined with a season-ending injury in the second-round series with the Edmonton Oilers. Adin Hill is signed for one more season at \$4.9 million, while Logan Thompson has one more season at \$766,667 before both netminders can become unrestricted free agents. The Golden Knights were eliminated in the opening round by the Dallas Stars and both goalies saw action. Vegas doesn't have much cap space available right now, so bringing back Brossoit could be a tad complicated – though that doesn't mean it's a move that won't be considered.

Detroit Red Wings

Since Red Wings general manager Steve Yzerman prefers to work in the shadows, it's tough to get a read on what might be happening in the crease in Motor City. But it's not hard to envision a pairing that includes Alex Lyon and Brossoit being an upgrade to the trio that included Lyon, James Reimer and Ville Husso last season. Although the Red Wings need to do a better job defending, they also need more saves if they want this to be the season that they're on the rise and back in the postseason. Bringing in someone with Brossoit's championship pedigree and desire to be a No. 1 guy should be something Yzerman and company are giving strong consideration to.

Utah Hockey Club

At first glance, perhaps the fit isn't there. But after Connor Ingram essentially grabbed the No. 1 job from Karel Vemeljka last season, there's a chance the franchise that relocated from Arizona could be looking for an upgrade in the pairing. If Vemeljka (who has one more season with an AAV of \$2.725 million before he can become a UFA) is moved, Brossoit could move into a job share situation. Brossoit has started as many as 53 games in the American Hockey League, but 24 is his highest regular-season total — and he's hoping to see that number increase to around 40 (or higher) as early as the 2024-25 season. Ingram set a career-high with 50 games and six shutouts last season, but sharing the load with someone like Brossoit could help Utah work its way into the wild card discussion in the near future.

Winnipeg Sun

Sneaky-good: Winnipeg fits Jets' Dylan DeMelo just fine

By Paul Friesen

It took a while and again came dangerously close to the free-agency deadline, both sides holding their cards close.

But in the end, Dylan DeMelo says contract negotiations with the Winnipeg Jets played out exactly as he thought they would.

“You’ve got to play the game of poker a little bit,” DeMelo told the Winnipeg Sun from his home in London, Ont., Tuesday. “I don’t think at any point both sides didn’t think it was going to get done. Sometimes you just have to be patient... there was some back-and-forth, for sure. I’m not going to say it was easy or hard.

“I would say probably right somewhere in the middle.”

DeMelo’s new deal covers four years at a total of \$19.6 million, an average of \$4.9 million per season. That’s an increase of \$1.9 million per year over the previous four-year contract he signed with the Jets.

Asked if he considered it a reward or an investment in him, the 31-year-old chose another angle.

“My mentality is to make that contract seem like I’m underpaid,” he said. “That’s how I’m going to approach it. I feel like I got my worth. But more important I signed in a place where I can continue to grow as a person, as a player. I have a fantastic role there. I’m not oblivious to that. I’ve got a good thing going, playing with some excellent players.”

The signing, like his last one, came less than a week before DeMelo could have explored the NHL free-agent market.

But his top-pairing role alongside Josh Morrissey, his relationship with teammates, GM Kevin Cheveldayoff and co-owner Mark Chipman and the bonds he and his wife have formed in Winnipeg all made staying his first choice.

“The biggest thing is the people and the fans,” DeMelo said. “Our building, when it gets going, it’s one of the best in the league, if not the best. And the people are really good. Obviously they’re passionate. They see you in the store and sometimes they want to talk shop, and that’s all part of it. People are super friendly. The friends we’ve made, it feels like home for us.

“Winnipeg is a sneaky-good city.”

And DeMelo is a sneaky-good defenceman.

He won’t dazzle the way his defence partner often does, but he compliments Morrissey’s more offensive game.

Playing all 82 games last season, DeMelo scored three goals and a career-high 31 points, while producing the second-best plus-minus rating in the NHL at plus-46.

He also led the Jets in blocked shots with 139 and recorded the second-highest average ice time on the team, at 21:44 per game — behind only Morrissey.

“Stylistically we have a really good fit,” DeMelo said. “He’s obviously got some amazing tools, offensively. I’ve always been more of a defensive guy. So it’s been really easy just playing off each other with our hockey sense and how we both approach the game. He makes me look quite good in a lot of cases.”

The feeling is mutual.

