

## Winnipeg Free Press

### *Chevy in no rush to move McGroarty, eyes inking Ehlers*

By: Ken Wiebe

LAS VEGAS — There will come a time when Kevin Cheveldayoff might open up about what has transpired with top forward prospect Rutger McGroarty.

But the runup to the first round of the 2024 NHL Draft apparently wasn't it.

As the general manager of the Winnipeg Jets met with members of the media for the first time since Scott Arniel was hired as head coach, Cheveldayoff wasn't about to shed much light on the situation.

Asked directly what has changed between the organization and McGroarty, Cheveldayoff chose to deflect the question rather than confirm or deny any of the speculation surrounding the University of Michigan Wolverines winger.

"So the Rutger situation here, right now, for me I think there's a time and a place where I'll comment on something," said Cheveldayoff. "Rutger's a prospect within our organization and that's where it's at right now."

That's also where it was at when the 32nd overall pick was made on Friday night at the Sphere in Las Vegas.

Despite the interest from multiple teams, nothing transpired involving the Jets moving back into the first round on Friday.

That's not to say a deal couldn't be on the horizon on Saturday, where rounds two through seven will be held, or somewhere down the road.

What it means in the interim is that the Jets either weren't interested in the offers that were made or they're hoping to focus a package more on a player that could help them right now rather than several years down the road.

The Jets retain the rights to McGroarty for two more years, so they're not going to rush to make a decision on his future.

As of now, the Jets hold the fifth pick of the second round (37th overall), along with one in the fourth round (123), one in the fifth round (155), one in the sixth round (187) and a final selection in the seventh round (219).

Among the players left on the board who might still be available once the Jets are on the clock in Round 2 are Brandon Wheat Kings defenceman Charlie Elick, Everett Silvertips centre Julius Miettinen, Ottawa 67s blue-liner Henry Mews, Czechia D-man Dominik Badinka, Prince Albert Raiders forward Ryder Ritchie and Medicine Hat Tigers winger Andrew Basha.

There had been some chatter that the Jets were trying to make a trade to move back into the first round, but that didn't occur — likely because of what the asking prices were.

“It’s always high at this point in time. From a team perspective and from a scouting perspective, this is where you restock the cupboards,” said Cheveldayoff. “It’s interesting, the ebbs and flows of the value of a draft pick. At the draft here, you can’t get one to save your life, but at the trade deadline, everyone just says, ‘Yeah, yeah. Give them this one, give them that one.’”

“This is where you sit and feel it. You have the passion to want to put your team, do something at the deadline, help them move forward. Usually it’s picks. Then you’re sitting here today. It’s a lonely Maytag repairman type feeling.”

Ultimately the Jets chose to stand pat and take their chances at 37th overall — at least so far.

“I can only speak for when we talk should we move up or should we move down. If you get pockets of players that you feel are very, very close, then maybe you have that ability to say, ‘You know what? We can risk moving X amount of spots one way or another.’ It is a little unique though that you see a lot of them before the draft,” said Cheveldayoff. “Usually, you see those things on the floor when you see your list and how it’s unfolding or not unfolding. So that’s a little bit unique here. We saw one, gosh it was probably a month ago when Chicago made that first one.”

The Jets felt comfortable picking early in the second round partly because there was a wide range of opinions on players ranked between 15th and 50th, which means many final draft lists for teams are substantially different.

“It really does seem like a real spread out year after maybe even a couple of picks. Usually I think you get a lot of general consensus after the top half or something like that of the first round,” said Cheveldayoff. “I do think, talking to the scouts, it’s their day, they’re the ones who put the list together and talk about the players and have passion for those players. But they do seem to think that a player you have on a certain level on your list may be very different on other lists.”

Cheveldayoff also poured some cold water on the trade rumours involving Jets winger Nikolaj Ehlers, who is about to enter the final year of his contract before he’s eligible to become an unrestricted free agent.

“So, not dissimilar to standing here last year, I think when we had Connor Hellebuyck and Mark Scheifele,” said Cheveldayoff, referring to a pair of franchise cornerstones who dealt with plenty of buzz surrounding them and their next destination before signing matching seven-year extensions last October. “Nikolaj Ehlers is a big part of our team.”

