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<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/09/11/yager-makes-amazing-first-impression>

Yager makes amazing first impression Centre notches nifty goal as Jets prepare for young-stars tourney

By: Mike McIntyre

Brayden Yager wasted no time making a positive impression.

The 19-year-old forward, acquired by the Winnipeg Jets last month in a trade, stepped on to the ice at the Hockey For All Centre on Wednesday for his first official practice. Moments later, he scored a highlight-reel goal during a drill that had the crowd on hand oohing and aahing, burying a puck just under the crossbar from a seemingly impossible spot.

Ho-hum. All in a day's work, the Saskatoon product would later explain.

"You work a lot on skills throughout the summer. You're always shooting pucks, especially as a forward, from different areas," Yager told a media horde with a slight smirk on his face.

It was easy to see why the Jets are so high on Yager, the 14th-overall pick from 2023 who helped lead the Moose Jaw Warriors to a WHL championship and an appearance in the Memorial Cup last spring. He's the return for disgruntled forward Rutger McGroarty, who went the other way to the Pittsburgh Penguins.

Yager will now try to take that kind of show on the road as he laces up the skates in the annual Young Stars Classic in Penticton, B.C. The Jets prospects will take on their peers from the Calgary Flames (Friday, 6 p.m.), Vancouver Canucks (Sunday, 4 p.m.) and Edmonton Oilers (Monday, 1 p.m.).

"I think its a good opportunity for us young guys to showcase our skill," said Yager. "And I think it gives a bit of an advantage coming into camp, getting a little bit more into shape. There's nothing quite like game shape."

Based on line rushes Wednesday, Yager will start at centre between wingers Nikita Chibrikov and Jacob Julien.

"Obviously I want to come here and start to gel with the players I'm playing with. Getting comfortable with everyone is kind of the main thing," he said.

Yager is currently roommates with Brad Lambert, who will centre another top offensive line between Colby Barlow and Kevin He. When full Jets camp begins next Thursday, Yager and Lambert will definitely be in the mix for Winnipeg's second-line centre spot, which appears to be wide open.

"Every time you step on the ice you try to be the best you can," Lambert said of the opportunity ahead and trying to make the most of what will be his third Young Stars tournament.

Jets No. 1 centre Mark Scheifele said earlier this week he's most excited about seeing young players like "Lambo" competing to make the big club this year. Lambert, who was born in Finland but raised in Saskatoon, had 55 points (21 goals, 34 assists) in 64 games with the Manitoba Moose last season as a rookie.

"That's unbelievable. One of the great players in this organization. I've followed him since I was a little kid. For him to say something like that, it's super exciting," said Lambert.

"But at the same time, I've got a lot of work ahead of me. Just take it a day at a time. Do the Young Stars thing first, then go to training camp and work my (expletive) off and we'll see what happens."

"I've got a lot of work ahead of me. Just take it a day at a time. Do the Young Stars thing first, then go to training camp and work my (expletive) off and we'll see what happens."

—Brad Lambert

Lambert was thrilled to add Yager to the prospect pool, describing him as "a great guy... I love him."

"We've bonded pretty quick. Obviously I knew him a little bit from back in Saskatoon," said Lambert, who spent the summer working out with former NHLer Gary Roberts in Toronto and said he put on about eight pounds of muscle.

"When I've been skating, I've felt stronger," said Lambert, who along with Chibrikov made his NHL debut the Jets final regular-season game of last season.

Yager, Lambert and Chibrikov are at the top of the list of players to keep a close eye on, but there are others, too.

Winnipeg's 26-man roster includes first-rounders Barlow and Chaz Lucius, who skated Wednesday in a yellow no-contact jersey. He's still recovering from ankle surgery and won't play this weekend, but the hope is he'll be ready by main camp next week.

"He hasn't had the chance to get in any contact over the summer, so it's just being very careful and very sure of him coming back at the right time," said Moose coach Mark Morrison, who will run the Young Stars bench.

He was asked how close Lambert is to making the Jets.

"We'll see. I've got my opinion on it, but I don't want to throw it out there," said Morrison. "I think that will happen with Arnie (Jets coach Scott Arniel) and Chevy (GM Kevin Cheveldayoff) and the group there. But Brad's come a long ways."

