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Jets make four selections at 2024 NHL Draft Alfons Freij (2nd round, 37th overall) was Winnipeg's first selection

By Jamie Thomas

LAS VEGAS – The Winnipeg Jets began the second day of the 2024 NHL Draft with five selections but finished Saturday with four thanks to sending their fourth and seventh round picks to the Buffalo Sabres to move up in the fourth round.

Round 2, Pick 37 - Alfons Freij D 6'1" 187 – Vaxjo Lakers (Swe-Jr)

Freij is a left shot defenceman who played the majority of last season in the J20 Nationell, tallying 33 points (14G, 19A) in 40 games with the Växjö Lakers. He had an impressive run at the U18's in Finland helping Sweden win bronze, Freij recorded six points (2G 4A) in seven games.

Mark Hillier, Winnipeg Jets Director of amateur scouting on Freij: "Really good skating defenceman, puck mover, has power play possibility, really escapes pressure well, builds his game around his puck moving."

Round 4, Pick 109 - Kevin He F 5'11" 182 Niagra IceDogs (OHL)

He has had an impressive run in Niagra the past couple of seasons with 87 points (52G 35A) in just 130 games. He is just the second player born in China to be drafted into the National Hockey League joining Andong Song, who was selected by the New York Islanders in the sixth round of the 2015 NHL Draft.

Hillier: "We traded up to get He, we're really excited about him. We didn't have a lot of picks, but we thought he was worth the gamble when you trade a pick and move up to get him. High pace, high tempo player. Really good speed and quickness. Goal scorer."

Round 5, Pick 155 - Markus Loponen C 6'1" 185 Karpät (SM-sarja)

Loponen appeared in 45 games, tallying 54 points (25G, 29A) with Kärpät U20 of the U20 SM-sarja league. He was selected the U20 SM-sarja Rookie of the Year and led the league with a plus-40 rating. Internationally, he also played for Finland at the 2024 U18 World Championship, netting an assist in five games.

Hillier: "He's a really an intriguing kid for us, our Finnish scout, Jari Kekalainen really had a lot of time for him, was really passionate about the player. I think he had 25 goals in 45 games in the under 20 league. He's a smart, responsible, two-way centre, with some goal scoring ability."

Round 6, Pick 187 - Kieron Walton C 6'6" 211 Sudbury (OHL)

Walton had 43 points (18G, 25A) in 65 games with the OHL's Sudbury Wolves last season. During the past two seasons with Sudbury, the Toronto native has 56 points (26G, 30A) in 111 games. His favourite player is Tage Thompson from the Buffalo Sabres.

Walton on his game: "200-foot player. I like to use my size and my skill to my advantage to try and find teammates at the right time and just try to make plays."

Winnipeg Free Press

Jets hope for quality over quantity at NHL Draft No first-round pick and only four overall

By: Ken Wiebe

LAS VEGAS – The Winnipeg Jets added three forwards and a talented defenceman to the prospect pool on Day 2 of the 2024 NHL Draft.

With the fifth pick in the second round, the Jets brought in Alfons Freij.

Freij is a mobile, puck-moving defenceman who is listed at 6-foot-1 and 196 pounds and is scheduled to play for IF Björklöven in the second division of the Swedish Hockey League.

“I would describe my game as a two-way defender that’s more offensive,” said Freij. “I like to have the puck, kind of good skating ability to set up my teammates in good position out there. I like to have the puck on my blade.”

Freij, who met with 24 teams at the NHL combine earlier this month, is hoping to suit up for Sweden at the 2025 World Junior Hockey Championship.

He also has some familiarity with top Jets defence prospect Elias Salomonsson, as they share the same agent.

“There’s a good package of speed and skill and hockey sense there that can make him into a good offensive player that can certainly move a puck and give a dynamic there,” said Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff. “He seems like a great kid as well. There’s some good upside there.”

Freij is excited to get to Winnipeg next week to take part in development camp and already has a good idea what he will be working on this summer.

“I would say, of course, be more able to do better things in the o-zone. But my defensive game also needs to step up,” said Freij. “Use my size a bit more. I’ve got such a good skating ability but to use my size a bit more, especially now that I’m playing with men.”

In the fourth round, the Jets traded up to select Niagara Ice Dogs left-winger Kevin He, who became the highest-chosen player born in China.

“It’s incredible. A huge honour. I had a lot of fans texting me right before the draft, wishing me good luck, showing me support,” said He, whose family moved to Montreal when he was five and to Toronto when he was 12. He had 31 goals and 53 points in 64 Ontario Hockey League games last season. “I hope to be a role model for kids that try to pick up hockey. I hope so.”

