

Cheveldayoff reflects on 'evolved' Jets development camp
"You want to see how players grow year over year."

By Mitchell Clinton

WINNIPEG – Another development camp came to a close on Sunday at hockey for all centre, and Winnipeg Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff was a big fan of what he saw from the team's prospects throughout the week.

"These camps are great," said Cheveldayoff, who joked that these camps didn't exist back in his playing days.

"It just shows how much the game has evolved. These players are craving knowledge, they're craving working with coaches, they want to talk to people and they want to learn and grow. That's what the development camp, that's the angle or slant for us, isn't so much about player evaluation as it is player orientation and player education."

It's a week that accomplishes a lot, no matter where one sits in the organization. For young prospects like Alfons Freij and the 2024 NHL Draft Class, it's an opportunity to learn what the organization is about and see what the city has to offer.

Head coach Scott Arniel and the rest of the coaching staff from the Jets and the Manitoba Moose get to expose the players to the fundamentals that separate players at the highest level – like puck retrievals and board play.

And even for players like Brad Lambert, who have been with the organization since being drafted in 2022, there is opportunity.

"Part of the process you want to see how players do grow year over year, not just physically but emotionally and mentally," said Cheveldayoff.

"It says a lot about a player like Brad Lambert who doesn't have to come here, but wants to come here and be part of it and take on that leadership role."

As the players in the organization evolve, so too does what the team offers at development camp. This year, there were off-ice activities including a pickleball tournament – won by 2023 fifth round pick Jacob Julien and camp invitee Graham Sward – a trip to watch the Winnipeg Blue Bombers earn a victory over the Ottawa REDBLACKS, and several off-ice sessions surrounding nutrition and mental health.

"Mental health is something that when we first started doing these, we didn't really touch on that," said Cheveldayoff. "Now it's such a big component of this week is having people come in and talking about social media, handling the pressure of being a young prospect and all that goes into it."

So as this year's version of development camp comes to a close, the players will leave hockey for all centre and go their separate ways, trying to put themselves in the best position they can for when training camps open in the fall.

If there is one regret of the week for Cheveldayoff, it's that one opportunity to take advantage of the Winnipeg weather just couldn't happen this year.

"Not a lot of players get to see how wonderful the summers are here," said Cheveldayoff. "The only unfortunate part is we didn't get them out on the lakes to get some fish. It's important for everyone to see the passion of this community, see all the people in the stands in the summer at a development camp. It shows these players that hockey matters here."

ICE CHIPS

When Free Agency opened on July 1, Cheveldayoff made mention of the fact that not all business that gets done occurs on the first day.

The last six days have shown that, as the Jets have managed to make a few transactions, highlighted by the signings of restricted free agents David Gustafsson (two years, \$835,000 average annual value) and Logan Stanley (two years, \$1.25 million AAV) on Saturday.

Winnipeg also acquired defenceman Dylan Coghlan from Carolina on Saturday (in exchange for future considerations), and – on top of all that – added three more pieces in defenceman Haydn Fleury, forward Mason Shaw (on one year, two-way deals) and forward Jaret-Anderson Dolan (two year contract).

"Haydn Fleury has been someone that you've scouted and seen for a long period of time, has experience in the league, had ups and downs, and it's a good opportunity for him and Dylan Coghlan to come in and compete and give the organization some depth and options," said Cheveldayoff.

"Anderson-Dolan is a player that's right there. We watched him in the LA organization, he got claimed on waivers, didn't quite play as much he'd wanted. He plays hard, he plays with energy. Mason Shaw plays hard and plays with energy. There will be a lot of competition at those levels."

There is still more to do, of course, with Cheveldayoff mentioning the need to get pen-to-paper with Ville Heinola and Cole Perfetti as just two of the things on the list.

According to Puck Pedia, the Jets have just over \$5.8 million in cap space available.

"You don't use cap space for the sake of saying 'I'm going to use cap space.' There are lots of different avenues and things that could unfold," said Cheveldayoff. "You talk about some of the opportunities that players in this camp might have, or a player like (Nikita) Chibrikov. Those are the things you don't know until you know, and that you know comes in September."

[Zhilkin looking to build on first pro season](#) [20-year-old "basically 100 percent" after shoulder surgery](#)

By Mitchell Clinton

WINNIPEG – Danny Zhilkin is wearing a non-contact jersey in Winnipeg Jets development camp this week, but he wasn't just standing off to the side during a 60-minute skate full of battle drills on Saturday.

He was right in the middle of it.

"I feel basically 100 percent. The non-contact is more precautionary," said Zhilkin. "It's summer so there is no need to rush anything. I feel good on the ice, there are no restrictions, there are no limitations. I feel great."

His first pro season with the Manitoba Moose ended after 44 games due to a shoulder injury, with his last game coming on February 19, 2024. Surgery was required to fix up his shoulder, but while he wasn't on the ice for the team's second half surge to the Calder Cup Playoffs, he still learned a lot about the pro game.

"Just everyday habits," he said. "You're coming from junior where you're not really focusing on habits. You're having fun with your buddies and going out and playing. It's not really a job yet. Here, it's pro hockey and you're battling for spots. You're trying to make a career for yourself."

The 20-year-old scored twice and finished with seven points in his first American Hockey League season, but next year the forward would love to see those numbers creep upward. He's lit the lamp 23 times in 2021-22 with Guelph in the Ontario Hockey League, and followed that up with 29 goals combined with Guelph and Kitchener the following campaign.

He's confident in his ability to contribute offensively at the next level as well.

"I'm trying to work on my shot, my skills down low," said Zhilkin. "I think I'm a pretty fast forward but I could use a little more agility down low and drive the net a little more. I think that would help my offensive game."

Being healthy will go a long way toward Zhilkin improving in those areas. In fact, his previously injured side might be an asset by the time the puck drops next season.

"I think in some areas my injured side is actually stronger than my other side," he said with a grin. "I've learned to just keep pushing. I've focused on a lot of areas on my body - not just my upper-body that I injured - and I feel stronger, faster, and more powerful than last year."

Add in the fact he'll have all those first-time experiences of being a pro out of the way, and Zhilkin is excited to get back to Winnipeg when camp opens in September.

"It's starting to really feel like home now," Zhilkin said of Winnipeg. "I've had a full season under my belt. You almost feel old seeing these young guys from the OHL and college come in. It's good to be a leader, I love being a leader, and it's good to see all the guys here."

Julien more confident following impressive season

Julien: "A lot of familiar faces, excited to have a good time here and learn lots."

WINNIPEG - Jacob Julien arrived in Winnipeg this week for Jets development camp still feeling the effects of losing in the Memorial Cup Final at the end of May. Julien and the London Knights fell to the host Saginaw Spirit 4-3 with the host team scoring the winning goal with just 22 seconds left in the third period.

"We had a good team, unfortunate with the outcome but it's definitely a learning experience," said Julien.

“You are not put in that situation too many times, a lot of pressure on you. You just have to battle with it and do your best.”