Another intriguing prospect is defenceman Elias Salomonsson, who is coming off a championship with his pro team in Sweden and now will begin his North American career.

"It's nice to get some games in, Of course you want to get as ready as you can for when main camp starts," said Salomonsson, who was chosen in the second round of the 2022 draft.

"It's nice to get some touches. I'm looking forward to it."

Salomonsson was paired in drills Wednesday with Dylan Anhorn, who is signed to the Moose this coming season.

“He’s a fun guy. We’re actually roommates at the hotel. He’s been driving me back and forth to the rink. He’s a great guy and a great player, too,” he said.

Salomonsson is likely to start the year with the Moose, but he plans to make that decision as difficult as possible for Jets coaches.

“It’s up to me to show them I can play there. Just do my best,” he said. “I feel confident. I’m just going to do the best that I can. It’s up to me.”

With 16 healthy forwards and seven defencemen, Morrison said there will be concerted effort to ensure everyone plays at least one game. The two goaltenders, Thomas Milic and Domenic DiVincentiis, will also share duties.

“I know it’s early days and it’s their first skate in a long time, but we were all paying attention and interested to see the players that we haven’t seen,” he said.

“There’s a lot of different things coming at these kids right now as far as staff goes and systems go. They want to impress and they want to do well, so we’re trying to slow them down a little bit and make sure the execution is there, because they’re just so excited to get out there.”

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/jets-prospect-brayden-yager-opening-eyes-at-rookie-camp-with-his-wicked-shot>

Jets prospect Brayden Yager opening eyes at rookie camp with his wicked shot

By Scott Billeck

It’s one thing to hear that a young player has elite shooting talent. It’s another thing to see it.

Brayden Yager had the puck in close to the left of Jets prospect goalie Domenic DiVincentiis on Wednesday, and before the 2023 OHL goalie of the year knew it, it had whizzed past his mask short side en route to the roof of the net.

That threading of the proverbial needle drew several ‘oohs and ahhs’ from a dozen or so fans watching Winnipeg’s rookies being put through their paces.

It was the kind of first impression that will go over well for the player the Jets acquired from the Pittsburgh Penguins a few weeks ago in the trade that sent McGroarty to Pennsylvania.

A few more of those, and it will be “Rutger who?” around these parts.

Yager, meanwhile, was a bit sheepish when reminded of the play after the hour-long skate.

“Just tight in front, tried to get it up, and it went in,” he said. “We work a lot on skills throughout the summer and you’re always working on shooting pucks, especially as a forward, in different areas.”

Yager, the 14th overall pick in 2023, lined up at centre with Nikita Chibrikov and Jacob Julien on his wings during drills. That line, and another featuring Brad Lambert, Colby Barlow and Kevin He, are expected to see a lot of ice time this weekend in Penticton for the annual Young Stars tournament.

“It’s a good opportunity for us young guys to showcase our skill,” Yager said. “And it gives us a little bit of an advantage coming into main camp.”

Yager is expected to return to Moose Jaw in the WHL this coming season after helping lead the franchise to its first league title last season.

“It was pretty cool to see the reaction of the city, they’ve been waiting a long time for that,” Yager said. “It meant so much to the city, and you could see with the parades and stuff like that.”

The league title win earned Yager and the Warriors a trip to the Memorial Cup. He also won a spot on Canada’s world junior squad, which was knocked out in the quarterfinals.

Yager, meanwhile, said he received messages from Jets captain Adam Lowry and his assistants, Mark Scheifele and Josh Morrissey, shortly after the trade.

He said he was “super excited” to be coming to Winnipeg, with part of that owing to his family back in Saskatoon, who won’t have to commute as long to see him play once he reaches the NHL.

“They can come down lots,” he said. “They can come down and help me cook meals and stuff.”

Yager is roommates with Lambert this weekend in Penticton. The two know each other, with Lambert often returning to Saskatoon, where his dad is from. He also knows Barlow from their time together in top prospect camps with Hockey Canada.

As far as established Jets, there’s a picture floating around of a very young Yager posing with a young Morrissey, who was playing junior hockey for the Prince Albert Raiders years ago.

“That’s kind of cool to have that come full circle,” Yager said.

