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[Hellebuyck honoured to win second Vezina](#)
[Hellebuyck becomes second American born goaltender since 1982 to win two Vezina's.](#)

By Jamie Thomas

For the second time in his NHL career, Connor Hellebuyck has won the Vezina Trophy. This time though, he received his award in Las Vegas unlike in 2020, where he had to accept it via zoom because of the COVID pandemic. The usually unflappable Hellebuyck admitted that he was nervous when he went up to receive the award but not for the reason you might think.

“It was nerve wracking making sure I didn’t miss (thanking) anyone this time,” said Hellebuyck.

“I forgot my summer goalie coach (Randy Wilson), got a lot of crap for it. So, I wanted to make sure I didn’t miss anyone to thank.”

The Vezina Trophy is voted on by the 32 NHL general managers, and the Jets goaltender brought in 31 first place votes and had 158 points. The Canucks Thatcher Demko finished second with 70 points and Florida’s Sergei Bobrovsky, who got the other first place voted finished third with 40 points.

“It’s an honour. I just know growing up my whole goal was to be the best in the world. This is a stepping stone for that,” said Hellebuyck.

“It’s not just something that’s given or awarded, it’s earned every single day. So, for me, it feels like I’m doing something right.”

You can say that again. Hellebuyck went 37-19-4 with a 2.39 goals against average, .921 save percentage and five shutouts in 60 appearances this season. He also had a career best and league leading 31.8 goals saved above average and led the Jets to fourth place in the overall standings.

“I think we made really big strides this year. We changed our identity a little bit. We brought a solid winning philosophy to Winnipeg,” said Hellebuyck.

“I think our fans bought in and I think our team bought in and just that all round buy-in, I’m pretty proud of that.”

When Rick Bowness took over as the Jets head coach two years ago, he told his number one goaltender that he was going to help cut down on the grade A scoring chances that Hellebuyck would face nightly. Bowness was true to his word as the Jets gave up the fewest goals against last season and Hellebuyck won the William M. Jennings Trophy. TSN analyst and former NHL goaltender Jamie McLennan noticed the improvements in the way Winnipeg defended but feels it shouldn’t take away from how well Hellebuyck performed in 23-24.

“I think a big part of it was still Hellebuyck because I come back to that stabilizing force. I talk about this all the time, there are probably eight general managers in the league that can sleep well at night knowing that they are taken care of in net,” said McLennan.

“Hellebuyck provides that stability. For what he did this year compared to his last Vezina (in 2020) I don’t discount it whatsoever because the team played better in front of him. He still had to be really consistent playing a ton of games.”

Bowness retired after the Jets season ended losing to Colorado in five games in the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs. While the Jets didn’t win a championship under Bowness, Hellebuyck feels that the organization is heading in the right direction as Scott Arniel takes over for the veteran coach.

“I think what he did for us is going to make my career. I truthfully believe that he has helped get the best out of me and the best out of our team,” said Hellebuyck.

“I know Arnie is aligned with a lot of the things that he says and done for us, so I’m really excited about the future, but Rick has done a phenomenal job the guys in our room.”

Hellebuyck was also named to the NHL’s First All-Star Team for the second time in his career. The 31-year-old was joined by Colorado’s Nathan MacKinnon, Tampa’s Nikita Kucherov, Artemi Panarin of the Rangers, Vancouver’s Quinn Hughes and Nashville’s Roman Josi.

Winnipeg Free Press

Jets could look to help roster, prospect pool at draft Predictions and possibilities for adding picks, potential players

By: Ken Wiebe and Mike McIntyre

LAS VEGAS — When it comes to building a team, the Winnipeg Jets have traditionally been all about draft and development. The current crop of core players — including Connor Hellebuyck, Mark Scheifele, Josh Morrissey, Adam Lowry, Kyle Connor and Nikolaj Ehlers — speaks volumes about that mindset.

In recent years, however, general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff has added a bit more wheeling and dealing to his resumé. High-end draft picks have become trade chips as part of a “win now” mentality that has yet to pay off. As a result, what was once a flood of fresh-faced homegrown talent has become more of a trickle.

Cole Perfetti (2020 first-rounder) and Dylan Samberg (2017 second-rounder) are the only players going back to 2015 who would be considered current full-timers. Logan Stanley (2016 first-rounder) and David Gustafsson (2018 second-rounder) are on the periphery.

The hope is the likes of Ville Heinola (2019 first-rounder), Chaz Lucius (2021 first-rounder), Nikita Chibrikov (2021 second-rounder), Brad Lambert (2022 first-rounder), Elias Salomonsson (2022 second-rounder) and Colby Barlow (2023 first-rounder) could eventually join the mix.

Meanwhile, Rutger McGroarty (2022 first-rounder) looks likely to join Kristian Vesalainen (2017 first-rounder) and Patrik Laine (2016 first-rounder) as players to find new hockey homes.

All of which sets the stage for what's about to go down here in Sin City. The Jets find themselves at a bit of a crossroads, with an eye on both the present and the future. Both the active roster and the prospect pool could use some work.

How might these next couple days play out? As things stand right now, Winnipeg has five total picks in the seven-round draft — 37th, 123rd, 155th, 187th and 219th.

They previously traded their first-round pick (as part of the Sean Monahan deal), second-round pick (as part of the Nino Niederreiter deal) and third-round pick (as part of the Tyler Toffoli deal) while getting a second-round pick back as part of the Pierre-Luc Dubois deal.

It's possible they could add an additional pick or two, and perhaps get into the first round, with some additional wheeling and dealing. The rumour mill is swirling when it comes to McGroarty and Ehlers, while clearing cap space by moving the likes of defencemen Nate Schmidt and/or Neal Pionk and forward Alex Iafallo would make some sense.

Could something go down on the draft floor inside The Sphere? Stay tuned.

The buzz around Las Vegas is that if the Jets are able to orchestrate a deal to get into the top 10, they would be looking to use the pick on either Kelowna Rockets forward Tij Iginla or Calgary Hitmen defenceman Carter Yakemchuk.

Iginla, the son of Hall of Famer Jarome Iginla, had 47 goals and 84 points in 64 Western Hockey League games last season. He plays with a bit of an edge and is an excellent finisher.

Yakemchuk is a physical right-handed shooting blue-liner that recorded 30 goals, 71 points and 120 penalty minutes in 61 games. He's known for his heavy shot and willingness to mix it up.

Looking at the current organizational depth chart, it's safe to say Winnipeg is stronger up front and in goal than on the back-end. Barlow, Lambert, Chibrikov and Lucius could all be future NHL forwards, while Thomas Milic (2023 fifth-rounder) and Domenic DiVincentiis (2022 seventh-rounder) are a promising one-two prospect punch in goal.

However, the cupboard gets rather bare on the blue-line beyond Heinola and Salomonsson. For those reasons, don't be surprised if the Jets look for a defencemen with the 37th pick — particularly one who shoots from the right-side, which is definitely a position of need.

One of the potential targets at that spot could be Brandon Wheat Kings defenceman Charlie Elick. Elick isn't an offensive dynamo but plays a robust game and collected four goals and 27 points in 65 games while amassing 71 penalty minutes.

This year's talent pool is believed to be very unpredictable beyond a consensus top 17 or so, which means Winnipeg should be able to grab a player in that spot they'll have ranked a lot higher than other teams based on their own scouting metrics and evaluations.

Pundits don't have anything near a consensus when it comes to picks 18 through 45-50. The variance means that many teams will have much different opinions over which players they value most and who is higher up on their final list, which could lead to some surprises and potential moves.

Prepare to hear something from the Jets along the lines of “We had that guy as a first-rounder on our list.”

As for the fourth round and beyond, these are likely to be even longer-term projects who, best-case scenario, are probably a year or two away from being a year or two away. The majority simply don't pan out.

One interesting thing to keep an eye on is where Winnipeg's picks come from. The Jets began to add plenty of American and European flavour over the years, and that hasn't always worked out.

Players like Jacob Trouba, Andrew Copp and Jack Roslovic were eventually shipped to U.S.-based teams while McGroarty hasn't even got out of college yet and wants a change of scenery. Meanwhile, Vesalainen, Sami Niku, Mikhail Berdin and Leon Gawanke are all former picks who went back across the pond to play without making any real impact here.

