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DiVincentiis ready for next step in development

DiVincentiis: "There's still more that you can work on and get better at each and every day."

By Jamie Thomas

Two years have already passed since the Winnipeg Jets selected Dominic DiVincentiis in the draft. Since that time, DiVincentiis is a combined 63-18-6 with the Ontario Hockey League's North Bay Battalion. The 20-year-old discussed how much he has changed as a person and as a player over the past two seasons at Jets development camp earlier this month.

"Just coming into this organization as a young guy being around the pros each and every day starting from the trainers to the coaches, and all the way down to main camp with the actual players. You pick up a lot of things that they do, and you try to go back to junior and be one of them and be a pro and act like a pro each and every day," said DiVincentiis.

"And I think from 16-year-old me being drafted now 20 years old, it's four years. It's not that much time but in that time you try to make yourself act like a pro and understand that you are a pro and in order to be a pro in the NHL one day you got to start from a young age and I think from 16 to now I've changed a lot and in positive ways and you learn a lot throughout that growth but there's always still more that you can work on and get better at each and every day."

A good sign about the growth in DiVincentiis came in the spring, as North Bay was one of the favourites to get to the OHL Finals, winning the Central Division and finishing second in the East Conference. The Jets prospect played outstanding in the opening game of the postseason but got injured in the next game and did not play again because of that injury. The Ontario product put his personal feelings aside and helped cheer on his teammates who went all the way to the conference finals, eventually losing in seven games to Oshawa.

"Part of being a pro is focusing on helping your team and helping your teammates get better each and every day. And I think with the injury I really learned how to take my leadership to another level and help the team internally in the dressing room," said DiVincentiis.

“Stick with each other through the ups and downs we had as a team this year. And I think that's ultimately what brought us success this year was the fact that our whole team was able to come together and be one and we fought for each other each and every day. And you know, I couldn't be proud of the team we had this year.”

By all accounts, it looks like DiVincentiis will be making the jump to the pros this upcoming season, which means that his time in North Bay has come to an end.

“My dad always said to me ‘Take your time because time is gonna go by fast and you're gonna be starting your first game in the OHL and you're going to be getting drafted to the NHL. So, take it step by step and slowly’ And as a kid, you really want to rush into becoming a pro,” said DiVincentiis.

“But now that you're not going back to that organization that you've been with since you were 16. And now you're moving to pro it's like, you go back in your head, and you see all the memories that you had, and with all your teammates and all the guys, you've been with every day. You have a billet family. Bill, it's siblings, you know, it's just a second family, like I said, and it's an emotional one, right? But I mean you cherish those moments when you have them, and I still talk to almost every single guy on my team. And like I said before, we're all brothers and we're planning on going back to North Bay as a group over the summer here.”

The future between the pipes for the Jets seems taken care of with DiVincentiis and fellow prospect Thomas Milic, who made his pro debut last season with both the Norfolk Admirals and the Manitoba Moose. Milic helped lead the Moose from the basement of the AHL Central Division to a postseason berth. The two goaltenders are great friends off the ice despite the fact they are competing for playing time within the organization.

“Obviously, he was the best goalie in the WHL when he played there. It's not a secret to know that he's a fantastic goalie and an even better person off the ice. We've been together for a couple years now and the organization here and I feel like every time we see each other, we're like best buds off the ice. Hopefully we're playing on the same team together and you want to have that good friendship and tandem together because that's what's gonna allow you to push each other every day,” said DiVincentiis.

“But like you said, you have that internal battling and, and compete against each other. And I feel like you know, when we're on the ice, we're competing against each other, we're pushing each other, but ultimately, it's all in good spirits. And that's how you're gonna end up making each other better and pushing each other to the next level. But he's a phenomenal, phenomenal guy to be around.

He's super funny. He's a great guy, but I hope he says the same about me. We get along pretty well together.”

Winnipeg Free Press

Arniel high on Winnipeg Jets

By: Ken Wiebe

Some observers see holes, Scott Arniel sees options and opportunities.

The head coach of the Winnipeg Jets is understandably optimistic about the coming season, while not ignoring the departure of several key pieces of the puzzle during free agency.

Since he was hired in late May as the successor to Rick Bowness, Arniel has been working at a frenetic pace: putting together a coaching staff and preparing for the upcoming season.

The 2024 NHL Draft and the annual Jets' development camp is in the rearview mirror and Arniel has basically set the agenda for the coaches summit, which will take place at the end of the month.

So what have the first seven weeks on the job been like for the man who is going to be running the bench of his adopted hometown team?

“It's been busy,” Arniel said on Wednesday during a one-on-one conversation after a downtown press conference held at the United Way Winnipeg building.

“Going from the draft to free agency to development camp, it was on for a while. Now, there is finally some time to sit back and get some other things done.”

Arniel wasn't involved in the selection process at the draft in Las Vegas, but it was a good opportunity to spend time with new assistant coaches Dean Chynoweth and Davis Payne and returning assistant coach Marty Johnston.

“It was good to interact with those guys and to see their personalities,” said Arniel.

“They got to meet all of our scouts, management and ownership. We had a couple of dinners where we were all out together. We shared some old stories and it was fun. It was good to hear the different stories from different organizations they’d worked with as well.”

Although the Jets didn’t make any big splashes in free agency, Arniel expects internal growth to help offset the departures of backup goalie Laurent Brossoit, hard-nosed defenceman Brenden Dillon, fellow blue-liner Nate Schmidt and experienced forwards Sean Monahan and Tyler Toffoli.