Lucius a no-go for Penticton

Off-injured prospect Chaz Lucius will play no part on the ice for the Jets this weekend in B.C.

The 2021 first-rounder skated in a yellow non-contact jersey on Wednesday, and sat out several of the battle drills.

“He hasn’t had a chance to get in any contact over the summer,” Manitoba Moose head coach Mark Morrison said. “It’s just being very careful and being very sure of him coming back at the right time.”

Lucius has been unfortunate to have had four straight seasons that ended with going under the knife, including the latest operation on a problematic heel back in January.

In 2023, it was a shoulder. His ankle curtailed his one and only year in college in 2022, and his draft year ended abruptly thanks to his knee, which left him in a wheelchair and required him to learn to walk again.

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/brad-lambert-looking-to-park-himself-in-jets-second-line-garage>

Brad Lambert looking to park himself in Jets' second-line garage

By Scott Billeck

If Brad Lambert wants it, there's a parking spot on Winnipeg's second line wide enough to fit a 'Lambo' in the coming weeks. He's well aware of the vacancy.

"I'm super excited," he said. "I'm going in taking it a day at a time and trying to do everything I can, work hard and try and earn a spot like I have the last two years that I've come here."

The man, whose nickname is derived from the legendary supercar manufacturer, has the high-horsepower engine coveted in the NHL.

With a full season of AHL hockey under the hood, Lambert's chance at cracking Winnipeg's opening-night roster appears better than anyone's.

"I know it's going to take a lot of hard work, but I feel like I'm ready to put in the work," he said.

First up in the team's annual trip to Penticton for the Young Stars tournament.

Like the team's development camp in late June, Lambert didn't need to attend this week's events. He wanted to.

"It's good to get games under my belt and try and get a feel for the game before main camp," Lambert said. "That kind of gives you a head start, so I'm happy to play some games."

According to Manitoba Moose head coach Mark Morrison, it's another show of leadership from a player who's experienced a lot of growth in that department.

"He feels like (being here) is important to him, and it is," Morrison said. "I have a lot of respect for the decision he made to come back here."

Morrison oversaw Lambert's rise from junior hockey standout to the AHL's all-rookie team last year. The 20-year-old finished second in rookie scoring with 20 goals and 53 points and was named to the league's all-star game.

He made his NHL debut alongside fellow prospect Nikita Chibrikov in Winnipeg's final regular-season game, grabbing his first NHL point on Gabriel Vilardi's 22nd goal.

"I've got my opinion on it, but I don't want to throw it out there," Morrison said about whether or not Lambert is ready to make the next step, leaving that up to Jets head coach Scott Arniel and his staff.

It wasn't too hard to read between the lines. Morrison thinks he's ready.

His future teammates seem to share the same opinion. On Tuesday, Lambert's name was the first out of Mark Scheifele's mouth when asked about the injection of youth that could enter the NHL fray this season.

"Seeing what he did in that last game," Scheifele said. "I feel like you don't see him all year and he grew a lot. Just physically. I think he's an exciting one."

Lambert spent his off-season tuning his motor, putting on eight pounds of lean muscle to his frame while working with former NHLer Gary Roberts in Toronto — someone Scheifele once worked with to achieve similar results.

Being in Ontario also allowed Lambert to skate with several NHL stars using Roberts' services.

"I feel I had a good summer, got stronger, put on a little bit of weight," Lambert said. "But still was able to keep my speed and quickness out there."

The other improvements have come on the ice.

Morrison's work last season included making Lambert, a player blessed with offensive gifts, better in his own zone.

"Be aware," Lambert said. "On the defensive side of the puck, make sure I'm engaged in the battles. Win one-on-one battles. If I'm able to win the majority of my one-on-one battles, the team will have the puck more and I will have the puck more, which will help me use my speed and skill."

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/jets-cole-perfetti-hopeful-of-new-deal-as-training-camp-nears>

Jets' Cole Perfetti hopeful of new deal as training camp nears

By Scott Billeck

Cole Perfetti joked on Wednesday in Las Vegas that a new deal must be close for him if he's working as the Winnipeg Jets' representative at the NHL's North American Media Tour.

"At the same time, you never know," he told reporters.

