

NHL.com

***Barlow using 'massive offseason' to prepare for opportunity with Jets
19-year-old forward prospect could get look following departures of Monahan, Toffoli***

By Darrin Bauming

WINNIPEG -- Colby Barlow took notice when Winnipeg Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff turned to his prospect pipeline after losing key players to free agency July 1.

"If I'm a young player in the Jets organization today," Cheveldayoff said, "I'm pretty excited about the opportunities that are in front of me and I'm working pretty hard in the offseason to make sure that I take full advantage."

The Jets lost several impact players from their veteran core, including top-six forwards Sean Monahan (Columbus Blue Jackets) and Tyler Toffoli (San Jose Sharks). So, Cheveldayoff's comments were exactly what a forward prospect like Barlow wanted to hear after being the No. 18 pick in the 2023 NHL Draft.

"It's obviously positive hearing those kinds of things; you just kind of take it, run with it, and I'll do the absolute best I can and be prepared for it," Barlow said at Winnipeg's development camp last month. "I'm working towards my goal, which is to play in the NHL. I'm just doing the best I absolutely can. I know there's steps along the way for sure, and a learning curve that needs to be done."

The 19-year-old has an uphill battle to crack the NHL roster this season. A back injury early in his third season with Owen Sound of the Ontario Hockey League limited him to just 50 games, but he still managed to score 40 goals. Barlow returned in time for the playoffs and then got his first taste of professional hockey with Manitoba of the American Hockey League, where he had three points (one goal, two assists) in three games.

"It was an up-and-down year," Barlow said. "I had an injury that left me out of the lineup for about a month and a half there, which was unfortunate. I came back, had a strong finish, I thought.

"Unfortunately, it was a short playoff run for us, but another opportunity arose, coming up with the Manitoba Moose. It was a great experience for me, getting into a few games there, being around the guys, getting to know [coach Mark Morrison] and the assistants here -- just how they run things, which was awesome. I took it into the summer and I'm just working on it."

Jets captain Adam Lowry scored 45 goals in his fourth and final junior season with Swift Current of the Western Hockey League in 2012-13. Now 31, the forward shared his experiences with the 35 prospects at development camp.

"[Lowry] talked about how in junior he was one of the best players on his team at that level," Winnipeg director of player development Jimmy Roy said. "He had 40 goals, I think, and 40-something assists, you know? And he comes in and he said, 'My first year [pro], I had [one assist in nine games] in the American league.' So, he talked about figuring out what his role was and understanding all of that stuff in his [own] development."

Barlow knows he needs to do more than just find the net, something he's excelled at with 116 goals in 168 OHL games. It begins with keeping pace with the tempo of the game.

"I think my skating has come a long way from first being drafted to now," Barlow said. "It's still got a lot to improve, but I think that I've taken the right steps towards that. I think I'm starting to grow into my body a little bit more.

"And just kind of think the game with a higher pace. Kind of being around the Jets organization for a year now, being around higher-end guys and older guys that have got that IQ, I think that's really helped me learn quicker and it's beneficial for me."

Whether Barlow can play in the NHL this season remains to be seen, but he's doing his part to prepare for that chance.

"I think it's just being ready for that opportunity," he said. "It's just preparing myself the best I can possibly be for the age that I am right now. I think it's a massive offseason for me."

[Best goalie entering this season debated by NHL.com](#)
[Bobrovsky, Hellebuyck, Vasilevskiy among picks by writers ahead of NHL Network show](#)

By NHL.com

Who are the best goalies in the NHL entering the 2024-25 season?

That is a question NHL Network will answer when a panel of its producers and analysts selects the top 10 goalies in the League right now during the first of a nine-part series that looks at the League's best players, both by position and as an overall ranking.

As an appetizer for the show, which airs on NHL Network on Thursday (6 p.m. ET), here are some of the goalies, in alphabetical order, who should be considered for the No. 1 spot, according to a panel of NHL.com writers.