Arniel also believes a few of the under the radar signings could prove to be valuable, whether it’s retaining defenceman Colin Miller or bringing in depth guys like forwards Mason Shaw and Jared Anderson-Dolan, D-men like Haydn Fleury and Dylan Coghlan or goalies like Kaapo Kahkonen and Eric Comrie.

“We went above and beyond, trying to get some players to come here and to get some players to come back,” said Arniel. “We lost out on some players, but at the end of the day, we got depth for the organization that we needed in all positions. So, that’s a good move forward for us.

“You know what, we still have a good hockey team. We have lots of good players here that we feel very comfortable with some young players that will get an opportunity now. This opens doors for other guys to get opportunities to show what they can do. My advice to them is to be in great shape, have a great attitude and work your tail off. Don’t let anyone take that situation away from you.”

One of those players moving up the depth chart figures to be Dylan Samberg, who did an excellent job in a third-pairing role and on the penalty kill and figures to see a boost in minutes after Dillon signed with the New Jersey Devils.

“He’s going to get a bigger role,” said Arniel. “He’s grown over the last couple of years, but it’s his opportunity to move forward.”

One of the questions at this point in the offseason revolves around who will replace Monahan as the second-line centre behind Mark Scheifele.

Arniel didn't rule out Cole Perfetti being considered to move from wing back to centre, and Brad Lambert is definitely in the mix to try and win a job, but he sounded comfortable going with Vladislav Namestnikov in that spot if that's how things shake out.

"I do prefer (Perfetti) on the wing, but at the end of the day, it is his natural position," said Arniel. "We'll just kind of play that out. Vladdy will probably get a good look there as well. He showed us last year that he can do it. You never know what happens.

"Last year, Ville Heinola made our hockey team and he breaks his ankle in the last exhibition game and that changed his whole season. You don't know where we're going to be in October."

Arniel is certainly looking forward to his third training camp since returning to the organization – and his first since being named head coach.

"We want competition," said Arniel. "There are some guys that we want to see. We want to see them in exhibition, we want to see them in practice and see how they kind of mix into our group.

"What I always say is that the players decide what the lineup is going to look like. Who comes out, how they play and how they take advantage of the opportunities that are in front of them."

As for some of the suggestions the Jets could be in danger of taking a step back next season after finishing fourth overall in 2023-24, Arniel isn't too concerned about the summer prognostications.

"There's nothing wrong with flying under the wire," said Arniel. "We'll just go about our business. We know what our strengths are, we know the areas we need to improve and it's going to be a process.

"When we get to training camp, we're not going to be looking at the end of the season, we're looking to build out of camp, get unified, come together as a team and then take those steps forward. I'm really excited about what we can do in this league."

[*Whiteout parties whip up green for city charities*](#)

By: Ken Wiebe

Scott Arniel remembers what it was like to experience the original Whiteout inside Winnipeg Arena as a player and to see how the event brought Manitobans together.

Nearly four decades later, the head coach of the Winnipeg Jets is encouraged to see the tradition continue and on a day where the United Way and True North Sports and Entertainment announced it is making a contribution of \$100,000 — to be split equally between four community charities — Arniel was among the speakers at a press conference in downtown Winnipeg who took pride in knowing what the cash would be used for.

“Winnipeg has been home for me since 1981, when I first came here. My wife Lia is from here and we raised our family here over the years and we are personally invested in efforts to make our city a better place,” said Arniel. “Being part of the original Jets Whiteout back in the ’80s, it was an exciting part of my personal hockey story. Now that my role has changed, in moving behind the bench, it’s exciting to see that this tradition not only lives on, but has grown tremendously.”

The Jets were eliminated in five games in the opening round series against the Colorado Avalanche, but the parties held during the three home games helped boost the total amount True North, in partnership with United Way Winnipeg, has contributed to more than \$312,000 into downtown agencies to combat homeless, addiction and hunger throughout the Whiteout Street Parties.

Roughly 20,000 fans attended the Whiteout Street Parties and Hargrave Market Street Party in the Plaza. Half of the proceeds from the \$10 tickets that were sold have been reinvested back into the community.

True North had contributed \$75,000 to the United Way during the playoffs and a contribution from Academy Hospitality’s Party in the Plaza events and “a small top off” from True North brought in an additional \$25,000 to hit the \$100,000 mark for 2024.

The \$25,000 contributions were made to Main Street Project, a safe place for people experiencing homelessness, substance use, and mental health challenges; the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre, which provides long-term residential care and addiction treatment for men struggling with drugs and alcohol; N’Dinewemak-Our Relatives’ Place, an Indigenous-led resource offering space for the homelessness; and Siloam Mission, which supports Winnipeggers struggling to meet their basic needs with clothing, food and shelter).

“Winnipeggers care about their community and they bring so much energy and enthusiasm. Our fans are there when things are good cheering us on and when things get hard, we rally together. Basically, Winnipeggers don’t give up, they show up,” said United Way Winnipeg president and CEO Michael Richardson.

“These organizations make sure that Winnipeggers aren’t alone during some of the toughest times of their lives. They meet people where they’re at, with passion, love and caring and have space for people, to heal and to grow.”

Some of that growth has come through viewing parties that are hosted by Main Street Project, with the help of True North, which donated pizza and supplied merchandise for those events.

“When you’re homeless, in your whole life, you don’t have any normalcy or a routine or anything like that. So to have Whiteout parties, we’re showing the game, you’re hanging out with your friends, (doing) kind of what everyone experiences,” said Main Street Project executive director Jamil Mahmood.