He provided a quick scouting report when asked to describe his game.

“Competitive. I’m a hungry player. I want to win. I always play with a chip on my shoulder. I’m skilled as well. I can skate well and shoot,” said He, who expanded his answer when asked a follow up question about his speed. “Yes. It’s something that I’ve always worked on growing up.

I did a lot of power skating coaches, a lot of skating. It's something I've been prioritizing and working on, ever since I was a little kid."

In the fifth round, the Jets chose Finnish forward Markus Laponen and with their final selection in the sixth round, the Jets picked 6-foot-6, 211-pound centre Kieron Walton of the Sudbury Wolves.

"Well, hopefully it's quality over quantity," said Cheveldayoff, asked to assess the picks that were made on Saturday. "We were staring at our list and when He was still sitting there, we just felt we had to be decisive there. We didn't think he was going to be around that much longer, so we just worked the phones to try and find somebody that we could partner up with to be able to make that pick. Again, it's the scouts' day."

One of the unresolved issues of the weekend is the status of top forward prospect Rutger McGroarty.

The expectation was that McGroarty was going to be moved at some point this weekend, but nothing came together on Friday despite several close calls.

Where things go from here remains a bit of mystery and Cheveldayoff wasn't providing many clues on the next move on Saturday.

"I really don't have an update," said Cheveldayoff. "Obviously, he won't be at development camp coming up here. But I don't really have an update at this moment."

It was a relatively quiet weekend for Manitoba prospects, as only one was chosen on Saturday.

In the fifth round, Swift Current Broncos forward Clarke Caswell was selected by the Seattle Kraken.

Caswell, who is from Brandon, had 26 goals, 51 assists and 77 points in 65 Western Hockey League games last season.

With the draft in the rearview mirror, free agency will take centre stage as it opens on Monday.

There was also a big trade on Saturday that involved Manitoban Conor Geekie.

The former Winnipeg Ice forward is on the move to the Tampa Bay Lightning, along with defenceman J.J. Moser and a pair of draft picks, with skilled defenceman Mikhail Sergachev on his way to the Utah Hockey Club.

Geekie, who was chosen 11th overall in the 2022 NHL Draft, is coming off an excellent season in the Western Hockey League, combining for 43 goals and 99 points in 55 games with the Swift Current Broncos and Wenatchee Wild.

While the Jets signed defenceman Dylan DeMelo to an extension earlier this week, there are still a number of important decisions on the horizon for them in regard to their pending unrestricted free agents.

"The next day and a half will be like the last two-and-a-half weeks. It's been that process of trying to understand where everything is at," said Cheveldayoff. "Certainly we're in more

constant contact with our own UFA guys, trying to see if there is a way to make some things work. This phase and time of the year is over now and we jump into the next one with both feet.”

Goalie Laurent Brossoit is one of the top goalies available on July 1, so there will be several options for him to consider, including the Toronto Maple Leafs and Detroit Red Wings.

Defenceman Brenden Dillon also figures to be a guy who generates plenty of interest, with the New Jersey Devils being one of the teams to watch out for.

Should the Jets not find a way to keep centre Sean Monahan, his suitors could include the Boston Bruins, Columbus Blue Jackets and Ottawa Senators.

Winnipeg Sun

Jets' Cheveldayoff aimed for quality over quantity at NHL draft

By Scott Billeck

Kevin Cheveldayoff is hoping quality trumps quantity after making just four selections at the 2024 NHL Draft in Vegas this weekend.

After a slow Friday night at the Sphere, and without a first-round pick after shelling it out for Sean Monahan in February, Cheveldayoff took Swedish defenceman Alfons Freij with his first pick, 37th overall, in the second round.

“We had lots of different conversations, but we didn’t (end up trading for a first-round) pick,” Cheveldayoff said. “Close only counts in horseshoes.”

The Jets did trade up in the fourth round to take China-born winger Kevin He. Finland’s Markus Laponen and Canadian Keiron Walton were taken in the fifth and sixth rounds, respectively.

“We were staring at our list and when He was still sitting there, we just felt we had to be decisive there,” Cheveldayoff said.

The Jets sent their fourth-round (123rd) and seventh-round (219th) picks to Buffalo in the deal.

“We didn’t think he was going to be around that much longer, so we just worked the phones to try and find somebody that we could partner up with to make that pick,” the GM said.

Freij comes in at 6-foot-1, 197 pounds and is a left-shot blue-liner who can play the right side.

“It was kind of blackout,” Freij said. “It was so cool. It was a dream come true for sure.”