There was plenty of surprise in the early stages of the first round, including a touching moment involving third overall selection Beckett Sennecke and his parents after the Oshawa Generals winger was selected by the Anaheim Ducks.

Ranked significantly lower by most analysts and observers, Sennecke was caught with a look of disbelief on his face and voiced his genuine surprise with a quick use of profanity sprinkled in as a camera captured the moment.

The Utah Hockey Club also made a splash as they selected Kelowna Rockets forward Tij Iginla with the sixth overall pick.

The son of Hall of Famer Jarome Iginla will carry the same distinction for Utah that Scheifele did when he became the first choice of the 2.0 version of the Jets back in 2011.

### *Free agency focus: 'things can change quickly'*

### *Winnipeg Jets have decisions to make with holes to fill, money to spend*

By: Mike McIntyre and Ken Wiebe

Could there be Canada Day fireworks for the Winnipeg Jets? Or will Monday's start of NHL free agency resemble more of a birthday cake sparkler that quickly fizzles out around here?

There's no question the hockey club has some holes to fill and money to spend, with the exact quantity still a bit of a mystery at this point.

Forwards Sean Monahan and Tyler Toffoli, defencemen Brenden Dillon and Colin Miller and backup goaltender Laurent Brossoit are all pending unrestricted free agents as of July 1. Should they all find new hockey homes, the Jets will need to replace them — either internally or externally — by next season.

Toffoli, Miller and Brossoit are out the door, while the future of Monahan and Dillon is a bit foggy.

"We've kind of remained in constant communication with all the camps really to try to understand what their wants and desires and wishes are and does it fit and does it work within the cap and stuff like that," general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff said Friday afternoon in Las Vegas just prior to the start of the NHL draft.

"It's a day-by-day business here right now, where there's lots going on in a short period of time and hopefully all those things will come to some sort of conclusion at some point."

Down on the farm, Manitoba Moose forwards Jeff Malott and Jeffrey Viel, defenceman Kyle Capobianco and Ashton Sautner and goaltender Collin Delia are also UFAs.

According to Cap Friendly, Winnipeg currently has US\$79.2 million accounted for next season, representing 18 players listed below. That doesn't include new contracts required for restricted free agent forwards Cole Perfetti and David Gustafsson and defencemen Logan Stanley and Ville Heinola.

Once you add those, along with an understudy to Vezina Trophy winner Connor Hellebuyck, there's a good chance the Jets will be getting fairly tight to the US\$88 million salary cap ceiling.

That's where things get tricky: Could they clear some cap space by moving the likes of defencemen Nate Schmidt (US\$5.95 million) and Neal Pionk (US\$5.875 million) or forwards Nikolaj Ehlers (US\$6 million) and Alex Iafallo (US\$4 million)? All four of those players have just one year remaining on their deals and have been the subject of recent buzz.

Cheveldayoff called Ehlers a "big part of what we have going forward," so that might pour some cold water on trade talk, at least for now.

“We’re very focused on trying to put the best team on the ice that we possibly can in order to compete for a Stanley Cup,” he said. “We had a good year this year, 110 points. We’re going to make some tweaks just generically by nature, there’s going to be some opportunities for some different players to come into the lineup.”

Jets head coach Scott Arniel said in an interview on Thursday that he’s excited to see how things unfold over the course of the coming days.

“There’s lots going on with our hockey club. We got (Dylan) DeMelo done, which was huge,” said Arniel. “Hopefully we can get the other guys done and see where it goes. You kind of get a feel for what’s going on in the league. Who is fishing for what kind of fish and those type of things.”

Here’s a position-by-position breakdown of what the Jets have, what they need, who’s in the pipeline and who could be on the free agent radar:

### *Goaltending*

What they have: Connor Hellebuyck.

What they need: A legitimate NHL backup.

In the pipeline: Thomas Milic is coming off a terrific rookie campaign that began in the ECHL and led to a well-deserved AHL promotion. Another season, or more, with the Moose will be to his benefit. The Jets also have Domenic DiVincentiis, who just finished his third OHL season with the North Bay Battalion.

On the free agent radar: How about a reunion with old friend Eric Comrie (Buffalo), who thrived as an understudy to Hellebuyck and under the tutelage of goalie coach Wade Flaherty — 10-15-1 in 16 starts and 19 appearances during the 2021-22 campaign.