Missing camp wouldn't be ideal for either side of the negotiating table, but sources suggest talks haven't begun in earnest.

The reality is it's uncertain at the moment. But the 22-year-old remained optimistic both sides would hammer out a new contract before training camp opens next week.

"Our side is working on a deal with them," the restricted free agent said. "We're obviously positive something's going to get done. Our groups are working hard together to figure something out. At this point, I want to be there."

Perfetti, whose professionalism continues to shine, is the last piece of business for Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff to take care of this offseason and one of the last free agents in the NHL this summer.

It's unclear what the hold-up is.

Perfetti is open to signing a long-term extension with the Jets, seemingly a no-brainer for an organization that watched one of its top young prospects, Rutger McGroarty, traded to Pittsburgh a few weeks ago after telling the team he had no interest in signing with them.

The Whitby, Ont., product has seen many of his peers sign long-term pacts this summer, which hasn't hurt Perfetti's cause as his situation has drawn out.

Sources suggest comparables for a long-term commitment include Los Angeles's Quinton Byfield and the five-year, \$31.25 million (\$6.25 million AAV) he signed earlier this summer.

A bridge deal is also an option, with Perfetti's camp looking at Ottawa's Shane Pinto and his two-year, \$3.75-million deal as a comparable.

Cheveldayoff wouldn't comment on contract talks with Perfetti when McGroarty was traded and isn't scheduled to speak until camp opens next week.

Winnipeg has \$5.78 million in cap space, according to PuckPedia.

Perfetti, meanwhile, said he's coming into a "clean slate" with new Jets head coach Scott Arniel.

Arniel views Perfetti as a top-six commodity moving forward after ending last season on a low, including several nights as a healthy scratch, and seeing action just once in Winnipeg's five-game, first-round playoff exit as his production dipped.

"New coach and then coming into a new contract, it's trying to take what I did last year, learn from all of it, and try to just take it as a positive," Perfetti said. "Obviously, there were some ups and downs. It's all part of the learning process, and I think every player has to go through that eventually. Now, hopefully that's over with, done with, and I'm able to learn from that."

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/i-love-winnipeg-jets-cole-perfetti-on-contract-talks-healthy-scratches/>

'I love Winnipeg': Jets' Cole Perfetti on contract talks, healthy scratches

By Luke Fox

HENDERSON, Nev. — All decked out in his crisp Winnipeg Jets home uniform, Cole Perfetti is twirling and shooting and posing for the television cameras inside a cold practice rink amid the bright lights on a scorching Nevada afternoon.

The great paradox here is that the budding 22-year-old talent sent to rep the Jets at the NHL's annual Player Media Tour in Las Vegas doesn't technically work for the team.

Yet.

Perfetti — one of a few key restricted free agents without contract — accepted his rights holder's invite, happily faced the questions and pumped up the 'Peg in promos, despite the unsettled state of his future with the club.

It's a rare move. (The Boston Bruins had considered sending Jeremy Swayman as their rep at the event but reconsidered with the goalie's contractual stalemate ongoing.) But it's a move that Perfetti has embraced.

Moreover, it's a sign that negotiations are speeding toward an amicable conclusion — hopefully before the Jets are required to report to training camp next week.

"It's not awkward. I mean, it's great opportunity for me. It's a great experience. Personally, I'm honoured that they still wanted me to come," Perfetti said Wednesday in a sitdown with Sportsnet.ca. "It hasn't been weird, for sure. My group's working hard there with the team, and I'm confident that something will get figured out here. It's just a matter of time."

Despite Perfetti's season ending unceremoniously with a string of healthy scratches, and the Jets' season ending with an ugly first-round bulldoze by the Colorado Avalanche, the Saginaw Spirit product is upbeat and optimistic with a new contract and campaign just around the corner.

"I don't want to be missing camp," he says. "I want to be there for camp. I want to be a part of this team. I want to be a part of a big part of this. We'll see what happens. Hopefully it gets done. And I know both sides are trying to get something done."

Perfetti, 22, headed to the negotiating table after a healthy but uneven campaign that saw him thrive for stretches in the Jets' top six and set career highs in goals (19) and points (38).