Was last year a philosophical shift or simply a blip? The Jets had five picks, and selected four Canadian Hockey League players. The only exception was third-rounder Zach Nehring, who is from North Dakota but has several family members from Manitoba.

Speaking of Manitobans, there are a handful of players who are projected to be selected this weekend led by forward Clarke Saswell of Brandon and goaltender Dawson Cowan of Warren.

The first round of the draft goes down Friday night beginning at 6 p.m. CT, while rounds two through seven get underway at 10:30 a.m. CT on Saturday.

[Hellebuyck wins second Vezina Trophy](#)

By: Ken Wiebe

LAS VEGAS — Connor Hellebuyck may be calm in the crease, but the Winnipeg Jets goalie has been waiting four long years for a chance to make amends in his victory speech.

As Hellebuyck stepped to the podium to speak with reporters after winning the second Vezina Trophy of his career on Thursday night inside the Fontainebleau Hotel, he showed his sense of humour when discussing the importance of ensuring he included Randy Wilson in his long list of thank yous.

“Yeah. It was nerve-racking, just making sure I didn't miss anyone this time,” said Hellebuyck, who went 37-19-4, with a 2.39 goals-against average, .921 save percentage and five shutouts in 60 starts this season. “I forgot my summer goalie coach and got a lot of crap for it, so I wanted to make sure I didn't miss anyone and thank him.”

The Vezina Trophy is voted only by all 32 general managers and Hellebuyck received 31 of 32 first-place votes to win in a near-unanimous decision.

“It's an honour. I just know growing up my whole goal was to be the best in the world, so this is a stepping-stone for it and that's not something that's just given or awarded,” said Hellebuyck. “It's earned every single day. So, for me, it feels like I'm doing something right.”

Hellebuyck exuded class during his acceptance speech and later spoke of how he became a goalie as a youngster and how his parents supported him as he started chasing his dreams.

“They just wanted to do whatever I wanted to do and that’s the same philosophy I have to my kids. It’s a great lesson they taught me. You’ve got to love what you do,” said Hellebuyck.

“It was when I was younger. My brother, he’s a year older than I am and he would always shoot on me, and I had a knack for stopping pucks and I kind of enjoyed it. So, I think I just kind of gravitated towards it and I was OK at it, so I wanted to do it more and more.”

Hellebuyck has stopped a lot of pucks since the Jets chose him in the fifth round (130th overall) of the 2012 NHL Draft.

He’s constantly referred to as the backbone of his team and having an impact player at that prime position brings a sense of relief to his teammates and the coaching staff.

“When you hear coaches get hired for different jobs and they say you’ve got an elite guy and you’re starting from the net and out, that’s exactly what I’m saying right now,” Jets head coach Scott Arniel said on Thursday afternoon. “You know that when you have that player back there that can win you hockey games when you’re not at your best and he can do what he does, those are things that allow you to move on to focus on other areas of your game. To have him back brings a comfort level.”

Hellebuyck’s trademark intensity on the ice during practice in games is offset by his laidback demeanour off it.

“All of the great ones are ultra competitive. They get mad when they get scored on — and he’s no different,” said Arniel, who was an associate coach with the New York Rangers when Henrik Lundqvist was the starter there. “The personality part of it, I know goalies are all different, everybody likes to say. But he has that outdoor, fisherman, hunter and all of that type of stuff and then it’s go and play goal. He does a great job of staying relaxed and it’s great that he has an outlet like that where it’s not 24 hours of hockey.”

Hellebuyck allowed three or fewer goals in 50 of his 60 appearances, including a pair of 10-game streaks with two or fewer goals against and was second in the NHL in wins (37) and save percentage, fourth in GAA.

He was a big reason the Jets finished tied for fourth overall in the NHL this season with a record of 52-24-6 for 110 points.

“I think we made really big strides this year. We changed our identity a little bit and we brought a solid, winning philosophy to Winnipeg,” said Hellebuyck. “I think our fans bought in and I think our team bought in. And just that all-around buy-in I’m pretty proud of that.”

Hellebuyck praised the job that outgoing head coach Rick Bowness did during his two seasons before he decided to retire in May.

“Rick is an elite coach. What he did for us is going to make my career. I truthfully believe that he has really helped get the best out of me and the best out of our team,” said Hellebuyck, noting he is excited to see Arniel take over as bench boss and happy to see defenceman Dylan

DeMelo sign a four-year extension earlier this week. "I know (Arniel) is aligned with a lot of the things he says and has done for us, so I'm really excited about the future."

Hellebuyck, who also won the award for the best goalie in the NHL in 2020, joins Florida Panthers goalie Sergei Bobrovsky as the only other active goalie with multiple Vezina Trophy wins and he paid a compliment to the man who just backstopped his team to the Stanley Cup in Game 7 on Monday.

"He's a great goaltender and he had a great run and he could just as well be up here," said Hellebuyck, who became the 23rd goalie in NHL history to win multiple Vezinas. "So, yeah, hats off to him."

Hellebuyck also appreciated what former head coach Paul Maurice said about hoping the Jets can win a Stanley Cup down the road.

"It was a nice gesture," said Hellebuyck. "Well, I agree with him. I hope we do as well."

As happy as he was to go home with some hardware, Hellebuyck knows the first-round loss in five games to the Colorado Avalanche is going to provide some additional fuel going into next season.

And he reiterated his long stated goal of capturing that elusive Stanley Cup as he prepares for his 10th NHL season.

"I kind of washed out everything that I needed to figure out. Now, I've just started skating and kind of ramping it back up for another year," said Hellebuyck. "There's only one thing left on my mind, and that's the Stanley Cup, so anything I can do to get there, I'm going to start doing."

Trade targets for moving McGroarty Examining potential deals as Jets set to part ways with top forward prospect

By: Ken Wiebe and Mike McIntyre

LAS VEGAS — The Rutger McGroarty sweepstakes appear to be in full swing. And it appears to be a matter of when, not if, the Winnipeg Jets will part ways with their top forward prospect.

What better time and place than here in Sin City, where NHL executives have converged for the 2024 NHL Draft. Whether it's jockeying for position in the draft itself, setting the stage for July 1 unrestricted free agency by trimming salary or changing the construction of a roster, this week presents a prime window for big moves to be made.

The revelation that the Jets and McGroarty are headed for a divorce, the result of fundamental differences on his development path, has sent shockwaves through the hockey world. It shouldn't be long before both sides have a chance to voice their respective opinions on where, why or how things went sideways, but for the time being, the focus is on finding a situation that is palatable for everyone.

This situation is one that the Jets need to salvage as best they can. There's a reason McGroarty was chosen 14th overall in 2022 and has a skill set that projects well to the NHL game. Winnipeg has a valuable asset a lot of teams are going to be interested in.

The Jets have several needs, including an upgrade on defence and/or a middle-six forward and a backup goalie. They are also looking for a way to shed a bigger salary to clear a bit of cap space — Nate Schmidt, Neal Pionk and Alex Lafallo all come to mind — and attaching that player to a potential deal involving McGroarty might be a way to do so.

Winnipeg could try and weaponize the asset as a way to get back into the first round on Friday night after moving that pick to the Montreal Canadiens in the trade for centre Sean Monahan. It's also possible the Jets are happy to take their chances with the 37th-overall selection, which comes just five picks into the second round on Saturday.

Given the “win now” situation the Jets are in, trying to acquire a player who can help sooner than a first-rounder, who projects to get into the lineup two or three years down the road, seems like a logical conclusion. But it's important to remember this deal doesn't need to be made this week unless it makes sense for the Jets, who hold McGroarty's rights for two more years.

With that in mind, here are eight potential landing spots for McGroarty:

Columbus Blue Jackets

There are plenty of University of Michigan Wolverines connections here, including Gavin Brindley and Adam Fantilli, close friends and former linemates of McGroarty. It's an up-and-coming program under new management, so there will be options available to consider. The fourth-overall pick isn't likely in play and neither will top defence prospect David Jiricek, who had a great season with the Cleveland Monsters.