Other capable puckstoppers on the open market include Anthony Stolarz (Florida), Winnipegger Chris Driedger (Seattle), Casey DeSmith (Vancouver), Scott Wedgewood (Dallas), Kevin Lankinen (Nashville) and Kaapo Kahkonen (New Jersey).

“You look at the situation we’re in, we have the best goaltender in the NHL as our goaltender, so he’s going to play a lot. He thrives on playing a lot,” Cheveldayoff said of the qualities a No. 2 netminder must possess.

“You need somebody that can understand that, can accept that, but can work with that and can be ready. Someone that has a good outlook of where they’re at in their career and can understand the situation in front of them. We are open and honest when we will get into discussions with players about that role. The goalie carousel is a very, very different one. It seems like there are lots of spots and then all of a sudden, the music stops and everyone tries to grab a chair. That’s always an interesting dynamic.”

### *Defence*

What they have: Josh Morrissey, Dylan DeMelo, Dylan Samberg, Neal Pionk, Nate Schmidt, Logan Stanley (RFA) , Ville Heinola (RFA).

What they need: A top-four upgrade, preferably on the right side. Some additional depth.

In the pipeline: Elias Salomonsson.

On the free agent radar: While Heinola, who is not waiver exempt, is sure to make the opening-night 23-man roster, Salomonsson (a right-shot) is a bit of a wildcard as he comes over to North

America to get his feet wet following a championship season in Sweden. Is the club comfortable with the current crop, or is a blue-line boost in the cards especially if Dillon isn't re-signed?

Big fish on the market include Brandon Montour (Florida), Chris Tanev (Dallas), Matt Roy (Los Angeles), Brett Pesce (Carolina), Brady Skjei (Carolina) and Sean Walker (Colorado), but term and salary may be too much for Winnipeg. Looking at the next tier, a defender like Alexandre Carrier (Nashville) could be a great fit that probably wouldn't break the bank. Vincent Desharnais (Edmonton) would also provide some serious size and snarl.

This is where a potential Ehlers trade becomes interesting, as a return could address this situation in a way free agency likely can't. The status of Pionk and Schmidt on what appears to be a crowded and rather costly back-end adds some additional intrigue as well.

"Everything is on the table when it comes to having to deal with the cap," Cheveldayoff said when asked about utilizing a potential buyout on one of his players. "You have to understand what levers you do have in front of you, yet still try to put the most competitive team on the ice in front of us. Again, nothing's off the table."

#### *Forwards*

What they have: Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor, Gabe Vilardi, Nikolaj Ehlers, Cole Perfetti (RFA), Nino Niederreiter, Adam Lowry, Mason Appleton, Alex Iafallo, Vlad Namestikov, Morgan Barron, David Gustafsson (RFA), Rasmus Kupari, Axel Jonsson-Fjallby.

What they need: A second-line centre. A bottom-six boost with penalty killing prowess. Some additional depth.

In the pipeline: Brad Lambert, Nikita Chibrikov, Chaz Lucius, Rutger McGroarty (for now), Colby Barlow.

On the free agent radar: Lambert appears ready to push for a job following a stellar rookie season with the Manitoba Moose, and Chibrikov might not be too far behind him.

Monahan is a major question mark, as he would solidify the 2C position should he be re-signed. If not, it remains a need unless the organization wants to give Lambert a look, or go back to someone like Namestnikov.

Unless some cap space is cleared, you can rule out a huge swing in a rather thin market. Elias Lindholm (Vancouver), Chandler Stephenson (Vegas) and Alex Wennberg (New York Rangers) are all centres who should attract plenty of interest, while wingers including Yakov Trenin (Colorado), Teuvo Teravainen (Carolina), Jordan Martinook (Carolina), Anthony Duclair (Tampa Bay) and Anthony Mantha (Vegas) check off plenty of boxes.

William Carrier (Vegas) would bring a number of qualities, including a physical presence and championship pedigree.

Has Arniel already started to draw up potential line combinations on the board in his office?

"I'm going to wait," he told the Free Press. "Until the third or fourth of July. Then I'll take a look at that. Things can change quickly."