He also endured a 23-game goal drought, 11 healthy scratches, and got limited to a grand total of 10:56 time on ice in Winnipeg's five-game loss to the Round 1 buzzsaw that was Nathan MacKinnon & Co.

A superstar in junior, Perfetti admitted to struggling mentally with his inconsistent usage and performance. And as the Jets sped toward the post-season, GM Kevin Cheveldayoff went out and rented a couple more top-six forwards, Tyler Toffoli and Sean Monahan, to eat up meaningful minutes.

Simply put: coach Rick Bowness (now retired) trusted his veterans more than Perfetti.

"If you look, it was bit of a trend with him and other teams. In Tampa, he was the assistant. In Dallas, (he was) scratching (Jason) Robertson and Roope Hintz," Perfetti points out. "He kind of treated them the same that I was getting treated. And he explained that to me."

Perfetti recalls Bowness pulling him aside and explaining that he limited Robertson and Hintz's ice time when they were on their entry-level deals. Like it or not, Perfetti was in for a similar dose of tough love.

"They had to be scratched and learn through it. And now look at them: Now they're stars, He said it's a part of the learning process," Perfetti recalls. "As much as maybe I disagreed with it. I figured: Just because they did it, why do I have to go through it?"

"But at the same time, he's been around for a while. He's a respected coach, and I respected what he had to say, and at the end of the day it wasn't my decision. I just had to live with it, roll with the punches, and be the best that I could be. So, it sucked. But I'm definitely using that as motivation for the future."

Perfetti sees his future as bright now that assistant Scott Arniel has been promoted to bench boss.

"He was the D and PK coach, so I didn't deal with him as much, but we had a great relationship, and we had some great conversations this summer for this upcoming year," Perfetti says.

With Monahan and Toffoli walking out the door and a reshuffled bench, Perfetti is in line for a fresh start.

"I think Cole's a guy that really stands to gain a lot," Cheveldayoff said at the draft.

The player remembers his ice time escalating when Arniel stepped in to coach a dozen games when Bowness took a temporary leave to be with his wife, Judy.

"I think I was playing 17, 18, minutes a night and was point-per-game. In a small sample size, it was really good with him," Perfetti says. "So, I'm hoping that's how it continues. I think the opportunity is gonna be there, and then it's gonna be up to me to make the most of it. That's all I can really ask for."

Perfetti has been involved in every step of the negotiations alongside agent Kurt Overhardt, and the process has opened his eyes to the business side of the sport.

"It kind of sucks that way, when you think about it. Because until you deal with it, it's all just for fun. Like, it's hockey. It's fun. It's just the game you love playing for a living. And then all of a sudden, the business side comes into it," he says.

Perfetti's situation shapes up like a classic bridge-deal case: The team needs to see more production and consistency, and the player has no arbitration power and should be careful about negotiating long-term based on a stat line that should only escalate.

Yet Perfetti, who spends his summers back in Ontario, isn't shy about wanting to commit for the long haul in Manitoba.

"I love being in Canada. I love Winnipeg. I love the organization. I love playing there. So right now, I would love to be a staple in this organization and a key piece of the core for the years going forward. I would love that, and it would be an honour to be a part of that," Perfetti gushes.

"But I don't determine what happens there. But I would love to be a part of this. I love this group of guys. I love this team. I love the city. So, if a deal gets done long term, that'd be great.

"And if not? If they want to go short term, whatever it is, then I'd stay just focused on this year, being the best player that I can be for this team, and whatever happens, happens."

With the Jets losing top forward prospect Rutger McGroarty to Pittsburgh, making things work with Perfetti becomes more crucial.

Cheveldayoff, too, has said talks were still ongoing and both sides remain hopeful a deal will be struck sooner rather than later.

As for the one lever Perfetti could have pulled — the offer sheet, which helped earn ex-Edmonton Oilers Philip Broberg and Dylan Holloway juicy raises with the St. Louis Blues — the Jets' representative wasn't tempted.

"I never really wanted to do that. I mean, if you want to be in an organization, I feel like that might just create some tension," Perfetti says. "I was also pretty determined that a deal was going to get done. So, those thoughts never really crossed my mind.

"I'm committed to being in Canada, being in in Winnipeg, and trying to be a solution for this team and help this team take the next step."