The 19-year-old put up 18 points (9G 9A) in 18 OHL playoff games and added three more points (3A) in four games at the Memorial Cup.

“I think I did good. First time experience. Kind of leaning on the older guys a little bit,” said Julien.

“(Goaltender) Mike Simpson was there. Year before they beat us out (when Simpson was with Peterborough who went on to go to 2023 Memorial Cup tournament), just kind of leaned on him, asked a lot of questions to just kind of see how things are going.”

The London, Ontario native was drafted by the Jets in the fifth round of the 2023 NHL Draft. Julien made a significant jump in his first full year in the Ontario Hockey League with 78 points in 67 games. Jets development coaches Jimmy Roy and Mike Keane spent a lot of time this season helping Julien improve his game in person and over the phone.

“Obviously they are great development guys, they helped me a lot whether it’s just simple things like winning 50/50 puck battles or getting your feet moving a little bit more,” said Julien.

“They really helped me especially with my self-evaluation. They guided me through that.”

Roy told a story recently that during the second round of the 2024 OHL playoffs, Julien scored seven goals in three games including back-to-back hat tricks against Kitchener. During the evaluation after the second hat trick, Roy said that Julien didn’t even mention the goal scoring tear that he was on.

“Throughout the season I didn’t really touch on points because that’s not exactly my main focus, right? You want to win the game, that’s the end goal, right?” said Julien.

“Kind of have to play good and then whatever you do wrong you have to realize what you did and fix that for the next game.”

As Julien continues to work on his game, face-offs will be a primary focus during the off-season. Knights coach Dale Hunter relied on him a lot last season to win important draws.

“Obviously there are many components to it, you have to break it down to make it as simple as possible,” said Julien.

“You just have to go in as hard as possible and get that puck back.”

With this being his second development camp, Julien said he has more confidence this time around. He added he kept in touch with fellow prospect Connor Levis throughout this past season, a friendship that began last summer.

“We talked all the time throughout the season, just to see how each other were doing,” said Julien.

“Kind of just started talking last season and hanging out a little bit more and ended up becoming friends.”

Levis played his final season in the WHL last season with the Kamloops Blazers before being traded to the Vancouver Giants.

"We just like to spend a lot of time hanging out. We've become really close friends. We've been pretty much hanging out the whole time here," said Levis.

"It's always nice to be pretty close with some guys. We kept in contact all year; it was really exciting to see him have so much success on that London team. Jules is a great guy."

NHL.com

Schmidt 'chasing a ring' by signing with Panthers, reuniting with Maurice Defenseman, who played under coach with Jets, aiming to land roster spot with Cup champs

By Jessi Pierce

EDINA, Minn. -- It was only four months of an NHL career that will enter a 12th season, but it was enough time for Nate Schmidt to realize how much he enjoyed playing under coach Paul Maurice.

And that experience, with the Winnipeg Jets in 2021-22, was a big reason why the 32-year-old defenseman signed a one-year contract July 3 to play for Maurice again, this time with the Stanley Cup champion Florida Panthers.

"My biggest ups when I was in Winnipeg was when I was under Paul Maurice," Schmidt said Wednesday at Da Beauty League, a 4-on-4 summer league featuring collegiate and NHL players with ties to Minnesota. "And honestly, I just felt like he was somebody who understood my game and knows how to unlock the most out of his guys. I felt that comfort level, and with Paul and this team, I'm just chasing a ring. That's all I want. I just want to win. I want to be a part of it, too."

Schmidt became an unrestricted free agent July 1 after the Jets bought out the final season of a six-year, \$35.7 million contract (average annual value \$5.95 million) he signed with the Vegas Golden Knights on Oct. 24, 2018, which preceded trades to the Vancouver Canucks on Oct. 12, 2020, and to Winnipeg on July 27, 2021.

That was Maurice's last of nine seasons as Jets coach; he resigned Dec. 17, 2021, saying the Jets "need a new voice," but was hired by Florida on June 22, 2022.

Schmidt, signed by the Washington Capitals as an undrafted free agent June 21, 2017, has 220 points (47 goals, 173 assists) in 661 regular-season games for the Capitals, Golden Knights, Canucks and Jets and 28 points (seven goals, 21 assists) in 76 playoff games.

He had 14 points (two goals, 12 assists) in 63 regular-season games for Winnipeg last season, and one goal in three playoff games.

“I’ve been to the (Stanley Cup) Final (with Vegas in 2018, a five-game loss to Washington) and I know how hard it is,” Schmidt said. “But you don’t realize how bad you want it until you’re not close to winning it again.

“I just want to have a chance. That’s all you ever ask for as a young kid. A chance to win the Stanley Cup. And I couldn’t be more grateful to get that in Florida.”

Schmidt knows a roster spot won’t come easy. The Panthers re-signed defenseman Dmitry Kulikov to a four-year contract July 1, and have veteran mainstay Aaron Ekblad, emerging standout Gustav Forsling and up-and-comers Tobias Bjornfot and Matt Kiersted.

“When you go with the champs, the first thing you say is, ‘I got to win that roster spot,’” Schmidt said. “So now, I’ve got to get back into hardware mode of wanting to get into that grind, and that’s what’s been my motivation this summer.”

But there’s no bigger motivation than joining a team entering the season as defending champs. And that’s what has Schmidt most excited.

“I’m joining a team that’s done it, that’s won the Cup,” he said. “I have to step it up. As defending champs, now it’s going to be harder. It’s hard to stay there. But what’s really important about a young group, and a group that has a lot of talent, is trying to have that same type of swagger they had all year.

“They had that swagger that, ‘We’re going to outwork you, we’re going to outcompete you.’ That’s an awesome mentality to have. If you don’t have it, you can’t manufacture it and that’s what I love it about joining this Florida team.”

Winnipeg Free Press

Jets positive on prospects, but ‘there’s still work to do’ on roster

By: Mike McIntyre

Kevin Cheveldayoff was feeling a bit nostalgic as he met the media on Sunday following the completion of the latest Winnipeg Jets development camp.

“We didn’t have these back in our day,” the club’s 54-year-old general manager noted, reflecting on his time as a junior hockey player with the Brandon Wheat Kings preparing to try and make his mark as a pro.

Cheveldayoff, a 16th-overall pick of the New York Islanders in 1988, never did make the NHL. He spent five seasons toiling in the minors before hanging up his skates and likely would have benefited from such a valuable resource which is now a staple among all big-league teams.

However, he’s thrilled modern-day players are now getting the types of valuable lessons, leadership and mentoring that his generation missed out on.

“I think these camps are great,” he said. “I think it just shows how much the game has evolved. These players are craving knowledge, they are craving working with coaches, They want to talk to people, they want to learn and grow.”

A total of 35 students — 17 recent Winnipeg draft picks and 18 free agents — spent the past five days soaking up plenty of on- and off-ice lessons which they'll now take into the rest of a summer and beyond.

"It's a great time of the year here in Winnipeg. Unfortunately not a lot of players get to see just how wonderful the summers are here," said Cheveldayoff.