Sergei Bobrovsky, Florida Panthers

A two-time winner of the Vezina Trophy as the best goalie in the NHL (2013, 2017), Bobrovsky added the biggest accomplishment missing from this career resume when he helped the Panthers win the Stanley Cup for the first time last season. Bobrovsky, who turns 36 on Sept. 20, showed no signs of slowing down last season when he was a Vezina finalist again after going 36-17-4 with a 2.37 goals-against average, .915 save percentage and six shutouts (tied for the NHL lead) in 58 regular-season games. He was 16-8 with a 2.32 GAA, .906 save percentage and two shutouts in starting all 24 Stanley Cup Playoff games for Florida. That included a 32-save shutout in a 3-0 victory in Game 1 of the Stanley Cup Final against the Edmonton Oilers and 23 saves in a 2-1 Cup-clinching victory in Game 7. -- Tom Gulitti, staff writer

Thatcher Demko, Vancouver Canucks

The Canucks goalie finished second in voting for the Vezina Trophy last season after he helped the Canucks to a dramatic turnaround and first place in the Pacific Division with a 35-14-2 record, 2.45 GAA, five shutouts, and NHL career-high .918 save percentage in 51 games (all starts). He was the first Canucks goalie to be a Vezina finalist since Roberto Luongo in 2011, and he matched the highest finish in voting by a Vancouver goalie (Luongo, 2007; Kirk McLean, 1992). Demko was limited to 32 games in 2022-23 because of a knee injury, and Vancouver

went 38-37-7 and missed the playoffs by 12 points. It's obvious how much a healthy Demko means to the Canucks, which is why I feel he is the best at his position entering 2024-25. In fact, I expect the 28-year-old to be included on the United States roster for the 2025 4 Nations Face-Off in February. -- Mike G. Morreale, senior draft writer

Connor Hellebuyck, Winnipeg Jets

The two-time Vezina Trophy winner (2020, 2024) is still among the best goalies in the NHL and has posted impressive stats during his nine seasons with the Jets. Hellebuyck has a 2.63 GAA and .917 save percentage in 505 NHL games (496 starts). Since debuting in 2015-16, he leads NHL goalies in games played, is tied for the most with 37 shutouts, and his 275 wins are second to the Tampa Bay Lightning's Andrei Vasilevskiy (286). Hellebuyck may have struggled in the Jets' five-game loss to the Colorado Avalanche in the Western Conference First Round last season, but it was one of the few times he was not on top of his game. Hellebuyck was 37-19-4 with a 2.39 GAA, .921 save percentage and five shutouts in 60 games last season. He had the highest save percentage of any goalie who played at least 30 games, and at 31 years old is a favorite to be the starter for the United States at the 2025 4 Nations Face-Off in February and the 2026 Milano Cortina Olympics. -- Derek Van Diest, staff writer

Juuse Saros, Nashville Predators

Among the best goalies in the NHL for years, the Predators goalie was the busiest last season. The 29-year-old led the League in games played (64), starts (64), shots faced (1,845) and saves (1,672). He was fifth in voting for the Vezina Trophy after he helped guide the Predators into the playoffs, going 35-24-5 with a 2.86 GAA, .906 save percentage and three shutouts. Nashville showed its belief that Saros is a franchise goalie when it signed him to an eight-year, \$61.92 million contract (\$7.74 million average annual value) on July 1. He has one season remaining on a four-year, \$20 million contract (\$5 million AAV) he signed with the Predators on Aug. 16, 2021. He should be Finland's No. 1 goalie at the 2025 4 Nations Face-Off and the 2026 Milano Cortina Olympics. -- William Douglas, staff writer

Igor Shesterkin, New York Rangers

Anyone who watched the playoffs last season knows just how good Shesterkin is. The Rangers goalie was the biggest reason they got by the Carolina Hurricanes in the second round and reached Game 6 of the Eastern Conference Final against the eventual Stanley Cup champion Panthers. In the six-game series win against Carolina, the 28-year-old had a .919 save percentage and 2.80 GAA. Against Florida he was even more impressive, with a .935 save percentage and 2.25 GAA, allowing 14 goals in the six-game series. The Vezina Trophy winner in 2022, Shesterkin has been a workhorse, playing the sixth-most games (166) since the start of the 2021-22 season, with the most wins (109) and tied for the second most shutouts (13). How high of a bar has he set? Last season, he was 36-17-2 with a .913 save percentage and 2.58 GAA and it was considered by some a down season. If I had to win one game with the Stanley Cup on the line, Shesterkin would be my pick. -- Bill Price, Editor-in-Chief