Speaking of Blue Jackets first-rounders, defenceman Denton Mateychuk and centre Cole Sillinger could be on the Jets' radar. There have been some whispers about a potential reunion with Patrik Laine, who remains in the NHL/NHLPA assistance program. While that would make for a great story, the cap number for Laine (US\$8.7 million for the next two seasons) would complicate matters, even if there is salary retained.

Carolina Hurricanes

The Hurricanes also have a new general manager in Eric Tulsky and he's got some substantial holes to fill on his roster with a lot of pending unrestricted free agents. For a group that needs to add scoring, McGroarty would be on their wish list and it wouldn't be a surprise if Nikolaj Ehlers were as well.

The Jets have been linked to pending restricted free agent forward Martin Necas and he makes sense on a number of levels. Providing he's willing to sign a long-term deal in the US\$7 million range, Necas would bring a nice blend of size, skill and speed to the forward group. Necas is looking for a larger role and would help offset the potential loss of someone like Ehlers.

New York Islanders

You never know what Lou Lamoriello might be up to, but adding an injection of youth to one of the NHL's oldest forward groups would make sense — especially in a market like New York where McGroarty's personality and presence would have a big stage. This is an organization that hasn't had a first-round pick since 2019, so McGroarty would instantly upgrade the prospect pool.

Right-shot defenceman Ryan Pulock is signed for six more years at US\$6.15 million and would be the type of impact blue-liner the Jets would love. Could the Dauphin product be had for a

package including McGroarty? He'd have to agree, since he has a no-trade clause in his contract. The Islanders also hold the 20th-overall pick on Friday, which could be of interest to the Jets.

New Jersey Devils

This team has already been active, stabilizing the goalie position with Jacob Markstrom. The Devils are looking to regroup after missing the playoffs last season following a second-round appearance in 2023. McGroarty could change the complexion of a talented forward group.

Devils GM Tom Fitzgerald has expressed an interest in being open to moving the 10th-overall pick in 2024. Right-winger Alexander Holtz would be of interest as part of the return. Dawson Mercer would be on the wish list, but he's not likely an option to be moved.

Utah Hockey Club

The group that relocated from Arizona is looking to make a splash and bringing in the captain of the United States world junior team makes sense on a number of levels, especially when you consider the personality.

Utah has a ton of draft picks during the next several drafts; they also have Manitoba product Conor Geekie in the pipeline. Geekie had an excellent Western Hockey League season and was dominant after joining the Swift Current Broncos. He, too, plays a power forward game and improved his consistency. Being a Manitoban is a bonus but it wouldn't be the driving force behind acquiring him. Other pieces could be in play, as Utah has plenty of salary cap space and no NHL D-men under contract yet.

Anaheim Ducks

How about a reunion with Cutter Gauthier, whose path McGroarty is essentially looking to follow? The Ducks are in the latter stages of their rebuild and McGroarty is someone Pat Verbeek would have admiration for.

The Ducks have a number of young defence prospects with appeal. Centre Mason McTavish is likely untouchable, but would that still be the case if the trade also included Ehlers? Trevor Zegras is coming off a tough season, but his skill level makes him a good bounce-back candidate. Defence prospects like Tristan Luneau, Pavel Mintyukov, and Jackson Lacombe could be of interest.

Montreal Canadiens

Why include a Canadian market if McGroarty isn't all that interested in coming to Winnipeg?

There is recent trade history between Cheveldayoff and Canadiens GM Kent Hughes. McGroarty is close with the Hutson family and Lane is a top defence prospect preparing for his rookie season, so having a fellow graduate of the U.S. National Development Team Program might be something McGroarty finds intriguing.

The same goes for playing for a coach like Hall of Famer Martin St. Louis. McGroarty would bring an element the Canadiens forward group doesn't have much of. Montreal has a surplus of NHL-level D-men and is one of the teams with two first-round picks.

Buffalo Sabres

They currently own the 11th overall pick and hold the longest active streak of non-playoff seasons. McGroarty is someone who could eventually flourish playing alongside JJ Peterka or Tage Thompson.

Former Winnipeg Ice winger Zach Benson has the hockey sense, finishing ability, defensive awareness and motor that would make him a fan favourite with the Jets.

Winnipeg Sun

DRAFT PREVIEW: Will Jets trade into first round in Vegas?

By Scott Billeck

It's difficult to nail down a preview of the 2024 NHL Draft for the Winnipeg Jets with so many irons in the fire.

Let's begin with what we know.

General manager Kevin Cheveldayoff doesn't have a pick in Friday's first round at The Sphere in Vegas.

He shipped that off to Montreal in early February when he acquired centre Sean Monahan from the Montreal Canadiens.

So unless something changes between the time of reading this until Saturday morning—and it very likely could—the Jets won't be on the clock until pick No. 37, ironically Montreal's by way of the Pierre-Luc Dubois trade last year around this very time.

They're then set to pick four more times before the draft's conclusion: 123rd in the fourth round, 155th in the fifth, 187th in the sixth and 219th in the seventh.

That's what is factually accurate for the time being.

Cheveldayoff is expected to move 2022 14th overall selection Rutger McGroarty before the draft gets underway on Friday night.

Does that mean the Jets will be back in the first round because of it? It remains to be seen.

McGroarty could certainly fetch that price, with many teams reportedly lining up for the 20-year-old University of Michigan star. A bidding war is always a good thing.

If not McGroarty, perhaps Nikolaj Ehlers paves a path.

The Jets are said to be shopping Ehlers, as the 28-year-old is reportedly unwilling to sign an extension with the team that drafted him ninth overall in 2014.

Like McGroarty, plenty of teams would be willing to add the dynamic winger, his analytical prowess, his 30-goal upside and his \$6-million cap hit.

As fond of the first round as he is, Cheveldayoff's needs extend beyond restocking his cupboards with another opening-round selection.

The Jets are about to enter the first year of big-ticket extensions for Mark Scheifele and Connor Hellebuyck—both franchise cornerstones who signed with the intention the team would be competing annually for a Stanley Cup.

Stockpiling first-rounders is good for this team's long-term goals, but their short-term plans must include beefing up their blue-line.

Just as McGroarty and Ehlers can help with the former, they can also aid in the latter.

Ideally, Cheveldayoff would pull off what Philadelphia counterpart Danny Briere did for the Flyers this past season when he turned wantaway 2022 fifth-overall pick Cutter Gauthier into promising right-hand shot defenceman Jamie Drysdale and a second-round pick from the Anaheim Ducks.

It was the best of both worlds amid difficult circumstances for Briere and the Flyers.

If the Jets trade themselves back into the first round, here's what they could aim for depending on where they land in the round.

Carter Yakemchuk, D, Calgary Hitmen (WHL) – 6-foot-3, 202 pounds

Yakemchuk has it all—size (which he uses to be physical), skill and a right-hand shot. Also, he's a Canadian kid from a Canadian junior league, so there's no risk of a McGroarty happening. Yakemchuk is projected to go in the early teens, meaning the Jets would have to hash out a deal with Minnesota (13th), Buffalo (14th) or Detroit (15th), if not earlier. San Jose and Philly hold the 11th and 12th picks, respectively.

Adam Jiricek, D, Plzen HC (Czechia) – 6-foot-2, 178 pounds

Another right-shot d-man. Jiricek is projected to go later in the first, likely in the 20s. He injured his knee at the World Juniors and missed the last half of the season. Said to be a solid two-way D-man in the NHL. If his injury scares teams off, perhaps he falls to Winnipeg at 37.

Berkly Catton, F, Spokane (WHL) – 5-foot-10, 175 pounds

Getting into the top 10 is a tall order, but if Cheveldayoff can pull off some wizardry, both Catton and the next player we'll feature would help the Jets down the middle in the future. Catton's size won't wow people, but his skill certainly will. He scored 54 times and added 62 helpers last year in the Dub and will fill out his frame with time. He's projected to be in the last couple of top-10 picks, meaning the Jets would have to find a deal with Seattle, Calgary, or New Jersey.

Tij Iginla, F, Kelowna (WHL) – 6-foot, 191 pounds

The chances that Calgary would allow the son of Flames legend Jarome to get past them at No. 9 are slim to none, and slim just left town. That means the Jets would have to slide in before that, maybe Seattle's eighth or Ottawa's seventh. It's unlikely, but Iginla comes with his dad's pedigree at the centre position. What's not to like? And if he's like his dad, maybe he's ready for the NHL at 19.