“Everyone is engaged and it’s super great. Having that normalcy of being a regular human and not struggling or trying to survive is such a powerful thing to give to people. So we try to give that to people every chance that we get.”

While those opportunities help supply a reprieve and are greatly appreciated, further investment from the community is needed to make fundamental changes to the challenges faced by the city.

Arniel, who is preparing for his first season as the bench boss of his adopted hometown team, is excited to be part of the growth of this initiative.

“It’s a priority for True North and the Winnipeg Jets to contribute to our cities’ story both on and off the ice,” said Arniel. “We hope to be able to play a role in helping move this forward in seasons to come. We’d like that party to last not just one week or two weeks, we want it to last two months.”

[*New Jets assistant coach ready to soar*](#)

By: Ken Wiebe

Dean Chynoweth was born into a hockey family, but he was undecided what career path he would pursue into his teenage years.

His father, Ed, was the longtime commissioner of the Western Hockey League while his older brother Jeff has a long resume of jobs in hockey operations, including stints as an assistant general manager, general manager, president and franchise owner in the WHL.

Part of Dean's early education included listening intently to conversations his father and brother were having on the way to the rink, where Jeff was the stick boy for the Calgary Wranglers back in the late 1970s.

"I would literally sit in the backseat and listen to them talk. My brother was very smart, statistic-wise and followed the old Hockey News and everything," Dean said in an interview last month at the 2024 NHL Draft in Las Vegas. "I would sit in the back and throw out a comment and they'd kind of look at me like 'you don't know what you're talking about.'

"I liked baseball and played all of the sports at school and it actually wasn't until I was about 14 that Medicine Hat came calling that I realized I might have an opportunity. We were always around hockey and he passion started to develop through that. Then at 14, I had to make a decision about baseball or hockey and figured it would be pretty tough to make it as an Albertan in baseball by going down south (to university)."

The decision proved to be a wise one for Chynoweth, who is now an assistant coach on Scott Arniel's staff with the Winnipeg Jets.

The Calgary product joined the Medicine Hat Tigers of the WHL as a 17 year old in 1985 and was part of a run that included three consecutive trips to the league win, two league championships and consecutive Memorial Cup victories (1987, 1988).

Chynoweth, a hard-nosed defenceman, was chosen in the first round, 13th overall, by the New York Islanders and captained the Tigers to that Memorial Cup title in 1988 before turning pro the following season.

During the 1989-90 campaign, Chynoweth was limited to six games with the Islanders due to injury in what was unfortunately a sign of things to come.

“I had my struggles with injuries at the NHL level, being up and down from the minors and eventually had to retire from concussions,” said Chynoweth, now 55. “They documented 13, but they weren’t all necessarily documented back then because they didn’t do the study yet. My last year with the Boston Bruins was the first year that the NHL put in the concussion protocol. Harvard did the study for us and that was the first year I ever did baseline testing. I played that year and suffered three more concussions in that season and met with some specialists and they just said, ‘enough.’”

Chynoweth wasn’t sure what he would do next after he retired as a player, but Winnipeg’s own Butch Goring offered him a job as an assistant coach and assistant general manager with the Utah Grizzlies of the International Hockey League.

“I was going to go back to school at that point and I decided that ‘you know what, I love the game,’” said Chynoweth, who won a Calder Cup with the Capital District Islanders as a player in 1990.

“I’ve had a lot of experiences with coaching and development and I wanted to get into that.”

What a ride it’s been.

After two seasons with the Grizzlies in the IHL, Chynoweth went back to his roots in the WHL, spending time with the Seattle Thunderbirds and Swift Current Broncos as head coach.

Following three seasons as an assistant coach with the Islanders under Scott Gordon and Jack Capuano, Chynoweth spent the next four seasons as a head coach in the American Hockey League for Colorado Avalanche prospects, with the Lake Erie Monsters and San Antonio Rampage.

He was out of coaching for the 2016-17 season before the Vancouver Giants of the WHL hired him as an associate coach in the summer of 2017.

That led to him joining the Carolina Hurricanes as an assistant coach in 2018, sparking a run of six consecutive seasons behind an NHL bench.

“Had a few crossroad moments of ‘what am I going to do?’” Chynoweth admitted, noting the season with the Giants helped reignite his passion for coaching. “With the years behind me, it gave me a lot of things to draw on and a lot of observations of how the game is changing, how the players are changing. The game was evolving and you had to adapt. I say that because to me, the best coach I ever had that epitomizes that was Al Arbour.

“He coached through three decades. When those (Islanders) players thought he was an (expletive). By the time we had him three decades later, he was like a grandpa or dad that you didn’t want to let down. So, you saw an evolution.”

Prior to his death, Arbour became a mentor for Chynoweth.

“While he was alive and when I got into the coaching ranks, he was a great resource for me,” said Chynoweth. “He would pick up the phone and he would come to the games when we played in Tampa. It was a neat process to be able to pull from different areas and resources to try and continue to grow as a coach.”

That growth includes time as an assistant coach with Team Canada at the world junior hockey championship and head coach of Canada’s U18 entry in 2003-04.

In the AHL, Chynoweth worked with blue-liners like Tyson Barrie and Nikita Zadorov and when he joined the Hurricanes, the defence corps included Dougie Hamilton, Brady Skjei, Jaccob Slavin and Brett Pesce.

This season, he’ll be responsible for the Jets’ defence corps and will also be running a penalty killing unit that is looking for considerable improvement.