Jeremy Swayman, Boston Bruins

Swayman might not be at the top of this list yet, but he's certainly in the conversation when it comes to the game's handful of elite goalies. The scary part, at least for opposing shooters: he's only 25 and hasn't reached his prime. Considering his impressive ascension, who knows how high his ceiling can be, given that he's at least three years younger than Shesterkin (28), Demko (28), Saros (29), Vasilevskiy (30), Hellebuyck (31) and Bobrovsky (35). With a 49-16-12 record in 81 games the past two seasons, he's now the No. 1 goalie for the Bruins after partner Linus Ullmark, the 2023 winner of the Vezina Trophy, was traded to the Ottawa Senators on June 24. If Swayman's career path doesn't encounter any speed bumps, don't be surprised if he's the

United States' starter at the 2025 4 Nations Face-Off in February. He's worked his way into the mix with Demko and Hellebuyck. -- Mike Zeisberger, staff writer

Andrei Vasilevskiy, Tampa Bay Lightning

Vasilevskiy has been in the conversation for the League's best goaltenders for years now, and he absolutely should still be in it. A four-time finalist and 2019 winner of the Vezina Trophy, Vasilevskiy, who turned 30 on July 25, was 30-20-2 with a 2.90 GAA, .900 save percentage and two shutouts in 52 games (all starts) last season. That's the highest GAA of his 10-season NHL career, but for a goalie who had a microdiscectomy to address a lumbar disk herniation in his back last September, I'd stay that's still pretty darn good. Vasilevskiy returned from that surgery Nov. 24 and still had more than 50 starts. He remained a workhorse following surgery and he's still among the best in the League. -- Tracey Myers, staff writer

[NHL Top Players: Top 10 Goalies](#) [NHL Network reveals best of current crop](#)

By NHL.com

From Stanley Cup champions to Vezina Trophy winners to All-Stars, the NHL has many great goalies. NHL Network producers and analysts on Thursday revealed their list of the top 10 goalies in the League right now in the first of a nine-part series. Here is the list:

10. Linus Ullmark, Ottawa Senators

Ullmark, who was traded to the Senators from the Boston Bruins on June 24, was 22-10-7 with a 2.57 goals-against average, .915 save percentage and two shutouts in 40 regular-season games (39 starts) for the Bruins last season. This came one season after he won the Vezina Trophy as the best goalie in the NHL; he went 40-6-1, tied Alexandar Georgiev of the Colorado Avalanche for the League lead in wins, and finished first in GAA (1.89) and save percentage (.938) in 49 games (48 starts). The 31-year-old leads the NHL in save percentage (.924) and is second in GAA (2.28; Frederik Andersen, Carolina Hurricanes, 2.22) over the past three seasons among goalies to play at least 50 games.

9. Juuse Saros, Nashville Predators

Saros has won at least 33 games each of the past three seasons, going 35-24-5 with a 2.86 GAA, .906 save percentage and three shutouts in 64 games last season. The 29-year-old led goalies in games played last season, faced the most shots (1,845) and made the most saves (1,672). With 106 wins over the past three seasons, he ranks second behind Igor Shesterkin of the New York Rangers in that span (109). Saros finished fifth in Vezina voting last season and has finished in the top six each of the past four seasons.

8. Jake Oettinger, Dallas Stars

Oettinger was 35-14-4 with a 2.72 GAA, .905 save percentage and three shutouts in 54 games (53 starts) last season and helped Dallas reach the Western Conference Final for the second straight season. The 25-year-old had 37 wins in 2022-23 and 30 in 2021-22. Oettinger has 20 playoff wins the past two seasons, ranking second behind Sergei Bobrovsky of the Florida Panthers (28).

7. Sergei Bobrovsky, Florida Panthers

Last season was one to remember for Bobrovsky, who finished third in Vezina voting after going 36-17-4 with a 2.37 GAA, .915 save percentage and a League-high tying six shutouts in 58 games. Among goalies to play at least 25 games, the 35-year-old was third in GAA and tied with

Ullmark for seventh in save percentage. He also allowed two goals or fewer in 32 starts. Bobrovsky helped the Panthers to a Stanley Cup championship, winning all 16 games in the Stanley Cup Playoffs to go with a 2.32 GAA, .906 save percentage and two shutouts.