#### **The Athletic**

## *Why the Winnipeg Jets haven't traded Rutger McGroarty yet and what I'm hearing comes next*

By Murat Ates

LAS VEGAS — The Winnipeg Jets didn't trade Rutger McGroarty during the first round of the NHL Draft on Friday. This was not for a lack of effort.

The Jets worked hard to trade McGroarty and got some bites, particularly in the middle of the first round. According to The Athletic's Michael Russo, Minnesota offered Winnipeg the 13th pick but changed its tack when Zeev Buium became available, trading up to take the defenceman at 12. We don't know the Jets' draft list: It's possible that making the deal with the Wild depended on which player Winnipeg could have drafted at 13.

But that wasn't the Jets' only bite.

The Jets' draft table was abuzz throughout Round 1, with GM Kevin Cheveldayoff spotted working the phone on several calls during the opening round. The biggest frenzies came during the middle of the first round, but ultimately Winnipeg was not able to pull off a trade.

Cheveldayoff's non-comment regarding McGroarty just prior to the draft revealed a sense of complexity.

"The Rutger situation here right now ... I think for me, there's a time and a place when I'll comment on something," Cheveldayoff said in response to a question from The Athletic. "Rutger is a prospect within our organization and that's where it's at right now."

I believed that a trade was more imminent than not and expected it to come by the end of the first round of the draft. I believe now that the twists and turns of the draft board, Buium included, changed trade winds more than once.

McGroarty's rights still belong to the Jets. An 11th-hour reconciliation does not appear to be in the cards. A league source shared that, despite the complexities involved in McGroarty's situation, trade talks took place with multiple teams.

There are differing opinions about McGroarty's value. He was taken 14th in 2022, which implies a similar value here and now — hence the Wild's No. 13 pick being in play. There is an argument to be made that McGroarty's development at Michigan, including his World Junior gold medal, should increase his stature — he's developed for two years and covered the bet Winnipeg made when it reached for him two years ago. However, there has been some talk that teams see the Jets as painted into a corner and were more inclined to value McGroarty as a late first-round pick.

Both could be true — there are enough rival clubs for a variety of opinions — but I lean toward the more optimistic side of the argument. Cheveldayoff has a long history of pulling rabbits out of hats, from the PL Dubois trade last summer to the Andrew Copp deadline day trade which yielded Morgan Barron and the picks which became Brad Lambert, Elias Salomonsson and Thomas Milic. And despite McGroarty's desire to play elsewhere, the 20-year-old forward's on-ice stock is at an all-time high. From the Jets' perspective, there's no official deadline — no rule that they have to trade McGroarty for beans if the phones go quiet. The timeline in which

Winnipeg does nothing sees McGroarty return to Michigan, continue to excel and re-emerge as a valuable trade piece at the 2025 deadline.

Now, though, the Jets need to pivot or double down in a different direction — perhaps for prospects a year or two into their development as opposed to picks. We discussed Manitoba native Denton Mateychuk in this look at potential McGroarty trade returns. The idea has appeal — Mateychuk was taken two spots before McGroarty in 2022, while David Jiricek is another attractive Blue Jackets defenceman. After the Wild's clear interest in McGroarty, it's difficult to ascertain whether they can find another way to make a deal.

Cheveldayoff and his staff planned to meet at their hotel on Friday night to regroup and make plans for Day 2 of the draft. It's all well and good for McGroarty's future to occupy the majority of Cheveldayoff's attention on Day 1. The Jets didn't have a first-round pick to make. Meanwhile, Winnipeg's prospect pool has been depleted by trades, with plenty of draft capital shipped out in recent seasons, including the first-round pick it sent Montreal for Sean Monahan earlier this year. This makes the Jets' work with picks 37, 123, 155, 187 and 219 all the more important on Saturday.

One player whose future in Winnipeg looks brighter today than it did heading into draft weekend? Nikolaj Ehlers.

"Nikolaj Ehlers is a big part of our team. We're very focused on trying to put the best team on the ice that we possibly can in order to compete for a Stanley Cup," Cheveldayoff said. "He's a big part of what we have going forward."

This is similar to Cheveldayoff's messaging on Connor Hellebuyck and Mark Scheifele at last year's draft, back when one or both players were expected to be moved. In those players' cases, a summer's worth of communication, wherein Cheveldayoff opened up his playbook and shared his long-term vision, helped bring his stars on board, signing matching extensions. On Friday, Cheveldayoff seemed to show confidence in Ehlers' spot in Winnipeg's opening-night lineup, despite trade discussions in the lead-up to the draft.