“It’s exciting because it starts with building a relationship, where you’re getting to know one another but you’re really building trust. Then, when there are times where you have to have tougher conversations, you can be honest with them,” said Chynoweth. “Every team is going to have a different make up. Some (players) are more offensive than others, so you’re always going to have that mix. You want to find the balance of what they have.

“Here, I’m not coming in to reinvent the wheel or make drastic changes.”

Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey is excited to see what Chynoweth will bring to the coaching staff.

“I’ve heard nothing but great things,” said Morrissey. “He’s an experienced guy and he’s been around some really good teams. He’s run some really good special teams and I think he’s going to be a really good addition to our team.”

The Hockey News

Opinion: Winnipeg Jets' Stalemate With Rutger McGroarty Easily Rectified – Just Lie to Him

BY KEN CAMPBELL

If the speculation is to be believed, the Winnipeg Jets are guilty of nothing more than being honest with 20-year-old prospect Rutger McGroarty. And for that, they're apparently being punished.

Word is from multiple outlets that the Jets and McGroarty's camp disagree on the best development for him, with the Jets not willing to guarantee a spot in the NHL lineup. It's speculated that McGroarty, on the other hand, feels he's ready to play in the NHL and can surpass the AHL. (McGroarty didn't attend Jets development camp, but GM Kevin Cheveldayoff and McGroarty haven't discussed the matter with reporters.)

Good for him. One option would be to sign a contract, go to camp and earn a job, just like every other prospect in the history of hockey has ever done. Because the reality is that if he's not ready to play in the NHL, it will become apparent and any assurances the Jets or any other team would make will immediately go out the window.

The Jets could lie to McGroarty to appease him. So could any other team that acquires his rights. But the bottom line is if Rutger McGroarty is good enough to play in the NHL, that's where he'll be. If not, he won't.

The Athletic

Best pranks and untold stories of the Winnipeg Jets' 2023-24 season

By Murat Ates

Nino Niederreiter sat in his Canada Life Centre stall, leaning forward with a smile. The pickleball-playing, dog-loving Swiss forward is a cheerful, engaging interview on most days. On this Friday in January, he'd been summoned by The Athletic to comment on winning the title of "best prankster" — as chosen by his teammates.

Niederreiter laughed. He questioned the accuracy of the vote.

"Fake news," he joked.

But The Athletic had receipts. Word had gotten around that Niederreiter was responsible for the wipeout-inducing sock tape that had been appearing on linemates' skate blades. He'd been called out for the avocado that snuck its way into Mark Scheifele's shoes, for the ginger root in Sean Monahan's suit pocket and for a whole series of incidents involving Nate Schmidt at the airport.

Niederreiter laughed again — this time, with feeling — and then shared his tales. I'd meant to share Niederreiter's mischief — and the mischief of so many other Jets — with you as part of our player polls but ran out of time before playoffs. I won't withhold them from you any longer. Now that the season is over, the draft has passed and July is upon us, it's time to start emptying my notebook.

With special thanks to Josh Morrissey for the surveillance photos — trust me, this will make sense in due time — here are the stories I wanted to tell you this season but ultimately could not, for whatever reason.

Until now.

The prank on Monahan was simple enough. The Jets have plenty of access to postgame food. Niederreiter swiped a chunk of ginger root and slipped it into Monahan's suit pocket at the end of a road trip. Monahan found it, tossed it on his kitchen counter at home and woke up the next day to a question from his wife: When had he found the time to go grocery shopping?

Food played a big role in a lot of player's jokes.

There was the avocado that kept following Scheifele around, showing up in shoes or suit pockets as the moment required. There was the time that Dylan Samberg got dressed after a skate to find his pant pockets plastered full of butter. Samberg cast about for a culprit and landed on the belief that Alex Lafallo was the evildoer. Samberg scraped the butter out of his pockets and into Lafallo's Crocs, leaving the veteran ankle-deep in unsalted dairy.

The defenceman who told me about Samberg and butter insisted that Lafallo was not the true culprit.

Was it him, then?

"Oh, I had nothing to do with it."

It turned out that denial was common. There was a portion of every single conversation I had that involved abject denial on the Jets player's part.

We polled 15 players. Nearly one-third of the team received votes. And, when it came to discussing the pranks themselves, no one admitted to anything without first being outed by a teammate.

"Nik's a sneaky one," I was told by a right-shooting forward. "Might not always be pranks. Might be little jokes here and there. You don't think it's coming but Fly can get you with a good one every now and again. Picture day today, he dropped a good hairline joke on someone right as we were setting up for it. I'm not going to say who (it was about) but he had a good one this morning. Fly's sneaky."

Ehlers wasn't the only surprising name on the list.

"(Logan Stanley) is always messing with guys' sticks or skates or throwing stuff in the dry stall or hiding stuff on them," said a top scorer.

"Stan's always undercover," echoed a younger player. "He keeps his mouth shut so a lot of guys don't really know it's him. He doesn't give away that he did it but he's always involved."

I took the accusation to Stanley himself. First, the inevitable denial.

“I don’t know what pranks I would pull,” he said, conveying innocence. “I like to poke fun at people and I feel like I take a lot of poking, too, so you’ve got to be able to dish it back out.”

Stanley’s handiwork involves sawing teammates’ sticks (at the bottom, so that you can’t see it’s cut until you try to shoot and your stick explodes). He also took partial responsibility for a unique bit of artwork on Axel Jonsson-Fjallby’s stick tape. Still, on a team that talked openly about Adam Lowry, Niederreiter and Mason Appleton messing with each other’s gear (tape on skate blades, stick gum in each other’s gloves, and tape balls tucked inside skates) Stanley seemed to consistently escape blame.