The immediate next step: Sign the player representing your team to the national media.

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5705057/2024/09/11/nhl-rookies-prospects-2024-2025-season/>

Each NHL team's most interesting prospect heading into the 2024-25 season

By Corey Pronman

NHL training camps open this week as rookie tournaments get underway across the NHL. Today, we take a look at one prospect on each team I think is the most interesting to watch during camp. "Most interesting" doesn't necessarily mean best, but it's a player I have a close focus on, particularly when it comes to making the team.

Winnipeg Jets: Brad Lambert, 20, C

Winnipeg needs some of their top prospects to push and help the big club, and Lambert seems the most likely candidate to do so. He was excellent in the AHL, helping reassure a lot of concerns that were building up about his game in recent years. He's a dynamic skater who can score versus men and could help the Jets this year.

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5761989/2024/09/12/jets-canucks-oilers-flames-young-stars-nhl/>

Canucks, Oilers, Flames, Jets: 10 players to watch at 2024 Young Stars tournament

By Thomas Drance

Hockey, at least in some form, is set to return to western Canada this upcoming weekend.

For a third consecutive year, the on-again, off-again Penticton Young Stars tournament is set to be contested by the four western Canadian NHL franchises at the South Okanagan Events Centre this weekend. And this year's tournament, which unlike the Traverse City tournament has no playoff format and no tournament champion, promises some real sizzle.

Every team at this tournament is bringing a key young player, whether it's a recent early first-round pick seeking to make a big first impression or a big offseason acquisition, guaranteed to excite their respective fan bases in advance of the hockey season. The games are set to take place between Friday and Monday, and fans unable to attend the tournament will be able to stream the games on various team websites.

Let's spotlight 10 names worth keeping an eye on at this year's Young Stars tournament.

Jonathan Lekkerimäki, RW, Vancouver Canucks

Jonathan Lekkerimäki scored goals at a historic clip for a 19-year-old winger at the SHL level last season and punctuated his tremendous draft-plus-two-year bounce-back campaign with an MVP performance at the world juniors.

Though Lekkerimäki got a brief cup of coffee at the American League level last season, his appearance in Penticton this weekend will mark the start of his first full season of North American professional hockey. Can he make a strong opening argument in the Okanagan this weekend about his ability to contribute at the NHL level this year?

You never want to put a ceiling on a player as skilled as Lekkerimäki, and the club will be open-minded about his ability to make an impact at the NHL level sooner rather than later entering training camp. Certainly, Lekkerimäki's ability to score goals from all areas of the ice — off of the rush and from the perimeter in particular — has a real chance to be special and is an attribute the Canucks are desperate for. Perhaps most impressive is Lekkerimäki's ability to anticipate the play. That part of his game is dynamic enough that the puck occasionally seems to follow him around the ice.

Of course, if Lekkerimäki is going to state his case to play NHL minutes this season, the Canucks will be looking for more than just offence. While Lekkerimäki improved as a battle winner and competitor throughout his breakout campaign last year, the demands on wingers in the Canucks system — from both a defensive and physicality standpoint — are extremely high.

We know Lekkerimäki can score goals in the SHL and dominate the world juniors. Impressive and beginning to earn the trust of Canucks head coach Rick Tocchet, however, is another level entirely.

Brayden Yager, C, Winnipeg Jets

The Jets were able to pull a high-end prospect out of the fire this summer when they acquired Brayden Yager from the Pittsburgh Penguins in exchange for Rutger McGroarty — a star collegiate player who had no intention of signing with Winnipeg.

Yager is a high-work-rate sharpshooter with a dynamic drag shot. While there's little left for him to prove at the WHL level, he's likely to be in tough-to-break camp with the Jets this fall given the depth of Winnipeg's forward group.

If he's going to make a case to play NHL-level hockey this season, that process will start in Penticton this weekend. And for all of Yager's gaudy stats and skill, he's still got a fair bit to prove to NHL talent evaluators.

No one questions Yager's pace and competitiveness, but there's work to be done on his overall defensive game. While his shot is electrifying at the Western Hockey League level, questions remain about whether it will play up against NHL competition. And like most snipers who fill the

net at will at lower levels of hockey, Yager will have to flesh out his skill as a dual-threat attacking option to be a high-end point producer at the next level.