“He does so many little things right on the ice, off the ice, that just make him truly an underrated player,” Morrissey said. “A lot of the talk has probably been about my game the last couple of years... that does not happen without DeMelo and our partnership. Your partner is so key and often can really make or break you as a player and take your game to new heights.

“I really credit a ton of the success I’ve had the last few years, individually, to him.”

The chemistry between the two was almost instant when the Jets traded for DeMelo late in the 2020 season.

They haven’t always played as a pair, but they’ve been nearly inseparable the last two years.

“It’s hard to describe, but you know where he’s going to be without necessarily seeing him,” is how Morrissey put it.

DeMelo calls it “one of those natural fits,” two players who’ve become fast friends and who think the game “on the same wavelength.”

With their best years still ahead of them and one of the NHL’s best goalies behind him, why mess with that?

“And sometimes the grass isn’t greener on the other side,” DeMelo said. “You see guys all the time, they go out and chase the money or chase the situation they think is better... and they fall flat on their face.

“Sometimes when you find something that’s good, on and off the ice, you hold onto it.”

There’s one other thing that made DeMelo want to stay put.

After back-to-back early playoff exits and doubters everywhere, he says this Jets team has something to prove, too.

“It’s a group of guys that I want to win with,” he said. “Nothing more that I want than to win in Winnipeg. It would be a unique experience. For everybody that doubts us... it would be a really nice feeling to be able to win in Winnipeg.”

[Paul the prophet? Jets Morrissey, DeMelo hope so](#)

By Paul Friesen

Paul Maurice may not coach the Winnipeg Jets anymore, but he found one more way to get the attention of his former players.

Immediately after his Florida Panthers won the Stanley Cup on Monday, Maurice told a national television audience that if he could have one more thing, "it would be for the Winnipeg Jets to win the next Stanley Cup."

A set of ears immediately perked up in front of a big screen in Calgary.

"Appreciative of the words," Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey said. "I hope it's more of a prophecy. That would be fantastic. I can echo that as a player and all our Jets faithful, we hope he's some kind of a prophet and maybe that comes true."

Morrissey says he wasn't overly surprised to hear his old coach throwing some Florida sunshine Winnipeg's way.

After being out of the NHL for a year, coaching in the Russia-based KHL, Maurice spent most of nine seasons with the Jets and put down roots in the Manitoba capital.

His best year saw the Jets reach the conference final in 2018.

Four seasons later, he shocked the hockey world by resigning in December. He took the job with Florida the following summer – and the rest is history.

"He had echoed many times his admiration for getting his chance back in the NHL for the Jets," Morrissey said. "Maybe that was something he thought he might not get again. And if he didn't get that position with Winnipeg, who knows if all of that would have ended up transpiring."

Second only to Scotty Bowman in NHL games coached, it took Maurice 26 seasons, five different teams – one of them twice – and three trips to the Cup Final to win the thing.

Even this one seemed destined to slip through his hands, as the Panthers blew a 3-0 series lead to Edmonton before escaping with a 2-1 victory in Game 7.

Watching his first NHL coach shed decades of disappointment while lifting that storied trophy, Morrissey could see what it meant.

"To finally win it and achieve that ultimate goal must have been an amazing feeling, and something that he's earned," the 29-year-old said. "I'm sure he's thinking, 'Am I going to be able to ever get this achieved?' And to actually be able to finally get that done is just unreal."

As thrilled as he was for Maurice, assistant coach Jamie Kompon and former Jets teammates Dmitry Kulikov and Kevin Stenlund, Morrissey was gutted for some good friends on the Oilers side.

Former junior teammate Leon Draisaitl is at the top of that list.

"It is tough to see those guys go through that heartbreak, and just imagine what that's like to come that close," he said. "It feels like an eternity ago that we were finished in the first round, so

that's a long time of competing and grinding, playing through injury and ups and downs, to come that close and lose.

"That's the story of the Finals. One way elation, one way heartbreak."

In London, Ont., Jets defenceman Dylan DeMelo had to turn the TV off before Maurice's Winnipeg shout-out.

"I have a really hard time watching the Stanley Cup presentation. Because it's not my team," DeMelo said, chuckling. "I have a tough time watching without getting kind of mad."

It wasn't long, though, before DeMelo saw his former coach's comments.