"I think it is important for everyone to see the passion of this community, to see the stands in the middle of summer at development camp. It shows these players that hockey matters here, hockey is a big deal here, and you're going to be part of a community that loves the game and loves you and hoping they will love it back."

From workout plans and nutrition to social media and mental health, the Jets tried to cover as much ground as possible while also adding in several team-bonding sessions.

"Mental health has been something that when we first started doing these, we didn't really touch on that. Now it's such a big component of this week," said Cheveldayoff.

"Young players want to get there so fast and people are telling them, 'You need to get there, you need this, you need that' but you have to help them understand where they are in the game, where they are in their head space."

The Jets are feeling positive about their prospect pool, with promising forwards such as Brad Lambert, Nikita Chibrikov, Chaz Lucius and Colby Barlow, defencemen such as Elias Salomonsson, Alfons Freij and Garrett Brown and goaltenders like Thomas Milic and Domenic DiVincentiis leading the way.

Lambert, Chibrikov and Salomonsson could all force their way into the Jets conversation as early as training camp this fall. However, Cheveldayoff has also spent the past several days with an eye on the present, bringing in a handful of players who could prove safety nets should some of the kids not immediately be ready.

Since free agency began last Monday, the Jets signed goaltenders Eric Comrie and Kaapo Kahkonen, forwards Jaret Anderson-Dolan and Mason Shaw, and defenceman Haydn Fleury. They also obtained blue-liner Dylan Coghlan in a trade with the Carolina Hurricanes on Saturday (future considerations went the other way).

"For us, Haydn Fleury's been someone that we've scouted and seen for a long period of time, has experience in the league and has had some ups and downs. It's a good opportunity for him and Coghlan to come in and compete and push," said Cheveldayoff.

"It gives the organization some depth and also some options. Anderson-Dolan is a player who is kind of right there. We watched him in the LA organization. He got claimed on waivers and didn't quite play as much as maybe he wanted. But he plays hard, plays with energy. Shaw plays hard. So there's going to be lots of competition at those levels."

Cheveldayoff also re-signed unrestricted free agent defenceman Colin Miller and got new deals done with restricted free agent defenceman Logan Stanley (two years, US \$1.25 million per season) and forward David Gustafsson (two years, US \$835,000).

Time to now put the feet up after a whirlwind week which also included the draft in Las Vegas? Not quite.

“There’s still work to be done,” said Cheveldayoff.

Forward Cole Perfetti and a trio of defencemen in Coghlan, Ville Heinola and Simon Lundmark are the remaining RFAs who still need new deals.

There is still plenty of trade buzz surrounding forward Nikolaj Ehlers, who has just one year left on his current contract. And forward prospect Rutger McGroarty, who didn’t attend development camp this week, could also be moved due to a stalemate with the organization over the direction of his future.

The Jets also project to have more than US\$4 million in salary cap space that they could potentially weaponize between now and the start of the 2024-25 season on Oct. 9 — especially since there could be several clubs who are currently above the US\$88 million cap ceiling and will need to shed players in order to be compliant.

“You know, it all comes down to opportunity. If there’s an opportunity we feel is right we obviously have the ability to jump on it,” said Cheveldayoff.

“But you don’t use cap space just for the sake of saying I’m going to use cap space. There’s lots of different avenues, things that could unfold.”

[Defenceman Zloty excited to be back in Winnipeg with Moose](#)

By: Zoe Pierce

It’s a case of déjà vu for Ben Zloty.

The Calgary native has spent a sizable chunk of his early hockey career in Winnipeg, playing four seasons with the Western Hockey League’s Ice (although one year was a bubble season when the WHL played in Regina).

Now the 22-year-old left-shooting defenceman is back in the all-too-familiar city. He signed a two-year contract with the Manitoba Moose on July 3, a day before he attended the Winnipeg Jets development camp which wrapped up Sunday at the Hockey For All Centre.

“It’s good to be back,” Zloty told the Free Press. “I’m excited, they got a good organization here (which) gives people a chance.”

Zloty played 207 contests with the Winnipeg Ice where he showed plenty of offensive upside in posting 189 points (26G, 163A).

“I’ve kind of grown up in the city,” said Zloty. “I know the city pretty well, there’s some great people here and I’m excited to come back here.”

Zloty turned pro last year, signing a one-year contract with the Texas Stars (American Hockey League affiliate of the Dallas Stars), although he spent the majority of last season in the ECHL with the Idaho Steelheads where he played 42 games and put up 23 points (7G, 16A). The 6-0

defenceman got in four games with Texas and hopes to further develop his career now on his second AHL contract.

“It’s a lot different than junior,” said Zloty on his experience south of the border. “You gotta get used to the speed and the physicality, but I think I learned a lot and I get to take here and just be ready for next year.”

Zloty describes himself as a good puck-moving defenceman who likes to jump on the rush and create offence, while also playing reliable defence in any situation.

“I definitely have some offensive instincts,” he said. “I’m trying to make it into a two-way game, you play both ends of the ice evenly. I’m trying to form my game into a two-way more.”

Growing up, Zloty looked up to Cam Fowler, the Canadian defenceman who has played 974 games with the Anaheim Ducks. Currently, Zloty says Rasmus Dahlin of the Buffalo Sabres is his favourite player in the NHL.

Graham Sward, a 20-year-old defenceman from Abbotsford, B.C. is another former Ice player who attended Jets development camp on a free agent invite. Sward and Zloty were reunited after playing together in the 2022-23 season.

“I was playing with (Sward) for a year there and he’s a great guy, great player,” said Zloty. “Anytime you can come back here with some teammates, it’s exciting.”

Sward was drafted by the Nashville Predators in the fifth round of the 2022 NHL Draft. Last season, he played 66 games with the Wenatchee Wild, putting up 31 points (15 G, 16A).

Zloty did not skate on the last day of development camp after being hit in the wrist by a puck impacting his range of motion. Instead, he focused on additional work and rehab with trainers.

“There’s a great group of guys here,” Zloty said on what he took away from camp. “We’ve got a great organization to work with, all the staff are good. Just being ready for anything, kind of expect the unexpected, that’s what I learned here.”

After going back to Calgary for the summer, Zloty will return as an exciting player to watch on the Moose.

“First year just kind of getting the foot in the door and just having a good year and letting the coaches trust me. And then progressing throughout the next year just trying to get the big NHL contract,” he said.

[Milic made most of first pro season](#)

[Jets goalie prospect started last year in ECHL, soon moved to Moose starting lineup](#)

By: Ken Wiebe

Thomas Milic didn’t let his mind wander.

As the Winnipeg Jets fifth round pick started out on his professional hockey journey last fall, he spent very little time worrying about which crease he would be tending.

The goalie prospect knew that if he stopped enough pucks, the rest would take care of itself.

The approach seems simple enough, though the execution of that plan is something that can occasionally lead to unnecessary speed bumps for rookies.

That was not the case for Milic, who embraced the opportunity to receive quality playing time for the Norfolk Admirals of the ECHL as a 20-year-old.