“I’m very honoured it’s Winnipeg. I had a good meeting with them at the combine. That was pretty good. I know they have good prospects. They are a good team, as well.”

Described as a smooth skater with an elite ability to move laterally by scouts, some had him listed as a late first-round pick. NHL Central Scouting ranked him 13th among European skaters.

The 18-year-old scored 14 goals and 33 points in 40 games this year with Vaxjo in the Swedish junior league.

“There’s a good package of speed and skill and hockey sense there that can make him into a good offensive player that can certainly move a puck and give a dynamic there,” Cheveldayoff said. “He seems like a great kid as well. There’s some good upside there.”

With Sweden at the U18 world championships, Freij scored two goals and six points in seven games to help his country win gold.

He’s slated to play in Sweden’s second flight next season after being loaned to Bjorkloven.

“The thing about that is to get the minutes, power play, 5-on-5,” Freij said. “That is a pretty smart move for me.”

Improving his overall game is a goal as well as cracking Sweden’s world junior roster this winter.

“I would say be more able to do better things in the o-zone,” he said. “But my defensive game also needs to step up. Use my size a bit more. I’ve got such a good skating ability but to use my size a bit more, especially now that I’m playing with men.”

Freij’s dad played hockey in Sweden’s lower divisions, sparking his own interest in the game.

“From morning to the night, I was at the rink with him and spent time there,” he said. “He has been my coach as well. That’s pretty cool.”

Freij shares the same agent—Peter Wallen—as fellow blue-line prospect Elias Salomonsson.

He, meanwhile, became the highest China-born draft pick in NHL history.

Previously, Andong Song held the title after being the first China-born player ever drafted when the New York Islanders took him 172nd overall in 2015.

“Speechless,” He said. “It’s a huge honour, especially to be drafted by an organization like Winnipeg. It’s a huge honour. I’m still a little shocked, a little speechless right now. Still trying to soak it in.”

Born in Beijing before moving to Montreal when he was five, the 5-foot-11, 182-pound winger scored 31 goals and 53 points in 64 games with the Niagra IceDogs of the Ontario Hockey League this past season.

He’s also friends with fellow OHLer and Jets prospect, Colby Barlow.

He is fluent in Chinese, English, and French and hopes to help develop the sport in China, where his grandparents reside. Most of his family lives in the U.S., and many were in attendance on Saturday.

“I have my family,” he said. “My billet family made the trip down. All of my aunts and cousins are here and all the staff from Niagara. The owner, the GM, all of them are here. My agent.”

He’s love for hockey began with his dad, who studied abroad at the University of Moncton.

“I fell in love with it,” he said. “I started skating with my dad when I was really young. I did a lot of rollerblading. In China, they don’t have a lot of arenas but they have these ice pads in the malls. I started playing in a league, competitive hockey, when I moved to Montreal.”

The Jets dipped back into Finnish waters with the 155th pick, taking the 6-foot-1, 185-pound Loponen.

The 18-year-old scored 25 goals and added 29 assists in 45 games last year with Karpat U20, serving as the team’s captain. He’s expected to step up and play for Karpat in Liiga, Finland’s top tier, next season.

With their final pick, the Jets went bigger, taking the 6-foot-5, 211-pound Walton at 187th.

Walton plays for the Sudbury Wolves in the OHL and scored 18 goals and 43 points in 65 games last season.

The Jets will hold their annual rookie development camp from July 3-7.

Cheveldayoff said that 2022 first-rounder Rutger McGroarty, who wasn’t traded this weekend despite much speculation, will not attend next week’s camp.

The Athletic

Winnipeg Jets depth chart 1.0: What changes will free agency bring?

By Murat Ates

LAS VEGAS — Rutger McGroarty’s lack of Jets future is Winnipeg’s biggest storyline right now. Just don’t lose sight of Kevin Cheveldayoff’s to-do list as we approach July 1.

It’s not that the Jets are associated with the market’s biggest names. They’ve got their offers in with Sean Monahan and Brenden Dillon’s camps, but those players are expected to explore the market. They know they need a backup goaltender, with Laurent Brossoit earning more money and more opportunity elsewhere.

But the Jets still need help — one top-four defenceman at minimum, while help at centre would spare them a season spent second-guessing Gabriel Vilardi, or Vladislav Namestnikov, or youngsters Cole Perfetti and Brad Lambert in that role.

They have approximately \$7.7 million in cap space to add that help, while also signing a backup goaltender and Perfetti to a bridge deal. This figure assumes minimal raises for restricted free agents like Logan Stanley and David Gustafsson but the point is clear: Without cap relief in the form of a buyout or trade, there’s only room for one substantial piece — and therein lies Cheveldayoff’s work. There are salary cap safety valves available, however. Trading Alex Iafallo would save Winnipeg \$4 million while buying out Nate Schmidt would save \$3.2 million this season before costing \$1.6 million next year.