How does he get away with it?

“I’m under the radar ... ‘It wouldn’t be Stan... He’s too nice.’ I’m just too nice a guy.”

Nice guys were the victim of pranks, too.

Schmidt was a renowned mentor to younger players, the team’s funniest player and a bright light to speak to in the room. He gave this reporter more than his fair share of time on multiple entertaining occasions and opened up for some frank discussions over the course of his tenure in Winnipeg. One thing that never seemed to go right for Schmidt, though? Just about any trip to the airport.

Somehow, the team plane would never have the food Schmidt wanted to order. This was because of Niederreiter’s menu prank. Niederreiter sat next to Schmidt on the team plane, providing ample opportunity for the following three-step prank:

Step 1: Spend the first part of the season stealing menus from the team plane.

Step 2: Get to your seat on the plane before Schmidt gets to his. Trade his (current) menu for one from your collection.

Step 3: Watch Schmidt ask the flight attendant for his favourite meal. They won't have it. Watch Schmidt ask the flight attendant for his second favourite meal. They won't have that either. Rejoice.

"I get Schmidty quite a lot during the plane rides," Niederreiter said in January. "He also went home with utensils a couple of times, where he unpacked his bag and there are forks, knives, all of that stuff. He had to bring them onto the next flight."

It's funny to imagine Schmidt, the good Samaritan that he is, raging upon the discovery of all these extra cutlery items but still feeling so compelled to do the right thing that he brings them back to the airport. It's funnier to imagine the scene the day he didn't know he had cutlery in his bags at all.

A veteran teammate got a kick out of the following scene at airport customs.

"Nino put the metal utensils from the plane in Schmidty's bag," said the veteran. "And Schmidty didn't notice. So he gets to passport control and it just starts beeping. The lady pulled the cutlery out, like, 'You have a knife.' I thought that was pretty funny."

One of Niederreiter's championship-winning votes came from Schmidt himself.

"I can't give Nino too much credit. I hate that stuff. It pisses me off every day," Schmidt said, laughing. "The silverware and napkins in my suit jacket t... Never at the rink, though. I'll say Nino but put Nino with an asterisk."

The mysterious case of Josh Morrissey and the Montreal Alouettes toque

Josh Morrissey, in addition to being a star and a leader on the current edition of the Jets, serves as a bit of a bridge to the team's past. When you talk to Morrissey about pranks, then, he thinks fondly of Dustin Byfuglien, Andrew Ladd, Bryan Little and Chris Thorburn.

In the old days, he says, the pranks were wilder.

"Their era of jokes was something else. They'd cut the sleeves off a guy's dress shirt during the morning skate or the sleeves off a suit jacket. You don't see those happen anymore," Morrissey says. "Guys would cut the guys' laces on their dress shoes, stupid stuff like that. I think our generation has a little bit less of the hilarious jokes."

That's not to say Morrissey doesn't get a kick out of how an avocado kept ending up in Scheifele's suit jacket or the times when someone would slap a player's name tag on the front of their helmet for practice as if they were learning to skate as a child. He laughed at the other examples given in this piece, plus this story from 2020 about an unnamed player's series of pranks on Brendan Lemieux. It's just that those olden days of Byfuglien and Little come with an added sense of mischief.

Until you bring up the Alouettes toque.

And really, that's as mild of a prank as it gets — or it would have been, if the players involved hadn't gotten so with it.

The story starts two seasons ago in the Jets dressing room. A Montreal Alouettes toque appears in Morrissey's stall. Everyone assumes it belongs to Pierre-Luc Dubois, but he says it's not his and he doesn't claim it when Morrissey puts it in the team's unofficial lost-and-found.

Somebody does take the toque, though. Morrissey's work is done: he's given the toque away.

But the toque comes back (the very next day).

Morrissey is mildly amused. He still doesn't understand why this Alouettes toque has appeared in his life, so he puts it back in the middle of the room. It disappears, then reappears in his stall, the very next day.

"This went on for ... A while," he says.

The Jets start coming up with theories. Some people point their fingers at Dubois, given his Montreal roots. Others push back in a different direction, targeting some of the other pranksters mentioned in this piece. The toque continues to appear in Morrissey's stall. It continues to be tossed on the floor. As literal months roll by, the toque continues to disappear and then reappear. Morrissey pays closer and closer attention and becomes convinced that Dubois is to blame. Dubois says it was his toque but that someone had taken it from him. Suddenly the toque ends up in Schmidt's locker.

“No one knew who it was,” Schmidt told me. “People would find it in their stall and throw it into the middle of the room. People would blame Dubie but he would be like, ‘I don’t know! Weird that someone put it in your stall, though.’”

Do you ever meet someone, forget their name, and then wait so long to ask for clarification — multiple meetings, say, over many months — to the point that you feel like it’s too late to ask at all? Sometimes I wonder if this story is like that. I doubt anyone involved expected the toque would continue to get passed around the Jets room like it did — for so many weeks, to so many players. Who keeps a joke going that long? And, how could the prankster keep getting away with it?

In this day of smartphones, couldn’t someone just put their phone in their locker, set it up to record and wait for the prankster to reveal himself?

Yes.

Yes, they could.

And that’s exactly what Morrissey did.

Presented for public consumption for the very first time, here is the moment the prankster was finally caught.