An ideal deal?

Let's have some fun, shall we?

The Jets and Sens swing a blockbuster that includes Ehlers, McGroarty and their 2024 second-round pick for Ottawa's seventh-overall selection, and defenceman Jakob Chychrun (like Ehlers, entering the final year of his contract in 2024-25), a player they've kicked tires on before.

It sounds good and not entirely insane. They get a big defenceman with scoring upside to replace Brenden Dillon, who is expected to hit the open market on July 1. Chychrun plays the left side, so it doesn't solve their right-side issues but beefs up their blue-line regardless. The Jets use the seventh pick on Catton or Iginla, giving them their centre of the future perhaps as early as 2025-26. It doesn't help immediately, but if they re-sign Monahan, they buy themselves time.

It's not perfect. but miracles are hard to come by when against the ropes.

Fantasy hockey, as Cheveldayoff might call it.

That's the name of the game until he pulls the trigger on reality.

Jets' Connor Hellebuyck wins second Vezina

By Scott Billeck

There was very little doubt heading into Thursday's NHL awards, and when the votes were finally tallied, Connor Hellebuyck ran away with the second Vezina Trophy of his career.

The league's 32 general managers voted the Winnipeg Jets netminder as the league's top goalie by a landslide in Vegas, adding his name to the trophy for the second time in five years.

"This is a huge honour," Hellebuyck said from the stage after accepting the award. "It's an honour just being in the same conversation as (fellow finalists Thatcher Demko and Sergei Bobrovsky) and your elite status."

Hellebuyck thanked his family, friends, the Jets organization, including goaltending coach Wade Flaherty, and his teammates.

"This is an individual award, but it's not won individually," Hellebuyck said.

Finally, Hellebuyck thanked the Jets fans who showed up to the awards show, drawing cheers.

"Your support is so appreciated when we need you guys," he said.

The 31-year-old finished with 31 first-place votes. Florida's Bobrovsky received the other first-place vote and finished third, with Vancouver's Demko second.

Hellebuyck also finished sixth in Hart Trophy voting as the league's MVP, receiving one first-place vote, four seconds and three thirds.

Hellebuyck finished top five among NHL goaltenders in wins (2nd: 37), shutouts (T-5th: 5), save percentage (2nd: .921), goals-against average (4th: 2.39), games played (3rd: 60), shots against (2nd: 1,798), saves (2nd: 1,656) and minutes (3rd: 3,567).

He made 60 appearances this past season, allowing three goals or fewer in 50 of them, including two 10-game streaks allowing two or fewer.

Hellebuyck also helped the Jets to their first William M. Jennings Trophy for fewest goals allowed during the regular season with 199, one fewer than the Stanley Cup champion Florida Panthers.

Analytically, Hellebuyck led the league in goals saved above expected in all situations (33.1) and 5-on-5 (28.2).

The 2012 fifth-round pick first won the award in 2020 after a remarkable, albeit COVID-shortened, 2019-20 campaign. He's been a four-time finalist, losing out to Nashville's Pekka Rinne in 2018 and Ottawa's Linus Ullmark last year.

The Commerce, Mich., product becomes the 23rd goalie in NHL history to be honoured on multiple occasions and just the third American goalie after Frank Brimsek (2) and Tim Thomas (2).

Meanwhile, Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey finished seventh in Norris voting, receiving 19 third-place votes, 16 fourth-place votes and 23 fifth-place votes.

NHL.com

[Hellebuyck of Jets wins Vezina Trophy as top goalie in NHL Captures award for 2nd time; was 2nd in League in wins, save percentage, saves](#)

By Tom Gulitti

LAS VEGAS – Winning the Vezina Trophy for the second time gave Winnipeg Jets goaltender Connor Hellebuyck a second chance at a couple of things.

Hellebuyck, who also won the award given to the NHL's top goalie in 2020, forgot to thank his offseason goalie coach Randy Wilson that time. He made sure not to make that mistake again on Thursday night at the 2024 NHL Awards at Fontainebleau Las Vegas.

"It was nerve-racking just making sure I didn't miss anyone this time," Hellebuyck said.

Becoming the 23rd goalie to win the Vezina Trophy multiple times also gave Hellebuyck the opportunity to celebrate with some friends and family at the NHL Awards. He missed out on that when there was no ceremony in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Just having those guys around, I think they might enjoy it more than I do, just because they're not around this every single day," Hellebuyck said. "I at least play the game, so I get a touch of it here and there. Just having them around, it means the world to me, because I really wouldn't be here without them."

This was the fourth time Hellebuyck was a finalist for the Vezina, which is voted on by NHL general managers. The 31-year-old was the runner-up in 2018 behind Pekka Rinne of the Nashville Predators and finished third last season, when Linus Ullmark of the Boston Bruins won the award.

This season, Hellebuyck beat out fellow finalists Thatcher Demko of the Vancouver Canucks, who finished second in the voting, and Sergei Bobrovsky of the Florida Panthers, who finished third.

Hellebuyck and Bobrovsky, who won the Vezina in 2013 and 2017, are the only active goalies to win the award more than once.

“It really hasn’t sunk in yet,” Hellebuyck said. “If I had to be fully honest, it’s kind of a stepping stone for what I want to be, the best in the world. So it was kind of showing me I’m doing right. I’ve had a lot of people around me that have been helping me along the way, so I know it feels good for them that they’re doing right with me as well, and I look forward to celebrating with all those people.”

Hellebuyck went 37-19-4 with a 2.39 goals-against average, .921 save percentage and five shutouts in 60 games this season for the Jets. He ranked second among NHL goalies in wins, second in save percentage and fourth in GAA. He made the second-most saves (1,656), behind Juuse Saros of the Nashville Predators (1,672).

Hellebuyck also won the William M. Jennings Trophy, presented annually to the goalies or goalie who play a minimum of 25 games for the team allowing the fewest goals during the regular season. Winnipeg allowed an NHL-low 199 goals (including shootout-deciding goals) and finished second in the Central Division (52-24-6).

“I think we made really big strides this year,” Hellebuyck said. “We changed our identity a little bit and we brought a solid, winning philosophy to Winnipeg, and I think our fans and I think our team bought in. And just that all-around buy-in, I’m pretty proud of that.”

After Hellebuyck struggled in the Stanley Cup Playoffs (1-4, 5.23 GAA, .870 save percentage) and the Jets lost to the Colorado Avalanche in five games in the Western Conference First Round, he’s had some time to reset mentally and has already begun getting ready for next season.

“I kind of washed out everything that I needed to figure out,” Hellebuyck said. “Now, I’ve just started skating and kind of ramping it back up for another year. There’s only one thing left on my mind, and that’s the Stanley Cup, so anything I can do to get there, I’m going to start doing.”

Hellebuyck said he’s looking forward to working with new Jets coach Scott Arniel, who was promoted from associate coach after Rick Bowness retired after the season.

“It’s very exciting,” Hellebuyck said. “The phone call that I had with him was very encouraging. I want him to know how bought in I am and how much I am looking forward to having him coach us.”

The Athletic

[Winnipeg Jets offseason defence targets: Brenden Dillon, Jakob Chychrun, more](#)

By Murat Ates

Dylan DeMelo knew he had a good case to hit the open market.

He knew that scoring 31 points while playing top-pairing minutes alongside Josh Morrissey on the Winnipeg Jets' top pair had value.

He also knows his own values — and that includes continuing to build his home and grow his family in Winnipeg.

“It’s a rare time in a career where you get a chance to explore free agency,” DeMelo told The Athletic on Wednesday. “With the cap going up and coming off of back-to-back career years, I knew that I wanted to feel like I got my worth and also set up my family. This is the last big one I’m going to get. I’m not going to get another contract like this ever again. And with all that being said, I wanted to do that in Winnipeg. I couldn’t be happier.”

DeMelo and his wife Jessica are expecting their second son this August. DeMelo says his family feels valued in Winnipeg — and that experiences like the Jets' whiteout are among the best things he's ever experienced.

“We feel we’re a part of the community in Winnipeg. It just felt right to stay again. We’re also close enough to home that it’s an easy flight for our parents to be part of their grandkids’ life.”