But cap space is only as valuable as what a team is able to do with it.

With the UFA market a seldom successful source of Jets solutions, Cheveldayoff will have to acquire his upgrades via trade, surprise us with a signing or find as much value as possible in less-heralded free agents. This might make McGroarty's exit wish convenient as opposed to catastrophic, although it feels like Winnipeg is at the mercy of players' increasing leverage on their right to play where they choose.

I emphasize "feels" for two reasons — first, because the last major case of this involved PL Dubois going for Vilardi, Iafallo, Rasmus Kupari and the pick that became fast, offensive defenceman Alfons Freij in Vegas on Saturday. And second, because Dillon, Monahan and Brossoit really did like it in Winnipeg. They may find more money or fits they like better, but they're not leveraging their situations to force their way out of town like Dubois did.

What now, then? What will actually happen in this ever-shifting Jets offseason?

For starters, Cheveldayoff confirmed that McGroarty won't attend development camp next week. That's completely reasonable — whether a move comes sooner or is delayed all of the way to the trade deadline, the relationship is coming to an end. Multiple teams were in on McGroarty negotiations with Winnipeg on Friday, including Minnesota and Montreal, so we'll need to keep a continued eye on trade talks. Cheveldayoff also spoke more optimistically about retaining Nikolaj Ehlers than expected, mirroring his words about Connor Hellebuyck and Mark Scheifele at last year's draft.

"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."

Cheveldayoff's offseason is only just beginning. Here are the key storylines, the Jets' updated depth chart and a look ahead to free agency.

Forward depth chart possibilities

Scott Arniel doesn't have to run these lines just because Rick Bowness did. He might even get to camp and find that Lambert has forced his way onto the roster, earning a roster spot at a veteran player's expense.

Overall, though? These forwards were pretty good during the regular season.

Adam Lowry's line went up against top competition all season and outscored it. Namestnikov, Perfetti and Ehlers were Winnipeg's secondary scoring line for roughly one-third of the season and they won their minutes, too. The Jets could return this exact same group of forwards with confidence if Scheifele's line with Vilardi and Kyle Connor could do the same, although their 200-minute track record last season gave up too many shots, changes and goals against.

For now, there are some clear takeaways. Iafallo's track record suggests he has more to give than we saw last season — let's give some grace to a player who lost a dear friend shortly after moving to a new city — but \$4 million is inefficient money to spend on the fourth line. If Winnipeg moves on from him, it's easy to imagine Namestnikov moving up and down the lineup as needed while Lambert earns an NHL job.

It's also clear that, barring the return of Monahan (or somebody like him), the season could be spent auditioning Vilardi, Perfetti or Lambert for second-line centre duties. Namestnikov's trio did win its minutes last season but he's a 31-year-old pending UFA who doesn't win many

faceoffs — capable as a workaround, but not ideal to depend on in the role. It would be fascinating if Winnipeg focuses on developing youth on its second line.

“There’s going to be some opportunities for some different players to come into the lineup,” Cheveldayoff said.

I think the Jets will try to augment their top-six forward group. They were happy with Monahan and would like to have him back. If that ship sails, then they could be left competing for name-brand centres like Elias Lindholm or Chandler Stephenson. Looking at their ages and their projected cap hits, though? Jets fans might prefer a year spent on forward development, without major additions, at least until the trade deadline.

That’s beginning to sound like the most likely path.

Defence depth chart possibilities

This is where it gets troubling.

Winnipeg has one star defenceman in Josh Morrissey and a top-four capable partner to play him with in Dylan DeMelo. They’ve fit well together for years now, with Morrissey crediting DeMelo, in part, for his own steps forward in performance.

Beyond that, every possibility for a top-four defenceman comes with a question mark.

Dylan Samberg has done really well with third-pairing for three straight seasons. He plays an old-school, stay-at-home game in his own zone without getting lost in coverage. He blocks shots and wins physical battles. His transition game is hit-or-miss, though, with some puck gaffes marring otherwise strong play. A top-four job might be within his reach and it would be a nice story if he found success with fellow Hermantown, Minn., product Neal Pionk. But Pionk has been chaotic defensively, while the next top-four job Samberg has in the NHL will be his first.