It’s an open-and-shut case, right? Nate Schmidt is guilty of a months-long toque prank, with video evidence proving it was him all along.

The thing is, Schmidt says he was framed.

He says that he hadn’t participated in the toque prank for months but then, when the toque appeared in his own locker, he couldn’t help himself from joining in.

“I grabbed the toque and put it in J-Mo’s stall and J-Mo had his phone on, sitting there, videotaping for the whole practice,” Schmidt says. “So he’s got a video of me putting it back. He calls out

‘SCHMIDTY!’ I was like, ‘What are you talking about?’ ‘You put it in my stall.’ ‘No I didn’t!’ He goes, ‘Yes you did!’ And he pulls out his phone and he’s got an hour and fifteen minutes of fricken’ video. But that was the first time I’d done that and I got caught, sure enough.”

“Of course the guy says, ‘This is the first time I did it!’” says Morrissey. “Of course he says it was someone else the whole time.”

It just so happens that I found out about this story toward the end of the season, with the Los Angeles Kings in town. Schmidt had told me Dubois set him up. I thought I’d ask Dubois, so I went down to the visitors’ locker room at Canada Life Centre and got Dubois’ side of the story.

“I don’t know what they told you and I don’t even know if they know but it was just a toque that my sister gave me,” Dubois said. “It was in my stall for some reason. I put it in J-Mo’s stall, J-Mo put it in Schmidty’s stall, and then we just started passing it to each other, like a ‘Who’s going to bring it home’ kind of thing. Nobody wanted it, so it was just sitting there.”

“And then one day I put it in Schmidty’s stall, knowing that he was going to put it in J-Mo’s stall. I told J-Mo, ‘Hey, I think Schmidty’s going to put in in your stall later. So J-Mo put his phone in his stall and it was filming, like a hidden camera, and he has a video. The video is just Schmidty, with his typical smile, opening the locker, laughing, putting the toque there and then closing it really quick and looking over his shoulder. That’s how it all ended. We were all like, ‘Who’s doing this?’ and then we could finally put the blame on Schmidty. That was the end of that prank.”

Shouldn’t it have been obvious that Dubois was to blame?

“I think everybody’s guess was that it was me but nobody ever saw me do it so nobody could tell,” Dubois said. “It kept ending up in other guys’ stalls so no one could be sure what was going on. Then the video, like I said, it’s their own video, so it has to be him, right?”

[NHL’s 10 best contracts, 2024 edition: Jack Hughes, Nathan MacKinnon and more](#)

By Dom Luszczyzyn

In the NHL, contracts matter. For better or worse, every player is judged based on the money he makes and whether he's worth the price.

This piece is about the players that are well worth the money — the best deals in the league. It's when you ask yourself, "How is this guy making that much?" but in a good way.

There are several team-friendly deals out there. According to each player's projected value over the remainder of their deals, these are the league's 10 best contracts.

The goal here is to grade contracts empirically, with the same context being applied to each player across the league: How much value does each player bring to the table per year and over the life of the contract. The way that's measured comes from comparing a player's Net Rating and the expected salary that comes with it to a player's current contract.

What players have already done holds no merit; this is about the future value of the deal. Contract clauses and bonus structure are important, but not considered with this assessment. Players on LTIR were not considered.

5. Josh Morrissey

Contract: \$6.25 million AAV for four years

Model Value: \$12.7 million AAV for four years

Four years ago, this exact contract ranked No. 10 on the list of worst contracts. It was an eight-year commitment at No. 1 defenseman money to a guy who struggled to drive play, didn't move the puck very well, didn't offer much offense and struggled to defend his blue line.

Four years later, look at Josh Morrissey: A franchise defenseman who does a lot of things well, a player who turned his most glaring weaknesses into serious strengths. He scores, he defends well, he drives play, he moves the puck — he is elite. To go from one end of the contract spectrum to the other on the same deal takes serious growth.

It also took growth on my end when it came to this model, specifically when it came to handling the context of a player's minutes. Morrissey had it very hard three years ago, playing tough minutes after losing Jacob Trouba, a partner he had a lot of chemistry with. He also played big minutes. Both

factors weren't accounted for well enough at the time and if they were, maybe Morrissey would've never made the worst contracts list in the first place.

He probably didn't belong that low, but it was still hard to argue he was providing positive value at the time. His growth since, especially over the last two seasons, has been an absolute pleasure to witness, and Morrissey is now at a point where his value is twice as high as his contract.

Started from the bottom, now he's here.

Global Winnipeg

[Winnipeg Jets' whiteout parties raise \\$100K for community organizations](#)

By Sam Thompson Global News

They may have been booted in the first round of the playoffs, but the Winnipeg Jets — with an assist from United Way Winnipeg — are sharing a combined \$100,000 with four local community organizations, thanks to the success of the traditional whiteout parties during home playoff games.

The club's owners, True North Sports + Entertainment, announced Wednesday that they were topping up their annual fundraising effort to provide \$25,000 each to organizations tackling homelessness, addictions and hunger: Siloam Mission, the Main Street Project, the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre and N'Dinewemak – Our Relatives' Place.

“The original Winnipeg Jets whiteout is an exciting part of my personal hockey story and it's exciting to see that this tradition not only lives on but has taken on new significance within our community,” current Jets head coach Scott Arniel said.

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“With these funds being put to very important work across and for our downtown community, it's an honour to know the impacts of what the Jets do on the ice can be felt beyond our rink and beyond the playoffs themselves.”

Since partnering with United Way Winnipeg in 2019, the club said a total of more than \$312,000 has gone back into important downtown community agencies.