DeMelo’s extension is for four years and his \$4.9 million cap hit gives the Jets room to work further down the lineup or to go shopping for upgrades anytime between now and 2028, when DeMelo turns 35. He’s 31 now and is approaching a time in his career when most players start to slow down.

He acknowledges that — although he’s pushing to get better.

“I came into this league as a guy who has really good hockey sense and a good feel for the game,” he said. “My job is to at least maintain my physique and try to keep pushing to get stronger and faster but I think my hockey sense will be my calling card until the day I retire and the day I stop playing.”

To that end, DeMelo has pursued a number of different avenues toward self-improvement, including off-ice work like mental coaching and pilates — a recommendation from former San Jose Sharks teammate Patrick Marleau. DeMelo says it’s helped him with mobility in his groin and hips.

“These are the things you learn as you go. I’m working to be good now and five years from now,” he said. “Joe Thornton always told me this is going to be the best job you ever have — enjoy it and play until they kick you out.”

DeMelo is still delivering first-pairing value alongside Morrissey. He’s the perfect complement for the more offensively minded star, with Morrissey often crediting DeMelo for part of his own growth.

However, does their reunion mean the Jets need to sign a bunch of giants for their second and third pairs?

DeMelo isn’t Winnipeg’s GM but he admits he’s thought about this question before. When Vegas beat the Jets in five games and won the 2023 Stanley Cup, he noticed the size of the

Golden Knights' defencemen — almost all of them 6-foot-2 and 200 pounds or more — and considered their efficacy.

But DeMelo takes a broader view of the question. Florida did have Aaron Ekblad, listed at 6-4, and 6-5 Niko Mikkola in its top four but the other two key defencemen were Gustav Forsling and Brandon Montour — both listed at 6 feet and under 200 pounds. DeMelo points to this year's Cup champions as proof that quality matters more than any one individual attribute.

"Florida had good structure and guys that played their game really well," says DeMelo. "I don't think there's just one way to win. In this new age of hockey, I think you can be a mix of smaller and bigger guys as long as you're a good player, you do the right things and do the job just as well."

So what does Winnipeg need, then? For this, we look beyond DeMelo and at the market for defence — which includes free agent Brenden Dillon.

Let's start with a look at the Jets defencemen currently under contract. The Jets have approximately \$8.7 million in cap space to work with — barring moves, big or small — and the following defence corps:

Josh Morrissey
Dylan DeMelo
Dylan Samberg
Neal Pionk
Nate Schmidt

Logan Stanley and Ville Heinola are restricted free agents. Elias Salomonsson's entry-level contract has slid twice and has three years left.

Doesn't it seem as though Winnipeg needs at least one top-four defenceman — two, ideally?

Let's take a look at the Jets' options on the trade and free-agent markets.

UFA

Brenden Dillon, LD

Age: 33

Contract projection, via Evolving Hockey: Two years, \$2.5 million AAV

Usage: Top four at five-on-five, first-unit PK

Production: 8 goals, 12 assists, 20 points in 77 games

Possession impact, via Hockey Viz: Positive

Jets fans are well acquainted with Dillon's brand of physicality and decision-making. Dillon has played a second pairing and penalty-killing role for the Jets for three straight seasons. In that role, Dillon was not the only answer to Winnipeg's defensive woes but a big part of the solution. He excels on a team that plays a consistent, committed structure but won't create that structure all by himself. I suspect Evolving Hockey's estimate of his contract is low but they nailed the DeMelo contract so we'll see.

Chris Tanev, RD

Age: 34

Contract projection: Four years, \$4.8 million AAV

Usage: Top four at five-on-five, first-unit PK
Production: 2 goals, 17 assists, 19 points in 75 games
Possession impact: Positive

Dallas won the Chris Tanev sweepstakes at the trade deadline and he appeared to give the Stars exactly what they needed in the playoffs. Tanev played big minutes against Nathan MacKinnon in a winning effort and against Connor McDavid in something a touch less successful, playing a desperate and competitive brand of hockey. Can he do it again next year, after turning 35 midseason? Could he do it for four more years, as per the Evolving Hockey projection — or longer, if a bidding war turns contract term into a deciding factor? These are the tough questions teams like Winnipeg must ask themselves if they're shopping in the Tanev aisle. He was exactly what it seemed the Jets were missing against Colorado but his next contract represents no small risk.

Brett Pesce, RD

Age: 29
Contract projection: Six years, \$5.5 million AAV
Usage: Top four at five-on-five, first-unit PK
Production: 3 goals, 10 assists, 13 points in 70 games
Possession impact: Positive

Brett Pesce makes up half of a dominant pairing in Carolina, along with fellow pending UFA Brady Skjei. Pesce's track record is full of shutdown, stay-at-home success, and he's capable of playing a hard-gapping game at his own blue line to defend entries before they turn into trouble. Pesce has been connected to New Jersey, among other teams, but the big right-handed defenceman should also be of interest to Winnipeg. Pesce is younger than Dillon and Tanev and offers more hope of living up to a longer-term contract — like the next player on this list.

Matt Roy, LD

Age: 29
Contract projection: Five years, \$6.1 million AAV
Usage: Top four at five-on-five, first-unit PK
Production: 5 goals, 20 assists, 25 points in 81 games
Possession impact: Positive

Matt Roy is a shutdown defenceman by the eye test and analytics alike. At 29, more of his prime will be covered by his next contract than, say, Tanev's. Check out this deeper dive by Shayna Goldman and Eric Stephens, in which they refer to Roy as a "no-maintenance" shutdown defenceman. He's also delivered results at five-on-five and on the PK. If the Kings let him hit the market, the Jets should be among a gaggle of teams with at least some interest in Roy.

Tyler Myers, RD

Age: 34
Contract projection: One year, \$2.4 million AAV
Usage: Top four at five-on-five, first-unit PK
Production: 5 goals, 24 assists, 29 points in 77 games
Possession impact: Neutral

There are a lot of dominoes to fall before a Tyler Myers reunion makes sense for Winnipeg. The big, right-handed defenceman survived top-four minutes in Vancouver this season, although it

should be noted that the Canucks relied on Quinn Hughes and Filip Hronek, making Myers' second-pair workload a little bit lighter than that of other players on this list. Vancouver appreciated his physicality and penalty killing during the playoffs and Myers can still move the puck at this stage of his career. The concern as he progresses through his 30s is that Myers isn't a No. 4 or 5 so much as a veteran right-handed defenceman who can handle himself on the third pair. If the chips fall just right and the Jets need a veteran right-handed defenceman, a contract like Evolving Hockey's projection would make more sense for Winnipeg than another long-term, big-ticket deal.

If you're looking for other former Jets on the free-agent market, two of Neal Pionk's best seasons came alongside Cup winner Dmitry Kulikov, 33, and Derek Forbort, 32. I suspect the Jets might be better served looking toward their future, although Kulikov's underlying numbers have been surprisingly good in most recent seasons.

Trade targets

Jakob Chychrun, LHD

Age: 26

Contract: \$4.6 million, UFA 2025

Usage: Top four at five-on-five, second-unit PP

Production: 14 goals, 27 assists, 41 points in 82 games

Possession impact: Neutral

Jakob Chychrun has been oft-discussed, coming up one more time in our discussion of Rutger McGroarty trade possibilities. He's a player that makes more sense for a pending UFA like Nikolaj Ehlers than a 20-year-old prospect like McGroarty, but there's no denying Chychrun's appeal. He's still just 26, carries a thoroughly manageable \$4.6 million cap hit and produced offence throughout a healthy, 82-game season. Chychrun doesn't seem like the safest long-term investment, given that 2025 UFA date, but he could help the Jets at five-on-five and contribute a cannon to the power play.

Mike Matheson, LHD

Age: 30

Contract: \$4.875 million, 8-team no-trade clause, UFA 2026

Usage: Top four at five-on-five, first-unit PP, first-unit PK

Production: 11 goals, 51 assists, 62 points in 82 games

Possession impact: Negative

Mike Matheson emerged as Montreal's go-to power-play option this season, scoring more power-play goals (five) and power-play assists (23) than most of the shutdown defencemen on our list had at all. His career year was about playing twice as many power-play minutes as he had at any point to date, connecting with Nick Suzuki, Cole Caufield and company to produce huge counting stats without dominating the flow of play.