Cheveldayoff has options: He can move Ehlers now, later this summer or even at the trade deadline. He has a track record of success with similar moves. And he could also surprise all of us by finding a way to keep Ehlers long-term. The runway isn't infinite — Ehlers is scheduled to become an unrestricted free agent next summer — but there is no deadline to pick a path until the 2025 trade deadline.

Other juicy items from Cheveldayoff's draft floor availability: He'd love for Laurent Brossoit to be back but believes Brossoit has played himself into an opportunity (and a raise) that the Jets can't afford. Winnipeg has been in constant communication with UFAs like Monahan and Brenden Dillon, although the Jets could be in tough to win the market prices for those players. Cheveldayoff reiterated to me that no salary cap safety valve is off the table, whether buyouts or otherwise, and stressed that the Jets are still in a competitive window. The NHL's first buyout window closes at the end of the weekend, so we should find out soon, while I also wonder if the Jets would move Alex Lafallo if they needed cap space.

For every bit of uncertainty, there is optimism as a counterweight. Cheveldayoff shared that Cole Perfetti is someone who "stands to gain a lot" from the tenure of new head coach Scott Arniel.

“We met with Cole’s group,” Cheveldayoff said. “I know (Arniel) and Cole have had many conversations. Again, Cole’s a guy that stands to gain a lot through my conversations with Arnie and just his thoughts on what his beliefs are and how things and move forward.”

As a restricted free agent, it’s likely that Perfetti’s contract — likely a two-year bridge, with a price to be determined — will get handled later this summer.

Cheveldayoff has more urgent problems to solve. McGroarty’s situation needs to be settled. If Ehlers isn’t being moved, then Cheveldayoff needs to find another route to improve the team. And the Jets’ roster needs help: It’s hard to see the players Winnipeg currently has under contract coming close to the 52 wins and 110 points the Jets earned last season.

Winnipeg’s forwards could use an upgrade. Its most productive offensive players don’t always hold their own defensively, while the most responsible defensive players don’t always contribute enough offence. Arniel may have some answers here, whether by blending the lines or working with Dean Chynoweth and Davis Payne to improve Winnipeg’s special teams.

The defence could really use Dillon, or a younger version of the same player type. Josh Morrissey is the standout, the star, and Dylan DeMelo has been a great partner for him, but a playoff-bound Jets team could use a Chris Tanev (but younger), a Mattias Ekholm (but available), or both. We looked at options for Winnipeg on defence here, while covering forward options in this piece.

In the end, the McGroarty trade didn’t materialize. The Jets did not acquire a first-round pick, despite the option being on the table.

“Oh, there’s always a chance,” Cheveldayoff had said earlier Friday. “This is Vegas, I guess. Obviously take a gamble here and there.”

He still has plenty of cards in hand and a lot of work to do with those cards. As Winnipeg gathers for its meetings at the hotel, the Jets have assets, a bit of cap space, a few roster holes and five draft picks to make on Day 2.

### [Seven NHL teams that need to make an offseason splash and moves they could consider](#)

By Harman Dayal

Where were all the big trades on Day 1 of the NHL Draft? There wasn’t a single move on Friday involving roster players. It was a letdown after some of the exciting activity that the last two weeks teased.

Despite a quiet day, some clubs have already been actively checking off important offseason needs. Many others are on the clock to make major moves and reshape their roster. Let’s dive deeper into some of the teams that still need to make a notable move or two on the trade market or July 1 free agency. It’s impossible to cover every team in this piece, so don’t take it personally if your favorite one was left out. To avoid redundant analysis, I’m also going to leave out teams that I already touched on in my biggest offseason questions article (Toronto, Utah, Ottawa, Carolina, Nashville, Buffalo).

*Winnipeg Jets*



Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff is juggling several key, delicate situations at once. He's performed well in tricky situations where his back is against the wall (e.g.: the PL Dubois saga last offseason) and will need to excel under pressure again.

Top prospect Rutger McGroarty, who reportedly doesn't see a future with the Jets, hasn't been dealt yet. Nikolaj Ehlers' future is still up in the air. The dynamic 28-year-old winger was chronically underused by Rick Bowness and is one year away from hitting free agency.

