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<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/perfetti-thrilled-to-join-jets-camp>

Perfetti thrilled to join Jets camp "This is the best I've ever felt going onto the ice."

By Mitchell Clinton

WINNIPEG – Cole Perfetti may have been the Canadian Hockey League’s Scholastic Player of the Year in 2020, but he’d much rather be using his smarts on the ice than on the business side of the sport.

Thankfully, the business side is done, as the 22-year-old forward and the Winnipeg Jets agreed on a two-year contract (with a \$3.25 million average annual value) late on Monday evening.

By Tuesday morning, number 91 was back on the ice with his teammates.

“It’s nice to get that done. It’s nice to be back in camp and with the guys,” said Perfetti after a nearly 90-minute skate. “I’m going to use this year to try and take a big step with my game and hopefully play as good as I can and play as good as I can for this team and take that next step.”

His first day in camp was a special teams filled practice, so he primarily spent time on a unit with Nino Niederreiter, Vladislav Namestnikov, Brad Lambert, and Neal Pionk.

Head coach Scott Arniel has already told Perfetti his first preseason game won’t come on Wednesday against the Edmonton Oilers, but on Friday in Minnesota instead.

“I’m glad it’s done. He can get in there and get some games in and get up to speed,” Arniel said. “He’s a top-six forward and when you don’t have that – those guys, you need them on your hockey team -- and he’s here and I’m pretty sure he’s excited to be back with the guys and to get going.”

Perfetti, Winnipeg’s first round pick in 2020, had a breakthrough season in 2023-24. The counting stats of 19 goals and 38 points in 71 games were all career highs, but after his first two National Hockey League seasons were cut short by injury, getting through a full season healthy was also important.

He didn’t rest on that fact, either. Perfetti went right back to work this past summer with trainer Matt Nichol and added some muscle – he’s up to “193 or 194” pounds from last season’s 185.

The important part is he feels strong on the ice, and noticed that right away, whether it was in informal skates prior to camp or with the small group of pros he’s worked with over the last week.

“I think this is the best I've ever felt going onto the ice,” Perfetti said. “Those skates before camp I felt fantastic with the guys. Today was a good day. I’m trying to get better every day and take what happened last year and just build off it and just try to be the best player.”

A year ago at this time, Perfetti was auditioning in the second line centre spot, but ultimately ended up on the wing. Arniel said that’s where the forward will start this season.

“He can play both left and right side. He was actually good on the walls,” said Arniel. “It kind of got the puck in his hands a lot because he wasn’t coming out of the hole from the corners. He was actually getting the puck either first or second touch, and now, he’s going from blueline to blueline, being able to make plays that way.”

There are four games left in the preseason and still plenty of time for Perfetti to work with different linemates and power play combinations ahead of the season opener on October 9 in Edmonton.

There will be time to look ahead in the calendar as training camp winds down, but for now, Perfetti is just happy to be back where he feels he belongs.

“I wanted to be back with the guys, wanted to be in the room with the group,” said Perfetti. “You wait all summer for that, then you have to wait a couple extra days. It was nice to walk in the rink today and have that feeling and just focus on hockey.”

ICE CHIPS

Prior to the first ice session on Tuesday, the Jets reduced their training camp roster by 12 players.

Chaz Lucius, Henri Nikkanen, and Danny Zhilkin were assigned to the Manitoba Moose.

Dylan Anhorn, Dawson Barteaux, Ashton Sautner, and Ben King were released from their professional try-outs and will head to Moose camp as well.

And finally, five players were released back to their junior clubs: Kevin He, Jacob Julien, Connor Levis, Kieron Walton, and Markus Loponen.

For that last group in particular, Arniel was happy to get them into NHL preseason action.

“I just asked them what they thought. It was amazing how every one of them said how faster, bigger, stronger... and that’s what I said to them as well, that’s the progression,” said Arniel. “It’s about making sure they don’t waste a year, that they go back to junior, they go back down to the Moose. Don’t waste a year. Go back and work on the things you have to work on. We have lots of people that are going to help them with things in that area, what they need to improve.”