Could Winnipeg appreciate that kind of impact if it meant lightening Morrissey's workload? Sure, but Morrissey offers power-play quality too, and you'd hardly call that job Winnipeg's most pressing need.

David Jiricek, RHD

Age: 20

Contract: \$1.91 million AAV, RFA 2026

Usage: Third pairing at five-on-five

Production: 1 goal, 9 assists, 10 points in 43 games
Possession impact: Negative

David Jiricek is a big, mobile right-handed defenceman. He has a booming shot. He contributes a ton of offence in the AHL and has put up a respectable number of points for a third-pairing prospect in limited NHL minutes. At 20, there are lots of reasons to think he'll be a viable top-four defenceman in the future. Scott Wheeler details those reasons here and calls Jiricek the Columbus Blue Jackets' second-best prospect.

Jiricek expressed frustration with his AHL demotion this year and there's a chance he could be had by trade — including for McGroarty. We covered that possibility — and that of Winnipeg product, Denton Mateychuk — in our latest McGroarty trade piece.

Thomas Chabot, LHD

Age: 27

Contract: \$8 million AAV, UFA 2028

Usage: Top four at five-on-five, second-unit PP

Production: 9 goals, 21 assists, 30 points in 51 games

Possession impact: Positive

Thomas Chabot hasn't grown into a dominant power-play threat like his 55-point sophomore season implied he would. That, plus a lack of fully healthy 82-game seasons, are the most obvious knocks on him. The appeal — and there's a lot of appeal — comes in the form of Chabot's ability to control the flow of play at five-on-five. He's quietly above average in all three zones, helping the Senators defend, kickstarting their transition and then finding ways to contribute in the offensive zone.

He isn't necessarily available — Senators GM Steve Staios says there's been no trade discussion — but remains intriguing enough to discuss as a player who could help the Jets. And for fun: Chabot set career highs in even-strength goals (12) and assists (26) back in 2018-19. His partner? None other than DeMelo.

[Winnipeg Jets NHL Draft guide: Picks, best fits and analysis](#)

By Corey Pronman

The Winnipeg Jets have five picks in the 2024 NHL Draft: Nos. 37, 123, 155, 187, 219. Here's what to expect.

Analysis

Take a good look at the above list of Jets draft picks before things change. The Jets don't have a first-round pick right now, but could be one of the league's biggest movers, trade-wise, in the leadup to Round 1.

Rutger McGroarty, taken No. 14 in 2022, could be a way for Winnipeg to get into the first round of this year's draft. He no longer sees his future in Winnipeg and the Jets have discussed trading his rights. Nikolaj Ehlers could be, too, as his name has been linked to Martin Necas in trade rumours.

If nothing changes on those fronts, Winnipeg's first pick will be on Day 2 of the draft at No. 37th. The Jets will feel pressure to hit with Montreal's second-round pick, acquired from Los Angeles

in the PL Dubois trade, just as they did the last time they were in a similar situation. Winnipeg drafted high-floor, low-ceiling David Gustafsson in the second round of 2018.

The Jets' prospect pool isn't as deep as it was during the team's draft-and-develop heyday. McGroarty is the organization's top prospect until they move him, followed by defenceman Elias Salomonsson and forward Brad Lambert — two promising players who should make top-six, top-four impacts, but aren't enough on their own for the Jets to be set at any position. Skaters Nikita Chibrikov, Ville Heinola, Chaz Lucius, and goaltenders Thomas Milic and Dom DiVincentiis all offer hope and help but Winnipeg should be firmly in "best player available" mode. They could use a push at every position. — Murat Ates

Corey's team need: Defenseman

The Jets have drafted a lot of forwards with their high picks in recent years, and that — coupled with the fact that their first pick in 2019, Ville Heinola, hasn't developed very well — has led to a depth issue on their prospect blue line outside of Salomonsson. Ideally, that is a position where they add some quality during this draft.

More on each team's biggest need here.

Names to watch

In recent mock drafts, Corey Pronman has projected the following picks:

- 37. Adam Jecho, C, Edmonton (WHL)
- 123. Nicholas Kempf, G, Usa U-18 (NTDP)
- 155. Aidan Park, C, Shattuck, St. Mary's Prep (HIGH-MN)
- 187. Christian Humphreys, C, USA U-18 (NTDP)
- 219. Zach Pelletier, G, Gatineau (QMJHL)

Winnipeg Jets' Connor Hellebuyck wins Vezina Trophy as NHL's top goalie

By Murat Ates and Julian McKenzie

LAS VEGAS — Connor Hellebuyck has won his second Vezina Trophy in five years, joining an elite group of goaltenders who have won the award twice.

The Winnipeg Jets star received 31 of 32 first-place votes, finishing ahead of fellow finalists Thatcher Demko and Sergei Bobrovsky.

Hellebuyck's regular season was sterling. He led all starters in save percentage (.921), finished second in wins (37) and helped the Jets win the William Jennings Trophy as the team with the fewest goals against in the NHL. By analytical measures, Hellebuyck lapped the field: his 39 goals saved above expected (GSAX) put him 10 goals ahead of the next closest competitor.

Hellebuyck's dominance was an enormous part of Winnipeg's 110-point finish in the regular season standings. Hellebuyck had a 37-19-4 record with five shutouts in 60 games. And yet he meant more to the Jets than his stats: Hellebuyck's seven-year, \$59.5 million contract extension was announced prior to the season, with Mark Scheifele signing a matching deal. The move came as a surprise to many — and was the result of an unprecedented summerlong communication process with Kevin Cheveldayoff. Hellebuyck's contract announced Winnipeg's continued competitiveness to the league — instead of rebuilding, Hellebuyck's presence helped the Jets look like Cup contenders for large stretches of the season.

“It’s an honor,” Hellebuyck said. “I just know growing up my whole goal was to be the best in the world. So this is a stepping stone. It’s not something that’s given or awarded. It’s earned every single day. For me, it feels like I’m doing something right.”

What happened in the playoffs?

No celebration of Hellebuyck’s season-long excellence can be made without an acknowledgment of his playoffs. Hellebuyck allowed four or more goals in all five games Winnipeg played in the first round for an .870 save percentage. An in-depth, goal for goal accounting shows that Colorado dominated the Jets, attacking with pace, cross-seam passes, deflections and rebounds. Hellebuyck’s workload was as miserable as a five-game sample gets.

“You’re probably not going to believe when I say I was playing the best hockey of my career,” Hellebuyck said in his exit interviews. “But that’s truly how I was feeling. Not only was I playing some of my best hockey but I was in that zone where you’re not thinking, you’re just playing. And that’s what you seek after. That’s a dangerous thing in sports and to not be able to keep four goals off the board is heartbreaking. It really is heartbreaking. I mean, you’ve got to give them some kudos for what they did, but looking back I don’t know if I even saw half of the pucks that went into the net. They did a great job but for me to not be able to put my foot down even in a single game is really heartbreaking. It’s not typically how I do things.”

Hellebuyck’s career has been marked by bold comments like this. “I liked my game” is not an uncommon thing to hear following a poor statistical performance.

There are reasons why it makes sense, though.

One thing we must understand about goaltending is that save percentage fluctuates enough — even among the best in the world — that predicting future performance based on a small sample just doesn’t work. That would be true whether you limit your sample to five games played in November or five games played in March. Still, Hellebuyck posted one of the worst goals saved above expected numbers of the last seven years — the fifth-worst GSAX in a single postseason of 165 goaltenders tracked by Evolving Hockey. Even after watching every goal against multiple times — or adding up all of Colorado’s multiple shot, multiple-seam pass flurries that Hellebuyck turned away — it’s a challenge to reconcile Hellebuyck’s words with the results.

His job is to manage his process. The numbers he’s posted over the past five years, including two thoroughly deserved Vezina trophies, imply that he’s well-equipped to do so.

Still, it seems as though the next step in Hellebuyck’s career must be to deliver another postseason performance worthy of his regular season accolades. To be clear, it’s not that he hasn’t been excellent in the playoffs; of the same 165 goalies tracked over the last seven years, Hellebuyck’s 2017-18 GSAX was 20th-best and his 2021 was 28th best. He’s delivered far more quality than his loudest playoff critics allow.