Further down the lineup, Winnipeg has Schmidt as a third-pairing capable veteran, Stanley as a third-pairing possibility and prospects Elias Salomonsson and Ville Heinola. I believe all four of these players could help in a third-pairing role — good news, but not so good it makes up for what looks like an outmatched second pair. I also believe that Schmidt would be celebrated if he made half his salary — he’s a great mentor and delivers positive value from the third pair — but his \$5.95 million salary makes him a buyout possibility this weekend.

Salomonsson is Winnipeg’s most exciting prospect — a right-handed defenceman who plays a physical brand of hockey and who has excelled on great teams in the SHL. Heinola was set to make the Jets out of camp last season — and needs to stay healthy and do it again, now that he’d need waivers to be sent down. Salomonsson wouldn’t require waivers so perhaps he gets AHL time to acclimate to North America.

We’re getting into the weeds, though. This is not a “win now” defence unless Samberg takes a reasonable step forward, Pionk reclaims the top-four form we saw back in 2021 and one of Stanley, Schmidt, Heinola or Salomonsson takes a positive leap. Winnipeg needs someone to replace Dillon at a minimum — and then another, right-handed version of the same player, if we’re living in fantasy land.

The cap won’t allow that and the market might not, either.

Matt Roy would be the dream UFA, while Brett Pesce is another player whose style meets the Jets' needs. Otherwise, Winnipeg's options are on the trade market or on players who make it past July 1 free agency. Pionk had success with Cup winner Dmitry Kulikov early in his Jets career. I think the Jets need a bigger upgrade than that.

Goaltending depth chart possibilities

Winnipeg is set in goal but needs a backup to replace Brossoit. The relationships involved are strong, but it's hard to see the Jets being able to offer the playing time and contract that Brossoit has earned.

What are the Jets looking for?

"We have the best goaltender in the NHL as our goaltender, so he's going to play a lot," Cheveldayoff said at the draft. "He thrives on playing a lot. 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."

I like a goaltending list that includes a pair of Manitobans. James Reimer and Chris Driedger wouldn't be the answer to Winnipeg's twisting and turning offseason path but I suspect they'd have a lot of fans in the building on any given night.

What happens between now and July 1?

"The next day and a half will be like the last two and a half weeks," Cheveldayoff said. "It's been that process of trying to understand where everything is at. Certainly we're in more constant contact with our own UFA guys, trying to see if there is a way to make some things work. This phase and time of the year is over now and we jump into the next one with both feet."

[2024 NHL Draft grades for every team: Best fits, analysis and what to know](#)

By Corey Pronman

With the 2024 NHL Draft in the books, we conclude our coverage of this draft by way of draft grades. These grades are based on how I think the clubs did, based on my knowledge of the players selected.

The only way I can fairly and reasonably go about this exercise is to assign grades based on which team added the most by way of draft picks to the organization. I don't account for players acquired by trade, how well a player fits into the organization, or whether I think a team reached or got potential value on a pick. This is a ranking showing who got the most talent in the draft, divided by tiers represented by a letter grade. Teams are listed by their grade, but teams with the same grade are listed alphabetically. I realize this basically becomes highly correlated to draft slot and amount of picks. Your method may vary, and I realize there are other ways to analyze a draft performance. This is how I do it.

This file has a brief synopsis of the draft classes, but there are individual team files for all 32 clubs linked in this article for a more detailed breakdown of each draft haul.

Winnipeg Jets: C-

Winnipeg's draft class didn't overly excite me. I know some people like Alfons Freij a lot and he's certainly talented, but I had concerns about his hockey sense and I don't think he's a sure thing to be an NHL defenseman, even if he has some clear NHL traits. The Jets' later picks have some varying chances to play games, but I could see this class not produce one full-time regular too.

[Winners and losers of the 2024 NHL Draft: Minnesota impresses while Philadelphia falls short](#)

By Scott Wheeler

Welcome to my complete review of the 2024 NHL Draft classes of all 32 teams, including thoughts on almost all of the 225 prospects selected.

This annual year-end analysis follows a season of travel and countless viewings and conversations with coaches, managers, scouts, agents and players. It's meant to be your one-stop shop analysis of your team's picks.

This work is my view of how each team's scouting department fared compared to the selections they had, carefully considering my own evaluations of the prospects but also each player's consensus expected draft range and statistical profile.

This is not an evaluation of the total value that each club got out of its picks, but rather an examination relative to where they picked and the number of selections they had. Teams with more picks (or higher picks on average) are not guaranteed high grades, just as teams with fewer picks (or lower picks on average) are not guaranteed poor ones. Trades also are not considered, with the focus exclusively on the picks themselves.

The goal is for this to be the most thorough draft review available anywhere.