6. Thatcher Demko, Vancouver Canucks

Demko (35-14-2, 2.45 GAA, .918 save percentage, five shutouts in 51 games) tied Saros and Oettinger for sixth in wins and finished fifth in GAA among goalies to play at least 25 games. He also was leading the NHL in wins when he sustained a knee injury March 9 that sidelined him for 14 games. Despite missing time, he finished as the runner-up for the Vezina, won by Connor Hellebuyck of the Winnipeg Jets. The 28-year-old also helped the Canucks win the Pacific Division, finish with 109 points -- 26 more than in 2022-23 -- and allow 2.70 goals per game, tied with the Bruins for the fifth-fewest.

5. Ilya Sorokin, New York Islanders

Despite having the highest GAA (3.01) and lowest save percentage (.909) of his NHL career last season, Sorokin was the Islanders' best player and a big reason they qualified for the playoffs; the 29-year-old was 25-19-12 with two shutouts in 56 games (55 starts). He leads the NHL with 18 shutouts since entering the League in the 2020-21 season and is tied for third with a .919 save percentage in that span among goalies to play at least 50 games (Ullmark, .923; Igor Shesterkin, New York Rangers, .920).

4. Jeremy Swayman, Boston Bruins

Swayman was one of the top goalies in the League last season despite not being a full-time starter, having split games with Ullmark. He was 25-10-8 with a 2.53 GAA, .916 save percentage and three shutouts in 44 games (43 starts) and is 79-33-15 in his NHL career. The 25-year-old has a 2.34 GAA since entering the NHL in 2020-21, second behind Ullmark (2.32) among goalies to play at least 50 games.

3. Andrei Vasilevskiy, Tampa Bay Lightning

Vasilevskiy, who was the No. 1-ranked goalie on this list each of the past five years, won 30 games last season, the seventh straight time he's won at least that many. He was 30-20-2 with a 2.90 GAA, .900 save percentage and two shutouts in 52 games after being sidelined for the first 20 games of the season because of offseason back surgery. The 30-year-old won the Vezina in 2019 and has finished in the top five in voting in five of the past seven seasons. He leads the NHL with 286 wins since 2015-16. Vasilevskiy helped the Lightning win the Stanley Cup in back-to-back seasons, playing every minute in the 2020 and 2021 playoffs. He was 16-7 with a 1.90 GAA, .937 save percentage and five shutouts in 23 games to win the Conn Smythe Trophy as playoff MVP in 2021.

2. Connor Hellebuyck, Winnipeg Jets

The reigning Vezina Trophy winner, Hellebuyck went 37-19-4 with a 2.39 GAA with a .921 save percentage and five shutouts in 60 games last season. He ranked second in the NHL in wins (Georgiev, 38). Among goalies to play at least 25 games, he was second in save percentage (Anthony Stolarz, Panthers, .925) and fourth in GAA. He also made the second-most saves overall (1,656), behind Saros. Hellebuyck won the William M. Jennings Trophy, presented annually to the goalies who play a minimum of 25 games for the team allowing the fewest goals during the regular season. Winnipeg allowed an NHL-low 199 goals (including shootout-deciding goals) and finished second in the Central Division (52-24-6). The 31-year-old also won the Vezina in 2020 and has been a finalist four times in the past seven seasons.

1. Igor Shesterkin, New York Rangers

After ranking No. 2 on the list last year, Shesterkin moves into the top spot. The 28-year-old was 36-17-2 with a 2.58 GAA, .913 save percentage and four shutouts in 55 games last season and was among the best players in the postseason, finishing with a 2.34 GAA and .927 save percentage in 16 games. Shesterkin leads the NHL with 109 wins over the past three seasons and is tied with Hellebuyck for second in shutouts with 13 in that span, behind Sorokin (15). He won the Vezina in 2022, when he also was a finalist for the Hart Trophy, awarded to the NHL MVP. Shesterkin is 135-59-17 with a 2.43 GAA, .921 save percentage and 15 shutouts in 213 regular-season games (208 starts).

Winnipeg Free Press

Winnipeg Jets new assistant coach a 'curious' choice

By: Ken Wiebe

Curiosity has always been a driving force for Davis Payne.

The character trait is especially helpful in the coaching industry, where keeping up with new trends while staying on top of why the current ones are working, is critical.