There's a lot to like about Yager's game. How will he fit in and help orchestrate things on a Jets Young Stars team with a loaded forward group headlined by recent first-round picks like Brad Lambert, Chaz Lucius and Colby Barlow?

Matthew Savoie, C/RW, Edmonton Oilers

A prize acquisition from the Ryan McLeod trade this offseason, there's a lot of well-founded excitement about what Matthew Savoie may be able to bring to an already star-studded Edmonton Oilers lineup this season.

Savoie is a versatile, skilled forward more likely to profile as a winger than a centre at the NHL level. One of the best players in his age group all the way up the ranks, Savoie positively torched the WHL over the past three seasons. He's a dynamic puck carrier, a deceptive skater, a gifted shooter and a wildly intelligent playmaker.

Savoie is the sort of skilled player who, if he can hack it at the NHL level this season, could add some nitrous to Edmonton's already unmatched offensive machinery.

Savoie, 20, will play his first full professional season this year. He may spend much of it at the American League level in Bakersfield, depending on his readiness to contribute.

Of course, it won't be any concern if Savoie needs some additional American League seasoning. The bar for playing meaningful minutes on this Oilers team, given the depth and quality of the roster, is exceptionally high. It's exciting to imagine what could be, however, if Savoie could put together a statement tournament in Penticton and carry that momentum into Oilers training camp next week.

Now, a statement tournament for Savoie, truthfully, would likely include one dominant showing in Penticton followed by some ice time for the balance of the games. However much Savoie plays this weekend, it will be fascinating to watch how his Penticton experience unfolds.

Zayne Parekh, RD, Calgary Flames

Zayne Parekh is the headliner on a deep, young Calgary blue line.

A top 10 pick at the 2024 NHL Draft, Parekh was a key offensive and transitional driver for the Memorial Cup-winning Saginaw Spirit this past season. His production in his draft year jumps off of the page, just as his skill set and his preternatural confidence jump off of the ice. This is a player who has all of the tools to be a future star, and a lot of "it" factor to burn as well.

The Flames blue line may emerge as one of the biggest stories of the tournament. In addition to Parekh, the Flames are bringing 2024 third-round pick Henry Mews and impressive 2023 second-round pick Etienne Morin as well as 2023 third-round pick Hunter Brzustewicz and 2021 second-round pick Artem Grushnikov, who the club acquired in various deadline deals last spring. It's an incredibly impressive group, but it's also a very young group.

Prospect tournaments are always informative, but the hockey itself can be a bit unstructured and challenging to evaluate. There's also often an age and experience gap between teams, one that can prove decisive in determining how the games at this tournament unfold.

This Calgary side is so loaded with younger, promising NHL prospects that they're guaranteed to be exciting to watch, but could struggle to win games in Penticton given the composition of the other rosters attending the Young Stars tournament this year. If Parekh and company can hold their own — or even stand out and run play — that would be something for Flames fans to get excited about.

Beau Akey, RD, Edmonton Oilers

Beau Akey was probably the single standout prospect at last year's Penticton Young Stars tournament and followed up on that eye-opening performance with an impressive showing at Oilers main camp.

Unfortunately, that was the peak of Akey's season. On returning to the Barrie Colts of the Ontario Hockey League, the 19-year-old Akey played in only 14 additional games before undergoing season-ending surgery to repair a shoulder issue that had been nagging him for a while.

Akey is an exceptionally high-IQ transitional defenceman with plus skating ability and an uncanny nose for eliminating space and time and disrupting opposition puck possession. Selected in the second round of the 2023 NHL Draft, Akey is an impressive prospect.

Losing a full season at a precocious stage of development is challenging, however, for any aspiring NHL-level prospect. Can Akey hit the ground running in Penticton?

Thomas Milic, G, Winnipeg Jets

Thomas Milic has overcome a lot.

Seen as undersized — Milic is listed at 6 feet tall while playing a position where the average height has come to resemble that of an NBA swingman — Milic went undrafted twice before the Jets nabbed him in the fifth round of the 2023 draft. A gold medal winner for Canada at the world juniors and a force in net for some memorable Seattle Thunderbirds teams, Milic has the resume of an elite prospect. And he largely backed that up in his first professional season, accumulating an impressive 19-9-2 record with a .900 save percentage at the American League level as a 20-year-old.