“I went in with the goal of getting experience down in Norfolk, regardless of if I got called up (to the AHL) once or twice or not at all,” said Milic, who was one of four goalies participating in Jets development camp this week. “I was ready and prepared, regardless of what happened. Going into it with that open mind and willing to just accept where I am right now and just make the most of it. I thought I did a good job with that.”

Did he ever.

After a strong start to the campaign, Milic got his first opportunity with the Manitoba Moose in the American Hockey League in November, making four starts before he returned to the ECHL.

By the time January rolled around, Milic had been recalled once again by the Moose — only this time, it was for the remainder of the season.

“That was pretty special for me,” said Milic, who led the Seattle Thunderbirds to a Western Hockey League championship and a berth in the Memorial Cup in 2023 before he was chosen by the Jets. “I’ve always believed in myself but I really proved to myself and everyone else that I belong here and that I’m ready to take on a big role.”

Milic wasn’t just around as an observer either, he was a big reason the Moose pulled themselves out of their tailspin and went on a run that led to a playoff spot.

At the most important time of the season, including the opening round series with the Texas Stars, it was Milic who got the call.

“Pretty impressive for a young first year player to take over the starting role in the American Hockey League as a goalie. He took us right down into the playoffs and had a great run at the end,” said Moose head coach Mark Morrison. “We were impressed with him. A lot of work to do and carry on. Certainly did a very good job for us and the future looks bright.”

The next reward for Milic came in early May, as he was signed to a three-year, entry-level deal by the Jets.

“That was pretty special, for sure. That’s obviously been a goal of mine for a long time, especially the last two or three years,” said Milic. “To be able to get that out of the way was pretty special. But at the end of the day, nothing really changes.

“Just realizing that even though I had a successful year last year, I really haven’t done anything. I’m just going into it with that mindset of taking it one day at a time and continuing to prove myself every day.”

Milic earned a berth in the ECHL All-Star Game in Savannah, Georgia, in January and helped his team defeat the host Savannah Ghost Pirates 18-11.

It was an interesting format as the two teams played 5-on-5 in the first period, 4-on-4 in the second period and 3-on-3 in the third period (when Milic was in net).

“It was an interesting experience. There were a lot of chances,” said Milic. “It went pretty well. It was cool to be part of that and the whole experience around it. It was a cool thing to do once. Obviously, the guys were doing stupid moves. Not ideal for a goalie, but it was still awesome.”

Speaking of awesome experiences, Milic also got an opportunity to represent Canada at the 2024 Spengler Cup in Davos, Switzerland, where he shared the crease with Aaron Dell and Tyler Beskorowany.

Milic got the call against the host team and relished the opportunity to play in front of a packed house at Eisstadion Davos.

“That was just an incredible experience, getting to experience the whole European hockey game. That was my first time in Europe as well, so being in Switzerland around Christmas time isn’t a bad way for that first time,” said Milic, who also helped Team Canada win a gold medal at the 2023 World Junior Hockey Championship in Halifax. “My in-game experience was getting the start against the home team, Davos, and seeing their crowd and how into it they all are. It really felt like a European soccer game, with the chants they do. I couldn’t understand what they were saying. It wasn’t in English, but it was pretty cool. I heard my name in a few of them. Hopefully it was good things.”

Milic also enjoyed a ride on the gondola with his family on one of the off-days and provided his seal of approval for the Swiss chocolate he taste-tested during the trip.

With the Jets bringing back Eric Comrie and adding fellow free agent Kaapo Kahkonen on July 1, Milic figures to have an experienced guy as a goalie partner next season, though 2022 seventh-rounder Dom DiVincentiis is also in the mix.

“Honestly, I’m not looking too closely into that. Just focusing on what I can do this summer to have a great season, regardless of whoever it’s with,” said Milic. “I’m excited to have them here and work with them. I’ve heard great things about Coms especially, who played here, from all of the staff and guys that have played with him as well. He seems like a great guy that I can learn a lot from. Kappo as well. He’s a great goaltender to watch.”

[Jets prospect Brown looking forward following freak injury](#)

By: Mike McIntyre

It was a bittersweet hockey season for Winnipeg Jets prospect Garrett Brown.

On one hand, the 20-year-old defenceman was thrilled that his University of Denver Pioneers made it all the way to the Frozen Four, then captured an NCAA-record 10th national championship in thrilling fashion by upsetting powerhouses Boston University and then Boston College in the tournament.

On the other hand, Brown was forced to watch the majority of the action from the sidelines, the result of a serious injury that happened during practice and limited him to just eight games in his rookie college campaign.

“You’re a hockey player, so you wish you were playing,” Brown, the 99th-overall pick in the 2022 NHL draft, told the Free Press on Saturday at the Hockey For All Centre. “But just being there, being able to support the team was awesome. It was an awesome experience.”

Brown underwent surgery last November for a torn ACL which occurred when he tried to hit teammate Kieran Cebrian during a routine one-on-one drill.

“I just felt a weird pop in my right knee,” Brown recalled. “It didn’t honestly hurt that bad. Just a freak accident. That’s sports, things happen.”

An MRI confirmed the worst and Brown’s year was over just as it was starting to get going. After being held off the scoresheet during his first three games with Denver, he’d racked up four assists over the next five contests and was really settling into a groove.

“I think I started off not so great. At the start, it was a bit of a jump,” said Brown, who had played the previous two seasons with the Sioux City Musketeers of the USHL.

“But I was kind of starting to gain some confidence. I had a great D partner in Shai Buium (a second-round pick of San Jose in 2021), he was helping me out a lot. I was starting to find my game there, and then the injury happened. It’s unfortunate.”

Brown is now far down the road to recovery, although not quite enough to hit the ice with 16 other Jets prospects and 18 free agent invites — including his Denver teammate, Cebrian — during his first-ever development camp this week.

The San Jose-born skater, who stands six-foot-three and weighs 195 pounds, has been doing off-ice workouts with the group, but is just beginning to slowly resume skating on his own.

“I’m starting to pick it up more and more,” he said. “I’m on a bit of a return to full contact program, so I think I’ve got about two more months until I’m full contact, so I’ll be good for training camp.”

At which point Brown hopes he can pick up where he left off and have a full, productive sophomore season in Denver with a healthy dose of adversity in the rear-view mirror.

“It was crushing,” he said of getting hurt. “But I think it was really good for me to kind of take the approach that this was an opportunity to better other habits in my life. My eating habits, my workout habits, my school habits. I think it’s kind of allowed me to better other attributes of my life, and I think it’s going to really benefit me moving forward.”

Spoken like a mature player who is wise beyond his years, which shouldn’t come as a surprise when you consider Brown’s Saskatchewan-born father, Curtis, played 736 games over his NHL career with the Buffalo Sabres, San Jose Sharks and Chicago Blackhawks.

“He’s the best resource,” said Brown.