But listen to Hellebuyck talk about his goals. A second Vezina has not been a loud part of the conversation. It’s about the Stanley Cup.

And Hellebuyck knows he can’t maintain the same approach and expect different results. After getting pulled in Game 3, the hope was that he would steal a game or two — just like he’d done all season — but Hellebuyck’s emotions belied a need to change his approach.

“When I got pulled to give me more rest, it was like a flood of emotions I had suppressed all series long and that was the realization that, I can’t do this alone,” Hellebuyck said. “And I’m not saying that I needed to do it alone. That was my mindset, I needed to do this alone. That was the realization that I need to be part of this team more than I am, and to take everything onto my shoulders — and that’s, I’m talking me personally, that’s not me talking against the team — it’s just the way my mentality is, I’m trying to put everything on my shoulders. I don’t think that’s the right way to go about playoffs anymore. I think what I need to do is just dive into a team game even more, and that will hopefully bring me peace of mind.”

Rutger McGroarty trade destinations: What could the Winnipeg Jets get back?

By Murat Ates

Rutger McGroarty trade talks have begun. A league source tells The Athletic that McGroarty has garnered interest from several teams.

A trade is expected to take place prior to the NHL Draft and could involve roster players or future assets, depending on McGroarty’s destination.

McGroarty, 20, finished seventh in NCAA scoring with 16 goals and 36 assists in 36 games for Michigan. He also captained Team USA to a gold medal at the 2024 world juniors. The No. 14 pick in 2022 doesn’t have interest in taking his next steps with Winnipeg — still, he’s a heck of a trade asset.

Here are three teams with interest in McGroarty and some thoughts on a potential Jets trade return.

What could Winnipeg get back?

Columbus Blue Jackets

Columbus has tremendous reason to have interest in McGroarty. In addition to being a young, rebuilding team in search of new leadership — from top to bottom of the organization — the Blue Jackets have built a stable of Michigan talent.

McGroarty played on a dominant line with Adam Fantilli and Gavin Brindley at Michigan in 2022-23 — at times, the best line in college hockey. Fantilli started his Blue Jackets career in 2023-24, scoring 27 points in 47 games, while Brindley helped McGroarty and company to a Frozen Four appearance before signing with Columbus when his NCAA ended. Acquiring McGroarty would give Columbus a chance to reunite a dominant college trio, add to its leadership group and continue trying to rewrite history from recent franchise struggles. Don’t forget 21-year-old Kent Johnson or veteran Zach Werenski, two more former Wolverines.

What could the Jets be after?

As reported by The Athletic’s Aaron Portzline, 20-year-old defenceman David Jiricek was not happy with the way he was handled in Columbus this season. Jiricek, taken sixth in 2022 — eight spots before McGroarty — had a higher opinion of his 43 NHL games than former Blue Jackets coach, Pascal Vincent. Whichever side you’re on there, the 6-foot-4, 207-pound Jiricek was an offensive force in the AHL, posting 30 points in 43 games last season and 38 points in 55 games the year before that. Right-handed defencemen with Jiricek’s size and skill are a rarity, making him a thoroughly appealing prospect.

Columbus may seek to patch that relationship instead of ending it, noting Jiricek's quality. The Blue Jackets might not be keen to move Winnipeg-born left-handed defenceman, Denton Mateychuk, who they took two spots before Winnipeg chose McGroarty in 2022, either. Mateychuk played a key role on the WHL championship-winning Moose Jaw Warriors, scoring 75 points in 52 games during the regular season before finishing second in playoff scoring with 30 points in 20 games.

Acquiring Mateychuk could help the Jets change the McGroarty storyline in a big way, bringing home a local kid who was named the WHL's top defenceman this season. Columbus also owns the No. 4 pick, although Winnipeg would need to add to McGroarty to acquire that kind of draft capital.

Ottawa Senators

There are a lot of reasons to connect Ottawa to Winnipeg. The most obvious topic of discussion has involved Nikolaj Ehlers and Jakob Chychrun, given each player is entering the final year of his contract.

Chychrun, 26, just posted a 41-point season while delivering solid top-four performance. His \$4.6 million represents a value contract, while the likelihood of a sizable raise next summer and a Senators blue line built around fellow left-handers Jake Sanderson and Thomas Chabot, have made Chychrun a common subject of trade rumours. Winnipeg could certainly use Chychrun's play, particularly if left-handed veteran Brenden Dillon signs elsewhere, but a new thought has emerged: What if the Jets target Chabot instead?

Enter McGroarty.

The 27-year-old Chabot has four years left on his eight-year, \$8 million AAV contract with a 10-team no-trade clause that kicks in on July 1. He played an even bigger role on Ottawa's blue line than Chychrun did, leading all Senators in even strength ice time. Chabot controls the flow of play at five-on-five while offering less of a cannon than Chychrun does (and less power play efficacy as a result).

Senators GM Steve Staios has firmly denied that Chabot has been the subject of trade conversation.

From the Jets' point of view, though, Chabot's 2028 UFA status would offer a ton of stability in addition to his quality as a player. Ottawa picks seventh on Friday but the Senators' prospect cupboard isn't overflowing with recent success. The Senators may be inclined to make that pick.

San Jose Sharks

McGroarty has helped his value with a strong start to his NCAA career and play at the world juniors.

Still, Columbus' No. 4 pick and Ottawa's No. 7 pick might be a little bit out of reach. This is where San Jose enters the picture. Not only do the Sharks have the No. 1 pick, with Macklin Celebrini waiting for them as a prize, but they have a second first-round pick: 14th, right where McGroarty was taken in 2022. They have three second-round picks as well — more than enough draft capital from which to deal.

The Sharks also have assets in the form of the NHL's fourth-best prospect pool, per The Athletic's Scott Wheeler, (one spot behind Columbus, who ranks third). Any of left winger Quentin Musty, left-handed defenceman Shakir Mukhamadullin and big left-handed centre Filip Bystedt should have appeal. Musty, the 26th pick in 2023, is similar in stature to McGroarty and finished last season with 102 points in 53 games for OHL Sudbury. Bystedt made a smooth transition into the AHL when his SHL season ended, picking up seven points in eight games for the San Jose Barracuda.

Columbus makes a lot of sense as a front-runner but McGroarty is a highly regarded prospect and will have suitors beyond the three teams we've covered here. Buffalo has a deep and diverse prospect pool. Everyone expects Utah Hockey Club to make a splash of some kind. And McGroarty is developing in Detroit's backyard — another team with depth and breadth of prospect talent.

The Jets also have other work on their plate. Ehlers' name continues to circulate in trade discussions. Pending Jets UFAs include Dillon, Sean Monahan, Laurent Brossoit, Tyler Toffoli and Colin Miller. Cole Perfetti will need an extension later this summer, as will fellow RFA skaters David Gustafsson and Logan Stanley. Winnipeg may also look to clear cap space to facilitate transactions — and that could come in the form of a buyout for Nate Schmidt.

Momentum is building on McGroarty and I expect that a trade will take place before the draft.

The Score

Report: Bruins among teams eyeing Jets' McGroarty

By Josh Gold-Smith

The Rutgers McGroarty suitors are starting to materialize for the Winnipeg Jets.

The Boston Bruins have had continuous discussions with the Jets about the top prospect, while the Buffalo Sabres, Columbus Blue Jackets, and New York Islanders have also inquired, reports the Winnipeg Free Press' Mike McIntyre.

On Saturday, it was reported the Jets are likely to trade McGroarty, but that he doesn't have any animosity toward the city of Winnipeg.

The Jets were apparently keen on signing the Nebraska-born University of Michigan star at the end of the college season in April, but they weren't willing to guarantee him a path to NHL playing time. McGroarty then decided to return to the Wolverines for his junior year in 2024-25.

Winnipeg bolstered its forward group in preparation for a playoff run in March, adding Tyler Toffoli and Sean Monahan in separate trades. The Jets reached the postseason, but the Colorado Avalanche bounced them out of the first round in five games. Both Toffoli and Monahan are pending unrestricted free agents.