As always, the ranking of all 32 draft classes is sorted into the following tiers for an added layer of context:

- **Winners:** Teams I believe won out over their competition with consistent, sleuth, home-run-level selections relative to where they picked.
- **Overtime winners:** Teams I believe did well with where they were slotted, even if they might not have picked the exact player(s) I would have.
- **Overtime losers:** Teams I believe could have done better but might, in time, be happy with their pick(s) regardless.
- **Losers:** Teams I believe will regret taking the player(s) they chose.

For more information on these players, here's my full 2024 NHL Draft package, which featured 143 scouting reports this year:

Overtime winners

Winnipeg Jets

The Jets didn't make a pick on Day 1 but took a bit of a swing to start Day 2, drafting offensive defenseman Alfons Freij, a player who basically ranked on my board where they took him. Freij is a very active and involved player who creates a lot with his mobility and has power-play tools.

Though their next pick wasn't until a couple of rounds later, I liked the decision to swap picks and grab Kevin He in the fourth round. He wasn't on my list but I spent a lot of time on him late in the year, and he's a great athlete and skater with some skill who I think has a chance to play.

Kieron Walton is an interesting gamble in the sixth round. Walton is a massive forward with impressive handling and feel on the puck for a player his size. And while he's not a natural mover, his skating has come along enough to warrant being picked.

I don't see anything in Finnish forward Markus Lojonen, but I liked 3/4 of their picks.

CBC Manitoba

[Winnipeg Jets pick highest Chinese-born player ever selected in NHL draft](#) [Team trades up to pick 18-year-old Kevin He in 4th round of 2024 draft](#)

By Arturo Chang · CBC News

The Winnipeg Jets had a hand in making hockey history this weekend by welcoming the highest player born in China ever to be drafted to the NHL.

Eighteen-year-old Kevin He was the overall 109th pick in the fourth round of the 2024 NHL draft in Las Vegas on Saturday.

The Beijing-born player from Ontario becomes the second-ever player born in China to be drafted to the league. That's following Andong Song, who was drafted by the New York Islanders on the 172nd overall pick of the 2015 draft.

"Super excited to be a Jet. Super honoured," He said in a video posted on Jets' social media channels. "Can't wait to see you guys at camp."

The forward has played his last two seasons for the Niagara IceDogs in the Ontario Hockey League. He finished last season with 53 points in 64 games.

The Jets traded their fourth- and seventh-round picks to the Buffalo Sabres to move up in the fourth round and draft He.

A young man wearing a hockey jersey

He was the overall 109th pick in the fourth round of the 2024 NHL draft in Las Vegas.

(Submitted by Niagara IceDogs)

Allan Chan, founder of the all-Asian hockey team Winnipeg Emperors, says many people have told him how excited they are by the news of He's selection.

"The NHL has been, and hockey in general, has been pushing the message of hockey is for everyone and for diversity and inclusion," said Chan, a Chinese Canadian whose son is, like himself, a hockey player.

The draft pick "just shows how well the game is doing it and attracting new players from all backgrounds to participate in the game," he added.

"It'll be great for my son Brayden this year, because now he'll get to cheer on a new player that ... looks like him and speaks Chinese and is from the same background as his family."

'Good kid'

Former Western Hockey League and University of Manitoba Bisons player Larry Woo said he was also following the NHL draft closely because his son, Jonas, is in the same age range as He.

Jonas plays in the WHL and would be eligible for next year's draft. His older brother, Jett, was selected 37th by the Vancouver Canucks in the 2018 draft, and currently plays for their American Hockey League affiliate.

"As a Chinese father, even growing up playing, I never really saw myself as a Chinese person playing hockey. I was just a person playing hockey," Woo said.

"But I do understand that ... for kids to see what's possible out there, sometimes it is really encouraging and it's pretty cool ... to see somebody that's like them and having success."

Woo said He's selection is great thing for the 18-year-old, his family and the game of hockey. He added that, whatever his background, He wouldn't have gotten to where he is if he didn't have a great work ethic and wasn't a "good kid."

"He's played on some tough teams in the Ontario Hockey League, which makes me think that, again, his character, the way he works, the way he competes is probably off the charts," Woo said. "The more I read about Kevin ... the more I just think that he's got so many good traits."

The Winnipeg Jets didn't have a first-round pick this year. In the second, they drafted Alfons Freij in the 37th overall pick.

The Swedish defenceman racked up 14 goals and 33 points in 40 games in the last season of that country's top junior league. He also helped the national team take the bronze in the last IIHF U18 World Championship, in which he recorded six points in seven games.