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<https://www.nhl.com/news/topic/nhl-insider/winnipeg-jets-cole-perfetti-aiming-for-big-jump-this-season>

***Perfetti feeling stronger, aiming for 'big, big jump this year' with Jets
Forward believes 7-8 pounds of added muscle has him prepared to take on larger role***

By Nicholas J. Cotsonika

Cole Perfetti has 140 games of NHL experience. He has more muscle and confidence after a great summer of training. Now the 22-year-old forward has a two-year, \$6.5 million contract (\$3.25 million average annual value) with the Winnipeg Jets after he signed as a restricted free agent Monday.

It's time.

"I'm hoping for a bigger role," Perfetti said during the NHL North American Player Media Tour in Las Vegas earlier this month. "I think the opportunity is going to be there, and then it's in my hands whether or not I can make the most of it. That's all you can ask for, really, as a player. ...

"I'm hoping for a big, big jump this year."

Perfetti has been working toward this since the Jets selected him with the No. 10 pick of the 2020 NHL Draft.

After splitting the next two seasons between Winnipeg and Manitoba of the American Hockey League, he became a full-time NHL player in 2022-23, and then set an NHL career-best with 38 points (19 goals, 19 assists) in 71 games last season.

Along the way, he developed relationships with forward Mark Scheifele and coach Scott Arniel, pushing to improve.

Perfetti and Scheifele have a lot in common on and off the ice, even though Scheifele is nine years older. The first time Perfetti came to training camp, Scheifele asked him if he wanted to do extra work.

"I'm super intimidated," Perfetti said. "But he was a superstar asking me to stay on with him, so he just kind of opened that door, and he's kept that door open ever since."

Perfetti spends time at Scheifele's house during the season, watching football or taking swings in the golf simulator. They go out to dinner together on the road. In the offseason, Perfetti travels with Scheifele to places like Calgary and Detroit to train, golf and hang out.

"Obviously he's one of the better players in the League, so being able just to watch what he does day in and day out, it's been really good for me," Perfetti said. "It's been really welcoming."

"It makes me feel that much more a part of the team right from Day One when the best player on the team is including you in everything and making sure that he's going out of his way to make sure you're good. It made me feel comfortable a lot faster than I think I would have been."

Arniel spent the past two seasons with the Jets as an associate coach. Perfetti would lean on him when he had questions about systems and what he could do better, because he didn't want to be a pain asking coach Rick Bowness.

"He was always willing to show me clips or stay on the ice extra," Perfetti said.

Arniel was named coach May 24 after Bowness retired May 6.

"Even though he's the head coach now -- he's going to have a little bit more responsibility and more of a role -- hopefully we can just build off that relationship we had in the past and I can still keep going to him and asking him [questions]," Perfetti said. "He's pretty helpful when it comes to that kind of stuff."

Perfetti said he and Arniel had a lot of good conversations during the summer. Free from injury, Perfetti had nothing in the way during his offseason training and said he put on seven or eight pounds of muscle. Although he is listed at 5-foot-11, 185 pounds, he said he weighs 192 or 193.

"I feel really strong on the ice," Perfetti said. "I think that's the biggest thing. A lot faster. A lot stronger. I put on quite a bit of weight, so I feel a lot better with the puck and controlling the puck and handling it. A little more corner weight, they always say, like, jokingly, but I actually feel a lot stronger in battles and stuff like that. I feel a lot faster."

The Jets went 52-24-6 last season, finishing tied for fourth in the NHL with 110 points. They went 3-0-0 against the Colorado Avalanche during the regular season, outscoring them 17-4, but then lost to them in five games in the Western Conference First Round.

Perfetti said when the Jets are at their best, everybody buys in. The first line plays without the puck the same way the fourth line does. But they couldn't raise their game during the Stanley Cup Playoffs the way the Avalanche did.