"A very classy message," the 31-year-old said. "We're on the same page there. Wish we'd all got to win together, in Winnipeg. That was the dream. But a piece of him will always stay in Winnipeg. He would always stand in front of the mic and say how great Winnipeg was when people weren't saying that.

"Him leaving, I'm sure it was not an easy decision. I think he understood what winning in Winnipeg would have been like... it would be a unique experience."

Some players felt abandoned when Maurice walked out on the Jets.

What was left of the team failed to make the playoffs under interim coach Dave Lowry.

But neither Morrissey nor DeMelo let that dampen their enthusiasm for seeing him raise the Cup.

"No ill will," DeMelo said. "Things happen, it's a business, he did what he felt was right in the moment and obviously was able to find another gig that worked better for him at that time. He's been around the game a long time. He's a good person.

"It's hard to feel bad for somebody who's grinded that hard and finally got the win."

Like Morrissey, DeMelo felt for the Oilers and players like Cody Ceci, his former teammate in Ottawa.

"Because they're at the other end of the spectrum," is how DeMelo put it. "They gave everything they could. They pushed and pushed and they were really right there. That Game 7 was, oh man, that was close. The longer you go, the harder it hurts. They had a fantastic season in Edmonton after a tough start to the year. A lot of resiliency.

"A good lesson for everybody in this league, from both teams, on how to get there and how to win."

That's something Morrissey takes from it, too: motivation.

"It just makes you want to be in that position as well," he said. "It's a pretty exclusive club."

[Feverish days ahead for Winnipeg Jets](#)

By Scott Billeck

It's nearly July. The Stanley Cup was finally hoisted just a couple of nights ago, and yet it still feels like we're only getting started.

The next few days could be pretty feverish for the Winnipeg Jets, who can never quite manage a peaceful offseason.

They're likely to ship off top prospect Rutger McGroarty at any moment and could continue the sell-off with dynamic winger Nikokaj Ehlers who, with one year left on his contract, is reportedly uninterested in re-upping with the only team he's ever known.

And if you're reading this on Wednesday after 2 p.m., the NHL buyout window is now open.

Could Nate Schmidt be the second player in as many seasons to be purchased out of their contract after Blake Wheeler last summer?

There's a lot to chew on over the next few days, with the NHL draft taking place Friday and Saturday in Las Vegas and the free agency period opening on Monday.

Let's begin with what we know.

McGroarty's a goner

The bombshell dropped earlier this week that the 20-year-old forward had grown sour on Winnipeg's development plans for him.

The relationship between the University of Michigan star and the club has grown untenable, and regardless of whose side you take or where you lay the blame, the Jets are looking to move him as the ship has sailed on healing the fracture.

The good news is McGroarty's emergence in the trade market is said to have no shortage of dance partners willing to tango with general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff.

While he could use McGroarty as a bargaining chip to get back into the first round (they traded this year's pick to Montreal in February for centre Sean Monahan), the aim could be higher.

Philadelphia turned a similar situation with 2022 fifth-overall pick Cutter Gauthier into promising right-hand shot defenceman Jamie Drysdale and a second-round pick earlier this season from Anaheim.

McGroarty went 14th in the same draft.

The Jets currently have five draft picks this year: 37th (2nd round), 123rd (4th), 155th (5th), 187th (6th), and 219th (7th).

It won't be a shock if Columbus kicks the tires on McGroarty, where he'd join former Michigan teammates Adam Fantilli and Gavin Brindley.

The Blue Jackets have RHD David Jiricek, who was irked by the club last season regarding his own developmental path. Will a new regime, headed by new GM Don Waddell, want to try to fix the mess left by former GM Jarmo Kekalainen?

I wonder if Montreal is also on the horn, offering Justin Barron (Morgan's brother). Justin didn't have a great year in Montreal and his stock has fallen since his 25th overall selection in 2020.

Feelers on Ehlers?

The Dane's camp has been pretty hush-hush about his current situation, only suggesting that he's still a member of the Jets and that they'll see what the next little bit brings.

While McGroarty could get the Jets back into the first round, Ehlers feels like the meal ticket if that's the direction they want to take.

Plenty of playoff teams will want a crack at the analytical darling with 30-goal upside. Maybe he puts Detroit over the top and they're willing to part with their 15th overall pick?

One thing about this year's draft: after Macklin Celebrini is taken first by the San Jose Sharks, the rest is a cauldron of unknowns.