Centres Markus Lojonen, from Finland, and Kieron Walton from Toronto were picked 155th and 187th in the fifth and sixth rounds, respectively.

Sportsnet.ca

Jets 2024 Free Agency Preview: Eyeing potential solutions at centre and in goal

By Ryan Dixon

A few major question marks float over the Winnipeg Jets when it comes to how the team will approach free agency.

Winnipeg entered the off-season with not one, but two significant pieces that could be pushed into the trade market. The one we saw coming was Nikolaj Ehlers, who has one year left on his contract before he can hit the open market in 2025. The second threw many people for a loop, as 2022 first-rounder Rutger McGroarty suddenly seems like he's headed for a split with the organization.

General manager Kevin Cheveldayoff is being predictably tight-lipped about both situations, but McGroarty was certainly involved in trade talk at the draft, with Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman

noting on the 32 Thoughts Podcast that he believed there were substantial conversations with the Montreal Canadiens.

“The Rutger situation here right now, I think for me, I think there’s a time and a place when I’ll comment on something,” Cheveldayoff said in Vegas. “Rutger is a prospect within our organization and that’s where it’s at right now.”

If the Jets wind up making a move involving McGroarty or Ehlers around July 1, the return could wind up filling an area of need. In fact, if a big name is to make his way to Manitoba in the next few days, it’s more likely to be via swap than monster signing.

The other big variable that will dictate what the next few days look like for Winnipeg is what happens with pending UFAs who wore the Jets uniform this past season. The club has three guys at three different positions — centre Sean Monahan, defenceman Brenden Dillon and backup goalie Laurent Brossoit — who, to varying degrees, played important roles in Winnipeg last year and can leave for nothing on July 1. In all three cases it seems like there could be a path to remaining with the Jets, but we’re at the 11th hour now and pen has yet to be put to paper.

If Monahan bolts, Winnipeg has a sizable hole at 2C. The 29-year-old was a dream fit with the team after being acquired from the Canadiens at the all-star break and seems like, by some distance, the squad’s best realistic option to play behind top pivot Mark Scheifele.

Brossoit was a marvellous backup to Vezina-winning Connor Hellebuyck and has played his best NHL hockey during his two stops in Winnipeg. At 31 years old, he could be looking for a nice pay day from a club that views him almost as a 1B who can play 35 games.

Dillon brings size and some snarl to the blueline. However, the club was able to strike a new deal with right-shooting defenceman Dylan DeMelo before he hit free agency and you wonder if the squad might be better served sniffing round for another righty who can play lower down in the lineup.

It could be fascinating couple days in Winnipeg.

Salary Cap Space: \$8,752,976

Roster Size: 18/23

Salary Committed to Forwards: \$43,622,024 (49.6 per cent of cap)

Salary Committed to Defence: \$24,375,000 (27.7 per cent)

Salary Committed to Goalies: \$8,500,000 (9.7 per cent)

Potential UFA Targets

Eric Comrie, G

Comrie’s best year in the NHL was 2021-22 with Winnipeg, when he formed a strong battery with Hellebuyck and posted a .920 save percentage in 19 contests. He used that showing to ink a free-agent deal with Buffalo to compete for a starting position and things just never worked out for him in Western New York.

Would the Edmonton native return to the site of his best NHL play in the hopes of rebuilding his game once again? It obviously helps that both sides have familiarity with each other and Comrie, who turns 29 this week, would come in understanding his job is to take 25 starts of Hellebuyck’s load.

Chandler Stephenson, C

Stephenson is a Prairie boy, hailing from Saskatoon. He's a late-bloomer who found his NHL game after Vegas paid just a fifth-round pick to get him from the Washington Capitals five years ago.

Stephenson, who turned 30 in April, had 64 points three years ago, a career-best 65 the following year (when he also got a couple Selke votes) and fell back to 51 this past season. He's not going to break any scoring records, but he's a dependable forward who can line up at centre or wing. He also comes with the added bonus of playing in two Cup finals — against Vegas in 2018 with the Caps and winning the 2023 title with the Knights — and boasts 95 games' worth of post-season experience.

If Monahan leaves, perhaps Stephenson is the first call.

Alexandre Carrier, RHD

Carrier was rumoured to be in play ahead of the trade deadline, but the surging Nashville Predators kept him in-house for their own playoff push. The 27-year-old broke through two seasons ago, making the 2021-22 NHL All-Rookie Team.

Carrier isn't going to wow you, but he's a steadying presence who could slot in on the right side of your third pair. He's not afraid to get his nose dirty despite being five-foot-11 and 174 pounds. Carrier was also Nashville's blocked shots/60 leader with 5.98.