"I've always been a tinkerer," Payne said during a one-on-one interview at the 2024 NHL Draft in Las Vegas. "The inner workings and the fine details of what leads to success. Why it happens versus why it doesn't happen has always been something that fascinates me, not just in hockey but in a number of different areas. It's something with our sport that I genuinely enjoy."

Payne has been heavily involved in the getting-to-know-you phase since he was hired along with Dean Chynoweth to round out Scott Arniel's staff in June.

Calls have been made to players and ample time has been spent with Arniel and the rest of the staff during the past few weeks — including some valuable time at the Jets' coaching summit last week.

Payne's path to this point is an interesting one.

Born in Port Alberni, B.C., the 53 year old found his passion for the game at a young age and his playing career included four seasons of NCAA hockey at Michigan Tech as a hard-working winger with the Huskies.

Originally chosen in the seventh round of the 1989 NHL Draft by the Edmonton Oilers, Payne battled his way to suiting up in 22 NHL games with the Boston Bruins by doing things the hard way.

There were a lot of tough miles on the journey, including multiple seasons in the ECHL — where Payne's best year included 25 goals and 61 points in 62 games to go along with 175 penalty minutes.

He also had 35 goals and 72 points in 108 American Hockey League games over the next two seasons with the Providence Bruins, which overlapped with those 22 games with the Bruins in 1995-96 and 1996-97.

After wrapping up his playing career, Payne transitioned to an assistant coaching job with the Greenville Grrrowl of the ECHL — the team he spent his final two seasons with.

Before the season was over, he had been hired by the Pee Dee Pride as the head coach and helped lead the team to the third round of the Kelly Cup playoffs.

Payne spent seven seasons in the ECHL in a head coaching role, leading the Alaska Aces to the league title in 2006.

After being promoted to assistant coach of the Peoria Rivermen for one season, Payne took over as head coach of the St. Louis Blues' primary affiliate.

Before his second season in that role was complete, Payne got his first NHL head coaching gig, replacing former Winnipeg Jets head coach and Manitoba Hockey Hall of Famer Andy Murray.

Just 39 years old, Payne took over a team that would miss the Stanley Cup playoffs in consecutive seasons and he was fired by Doug Armstrong just 13 games into the 2011-12 campaign.

His career record at the NHL level is a respectable 67-55-15, good for a .545 winning percentage, but that was Payne's first real welcome-to-the-coaching-fraternity moment.

"It was tough because I had been in coaching for probably 10 years and you didn't know the reality of the business side being as harsh as it is," said Payne. "You've got to deal with the fact that people are saying that you failed."

How did Payne deal with the debriefing process of where things went wrong with the Blues?

"It was about finding different areas, different ways, different situations to pick yourself back up. Just like anybody does," said Payne, noting that Armstrong remains one of his mentors, despite the fact he fired him. "We're not all dealt roses and rainbows. It's no different than a player's mentality. If you have a bad shift, you're getting another one, go out and do it better. You had to sort of develop that mindset.

"You're either going to be one and done, or you're going to keep going. I'm probably not bright enough to quit, so I kept going."

Rather than lament the opportunity that didn't go as planned, Payne dug in and has spent the past 12 seasons as an NHL assistant coach, with the Los Angeles Kings, Buffalo Sabres and Ottawa Senators.

His journey included winning the Stanley Cup with the Kings in 2014, with the clincher coming against Arnie's New York Rangers in five games.

"It's pretty humbling," said Payne, asked what it was like to see his name engraved on the Stanley Cup for the first time. "Knowing that a lot more people put in the work than just the one name. The enjoyment they get out of that is as important as my own. But truly, when you get a chance to share it with friends and family and coaching staff and players, it's such a shared feeling and I can't wait to do it again."

Whether it's reaching the pinnacle of the sport or the trials and tribulations along the way, Payne has enjoyed every step of the process.

"Without a doubt. It's a matter of going to the NHL, understanding the player, understanding the routine and understanding what it takes. Then, having a chance to taste some success and understanding exactly what it takes, what has to go into it," said Payne. "Those experiences you gain along the way from every up and down. There's as much to learn from winning a championship as there is from missing the playoffs. There's ground to cover and things to figure out. Every step along the way has always been about learning how to do something a little bit better."