If McGroarty doesn't land the Jets right-side help on the blue-line, maybe there's an opportunity with Ehlers.

The team just agreed to another four years of Dylan DeMelo. He will start his extension as Josh Morrissey's partner on the top pairing before perhaps sliding down the order to make room for Elias Salomonsson, who is expected to play with the Manitoba Moose this season.

Still, the Jets need to bolster that side further. Their defence last year simply wasn't good enough, and it doesn't appear that pending UFA Brenden Dillon will be back, nor is Logan Stanley the answer.

Ehlers to Ottawa for Jakob Chychrun makes sense, as both players have one year left on their current deals. I wonder about Ehlers to Seattle for RHD Adam Larsson who also has one year left on his contract.

Is Schmidt set to be shaved?

Re-tooling the blue-line is impossible without moving something out, even with the salary cap rising \$4.5 million for 2024-25.

Buying out Schmidt's final year offers a way out, saving the team more than \$3 million under the cap to address their needs on the blue-line.

Trading Neal Pionk would also allow the team to go hard when free agency opens on July 1, although this seems less likely.

Ville Heinola will likely — and finally — get a regular job in the NHL next season, and bringing in an experienced and impactful partner should be at the top of the list for a team committed to putting a contender on the ice.

What else?

Alex Iafallo is set for unrestricted free agency next summer. The 30-year-old is making \$4 million next season but is likely a fourth-liner.

Perhaps they look to move Lafallo and promote someone like Nikita Chibrikov, freeing up roughly \$3 million that can be spent elsewhere.

The Athletic

Winnipeg Jets offseason forward targets: Sean Monahan, Martin Necas and more

By Murat Ates

The Winnipeg Jets signed one of their pending free agents on Tuesday, locking up Dylan DeMelo for four more years at a cap hit of \$4.9 million.

The team's next moves could be more dramatic, with Nikolaj Ehlers on the market and a Rutger McGroarty trade expected before this weekend's NHL Draft.

Looking ahead to July 1, which free agents make the most sense for the Jets? How might Sean Monahan stack up with Elias Lindholm, who's likely headed for a bigger UFA payday, or prairie product, Chandler Stephenson?

If they acquire Martin Necas from the Hurricanes, what kind of player are they getting? And what are a few other options for Winnipeg on the trade market?

Before we get started, consider this look at the forwards as things stand.

The Jets have veterans like Dominic Toninato and youth like Rasmus Kupari, Brad Lambert and Nikita Chibrikov who might yet make an impact on next season's roster, but here's a snapshot of the moment:

The Jets could use some more "hard to play against" in their forward group even if they're able to bring Monahan back and find a way to retain Ehlers. Without them, Winnipeg needs upgrades.

Where might they look?

UFA

Sean Monahan, C

Age: 29

Contract projection, via Evolving Hockey: Four years, \$5.3 million AAV

Usage: Second line at five-on-five, first unit PP

Production: 26 goals, 33 assists, 59 points in 83 games

Possession impact, via Hockey Viz: Neutral

Monahan continues to create offence — particularly on the power play, where quick reads and soft hands make him a high-end bumper player. This gets lost in the Jets' season-long struggles with the man advantage but Winnipeg's power play hummed when he and Gabriel Vilardi were both in the lineup. I've written this before but Monahan looked less overwhelmed than some of his teammates in the playoffs; the Jets got half the goals and roughly half the scoring chances with him on the ice against Colorado.

The questions about re-signing Monahan are about the size and term of his contract versus his age (30 in October), footspeed (below average) and roster construction. His presence makes

Winnipeg better but could impact the team's ability to play at speed or serve to limit the minutes of younger centre options like Vilardi, Cole Perfetti or even Lambert. Durability could also be a concern, given that multiple injuries and surgeries were the source of Monahan's decline from a surefire 60-point player to a reclamation project. I believe Monahan has received an offer from the Jets and is considering his options as July 1 approaches.

Elias Lindholm, C

Age: 29

Contract projection: Seven years, \$7.9 million AAV

Usage: Second line at five-on-five, first unit PP, first unit PK

Production: 15 goals, 29 assists, 44 points in 75 games

Possession impact: Negative

Lindholm spent the majority of his career as a completely viable tough-minutes centre before falling off in a big way when Calgary traded Matthew Tkachuk to Florida. He still helps on both special teams but wasn't a dominant five-on-five player in recent seasons. Winnipeg was keenly interested in Lindholm before Calgary traded him to Vancouver. Now that Lindholm is coming off a celebrated playoff performance (10 points in 13 games while playing against Edmonton and Nashville's best players) he should have plenty of suitors as free agency approaches.