“Winnipeggers rally around their city like no other fans in the country,” United Way Winnipeg’s Michael Richardson said.

“They take care of each other—and the money raised at the whiteout parties is an amazing example of that.

“These funds will make a significant impact on Winnipeggers by supporting the life-saving work being done every day by four community organizations — both in our community, and for our community.”

According to the team, more than 170,000 fans have attended whiteout street parties since the current incarnation of the Jets brought back the tradition, long associated with Winnipeg’s previous NHL franchise.

CBC Manitoba

[*Winnipeg Jets' whiteout parties raise \\$100K for 4 charities in city*](#)

[*Money will address hunger, homelessness, mental health and addictions*](#)

Darren Bernhardt · CBC News

Four community organizations are sharing the \$100,000 raised during the Winnipeg Jets' brief playoff run in spring.

The money came from the whiteout street parties held outside Canada Life Centre during the Jets' home games in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Behind the flurry of thousands of white jerseys and cheering fans exists a tremendous partnership between two local organizations — the United Way Winnipeg and True North Sports and Entertainment, said Donna Miller, United Way Winnipeg's board chair.

"By partnering and working so well together, our two organizations make a mighty force for good."

Tickets for the sold-out parties were \$10, with \$5 from each going to United Way Winnipeg, "creating a ripple effect far beyond the energy and excitement of those whiteout parties," Miller said.

Just three parties were held, though. The Jets won the first game in the best-of-seven series against the Colorado Avalanche, then lost the next four and were eliminated from the post-season.

Still, the parties attracted more than 15,000 people in that time, while another 5,000 gathered at True North Square for the Party in the Plaza, said True North's Kevin Donnelly.

The money raised for charity will help people facing homelessness and hunger as well as mental health and addictions issues, he said.

"At True North we ... view it as a responsibility to give back and find meaningful ways to support this community, which the Winnipeg Jets and Manitoba Moose call home," Donnelly said.

Through the United Way, four organizations will each get \$25,000: the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre, N'Dinewemak-Our Relatives' Place, Siloam Mission and Main Street Project.

"These organizations make sure Winnipeggers aren't alone during some of the toughest times of their lives," said Michael Richardson, president and CEO of United Way Winnipeg. "These funds will make a significant impact."

Scott Arniel, who was appointed the Jets' head coach at the end of May, said he couldn't be prouder to be part of a team and community that shows up for one another.

"Being part of the original Jets whiteout back in the '80s, it was an exciting part of my personal hockey story. It's exciting to see that this tradition not only lives but has grown tremendously," he said, stressing his own strong ties to the city.

Thousands of Jets fans show up for their team as downtown Winnipeg enters total whiteout conditions

Whiteout to return to Donald Street during Winnipeg Jets home playoff games

Arniel was drafted as an 18-year-old NHL rookie by the first iteration of the Winnipeg Jets and later served as captain and then head coach of the Manitoba Moose. His wife is from Winnipeg, and their kids were raised in the city.

"We hope to be able to play a role in helping move this forward in seasons to come, and we'd like that party to last not just one week or two weeks, we want it to last two months so that we have lots of time [to raise more money]," he said.

Jamil Mahmood, executive director of Main Street Project, said True North helps groups like his in less conspicuous but significant ways during playoff time.

Quietly, behind the scenes, the organization makes sure every shelter in the city is able to throw a whiteout party in its own buildings, by providing pizza and merchandise and access to the game broadcasts.

"True North doesn't promote that part, but it's a big part of celebrating that culture of hockey and what the whiteout parties mean in all of our spaces for all of our community members," Mahmood said.

As for the \$25,000, it couldn't come at a better time, he said.

"This is probably one of the hardest times our city's ever faced, in terms of the situation around homelessness, toxic drug supply [and] mental health challenges that we've seen," Mahmood said.

"This is a time where we all need to come together and ... funding like this really gives us the support we need on the front lines to be able to do the work that supports our most vulnerable citizens."

[Sportsnet.ca](https://www.sportsnet.ca)

Potential trade destinations for Jets' Rutger McGroarty, Predators' Yaroslav Askarov

By Ryan Dixon

Trade speculation is always fun, but there's a little layer of sugar on top when the players being discussed could conceivably fit with all sorts of teams.

That's the case when it comes to a pair of early-20s prospects who could appeal to both contenders as cap-friendly depth contributors and rebuilding squads looking to plop another key piece in the foundation.

High-priced veterans tend to have a fairly narrow market, but the field widens significantly for young legs that can help for the next dozen seasons, beginning as soon as this coming October.

So with rugged winger Rutger McGroarty and highly regarded goalie Yaroslav Askarov looking as though their long-term futures are not with the teams that drafted them — the Winnipeg Jets and Nashville Predators, respectively — the mind begins to wander in terms of where they could ultimately land before training camp.

McGroarty, 20, has completed two years of NCAA hockey and the 2022 14th-overall pick certainly appears ready for the pro jump. The 22-year-old Askarov, meanwhile, has a pair of AHL seasons under his belt and is surely ready for a role in an NHL crease.

In McGroarty's case, neither camp is getting overly specific about why the American's NHL destiny appears to be with a team other than the Jets. All we know is, at some point in the off-season, it became clear a split was likely and the captain of Team USA's gold medal-winning team at the 2024 world junior championship was certainly at the centre of trade speculation that ultimately never came to fruition at the NHL Draft in Vegas.