“Obviously there’s times where it gets frustrating and I was down on myself and it’s like this is hard, this is tough. Being able to talk to my dad, he’s been through it, has been so helpful. He’s been there to kind of remind me to stick with it, that it’s OK, injuries happen. I think a lot of my mindset stems from him, and it’s helped me through the full process.”

When it comes to Winnipeg’s prospect pool, defencemen Ville Heinola (1st round, 2019) and Elias Salomonsson (2nd round, 2022) generate much of the buzz. You can now add Alfons Freij, selected last weekend in the second round by the Jets, to the list as well.

But don’t sleep on Brown, who is highly-regarded within the organization and might just have the tools to be a shutdown defender at the NHL level one day.

“The Jets have been awesome,” he said, noting how director of player development Jimmy Roy attended several of his games and has remained in constant communication.

For now, Brown is just soaking in the development camp experience which includes meeting many fellow Jets draft picks for the first time.

“It’s been unbelievable,” he said. “You know the names but getting to hang out with the guys over lunch, just at the hotel, football game (Friday) night, it’s a good group of guys and has been so much fun. Even all the staff, they’ve been great.”

Saturday swap, signings

The Jets added a new player and retained two others in a trio of moves on Saturday.

Defenceman Dylan Coghlan was acquired in a trade from the Carolina Hurricanes in exchange for future considerations. The undrafted 26-year-old from British Columbia has played in 106 career NHL games (six goals, 16 assists) and will provide some additional blue-line depth in the organization.

Meanwhile, defenceman Logan Stanley and forward David Gustafsson both signed new contracts with the team the drafted them. Stanley, 26, will earn US \$1.25 million over the next two seasons, while Gustafsson, 24, will make US \$835,000.

Both players were restricted free agents. The Jets now have four RFAs left to re-sign: Coghlan, Heinola, Cole Perfetti and Simon Lundmark.

Winnipeg Sun

Jets' Cheveldayoff sings Lambert's praises, fires subtle shot at McGroarty

By Scott Billeck

Kevin Cheveldayoff capped off his team’s development camp on Sunday with a moment of high praise for a budding star and a subtle shot at a notable absentee from the annual prospect get-together.

The general manager of the Winnipeg Jets was asked to give his overall impressions of his prospect pool.

Among the usual excitement you'd expect to hear from the team's architect was this little nugget:

"It says a lot about a player like Brad Lambert who doesn't have to come (to development camp) but wants to come here and be a part of it and take on that leadership role," Cheveldayoff said.

After his impressive rookie campaign with the Manitoba Moose this past year, the 20-year-old Finn didn't need to interrupt his offseason to participate this week.

But that's what leaders do.

Lambert's buy-in spoke volumes to the team that drafted him 30th overall in the first round in 2022, especially when the player they took 16 picks earlier in that draft was AWOL.

In what was likely his last availability until training camp, Cheveldayoff wouldn't touch the Rutger McGroarty situation.

Asked if there were any new developments with his disgruntled forward, Cheveldayoff was quick to move the conversation along.

"You would have it if there was (one)," he said.

McGroarty set this town alight at this time last year, his convincing charm glowing throughout that week.

A blossoming bromance between himself and 2023 first-rounder Colby Barlow was well-documented and pushed by the team's social media department.

McGroarty oozed future captain material. While that may still materialize one day, it isn't expected in Winnipeg.

A situation that seemingly soured out of nowhere following McGroarty's run at an NCAA title this past spring is expected to end with the 20-year-old Nebraskan shipped out of town.

Cheveldayoff was addressing an entirely different situation on Sunday when he spoke about the team's philosophy regarding those they draft.

"I don't know how it's done in other organizations, but this organization here, when we draft a player, they become part of our family," he said. "And you take care of them like they are your family. That's an important thing."

McGroarty is still a family member by that definition. But he's the prodigal son right now.

You'd imagine an arms-wide-open welcome home from Cheveldayoff if McGroarty stumbled back this way, but that prospect would be a biblical miracle.

Amid an offseason clouded by the strife of the selfish, Lambert stepped up this week to wrestle back some pride for Winnipeg's fan base.

He's slated to compete for a top-six spot this fall, and showing up this week like he did will undoubtedly earn him some extra marks in that fight.

But you don't teach that sort of thing.

"You are not asking a player to be or do anything that they're not," Cheveldayoff said. "But I do think part of the process is that you do see players grow year over year. Not only physically but emotionally, mentally."

Lambert spoke earlier in the week about seeing what it takes to be a pro hockey player after his year with the Moose.

It isn't easy. And more so, you have to earn your keep.

We're told McGroarty's unhappiness stems from the Jets' not guaranteeing him a spot in the NHL when he leaves college.

That sort of thing is often only reserved for the very few. The Patrik Laines of the world, to keep it local, who was taken second overall and already possessed something few at the NHL could do similarly — in Laine's case, his wicked release.

The Jets aren't in the business of handing out free passes when guys like Lambert, Nikita Chibrikov, and others have not only paid their dues, but are demonstrably better at a level McGroarty has yet to touch.

It would be unwise for a team that relies on drafting and developing from within to poison the well like that.

Lambert's actions this week stood in stark contrast to any of the seemingly disingenuous lip service McGroarty has paid this team and this town since he was drafted two years ago.

Lambert has preferred to do his talking without having to say much at all.

Those are the people you move forward with, not just in hockey but in life.

Jets' prospect Chaz Lucius a model of resiliency

By Scott Billeck

Nothing could wipe the smile off Chaz Lucius' face this past week when he hit the ice for the Winnipeg Jets development camp.

For the first time in more than five months, he was finally skating,

And even as he skated separate from the rest of the team's prospects, clad in yellow threads denoting a player who's not quite 100 per cent, there was a sense of joy.

He willed himself up off of the mat, and not for the first time.

"I just couldn't wait to get out there," Lucius said on Sunday as Winnipeg's annual camp wound to a close.

Skating is something most hockey players take for granted. Most haven't strung together four straight years that have ended in season-ending surgeries.

A unique issue with his heel required a major operation in January, the latest on a long list of dates with a surgeon's scalpel for the 18th overall pick in 2021.

"It's definitely one of the harder recoveries I've had," Lucius said, detailing a two-month period where he couldn't walk and would use a motorized scooter to get around the rink.

The fact the 21-year-old centre can rank his recoveries says it all.

His heel issue halted this past season with the Manitoba Moose. In 2023, it was a shoulder. His one and only year in college in 2022 was curtailed by his ankle, and his draft year ended abruptly thanks to his knee, which left him in a wheelchair and required him to learn to walk again.

"He's had to really show his resiliency," general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff said.

"I've been unfortunate to have an injury as a player, (but) one thing you learn is it tests your will and how much you love the game, how much you want to play. The off-ice work that you have to put in when you're rehabbing an injury, that's all will and fortitude. It's just easy to say: 'I've had enough.'

"But when you see a player that's constantly trying to bounce back from that, that's an important trait to know, that they want to play the game and they love the game."

And Lucius loves the game. No one can question that.