I'd be leery of a seven-year contract, to be clear, but Lindholm's best work is still good work. On the cheaper end in Vancouver, left-shooting Teddy Blueger won a pile of faceoffs and scored 28 points from a middle-six role.

Chandler Stephenson, C

Age: 30

Contract projection: Four years, \$6.1 million AAV

Usage: Second line at five-on-five, first unit PP, second unit PK

Production: 16 goals, 35 assists, 51 points in 75 games

Possession impact: Negative

Stephenson is a prairie product who punished Winnipeg for its 2023 playoff mistakes, scoring four goals and four assists in the Golden Knights' five-game win. I suspect that kind of production on the way to the Stanley Cup will inflate people's impression of Stephenson. He's not a point-per-game player like he was that series, although he's been a consistent 60-point scorer. The concern? Stephenson has been described to me as the beneficiary of Mark Stone's elite two-way play more than a driver in his own right — and his underlying numbers bear it out.

I'll be fascinated to see what kind of contract Stephenson gets compared to Monahan and which player has a bigger impact. Monahan has stronger impacts on shots and expected goals, but Stephenson's two Stanley Cups probably shine brighter — in the minds of teams and fans alike.

Teuvo Teravainen, LW

Age: 29

Contract projection: Five years, \$6.8 million AAV

Usage: Third line at five-on-five, second unit PP, second unit PK

Production: 25 goals, 28 assists, 53 points in 76 games

Possession impact: Positive

Teuvo Teravainen is a product of Carolina's high-energy, high-pressure forechecking system. He consistently scores at a 50-point per 82-game rate (and has surpassed 60 points four times).

He's also a dogged penalty killer who has put in work for new Jets PK coach, Dean Chynoweth, on an aggressive, effective, high-tempo penalty kill that kept the puck moving up ice. There's a lot to like about a short-term fit, although don't mistake Teravainen for an elite even strength finisher. His 1.65 points per 60 minutes at five-on-five last season tracked closer to Nino Niederreiter — solid, but not that a top-six forward. Seventeen of Teravainen's points came on the power play and four came on the PK.

While we're talking about Hurricanes free agents forwards, consider Jordan Martinook. Renowned for being hard to play against, Martinook was born in Brandon, Man., and still has Manitoban roots. He's a left winger who tends to score about 30 points a year from the middle of the lineup.

Bryan Little, C

Age: 36

Nostalgia impact: Sweet

I have no sourced information that leads to Bryan Little's inclusion on this list. I just can't help myself from thinking Winnipeg could do Little a great honour of signing him as a UFA such that he could retire as a Jet — if he's even interested in such a thing. Wayne Simmonds signed a ceremonial one-day contract with Philadelphia in April to be honoured by his longtime club. Perhaps there is a similar route available here.

If you're interested, Guelph Today recently published an excellent piece about Little's triathlon pursuits. In it, Little says his heart stayed in Winnipeg even after his contract was traded to Arizona.

Trade targets

Martin Necas, RW/C

Age: 25

Contract: RFA 2024, with arbitration rights and 2026 UFA eligibility

Usage: Second line at five-on-five, second unit PP

Production: 24 goals, 29 assists, 53 points in 77 games

Possession impact: Positive

Necas creates a lot at both ends of the ice, generally helping more than he hurts, and he's probably ready to be counted on as a second-line scorer. Making sense of him as a player takes an understanding of Carolina's unique forward usage: Necas got the second most five-on-five minutes per game Teravainen placed 10th, and only two minutes separated the two of them. The distance between second and 10th in Winnipeg was closer to four minutes.

What does it all mean? Necas played second-line minutes for Carolina, mostly on the wing. His faceoff numbers are miserable, making him an unlikely center in Winnipeg. Still, there are those who believe that the right-shooting forward is on his way to becoming a higher-end top-six scorer, using his size and heads-up play in transition to generate offence at five-on-five.

I wonder if the Jets are able to make something work around Ehlers.