With the Jets, Payne will be running the forwards and the power play and he's excited about some of the pieces at his disposal, while recognizing that improving the power play efficiency is a priority for the upcoming season.

"Whatever unit you want to talk about, whatever player you want to talk about, there's some really skilled players that you can work with to help the hockey club. So that's enticing," said Payne. "I truly believe that you have to be dangerous from above and you have to be dangerous from below and constantly attacking."

"It will be from above, it will be from below, it will be from both sides of the ice. I don't feel like the guy at the net always needs to be the guy at the net. Guys moving in and out on the backsides. It just gives you constant threats and different threats, so that there's going to be a little bit more of a dynamic to it the guys will enjoy."

Winnipeg Sun

Never a better time for Jets to buy low on Patrik Laine, but does he fit?

By Scott Billeck

If there were ever a storyline to captivate and re-invigorate a Winnipeg Jets audience, it'd be the return of Patrik Laine.

There's a little prodigal son to it—a little Allen Iverson returning to the Philadelphia 76ers after several seasons away or Charles Woodson to the Oakland Raiders.

Lainemania 2.0 would be something to behold around these parts.

Fit, both on the roster and in terms of the salary cap, is king in this game, and that's the biggest question about Laine.

Does he fit?

The 2016 second-overall pick by the Jets has been in Columbus since January 2021 after the Jets shipped him and fellow forward Jack Roslovic to the Blue Jackets for centre Pierre-Luc Dubois and a third-round pick.

The trade was a flop for both teams.

Dubois was dealt Los Angeles last summer and is now in Washington after failing to live up to lofty expectations after signing a massive contract.

Laine's time in Columbus hasn't produced the same fruits that grew in Winnipeg. After some turbulent seasons dealing with injuries and a stint in the NHL/NHLPA Player Assistance Program that ended late last month, Laine has asked to be traded.

This, of course, has Winnipeg fans excited. Could there be a reunion?

Let's dive into the pros and cons.

THE PROS

He's still Patrik Laine

He's still an elite goal scorer, scoring 100 times in his first 179 NHL games, and a power-play maestro. The Jets would benefit from his injection of offence.

His release is still among the best in the world. At his best, he's a point-per-game player with 40-goal upside and comes with size Winnipeg lacks in their top six.

And he's still just 26.

Laine benefits best when a centre gets him the puck. He didn't have that in Columbus.

Winnipeg is a different team, and even with Sean Monahan's departure, they have a playmaking centre in Mark Scheifele and another in Cole Perfetti (or Brad Lambert, depending on which route they take).

Laine is the type of player that finds open space. He's done that consistently throughout his career. Laine's shot and Perfetti's vision could set up the latter for the success he needs as a second-line centre.

Also, just imagine what he can do with assistant Davis Payne and Winnipeg's listless power play. He had 52 power-play goals in 306 games with the Jets.

Box office hit

Gary Bettman's trip to Winnipeg last year wasn't just to check off the city on his yearly tour of every NHL market.

He brought with him a sales pitch, as Winnipeg was failing to sell out the league's smallest barn, and its season-ticket base was dwindling.

Winnipeg's summer likely hasn't had fans reaching deep into their pockets to shell out thousands.

Despite its 52-win season last year, the team was quickly dumped from the playoffs and there hasn't been much in the way of improving a club that lost notable players in Sean Monahan and Brenden Dillon in free agency.

Laine's return could be the summer splash this team needs on the ice, and another at the ticket booth.

THE CONS

The contract

Laine's \$8.7 million average annual value is a big obstacle.

As of Thursday, the Jets have \$5.7 million in cap space, and they've yet to sign restricted free agent Cole Perfetti. One way or another, Perfetti's contract will eat up most, if not all, of that depending on whether he signs a bridge or a long-term extension.

Fitting Laine would mean figuring out a way to create a good chunk of space.

Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell conceded to The Columbus Dispatch last week that he will likely have to retain some money, but "if I wanted to eat half, I could've traded him by now, but that's not my first choice," he said.

The Athletic's Aaron Portzline, who covers the Blue Jackets, said in a recent story he believes the Blue Jackets aren't expecting a top player in return but rather a guy who can play every night and make the team more competitive.