"Nobody sees me re-teaching myself how to walk, re-teaching myself how to skate again or do all the things that are, mentally, just so challenging," he said. "That's a big part of it. I have to motivate myself because the Jets have been great at the end of the day, but it's up to me to make those decisions and put in the work for it."

And remain positive.

The unfortunate part of being injured during these critical developmental years is how quickly a player can tumble down the order. New prospects are drafted into the organization, overtaking those whose paths become hampered.

When training camp kicks off this fall, Lucius' name won't be spoken in the same breath as 2022 draft pick Elias Salomonsson or 2023 first-rounder Brad Lambert. Those two will fight for roster spots with the big club.

Lucius, meanwhile, is aware that more time with the Manitoba Moose will be necessary.

"I've gotta stay healthy," he said, painting his immediate future with a realistic brush.

That's the main goal, and Winnipeg hasn't wavered in its opinion of its top prospect. The Jets are not giving up, just as Lucius hasn't thrown in the towel.

"I don't know how it's done in other organizations, but this organization here, when we draft a player, they become part of our family, and you take care of them like they are your family," Cheveldayoff said. "That's an important thing. I know our trainers, our medical staff, take a real hard interest in all aspects of them — whether it's the actual injury itself or the mental well-being of the player going through that tough time."

The good news is that Lucius is expected to be ready to go by mid-September, when training camp kicks off. And he's ready to bring all he's learned off the ice with him.

"I can overcome anything, whether it be in hockey or life," Lucius said. "Hockey ends one day for everybody. Hopefully, I can have a long career and put these injuries behind me. These are just life lessons I can take with me forever."

JETS MAILBAG: The kids, Paul Maurice, Rutger McGroarty and more

By Scott Billeck

One thing about the Winnipeg Jets: Fans have questions no matter what time of the year.

It has been balmy in Winnipeg this week, with the city finally getting some of that summer sunshine.

But this is a Canadian hockey market. We're either watching, talking, or thinking about hockey.

Our short summers are just a necessary evil.

You want to know about Rutger McGroarty, wanna talk prospects and Paul Maurice even, and ponder the over/under on how many wins Connor Hellebuyck will get next season.

So, let's talk hockey, shall we?

What can we assume we know about the Rutger McGroarty situation? A lot of folks are just straight-up trashing the kid for no good reason, as far as I can tell. — @bobbybaggin on X

We can assume we know there is a disagreement on his development path and that the team tried to trade him at the draft.

These two have been well-documented and confirmed to several reporters via several sources.

We can't assume that the situation is irreparable, especially if other teams, as reported, have been turning down deals because of McGroarty's alleged position of wanting an NHL roster spot handed to him.

Fans will always be upset when players don't want to play for their team. It's understandable and unavoidable. It's just the way it goes.

It's also understandable that a player may want to find a better opportunity for himself, even if that includes forgoing conventional methods of making an NHL roster. College players have a unique loophole they can use. Not all of them use it. Most don't. But it's there and well within their right to exercise it.

McGroarty is watching his college friends and teammates do it. It's only natural to want the same thing, especially when young.

I'll never blame a player for attempting to chart their own course. All the power to them. We all wish we could do the same in our jobs.

But I can't stop thinking about whether McGroarty is getting the right advice from those around him. There's a genuine opportunity in Winnipeg. And, as I wrote earlier this week, Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff would welcome him back like a prodigal son. The city, too, I believe.

If Brad Lambert, Nikita Chibrikov, Ville Heinola, and Elias Salomonsson make the team, who are the players that are out? — @MalloryS1n on X

I like this question because it forces me to look further than just telling you I don't think all four are making the opening night roster this fall.

On forward, this would be my take:

Kyle Connor-Mark Scheifele-Gabriel Vilardi
Nikolaj Ehlers-Brad Lambert-Cole Perfetti
Nino Niederreiter-Adam Lowry-Mason Appleton
Morgan Barron-Vlad Namestnikov-Nikita Chibrikov

In this scenario, the Jets don't end up trading Ehlers but do trade Alex Lafallo's last season to free up some cap space.

On defence:

Josh Morrissey-Dylan DeMelo
Dylan Samberg-Elias Salomonsson
Ville Heinola-Neal Pionk

I don't believe the Jets are done on defence. That said, I don't believe they will be trading Pionk. Pionk struggled last season and has for a few.

I don't see the Jets giving Salomonsson top billing with Morrissey just yet, but if they want to reduce Pionk's minutes to keep him healthier, a Salomonsson partnership with the defensively responsible Samberg would make sense. I'm not sure it would be ideal for Heinola to be with Pionk, but given the parameters, I'm unsure who else it fits.

In light of Paul Maurice's Stanley Cup victory, is it time to look back at his departure in Winnipeg and ask what factors led to him quitting mid-season and what led to the decision? — @TimberKing92 on X

If we take Maurice at his word, he got burnt out. The COVID seasons wore him down, and the team wasn't responding to what he was preaching. "They need a new voice," Maurice said.

It's important to remember that Maurice's uncertainty stretched back to the off-season, which I believe was shared with the club. But Cheveldayoff's acquiring of defencemen Brenden Dillon and Nate Schmidt re-ignited Maurice, at least for a time.

I don't think there needs to be an inquest, and I suspect both sides would have handled it differently if they could.

Maurice should have quit during the off-season, as he alluded to when he discussed the decision months later. The Jets should have seen the signs, especially if it had been made known that off-season, Maurice wasn't sure. That's a red flag missed.

I'd argue that the results weren't coming for a while, not since the 2019-20 season, and even then, the team wasn't guaranteed a playoff spot before the shutdown. The Jets held on too long. Maurice held on too long. C'est la vie.

Did the Jets accomplish their off-season goals of retooling this roster? If not, what's left to do?
— @MrEd315 on X

It's not even mid-July!

No. Not yet, at least if the opening of free agency was any indication. The Jets tried hard to re-sign Sean Monahan and then tried, in haste, to sign Adam Henrique as a backup plan.

I wrote about this a week ago. I'm unsure what the club's direction is (which will answer, at least on the surface, another couple of questions I received). Last Monday, Cheveldayoff came out and said, after failing to seemingly hit his targets as free agency opened, that opportunities would be aplenty for the team's youth. Earlier in the day, he had tried to sign at least three free agents, with sources suggesting he had his hand in on a few more.

Based on that, I don't think this team has accomplished its goals to this point. And perhaps they've now shifted the goal posts. They've signed a bunch of depth players, which will promote competition. I've liked the low-risk, high-reward profile most of them bring. But I suspect this team is still roaming the league for a second-line centre and a top-four, right-shot defenceman, using Ehlers and McGroarty as trade bait pieces to get one or both.

I keep hearing how the Jets need to get faster. Do you see a world where Barron or (Rasmus) Kupari get a look at the 2nd (3rd by minutes) line centre role with Perfetti and Ehlers (assuming he is still around)? — Cole via email

I don't see Kupari getting a shot there, no. He's got the wheels, but he doesn't produce.