"I think that's just our next big thing, is just being able to find that next gear, because we have the skill, we have the goalie, we have the 'D,' we have the players," Perfetti said. "We have the team to do it. It's just being able to find that next level, that 'it' factor for our team."

Perfetti wants to be a part of it.

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/10772938/winnipeg-jets-cole-perfetti-back-special-teams-training-camp/>

Winnipeg Jets welcome back Cole Perfetti, drill down on special teams play

By Kelly Moore Global News

Day 7 of Winnipeg Jets training camp was easily the most noteworthy to date.

Topping that list was the arrival of Cole Perfetti after reaching an agreement the night before on a bridge deal that will pay him \$6.5 million over the next two seasons.

Perfetti skated out onto the ice Tuesday morning at Hockey For All Centre to stick taps from 31 other teammates, and afterwards admitted it was a relief to have his first "business" experience as an NHLer in the rearview mirror.

"Yeah, it's nice to get that done," the 22-year-old from Whitby, Ont., said. "It's nice to be back in camp with the guys. Sucks missing time, so it's just great to get that contract done and now it's time to focus on hockey."

"Both sides were working together. I'm working with my side to figure out a plan. Obviously, no one wants to miss time, no one wants to miss camp. From the get-go I always wanted to be a part of it from day one; obviously that wasn't the case. You wait all summer for that and then you have to wait a couple of extra days — it was nice to walk into the rink today and have that feeling gone and just focus on hockey."

One of the “minefields” in contract negotiations like these is the potential for animosity to develop between the two sides, but Perfetti says he always tried to maintain that it was just business, and not to take anything personally.

“They’re not just going to give away money for no reason. Everyone understands that. You know where you stand with other guys and you obviously want to be in that range,” Perfetti said. “So find a number that works for both sides, be happy, and get to play hockey again.”

Perfetti has always maintained he wants to be in Winnipeg for the long haul when asked if he would have preferred a long-term deal for his second pro contract. But the young forward says that’s not the direction contracts took, so now it’s up to him to better position himself over these next two seasons.

“That’s what a bridge deal is, you have two more years to prove yourself — to go show what you can do on the ice,” said the five-foot-11 forward who is listed at 185 pounds but says he is reporting to camp at about 193 or 194 pounds after a summer of working out with renowned trainer Matt Nichol.

“I’m going to use this year to try and take a big step in my game. A bridge deal is all about, I wouldn’t say betting on yourself, but I would just say an extra two years to go prove what kind of a player you are and what you can do for this organization.”

Perfetti had a strong start to his third NHL campaign a year ago, scoring 14 goals and adding 15 assists for 29 points in the Jets’ first 40 games. But a second-half extended drought resulted in just five goals, five assists, and 11 games where he was made a healthy scratch. So Perfetti “100 per cent” agrees he has something to prove in 2024-25.

“Wasn’t too pleased with how it went, personally, for me down the stretch. But I think last year, all things considered, still was a pretty decent year I think. Proved that I can produce in this league,” Perfetti said. “It didn’t go like that the whole year but I’m just going to use that as motivation, take the good from it.”

The timing for an agreement to be reached on a new contract was probably as good as it could have been for Perfetti in not putting himself too far behind the 8-ball in terms of catching up with everyone else at camp. It also nipped in the bud any type of off-ice distraction.

But Jets head coach Scott Arniel says beyond Perfetti getting a chance to work on several power-play units during an on-ice session Tuesday that was devoted entirely to special teams, there are other benefits to having Perfetti back in the fold with two weeks still remaining before the start of the regular season.

“We’ve talked about having him get some different looks when it comes to lines, using some different people,” Arniel said following Tuesday’s practice. “Now that he’s here, I get to do that. It takes a lot of the questions about it out of the equation and now we move forward.”

Arniel confirmed Perfetti will make his pre-season debut Friday night in Minnesota to allow the young forward to get in a couple more practices. Perfetti said he was able to skate with some AHL players and others headed for East Coast Hockey League camps to stay in shape during his time away.