Mathieu Joseph, RW

Age: 27

Contract: \$2.95 million, UFA 2026

Usage: Third line at five-on-five, second PP, first PK

Production: 11 goals, 24 assists, 35 points in 72 games
Possession impact: Negative

Ottawa made a big trade to acquire Linus Ullmark and could use the cap relief of moving on from a player like Mathieu Joseph.

Joseph is a left-shooting forward who plays either wing with plenty of competitiveness and forechecking energy. He'd be a luxury on Winnipeg's fourth line or perhaps an upgrade on Mason Appleton playing on his off-hand side on the Jets' third line during Appleton's colder streaks. He's an aggressive penalty killer who tends to pick up a short-handed goal or two in most seasons. At five-on-five, he's a low event player but was associated with more scoring chances against the Senators than for them.

Joseph's contract should make him a cheap acquisition if the Jets want more sandpaper in their bottom six.

Tanner Jeannot, LW

Age: 27

Contract: \$2.665 million, UFA 2025

Usage: Third line at five-on-five

Production: 7 goals, 7 assists, 14 points in 55 games

Possession impact: Positive

For a little while early in his career, everything that Tanner Jeannot touched turned into a goal. He scored on 20 percent of his shots as a rookie in Nashville, leading to 41 points in his first full season. Add in the physicality, the 200-plus hits per season and a general sense of being annoying to play against and one begins to understand why Tampa Bay threw so very many draft picks — a first-, second-, third-, fourth- and fifth-round pick, to be exact — at the Predators to acquire Jeannot in 2023.

The year he scored a ton of points was a wild outlier. Jeannot is not Milan Lucic in his prime, but now I wonder if the market has started to undervalue Jeannot based on the way his shooting percentage (and point totals) have crashed down to earth. He continues to play a truculent brand of hockey and creates as much chaos in the offensive zone as he does in his own end. Chris Johnston lists Jeannot eighth on his trade board; he could be an intriguing target.

[Dylan DeMelo, Jets agree to 4-year, \\$19.6 million contract extension: What's next for Winnipeg?](#)

By Murat Ates and Chris Johnston

Winnipeg Jets defenseman Dylan DeMelo has agreed to a four-year, \$19.6 million contract extension, the team announced Tuesday. The average annual value of the deal is \$4.9 million. The Athletic's Chris Johnston was the first to report the news.

DeMelo is coming off back-to-back career seasons playing on the top pair with Josh Morrissey. It's a role he shone in almost immediately upon being acquired from Ottawa in 2020 for a third-round draft pick, although it wasn't until Rick Bowness' arrival two seasons ago that Morrissey's offense took off and DeMelo's soared with it.

DeMelo's biggest strength is his vision, particularly following puck retrievals; his first pass in his own zone tends to come after fast, safe reads of the opposing forecheck. Listed at 6-foot-1 and 194 pounds, DeMelo is not a bruiser or a punishing physical force but maintains a positive defensive impact. He can be beat by the game's biggest forwards in front but he's positionally sound and boxes out well.

Strengths like "positionally sound" and "good five-foot passes" are not the stuff of headlines, but DeMelo earned second-place votes for "most underrated teammate" in The Athletic's survey of Jets players earlier this season.

"I just think that he's very easy to play with. He makes players around him better," said Morrissey.

At 31 years old, there's no guarantee that DeMelo will continue to provide first-pairing caliber support for the duration of his contract. Analytics site Hockey Viz shows a slight step back in his overall impact in 2023-24, despite DeMelo's three goals and 28 assists for 31 points on the season. The Athletic's player cards show a defenseman who helps at both ends of the ice and whose impact is to reduce expected goals against. Winnipeg outscored its opponents 81-44 with DeMelo on the ice at five-on-five this season — the best results on the team. He also led the Jets in blocked shots and shorthanded ice time per game.

Perhaps most importantly for a team with a challenging offseason ahead, the veteran right-handed defenseman chose Winnipeg. His previous four-year, \$3 million AAV signaled a commitment to the city and the organization; this time, DeMelo's family has even more on its plate.

"I guess it's not public to everybody, but we are expecting another (child) in August," DeMelo said in May. "Going from a 2-1 zone to a man-on-man is going to be interesting. We have really enjoyed our time here, my wife and I, and our son."

DeMelo also spoke about his comfort with his teammates and shared optimism despite the Jets' first-round loss to Colorado.