Locking Dylan DeMelo up for four years was smart business, but they need a second pair left-handed defender to replace Brenden Dillon's role at the bare minimum, and ideally, another top-four right-handed blueliner, so Neal Pionk can play further down the lineup. The Jets could also use help at second-line center to replace Sean Monahan.

That's a long wish list for a club that may only be left with approximately \$4-5 million in cap space to play with after they re-sign Cole Perfetti and Logan Stanley as RFAs. Winnipeg should explore every opportunity to offload the final year of Nate Schmidt's \$5.95 million cap hit. A trade would be preferable, but if that isn't possible then a buyout to carve out \$3.2 million of extra flexibility seems like a no-brainer.

## **Winnipeg Sun**

### ***Jets' Cheveldayoff like Maytag repairman on Day 1 of draft***

By Scott Billeck

Our draft preview on Thursday asked a question that got answered on Friday night in Vegas.

No, Kevin Cheveldayoff did not trade back into the first round.

The Winnipeg Jets general manager had a quiet night by Las Vegas standards at the 2024 NHL Draft at The Sphere, watching 32 selections pass by without wagering a bet.

In his comments earlier in the day, he foreshadowed the lack of action on the draft floor.

"It means earlier back to the hotel tonight to discuss what's left," he told reporters.

If no trades are made, the Jets will make their first selection with the 37th pick early in the second round on Saturday. They are also slated to pick 123rd overall in the fourth round, 155th in the fifth, 187th in the sixth, and 219th in the seventh.

Cheveldayoff said Friday that there was always a chance he'd find a way back in after trading his first-round selection to Montreal for Sean Monahan in February.

"This is Vegas," he said. "Take a gamble here and there."

The Jets reportedly have been shopping their 2022 14th overall pick, Rutger McGroarty, and veteran forward Nikolaj Ehlers, but neither trade materialized.

Cheveldayoff was mum on the McGroarty situation earlier in the day and compared the Ehlers speculation to assumptions made about Mark Scheifele and Connor Hellebuyck this time last year.

Both cornerstones of the franchise ended up signing identical seven-year extensions.

The high cost of acquiring a first-round pick may have kept Cheveldayoff from buying in.

"It's always high at this point in time," he said. "From a team perspective and from a scouting perspective, this is where you restock the cupboards. It's interesting to see the ebbs and flows of the value of a draft pick. At the draft here, you can't get one to save your life, but at the trade deadline, everyone just says, 'Yeah, yeah. Give them this one, give them that one.'

"This is where you sit and feel it. You have the passion to want to help your team, do something at the deadline, help them move forward. Usually, it's picks. Then you're sitting here today. It's a lonely Maytag repairman-type feeling."

The league's worst-kept secret was finally revealed when the San Jose Sharks selected Boston University star Macklin Celebrini first overall. Longtime Sharks forward and 1996 first-overall pick Joe Thornton called Celebrini to the stage.

The Chicago Blackhawks took Michigan State University defenseman Artyom Levshunov with the No. 2 pick. The Anaheim Ducks then took Oshawa Generals forward Beckett Sennecke at No. 3.

Sennecke produced the best reaction of the night, appearing genuinely stunned the Ducks drafted him. He later said he never talked to Anaheim before the draft.

Canadian music legend Celine Dion made the Canadiens' fifth overall selection, taking Russian forward Ivan Demidov.

And with the 15th pick, Detroit made winger Michael Brandsegg-Nygaard, the first Norwegian player to be taken in the first round. Blue-liner Stian Solberg, taken 23rd by Anaheim, became the second.

Norway became the 26th country to have at least one player selected in the first round of an NHL draft.

From a local perspective, no Manitobans were taken on Friday.

Brandon's Clarke Caswell (Swift Current Broncos, WHL) is the highest-ranked Manitoban amongst North American skaters at No. 77, while Warren's Dawson Cowan (Spokane Chiefs, WHL) is the No. 5-ranked North American goaltender.

Steinbach's Luke Mistelbacher (Swift Current), Boissevain's Josh Fluker (Wenatchee Wild, WHL) and Winnipeg's Gavin Hodnett (Edmonton Oil Kings, WHL) were also ranked by NHL Central Scouting.