Arniel and his coaching staff had Nikolaj Ehlers working in the bumper spot occupied by Sean Monahan last year on the number one powerplay unit. And Ehlers feels “playing the right way” in that position will create opportunities for loose pucks and scoring chances.

“You’ve got Brayden Point in Tampa — he’s been unreal in that spot. Reinhart this year in that spot. Bergeron when he was in Boston, Aho in Carolina,” Ehlers said, listing off a group of players he would like to emulate. “I’m going to do my best to learn how to play in there. It’s going to be a process for me and you want to see, especially those guys I just mentioned, how they move in that slot and not just do figure eights.”

Another interesting twist to practice saw Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor working as a penalty-killing tandem. Arniel says each of those players’ ability to read the game and break up plays is an asset the team wants to take advantage of, and Arniel shared another reason he wants to use Scheifele when the Jets are short-handed.

“Last year, (Adam Lowry) had to go and take almost all the faceoffs, (Sean Monahan) as well, but we didn’t have a right side,” Arniel explained. “Scheifele is a good faceoff guy and ... (we) always found last year that everybody, because the power play gets to choose the side they’re on, they kept going to our right side all the time. So this helps.”

And Arniel says the plan for the Jets is to be a little more aggressive on their penalty kill.

“The one thing about top-end, sort of skills guys, they have great instincts where the next play is going and they have a tendency to jump those plays — we’ll see,” he said.

The Jets are also down to 41 players on the camp roster heading into Wednesday’s third game of the pre-season against the Edmonton Oilers.

A dozen players were released or assigned on Tuesday. Forwards Chaz Lucius, Henri Nikkanen and Danny Zhilkin were assigned to the AHL Manitoba Moose. Forward Ben King and the defensive trio of Dylan Anhorn, Dawson Barteaux and Ashton Sautner — who all attended camp on AHL contracts — were released to the Moose.

Five other players were released to their junior teams. That group included 2024 draft picks Kevin He, Kieron Walton and Markus Lopenen, along with Jacob Julien and Connor Levis, who were selected in 2023.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/10773673/winnipeg-jets-cole-perfetti-hockey/>

ANALYSIS: Jets’ Cole Perfetti ready to focus on hockey

By Paul Edmonds CJOB

Cole Perfetti greeted the media with a vibrant smile on Tuesday afternoon. As the owner of a new contract, and with a somewhat protracted negotiation now officially behind him, you could sense the relief in his disposition and the excitement to be back on the ice with his team.

For the next two years, the Jets will pay the 22-year-old \$3.25 million per season — a market value that was widely considered across the league to be the sweet spot for his services based on projections and past performance, but numbers his camp had to significantly fall back to during their business dialogue with the Jets.

And while the Jets aren't trumpeting a victory in negotiations, it was Perfetti's representatives at KO Sports Inc., who blinked first, especially as two preseason games and a five-day training camp holdout progressed.

In the end, the extremely likeable Perfetti — a first-round pick of the team in 2020 and a 19-goal scorer last season — called the agreement “a number that worked for both sides” and he's now ready to focus on hockey, which will happen in earnest on Friday in Minnesota when he plays in his first preseason game.

Now, as a top-six player for the Jets, Perfetti's addition to the roster certainly makes Winnipeg a much better and deeper team. And he's an important part of the organizational youth that has either already been pushed into the lineup or is hovering on imminent arrival.

And while Perfetti refuted the notion Tuesday that this new contract is a two-year platform to bet on himself before the next round of negotiations in 2026, when he'll still be under team control, it is for certain a two-season opportunity for him to play well, put up points and cement himself as a star on the team, to thereby receive the money and term he wants the next time around.

If that happens, it will be interesting to see how radiant his smile will be then.'

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/car-owned-by-ottawa-senators-claude-giroux-reportedly-stolen/>

How will Jets deploy Cole Perfetti after signing bridge deal?