"I know that I definitely am comfortable here. I have played my best hockey here and I really think my best hockey is still ahead of me," he said. "I have really loved my time here, and the guys in this room are guys that I want to play with and win with."

What comes next for the Jets' defense?

Winnipeg has five defensemen under contract for next season — Morrissey, DeMelo, Dylan Samberg, Neal Pionk and Nate Schmidt. Brenden Dillon and Colin Miller are unrestricted free agents, while Logan Stanley is a restricted free agent with arbitration rights.

The Jets need to add two defensemen to their group. Those defensemen would ideally be capable of playing top-four minutes. Samberg may not be ready to step onto the second pair beside Pionk, while Pionk struggled in that role alongside the more established Dillon last season. Winnipeg needs answers — and the higher up the lineup they can play, the better, because prospects Ville Heinola and Elias Salomonsson might be ready to step onto the Jets' third pair.

Dillon's future is the key item at the moment. He had a big impact on Winnipeg's second pair with Pionk, helping the duo play tough minutes and beat them. His blend of size, toughness and

enough puck skill to keep the play moving up the ice was unique on the Jets' roster. If the Jets can sign the 33-year-old to a short-term contract, they'd be better for it. The team has spoken with Dillon's camp but he could want to see what's out there on July 1 before making his decision.

The NHL's buyout window will open on Thursday. Winnipeg used a buyout on Blake Wheeler last season and GM Kevin Cheveldayoff didn't take the idea off the table when asked about it in May. Veteran defenseman Nate Schmidt is a buyout candidate; buying out his \$5.95 million contract would save \$3.2 million in cap space next season while costing \$1.6 million in cap space in 2025-26. He's a likable player who showed well in limited minutes but one who also became an occasional healthy scratch last season.

What comes next for Winnipeg's offseason

Rutger McGroarty's camp has made it clear to the Jets that he'd like to play elsewhere. A trade is expected before Friday's draft, perhaps allowing Winnipeg the opportunity to get into the first round. Nikolaj Ehlers is still believed to be on the market, too. The Carolina Hurricanes are believed to have interest, potentially with talks around Martin Necas, but the market is broad. Ehlers is listed fourth on The Athletic's most recent trade board.

Barring major transactions, the Jets' next move will be to pick 37th overall on Saturday, in the second round of the draft. Don't count on needing to wait that long; Winnipeg has plenty of work to do.

[Which NHL teams need goaltender upgrades? Ranking all 32 teams by current quality](#)

By Sean Gentille and Dom Luszczyszyn

With draft-floor trades and the first day of unrestricted free agency just days away, it's time to break down where each team stands on a position-by-position basis.

That means striking a balance between what each franchise already has in the fold and what it still needs going into the offseason.

Using Net Rating, we looked at how much value each team is currently expected to carry at each position and the holes they have to address. Teams without franchise talent (top-32 forward, top-16 defenseman, top-eight goalie) were penalized further for having a more glaring need. With that as a baseline, we added some subjectivity as a finishing touch.

Here's how we'd rank each team's goaltending depth, from best to worst, as the offseason kicks off and the window to improve begins.

1. Winnipeg Jets

Current quality: 98th percentile

Looking for: Backup goalie

No single goalie is more valuable than Connor Hellebuyck. He brings quality and quantity to the equation, enough to singlehandedly put the Jets in first place. This spot belonged to the Bruins before they shipped Linus Ullmark to Ottawa, since two fantastic goaltenders are better than one. Ullmark's exit, though, swung things in Winnipeg's favor.

A potential issue for the Jets, though, is their lack of a backup — great as Hellebuyck is, someone else will need to start 20 games or so.

Global Winnipeg

Four more years: Winnipeg Jets extend veteran defenceman Dylan DeMelo

By Sam Thompson Global News

An important member of the Winnipeg Jets' blue line is coming back for four more years.

Dylan DeMelo, 31, agreed to a four-year contract extension Tuesday, the team announced, with an average annual value of \$4.9 million.

The veteran defenceman, who came to the Jets from the Ottawa Senators in early 2020, set personal bests for points (31) and assists (28) last season in Winnipeg, also finishing second on the club in time on ice per game.

The London, Ont., native was drafted in 2011 by the San Jose Sharks, where he spent parts of three seasons before being sent to Ottawa in the blockbuster Erik Karlsson trade in 2018.