One scenario would see some form of retention, a player (someone like Alex Lafallo and his \$4 million AAV) sent back to Columbus, and then, perhaps, a third-party broker to make it all work over the next two seasons—the remaining length of Laine's four-year, \$34.8 million deal.

Another would see Neal Pionk and his \$5.875 million AAV sent to Columbus, making it slightly easier from a cap perspective.

Both players have one year left on their respective deals.

Winnipeg gains significant cap space for 2025-26, with a number of UFAs and nearly \$4 million in dead cap space from buyouts coming off the books.

The risk

Laine played just 18 games last season after breaking his clavicle in mid-December, an injury that required shoulder surgery, before entering the player assistance program.

He hasn't played a full 82-game schedule since 2018-19, with injuries in his previous four seasons restricting his time on the ice.

Laine's hope, he said after it was announced he would enter the player assistance program in January, was that his time in the program would help him return to his best.

"Hockey has been my passion and my life, but I have come to realize that in order to perform at my best, I need to take this time to focus on myself," he wrote in an Instagram post.

Laine isn't known for his strong defensive play.

His teams have given up a lot when he's on the ice, his possession numbers have topped 50% just once in his career, and his expected goal mark has never been positive.

MAILBAG: Patrik Laine, top-four defencemen and some Formula 1

By Scott Billeck

It's August already. Where does the time go?

In six weeks or so, the Winnipeg Jets will begin training camp ahead of the 2024-25 season, which kicks off in a little over two months.

For many, summer is just a necessary evil between the end of one hockey season and the beginning of another.

And there's never a drought when it comes to people wanting to talk about the Winnipeg Jets.

Patrik Laine? Top-four defenceman? A local kid who's an unrestricted free agent at the moment?

Yup, you'd like to know about them.

Also, because there's more in this town than the Jets, there's a Winnipeg Blue Bombers question and a couple of F1, which is tremendous.

Let's go.

The Jets lack size and scoring and Laine is waiting. The Columbus Blue Jackets have recently stated they will most likely need to retain. So, what are we waiting for? — @KasperskiStuart on X

I don't believe the Jets are waiting for anything. I just don't see the fit.

The risk is very high, and even if Columbus retained half, the Jets don't have the cap space to make it work without shipping out someone. Sure, they could perhaps send Alex Lafallo back to the Blue Jackets, which would help. Make it work, but there's a bigger problem.

Where does Laine fit?

Winnipeg's top six is more or less set at the moment, with Kyle Connor, Mark Scheifele, Gabriel Vilardi, Cole Perfetti, Nikolaj Ehlers and one of Brad Lambert or Vladislav Namestnikov.

I'm led to believe head coach Scott Arniel wants Perfetti in his top six going forward. They want to incorporate more youth (Lambert, for example) and expand Perfetti's role and ice time.

Unless Ehlers is shipped off, and I'm told there's constant contact between his camp and the Jets this summer, then where's the fit? Arniel likes Ehlers, too, and one would think their analytics summit is going to show his value to the organization if utilized properly.

It's a nice story. I get it. I'm just not convinced there's a happy ending in Winnipeg.

Are there any top-four defencemen available in the league right now? — @Darryl_Rempel on X

Not really...

The free-agent market does not have anyone who fits the bill, and everything else is a shot in the dark.

Let's say the New York Islanders wanted Ehlers. Could the Jets get Ryan Pullock in return? A big, rugged right-shot D would be perfect for this Jets team. But is it realistic?

In theory, anything's possible, but Winnipeg whiffed on July 1 in the open market and didn't resign Brenden Dillon.

There's just not a lot left without getting creative with another team.

Colton Parayko has been linked with the Jets in the past. He has size, a big shot and plays big minutes. He has a no-trade clause.

David Jiricek in Columbus? Just spit-balling here.

What about teams close to the cap? Perhaps Erik Cernak in Tampa? He has a full no-trade, too.

The Jets would like to see Dylan Samberg taking the next step or Heinola moving into that role. Both are possible, and if they're leading this youth movement, pulling from within makes sense.

Should the Jets go after Calen Addison? — @RyanWakshinski on X

In a word, no.

I get that he's a right-shot defenceman and gets bonus points for being a local lad from Brandon, but the Jets don't need another undersized blue-liner.