McGroarty collected 16 goals and 36 assists over 36 games for Michigan this season. He notched 18 tallies and 21 across 39 contests in 2022-23. McGroarty also led the United States to the gold medal as captain at this year's World Junior Championship, posting five goals and four assists in seven games.

The Jets drafted him 14th overall in 2022.

Global Winnipeg

Dylan DeMelo excited and relieved to remain a Winnipeg Jet

By Kelly Moore Global News

For the second time in his NHL career, veteran defenceman Dylan DeMelo has chosen staying with the Winnipeg Jets over testing the free agent market. And clearly, he has no regrets about how things have worked out.

DeMelo was a pending unrestricted free agent in October 2020 when he signed a four-year, US\$12-million deal with Winnipeg.

And that same scenario has played out less than a week from the start of the 2024 free agency, after the 31-year-old London, Ont., native put ink to paper on another four-year contract — but this time for just under US\$20 million in total value.

“Just super happy to be able to extend in Winnipeg,” said DeMelo, who admitted he was relieved to not have to go too deep into the summer without knowing where he’d be playing going into his 12th full professional season, especially with an Aug. 1 due date for baby number two.

“I’ve obviously been very vocal about staying. Enjoy the community and the group of guys we’ve been building. Just super pleased to get it done and be able to enjoy my Canada Day weekend.”

The email you need for the day's top news stories from Canada and around the world. DeMelo was considered a priority re-signing for Winnipeg because of the role he has played over the past two seasons, in particular with Josh Morrissey on the Jets’ number one defence pairing. He told Cameron Poitras and Jim Toth on 680 CJOB’s Jets at Noon program that was one of several main considerations that led to staying in Winnipeg.

“I’m very fortunate to play with really good players. Obviously Josh has been my partner the last couple of years; that was a huge draw for me to re-sign,” said DeMelo, who is coming off a career year for assists (28) and points (31) — as well as a +46 ranking that was second in the NHL only to Florida’s Gustav Forsling, who was a +56.

The former San Jose Sharks and Ottawa Senators blueliner is the first to admit the onus is on him and Morrissey to keep that partnership intact with how they perform in the future and not what they have done in the past.

Related to recent history, DeMelo says he’s still searching for answers two months after the Jets’ five-game elimination at the hands of Colorado in Round 1 of the Stanley Cup playoffs

“The ‘what happened’ part is easy. It’s the why. And you know, I got a few theories, not willing to share. If we have a good run, go far and win it all, maybe I’ll spill the details,” DeMelo said with a laugh. “The one thing I think we can do, and I think I can say confidently is our group, we need to continue to push, and push each other to be better.”

“At times during the season — this is every team I’ve been on — there’s just that natural human instinct ... you’re feeling it during those dog days and you just want to get through the day and punch the clock and go home. And I think the best teams on those days push each other internally and demand more from each other. So that’s one thing internally I’m going to try and do.”

However the Jets attempt to improve by the five or 10 per cent that has been mentioned to get over that first-round hump, they’ll be doing it with Scott Arniel in charge. DeMelo is looking forward to seeing how the team will play under its new head coach.

“He has an open door policy, very good communicator. He’s got some great ideas, just on the philosophy of the game,” DeMelo said. “Obviously, working with the D in an assistant role, I feel he did amazing work for us as a D corps. Individually, I felt like I really grew under his tutelage.”

ANALYSIS: DeMelo extension a meaningful start to busy week for Winnipeg Jets

By Paul Edmonds CJOB

The timing of Dylan DeMelo’s extension with the Winnipeg Jets is a meaningful beginning to what is assuredly going to be a busy week toward month’s end.

And while the 11th hour was nearing to get a deal done before his contract expired on Canada Day, Tuesday’s announcement now allows the team to focus on other business – all of which comes with additional and approaching deadlines of its own.

Priorities like this weekend’s draft, perhaps finalizing further contract negotiations and a potential dip into the free agent pool, all within a four-day period, will consume most of the available waking hours of the Jets’ executives.

The email you need for the day’s top news stories from Canada and around the world. But wrapping up DeMelo for four more years at a very equitable price tag of just under \$5 million per year is a huge stroke of completion to allow Kevin Cheveldayoff and his staff to focus on the rest of Winnipeg’s remaining hockey business.

At 31 years old, DeMelo has become an important part of the team’s blue line, a sound defender, a puck mover, a leader, a penalty killer and – probably the most significant to his substantial list of skills – a complement to his partner Josh Morrissey.

It comes to no one’s surprise that over the last two-plus years since Morrissey has been paired with DeMelo, Morrissey’s offensive production has increased to where he’s led the team in points by a D-man the last three seasons. That contribution, in large part, comes from Morrissey himself, but having the confidence and comfort in your partner to execute more in your game has extreme value and that’s why DeMelo’s signing is crucial to the team’s success.

Plus, DeMelo wants to be here, an important aspect of fostering growth, culture and winning within the league’s smallest market – a place that may very well end up being the longest stop in his NHL career.

Nonetheless, the timing of DeMelo’s signing is certainly meaningful — a building block to next year, no doubt, but also a significant point to what is going to be a busy month’s end.

Connor Hellebuyck wins Vezina Trophy as NHL's top tender

By Russ Hobson Global News

Connor Hellebuyck is now a two-time winner of the Vezina Trophy.

The Winnipeg Jets goaltender was named the NHL's outstanding goalie in a landslide at the NHL Awards on Thursday.

In a nearly-unanimous selection, Hellebuyck received 31 of the 32 first place votes. Thatcher Demko of the Vancouver Canucks was second in voting by the league's general managers. Sergei Bobrovsky of the Florida Panthers received the only other first-place vote and finished in third place.

It's the second major award for Hellebuyck this season as he also won the William M. Jennings Trophy after the Jets allowed the least number of goals in the regular season.

Hellebuyck was second in the NHL with 38 regular season wins, only one behind Colorado Avalanche tender Alexandar Georgiev. He had a 2.39 goals against average and ranked second in the league with a .921 save percentage in 60 appearances.

This was the fourth time Hellebuyck was voted a finalist. He won the award in 2020, finished third last season, and was the runner-up in 2017-2018.

The email you need for the day's top news stories from Canada and around the world. Nathan MacKinnon of the Colorado Avalanche was the big winner. He claimed the Hart Trophy as the most valuable player to his team and also won the Ted Lindsay Award for the MVP as voted by the players.

Hellebuyck was also sixth in voting for the Hart.

Connor Bedard of the Chicago Blackhawks took home the Calder Trophy as the rookie of the year. Winnipeg's Joel Hofer of the St. Louis Blues finished tied for 11th in voting.

The Vancouver Canucks' Quinn Hughes is the league's best defenceman after winning the Norris Trophy. Jets blueliner Josh Morrissey finished seventh with 19 third place votes, 16 fourth place votes and 23 votes for fifth place.

ANALYSIS: Buckle up, it's the summer hockey season

By John Shannon CJOB

It feels like we just gave the Cup away, and here we are on draft day. For the next few years, get used to it.

The TV ratings Monday which had more than 16 million people in Canada and United States watch the game will be the fuel for the league and the networks that late June isn't that bad for playing hockey

Those numbers are impressive, but shouldn't be the rationale for June 24 to be the end date in the future. Some of the other games with high ratings occurred on earlier dates in June, and

often these were Game 7 contests that involved Canadian teams, such as 2011 in Vancouver, 2004 for Calgary, and 1994 for Vancouver.

Hockey fans love drama, and a seventh game is just that. Hopefully, we can have some sort of break between the games and the draft in the future, but don't bank on it.

As for the draft, in the Sphere for the next two days in Las Vegas, it will mark the end of the traditional draft with team draft tables and everyone who's anyone on the draft floor.

What the future brings, which most believe is what we saw for the NBA on Wednesday, isn't that bad. The players were there, their families were there — just the teams were all at their home bases, linked electronically, and, quite frankly, probably a little more financially inexpensively. It makes sense.

But hopefully, the players will still feel the rush and excitement of draft day as we've seen for the past 40 years.

The only thing that isn't changing is free agency on Monday. And as we get closer to July 1, it appears things are just going to be get crazier, with teams jockeying for position and feeling flush with money.

Buckle up folks, the summer hockey season is upon us.