Matt Dumba, RHD

Dumba's star has faded in the past few years and you would not be inking this player to skate on your top 4. Dumba's trajectory is that of a player who is never going to match the early heights of his career — he was a 50-point guy with the Minnesota Wild in 2017-18 — but is beginning to settle into a new version of himself. And that current form still has some value.

Dumba, who turns 30 in July, plays with edge and has a lot of experience at this point. He comes in the coveted right-shot package and the Saskatchewan native could log decent minutes playing on Winnipeg's third pair.

Kaapo Kahkonen, G

The Jets know Kahkonen pretty well as he's spent the vast majority of his career in the Western Conference with Minnesota and San Jose. The Finn, who turns 28 this summer, has been on some pretty awful Sharks teams the past couple seasons, but looked good in an extremely limited run with the Devils post-trade deadline, registering a .923 save percentage in a half-dozen showings.

Could he be the kind of goalie who really eases the burden on Hellebuyck as the latter runs through his early 30s?

The Hockey News

Exploring Free Agent Options for the Jets' Backup Role **Free Agency kicks off on Monday with the Jets possibly looking for a new backup netminder**

BY JAKE TYE

The Winnipeg Jets have an estimated \$8.75 million in cap space heading into free agency, where they look to hopefully shore up holes on the roster.

One Jet that the team would like to bring back is backup netminder Laurent Brossoit, who is coming off a career-best season with a 15-5-2 record, 2.00 goals against average and a .927 save percentage.

The direction of the organization, according to Manitoba Moose goalie development coach Drew MacIntyre, is to fulfill the role with a free agent, whether it is Brossoit or not.

Winnipeg has enough cap space and interest to bring back the 31-year-old Port Alberni native, but if he decides to leave, there are several netminders around his price point and range that could possibly fit the position.

Anthony Stolarz

The Florida netminder will be a popular name this off-season as one of the best available backups. He had nearly-identical numbers as Brossoit with a 16-7-2 record, a 2.03 goals against average and a .925 save percentage this past season. He is coming off a very affordable contract at \$1.1 million cap hit and should see a pay raise.

The 31-year-old played a pivotal role in the Panthers' Stanley Cup, as he played enough games to give regular starter Sergei Bobrovsky enough rest to continue playing at a high level.

The Jets gave a very similar role to Brossoit with Vezina trophy winner Connor Hellebuyck last season and could make Stolarz a seamless replacement.

Many contending teams will look at the Panthers' success with a reliable backup and create a bidding war for Stolarz. This would be a very favourable signing for Winnipeg but it could be a challenge to prevent an overpay.

Scott Wedgewood

Dallas was the favourite to win the Western Conference for most of the season and made it all the way to the Conference Finals before being downed by the Edmonton Oilers. Much like the Panthers, the Stars had a backup netminder that provided much needed relief for the team's regular starter.

Wedgewood played a great sidekick to superstar Jake Oettinger and should receive a pay raise after finishing with a 16-7-0 record, a 2.85 goals against average and a .899 save percentage.

He is a slightly older 31-year-old but has been playing his best hockey over the past two seasons with a 25-15-8 record, a 2.80 goals against average and a .908 save percentage.

He can join a Jets organization that has excelled at the goalie position, which has seen them place in the top-10 in goals against average over the last decade with a 2.79 average. They can help Wedgewood continue his success and become a cheap and reliable backup option.

Kevin Lankinen

The Finnish netminder is coming off two solid seasons as the backup behind Nashville's Juuse Saros. If you remove his 32 starts from his poor second season with the Blackhawks, Lankinen has a 37-28-6 record in the NHL and would work as a solid replacement for Brossoit.

He is a younger 29-years-old and since joining Nashville, he reps a 20-14-1 record with a 2.79 goals against average and a .912 save percentage.

He should be a great cheap option due to his lack of games played at the NHL level, plus could also not be interested in playing in a bigger market after playing in Nashville.

Devin Cooley

The Los Gatos product played for the San Jose Sharks junior program growing up, before eventually playing for the pro team for just six games last season. His future with the club is uncertain and makes him a decent case for a late-career breakout if the Jets play their cards right.

The Jets development system at the goalie position can turn Cooley into a decent backup as he has the foundation of decent numbers in the minors.

He started off his career with stellar numbers at the University of Denver, where he recorded a 15-9-4 record, a 1.93 goals against average and a .927 save percentage. He continued to win games with a 32-24-6 record and a 3.16 goals against average in 66 AHL games.

Winnipeg could add Cooley as a very cheap option alongside some of the other names listed, as he should still have a decent amount of potential upside.