Barron is an interesting proposition. He's a versatile tool, given he can play all three positions up front. There were times last season when I wondered if the Jets were grooming him into a centre role. He took a lot of draws in the latter half of the season, finishing with 132 on the year— the most he's ever taken in the NHL.

And you're right — he's got size and speed that this team could use at the position. Now, is he top-six material? I'm not certain. And if Lambert is going to take that step up into that role, or Perfetti snatches it up, there may not be room.

But if I were to make an early prediction for the coming year, it's this: Barron's role will increase on this team. At some point, I could see him as a staple on the third line.

Do you think the Jets will get their history back now that the Coyotes have folded? — @wpgjetsice on X

I do. This team has celebrated it since they returned in 2011, be it Teemu Selanne's return, Dale Hawerchuk's close ties, his statue outside Canada Life Centre, or all the names of yesteryear now hanging in the rafters.

That said, I'm not sure the records would be amalgamated. I believe they will get the history back, but I don't think the franchise records will shift to the Jets from the Atlanta Thrashers. I'm not even sure if that's a possibility. But my guess is that history is returned where it rightfully belongs. Here, in Winnipeg.

Will the Jets continue to struggle with fan attendance, given the lack of improvements to the roster this off-season? — Multiple people via X and email

Hard to say for certain, but I suspect there will be nights of low attendance, especially if the on-ice product suffers. There's a reason the Jets avoided a complete teardown: They weren't confident fans would continue to come during it.

There are economic factors, of course. It's bloody expensive to live these days. The Jets have reduced ticket prices, and there are several different options now to consume games, including quarter-, half- and full-season packages.

All of those come with varying levels of discounts on food, beer and merchandise, at least pre-sale access to playoff tickets, if not guaranteed at the higher commitments, and what the team is calling a dedicated account executive, which is an answer to dozens, if not hundreds, of complaints over poor customer service in the past.

There are also payment plans now, so the money doesn't have to be all forked out upfront, and you can join a ticket group to share tickets.

So there are more options. But ultimately, winning matters here. This was seen closer to the end of the season when the Jets sold out several games, and fans began to believe in the club again. The playoff atmosphere was tremendous.

The truth around here is the Jets have to sell the building out. NHL commissioner Gary Bettman isn't holding court with the business community doing the media rounds and speaking to fans last season if there wasn't a concern.

The good news for fans is that the Jets are working to earn back their trust. How long that takes after years of taking it for granted remains to be seen.

Over/under 36.5 wins for Hellebuyck next year and why under? — @daboss_wire on X

I see what you did there ...

Hellebuyck has reached the over just three times in his career — 2017-18 (44 wins), 2022-23 (37) and 2023-24 (37).

Getting back there next year without Brenden Dillon would require another Vezina-worthy season. That's not out of the question, but as it stands right now, the Jets are taking a step back this coming year. No Dillon, no Monahan, no Nate Schmidt and no Laurent Brossoit.

I suspect Hellebuyck will make a few more starts next season. They won't have the luxury of Brossoit, and he barely played this past season, even with his sterling numbers.

With either Eric Comrie or Kaapo Kahkonen, I don't see Hellebuyck working less. He wants to work as much as he does now, and he is in the 60-start range as it is. I also don't see the Jets, as a team, reaching 52 wins again in 2024-25. That could change depending on whether McGroarty is traded or what happens with Ehlers. But losing Ehlers would be a net-negative, given how well he keeps the puck away from his own goaltender.

JETS NOTEBOOK: Max Namestnikov trying to follow in family's footsteps

By Scott Billeck

The last name was instantly recognizable. It's his given name that made many head straight to Google.

Little was known about Max Namestnikov before his name appeared on the Winnipeg Jets' development camp roster earlier this week.

It turns out he's Winnipeg forward Vladislav's brother.

"Just trying to follow in his footsteps," Max said on Saturday.

Max is 11 years younger than Vlad and spent a lot of time following his brother growing up, including watching him go 27th overall to the Tampa Bay Lightning in 2011.

Thirteen years later, Max sat near the stall his brother normally sits in at Winnipeg's practice facility.

It's the third development camp for the undrafted 20-year-old, who was also in Carolina and Vancouver in recent years.

Max has played in the Ontario Hockey League for the last four seasons, most recently with the Guelph Storm.

He scored 24 goals and 50 points in 68 games this past season and isn't letting his 5-foot-8, 181-pound frame speak for him.

"I'm smaller, so I've got to play with a lot of speed, and I like to be feisty and shoot the puck as much as I can," Max said. "You kind of have to. You can't get pushed around by bigger guys. You have to make a statement that you won't be, play with a little bit of an edge."

Like Vlad, Max comes from quite the hockey bloodline, including his father, Yevgeni, who played parts of six seasons in the NHL.

His uncle is Slava Kozlov, a two-time Stanley Cup winner and member of the famed Russian Five with the Detroit Red Wings in the '90s, which included Sergei Fedorov, Igor Larionov, Vladimir Konstantinov and Viacheslav Fetisov.

"Taking as much advice as I can from them," Max said. "They're giving me a lot of it, watching my games."

Jacob Julien, meanwhile, is still feeling the pain of losing in the Memorial Cup final.

The hometown kid had already helped the London Knights to an OHL title and seemed poised to return the Canadian junior hockey title to Southern Ontario this past spring.

That chance ended 22 seconds from the end of regulation when the Saginaw Spirit fired the go-ahead goal to clinch the trophy.

"It's not going to go away," Julien said.

Still, it was a tremendous year for the 19-year-old, who broke out on the junior scene with 29 goals and 78 points in 67 games.

He kept up that success in the OHL playoffs, scoring nine goals and 18 points in 18 games.

"I just tried to keep it simple, play the systems," he said. "I just kind of took off and did the best I could every game."

Julien has come a long way in a short amount of time.

Only a few years ago, the 6-foot-3 winger contemplated quitting the game after being overlooked in the OHL draft and playing Junior B.

"I give a lot of credit to the Hunters (former NHLers Mark, London's GM, and Dale, the Knights' head coach) for helping me out," Julien said. "They brought me into the system and showed me a lot of things to help me progress."

Now, he's getting set for what's expected to be an even bigger year in London.

"We lost the league title to Peterborough (in 2023) and we came back and won it (this year)," Julien said. "Now, we've got to come back and win (the Memorial Cup)."

JETS RE-SIGN RFA PAIR

We now have a good idea why David Gustafsson and Logan Stanley elected against taking the Jets to an arbitrator later this summer.

Both re-upped with the Jets on Saturday, with the Swedish forward signing a two-year deal with an average annual value of \$835,000, and the 6-foot-7 defenceman also inking a two-year pact with a \$1.25 million AAV.

Gustafsson scored three times and added four assists in 39 games last season, his most productive season to date.

The 24-year-old, drafted in the second round by Winnipeg in 2018, has played 113 NHL games and has four goals and 14 points.

Stanley, meanwhile, featured in just 25 games, scoring once and assisting on another.