He doesn't offer much offensively or defensively, and his best season, points-wise, was heavily skewed by two-thirds of his points coming on the power play. Addison had one good season on the PP. Since then, his role diminished as the Wild looked elsewhere, and he was shipped to the San Jose Sharks early last season in a three-team deal to get former Jets blue-liner Zach Bogosian. The Wild were looking to get better defensively. Addison wasn't the guy.

The Jets need to improve defensively after losing Dillon to free agency and Nate Schmidt to a buyout.

And the biggest deterrent? There's simply no room for another sixth/seventh defenceman.

A top-four guy? Winnipeg would welcome one with open arms, but they've stocked the cupboards this summer with bubble blueliners, adding Dylan Coghlan and Haydn Fleury and re-signing Colin Miller, Logan Stanley, and Heinola.

What do you think is the shelf life of the current Jets jersey set? Obviously, the heritage ones are hugely popular, but that vs. TNSE's iconic 2.0 identity gives the ones in charge pause. What do you think? – @joechurchill on X

I don't think the current jersey is going anywhere.

The whole brand is now built around that crest and colour scheme, and they can mix in the Heritage jerseys when they want to.

There will always be something new, whether the Jets get another outdoor game here in Winnipeg, participate in one elsewhere, or Fantatics (who make the jerseys now) create a run of jerseys similar to the reverse retros or the aviators.

The shelf life is indefinite. There may be a few small tweaks here and there, but I don't see it veering too much from the status quo.

The Score

Jets GM urges young players to step up: 'The ball's in their court'

By Kayla Douglas

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA - JULY 23: Winnipeg Jets General Manager Kevin Cheveldayoff speaks to members of the media via a Zoom call at the end of the first round of the 2021 NHL Draft at Canada Life Centre on July 23, 2021 in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. The 2021 NHL Draft was held virtually due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic.

Winnipeg general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff has issued a challenge to the future of the Jets' organization.

"I'm looking forward for our younger players to try and take a step, whether it's Logan Stanley, Ville Heinola, Brad Lambert, (Nikita) Chibrikov, (Cole) Perfetti," he said Wednesday during the Hlinka Gretzky Cup, per TSN. "Those are the kind of players that we need to keep growing to push our organization forward."

He added, "The ball's in their court. If you're a young player in our organization right now, it's all in front of you, there for the taking."

Perfetti and Stanley have the most NHL experience among the five players Cheveldayoff named.

This past season was Perfetti's third in the big leagues and his first unaffected by injuries. He posted a career-high 19 goals and 38 points in 71 appearances, but 19 of those points came in his first 25 games of the season.

Perfetti went 15 games without a point during the winter. He was a healthy scratch for 11 regular-season matchups in March and April and appeared in just one playoff contest. He's currently a restricted free agent in need of a new contract.

Despite that slump, Cheveldayoff threw his support behind the 2020 first-round pick.

"I think Cole's just scratching the surface. ... Last year, he had a great year," he said. "We're looking forward to good things with him moving forward with our core."

Stanley, meanwhile, appeared in 25 regular-season games and three playoff outings in 2023-24.

Cheveldayoff noted that it was difficult to get Stanley into the lineup because the Jets' blue line stayed remarkably healthy. However, the executive foresees a greater opportunity for Stanley after the club bought out veteran rearguard Nate Schmidt.

The Jets re-signed Stanley to a two-year pact with a \$1.25-million cap hit in July.

Chibrikov and Lambert both made their NHL debuts on April 18, with the former scoring a goal and the latter registering an assist.

"Both guys look to factor into our equation sooner rather than later," Cheveldayoff said.

Cheveldayoff didn't mention Rutger McGroarty, the 14th overall pick of the 2022 NHL Draft. Winnipeg has reportedly been looking to trade the 20-year-old forward this summer.

On top of Schmidt's exit, defenseman Brenden Dillon, center Sean Monahan, and winger Tyler Toffoli departed in free agency, creating more vacancies in Winnipeg's lineup.

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[Cheveldayoff: 'I'm looking forward to our younger players trying to take a step this year' \(VIDEO\)](#)

Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff joined the TSN Hlinka Gretzky Cup broadcast to discuss his team's scouting strategy at the tournament, and his excitement about the many promising young prospects in Winnipeg right now.