A successful year for Milic would include evolving from being widely considered one of the American League's best young goaltenders into one of the best AHL goaltenders outright. Playing behind a Jets defense in Penticton that includes five camp invites, the New Westminster, B.C.-born netminder has an opportunity this weekend to make a season-opening statement in his home province.

Aätu Raty, C/LW, Vancouver Canucks

Acquired by the Canucks as one of the three major pieces of the Bo Horvat trade two seasons ago, Aätu Raty broke out toward the second half of last season. His spike in offensive production coincided with a full-time move from centre to the wing, where he may be better suited given his size and lack of elite foot speed.

The Canucks added a ton of bodies on the wings this past season and even jettisoned Vasily Podkolzin based on concerns that he'd struggle to break camp with the team given the club's newfound depth. That reality means that the deck is stacked against Raty making an NHL impact in Vancouver this season at the outset of Canucks training camp.

If Raty has put together a strong summer, however, and if he's able to carry the momentum he found at the end of last year into this season, he could be a dark horse candidate to watch for at Canucks training camp. A dominant showing at Penticton could be a necessary step if Raty is going to elbow his way into NHL consideration for Canucks brass over the next several weeks.

Samuel Honzek, LW, Calgary Flames

Samuel Honzek is a polished, big-bodied winger with excellent wheels and a level of nastiness in his game that will likely make him a real handful at the NHL level down the line. He's a good bet to be an NHL contributor who provides significant physical value for many years to come.

The 16th pick at the 2023 draft, however, has yet to have that breakout offensive season. And there are some questions among amateur evaluators about whether that offensive element exists in his game at all.

For players with Honzek's profile, the Penticton Young Stars tournament can provide either a real challenge or a real opportunity.

Players like Honzek often look better in a more structured environment where their two-way intelligence and imposing physical game can allow them to make an impact naturally. In a rookie tournament-type environment, sometimes it's the more aggressive offensive players that take over since they're more willing to roll the dice and seize the opportunity as opposed to permitting the game to come to them.

It's worth watching Honzek play at this tournament with that dynamic in mind. If he can find a way to be an assertive attacking presence in Penticton, that will augur well for his ability to break out a bit more offensively in his draft-plus-two campaign.

Jesse Heslop, RW, Edmonton Oilers (camp invite)

A native of Nanaimo, B.C., Jesse Heslop is a tournament invitee of the Oilers and an intriguing one to keep an eye on during the Penticton Young Stars tournament.

A smart, skilled, undersized winger with a high motor, Heslop went undrafted in 2024 despite being a productive, useful part of an Everett Silvertips team loaded with players who play with pace and intensity. Heslop's game is the epitome of that ethic.

Heslop is a fascinating invite for a contending Oilers team that should be taking a longer look at players like Heslop who, if selected in the middle or late rounds of future drafts, might be able to contribute at the NHL level more swiftly than your average prospect.

Heslop could land on NHL radars this spring if he can convince talent evaluators that his skating mechanics can improve with additional strength and maturity, or that he can overcome concerns about his skating with skill and raw gumption. Heslop is a player to watch in Penticton, and an intriguing second-time draft-eligible player to monitor ahead of the 2025 NHL Draft, too.

Elias Pettersson, LD, Vancouver Canucks

It would be pretty unfair for the tournament host to bring Elias Pettersson to play in a rookie tournament in Penticton, but alas, this is a very different Elias Pettersson.

Pettersson is a physical, authoritative left-handed defender whose development has taken a sharp, positive trajectory since the Canucks selected him in the third round of the 2022 draft. Mature, athletic and a solid on-ice communicator with some snarl in his game, Pettersson is a

bit of a throwback-type defender and has become an exciting riser in a relatively lean Vancouver prospect pool.

This will be Pettersson's first full campaign in North American professional hockey. He turned heads in the organization with his form and aggressiveness during a late-season cameo in the AHL last season and could be in line for a major shutdown role in Abbotsford this season if he can make a solid first impression at training camp.