The 2016 first-rounder is set to be a part of a sizeable fight for lower-pairing spots on Winnipeg's blue line when training camp kicks off in a couple of months.

Speaking of that competition, the Jets traded for another depth defender on Saturday, sending future considerations to the Carolina Hurricanes for right-shot defenceman Dylan Coghlan.

Coghlan played just one NHL game last season and is a couple of seasons removed from 59 games with the Vegas Golden Knights, for whom he scored three times and finished with 13 points in 2021-22.

The Jets have added several depth pieces to their blue-line in the past week, including re-signing Colin Miller and signing former first-rounder Haydn Fleury.

Coghlan, meanwhile, is a restricted free agent who will need a contract this summer.

Winnipeg's other RFAs are led by Cole Perfetti and defencemen Ville Heinola and Simon Lundmark.

Global Winnipeg

Winnipeg Jets put a wrap on Development Camp 2024

By Kelly Moore Global News

The Winnipeg Jets 2024 Development Camp finished with a Sunday Morning scrimmage in front of another good turnout of fans at Hockey For All Centre.

Recent draft picks Fabian Wagner, Markus Loppinen, Kevin He and Zach Nerhring were among the goal scorers as Elias Salomonsson and Team White edged Brad Lambert and Team Blue 4-3.

Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff says these camps, which weren't around a decade or so ago, are an asset in a variety of ways from an organizational perspective.

"I think it just shows how much the game has evolved. These players are craving knowledge, working with coaches. They want to talk to people, they want to learn – they wanna grow," said Cheveldayoff who explained the slant or angle of the development extends beyond the on-ice evaluation.

"(It's about) player orientation, player education, but it's also about relationship building – not just with the other players and the coaches and the like. We brought in a chef this year who is helping with chefs in our building, but also talking with the players about the needs of nutrition and the values of nutrition. That's something players really didn't understand. Back 10, 15, 20 years ago it was just chicken and pasta – that was the meal."

Winnipeg's breaking news sent to your email as it happens.

Continuing on the topic of how the game has changed, Cheveldayoff agrees there is an added challenge for these young players when it comes to absorbing or filtering all the information they are receiving from the increasing number of voices in their ears.

“Whether it’s a skills coach, a skating coach or a nutritionist – they’ve got this way – well you were told this. ‘Mom and Dad want me to do it this way,’” the veteran Jets GM described. “There are a lot of voices to decipher. We’re just here to help give them some guidance with the professionals that we bring in.”

Cheveldayoff maintained his stance on not commenting about the absence of 2022 first-round pick Rutger McGroarty, or providing any kind of an update on where the relationship sits between the hockey club and the University of Michigan star who has elected to play his junior year in Ann Arbor rather than sign with Winnipeg. But the Jets GM was more than willing to talk, and admit to the organization’s excitement about some of the prospects who did attend the camp and that the team and fans are finally going to get a chance to see: like 2022 second-round pick Elias Salomonsson who is expected to make his North American pro debut this coming season.

“I think it was a great opportunity for him to go back to Sweden last year to play. Obviously a big part of winning a championship. That’s the exciting thing for us – seeing a player year over year over year and whether it’s skating or whether it’s strength, or personality, just watching them grow,” said Cheveldayoff. “It says a lot about a player like Brad Lambert who doesn’t have to come here, but wants to come here and take on a leadership role.”

Cheveldayoff was also asked about the Jets’ post-July-1st free agent signings that have added the likes of forwards Jaret Anderson-Dolan and Mason Shaw, along with defenseman Haydn Fleury to the depth chart. “Hadyn Fleury is someone that you’ve scouted, you’ve seen for a long period of time and has experience in the league,” said Cheveldayoff of the former 7th overall pick by Carolina in the 2014 NHL entry draft. “He’s had some ups and downs.”

Fleury, who turns 28 on July 8, brings 268 games of NHL experience spread out over eight professional seasons with the Hurricanes, Anaheim, Seattle and Tampa Bay. Cheveldayoff says the Carlyle, Sask., product will be given the chance to compete for a job on the Winnipeg blueline along with restricted free agent Dylan Coghlan who was acquired on the weekend in a trade with Carolina for future considerations but is still unsigned.

The 26-year-old Coghlan, from Duncan, B.C., joins the likes of Cole Perfetti and Ville Heinola who are also unsigned RFA’s the team needs to dedicate some of their remaining \$US 4.25 million cap space to.

The Hockey News

[NHL Hot Seat Radar: With Winnipeg Jets' Franchise Stars Locked In, Heat Shifts to Ehlers](#)

BY ADAM PROTEAU

As we settle into the NHL’s 2024 off-season, it’s as good a time as any to kick off another year of THN.com’s Hot Seat Radar.

Team by team, we'll identify one player, coach or GM who is on the hot seat as someone with all kinds of pressure to produce positive results or face major consequences. We'll also feature another individual on the cold seat as someone who's so valuable to their team's success that they aren't going anywhere.

Let's start things off in reverse alphabetical order of NHL teams by examining the Winnipeg Jets:

Jets' Hot Seat: Nikolaj Ehlers, LW

With 25 goals and 61 points in 82 games this past season, Ehlers was one of Winnipeg's best generators of offense. But he's on the hot seat because of his contractual status.

Ehlers is heading into the final season of his current contract, meaning Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff could deal him by next season's trade deadline or sooner.

There would be no shortage of suitors for Ehlers, either as a pure rental this season or as a long-term solution for a new team. His \$6-million annual salary isn't so bulky as to scare away many teams, and even with a raise beginning in 2025-26, Ehlers is still a high-value target who will create interest from inside and outside of Winnipeg.

The 28-year-old Dane is about as reliable as they come for the Jets, but the way Ehlers responds to the pressure of being in a contract year will go a long way toward where he plies his trade over the long haul. He won't be able to avoid speculation about his future, but if he can compartmentalize that speculation, he should be once again a key contributor — either in Winnipeg or somewhere else.

Jets' Cold Seat: Connor Hellebuyck, G

Heading into last season, there was concern that Hellebuyck and Mark Scheifele would leave the Jets as UFAs. But Cheveldayoff, Hellebuyck and Scheifele put those fears to rest when they signed seven-year, \$59.5-million contracts that begin in 2024-25.

Hellebuyck, in particular, put his mouth where his money is, winning the Vezina Trophy as the top goalie in 2023-24 with a 2.39 goals-against average and .921 save percentage. And although he didn't have a good post-season, Hellebuyck is really in his prime right now.

The 31-year-old will have a different understudy in Jets newcomer Kaapo Kahkonen this coming season, but Hellebuyck's status as a premier workhorse — he appeared in a whopping 60 games last season — means he'll once again do the bulk of the heavy lifting.

Winnipeg's group of defensemen took a hit depth-wise this summer, but Hellebuyck is a formidable last line of defense, and he's locked into a deal with the Jets that lasts through the 2030-31 campaign. He's about as safe as anyone can be in Winnipeg, and his degree of success will dictate how well the Jets perform as a whole.