A year ago, it was Askarov's name appearing in trade rumours at the Nashville-based 2023 draft as the Preds tried unsuccessfully to move up the board in front of their home fans. Nashville GM Barry Trotz has been movin' and shakin' ever since taking the big chair last spring, including inking No. 1 man Juuse Saros to an eight-year extension this summer and bringing in veteran backup Scott Wedgewood on a two-year contract in free agency to complete the duo.

That makes Askarov's path to the crease in the near-term murky, to say the least. And with Nashville clearly all in on these next couple seasons, it sure makes sense to try and help other parts of the team by dangling a very talented young tender.

With that in mind, let's identify some teams that make sense as landing spots for either McGroarty or Askarov — and, in a couple cases, clubs you could see being interested in both prospects.

Calling on McGroarty

Montreal Canadiens

There seemed to be some smoke around the Jets and Habs about McGroarty at the draft, but Montreal's long-term prospects at forward changed when Ivan Demidov landed in its lap at No. 5. That doesn't mean there's not still a fit here, though. And it sure seems like there's already been some conversations to build on.

The Canadiens' rebuild remains flush with defencemen, so perhaps they could find a blueline fit that makes sense in a swap with Winnipeg.

Minnesota Wild

This is another team that seemed poised for a deal with the Jets at the draft until defenceman Zeev Buium fell all the way to No. 12. (Seriously, how did that happen?)

Now that the Wild have stopped tap-dancing over landing Buium, maybe they circle back and see about adding a forward with McGroarty's enticing profile.

Boston Bruins

Here's an example of a contending team that could use a cost-friendly injection of youth in the lineup. Boston holds its own 2025 first-round pick, so maybe that's the basis of a swap and Winnipeg views that pick as a chip it can play to address a need ahead of the trade deadline next winter.

Calgary Flames

The Flames have leaned into a rebuild this summer and a top-six winger with size and grit like McGroarty would be an exciting addition to the fold.

Winnipeg has a huge hole at second-line centre; is there any world where Nazem Kadri could be a fit?

Kadri, who turns 34 just before the season starts, has no-trade protection, so the player would have to be on board with the move. But when you consider Calgary is surely entering into a down period, while the Jets are coming off an 111-point showing, perhaps the accomplished veteran would be sold on spending the last chapter of his career on a team trying to win it all in the next couple years.

Calling on Askarov

Columbus Blue Jackets

As bleak as the results have been in Ohio the past couple years, drafting Adam Fantilli third overall in 2023 and Cayden Lindstrom at No. 4 a few weeks ago has given the Jackets a potentially wonderful 1-2 duo down the middle for a long time to come.

On the back end, David Jiricek is a right-shot stud who's ready for NHL action and 2023 first-rounder Denton Mateychuk looks like a real offence driver from the blueline.

Now what about that net?

Danill Tarasov has shown some potential, but the Elvis Merzlikins experience has not gone as Columbus hoped it would.

The Jackets also have an interesting potential trade chip in forward Kent Johnson. The fifth-overall pick from 2021 has had ups and down so far in the NHL, but there's undoubtedly real offensive ability in that long, lanky frame.

Carolina Hurricanes

While Canes goalies have, at times, been superb at different points of the past few years, it's fair to say Carolina has just never fully settled the crease. Pyotr Kochetkov, 25, looks like a keeper, while Frederik Andersen has just one year left on his contract and only limited trade protection. Pairing Askarov with Kochetkov long-term could be an incredible combination in an age where teams heavily rely on two goalies — especially if they're both good.

Before Saros inked an extension to stay in Tennessee, we often saw his name appear on trade big boards and Carolina was certainly one of the squads we all mentally drew a line to. Maybe the Canes change course and target a younger Nashville goalie. With the future of restricted free agent Cane Martin Necas still up in the air, who knows, maybe he could be sent the other way as part of a bigger swap.

Calling on both

New Jersey Devils

Hey, the Devils solved their short-term goalie woes this summer, why not go out and take care of the big picture, too?

Jacob Markstrom, acquired from the Flames in June, is under contract for two more seasons. Jake Allen, plucked from Montreal ahead of the trade deadline, is locked down for just one more year. The former is already 34, the latter hits that age in August.

If Askarov could be patient for one more season, there sure seems to be an opportunity to play a huge role on what should be a very good club for a long time. And, when we're talking about mid-30s goalies, there's that much more of a chance the injury bug strikes and Askarov is called upon almost immediately.

As for McGroarty, the Devils have a lot of young talent up front, but lack a little of the sandpaper element the Michigan Wolverine could bring.

The Devils also have a couple interesting pieces they could choose to put in play. Dawson Mercer is a restricted free agent in need of a new contract, while Seamus Casey — McGroarty's teammate at Michigan the past two seasons — is a right-shot, offence-minded defenceman in an organization that already has young studs Luke Hughes and Simon Nemec locked into the defence corps.

San Jose Sharks

The Sharks' rebuild suddenly looks like the real thing with 2024 picks Macklin Celebrini and Sam Dickinson joining prime 2023 selections Will Smith and Quentin Musty. McGroarty could definitely be a nice winger for either Celebrini or Smith down the road, while Askarov might be the perfect tender to play behind a blueline anchored by Dickinson.

The Sharks' battery is currently MacKenzie Blackwood and Vitek Vanecek, with both goalies eligible to become UFAs next July and not exactly entrenched as trusted puckstoppers right now.

San Jose also has Vegas' 2025 first-round pick already in its backpocket, so it could dangle that selection while still hanging onto its own pick to try and get yet another prime prospect in the 2025 draft.