By Jacob Stoller

WINNIPEG — We'll never know exactly how Cole Perfetti's deal came together, but odds are it was along the lines of the player telling his agent to 'just get it done.'

The 22-year-old inked a two-year \$6.5-million contract with the Winnipeg Jets on Monday evening, ending a stalemate that held him out for the first five days of training camp. Considering that Perfetti's camp was reportedly eyeing closer to \$4 million, the 10th overall selection in the 2020 draft caved on his original ask.

“No one wants to miss time, no one wants to miss camp,” Perfetti said. “From the get-go, I've always wanted to be a part of it from Day 1 and obviously that wasn't the case. I just tried to get it done in a good time and just make sure I'm not missing too much, that was the biggest thing for me. I wanted to be back with the guys. I wanted to be in the room with the group, you know, you wait all summer for that and you have to wait a couple extra days. It was nice to walk into the rink today and have that feeling kind of gone and just focus on hockey.”

The stress of the contract negotiation may be done, but the real work starts now for the five-foot-11 forward. He's got lots to prove to a Jets team that he hopes to be with for the long term. But as Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman said in an appearance on the Kenny and Renny Show, the Jets never offered Perfetti a long-term deal.

“A bridge deal is all about, I wouldn’t say betting on myself, I would say I have two years to go prove what kind of player [I am]. What [I] can do for this organization,” Perfetti said.

After two seasons cut short by injuries, Perfetti completed his first full NHL season last year, recording 19 goals and 38 points in 71 games. But he struggled in the second half of the year — recording just nine points in his final 41 games — and was scratched for four of Winnipeg’s five playoff games. Coming into this year though, new Jets coach Scott Arniel made it clear that he views Perfetti as a top-six forward for the team. The question now is where will he play? Or rather, how can the Jets maximize his talents?

For starters, it appears the Jets are putting a pause on developing him as a centre. This time last year, the Jets seemed gung ho on trying Perfetti down the middle. While Perfetti bulked up this summer — telling reporters that he’s up to around 193 pounds — he’s not the fastest skater and Arniel pretty much insinuated that was a deciding factor in him staying on the wing.

“The hardest part for a centreman in the NHL is that you have to go from your defensive corner — you’re in the battle, 90 per cent of the time you’re the low forward — and you’ve got to get out of the hole and you’ve got to get in the rush and get to the other end of the rink,” Arniel said.

The Jets' bench boss went on to say that he liked what he saw from Perfetti on the wing, noting that the left-shot forward is capable of playing on either the left or right side.

“He was actually good on the walls. It kind of got the puck in his hands a lot because he wasn’t coming out of the hole from the corners,” Arniel said of Perfetti’s abilities as a winger. “He was actually getting the puck either first or second touch and now he’s going from blue line to blue line, being able to make plays that way.”

But how can the Jets maximize Perfetti’s talents? It’s all about how they deploy him.

Assuming that Perfetti plays on the team’s second line as Arniel said, here are three optimal line combos that could help get the most out of Perfetti.

Option 1: Nikolaj Ehlers — Vladislav Namestikov — Cole Perfetti

This is the safe option, so to speak. There’s some familiarity with this trio, who remained largely intact during Perfetti’s strong first-half showing last year. The bread-and-butter of Perfetti’s game is facilitating and finding seams to set up teammates and this scenario would weaponize his ability to set them up in transition, as he’d have a lightning-fast Nikolaj Ehlers skating on the opposite flank.

Option 2: Cole Perfetti — Brad Lambert — Gabriel Vilardi

We’re operating under the assumption that Brad Lambert will make the team out of camp and that Arniel will be comfortable taking Vilardi off the top line. If the stars were to align, this could be an excellent second line for the Jets and do wonders for Perfetti. Lambert’s got the speed to drive this line in transition. Vilardi’s got the forechecking and puck-protection ability to be an asset on the wall. And Perfetti’s I.Q. and passing ability would complement these two well, be it by finding Lambert in the neutral zone to facilitate a zone exit or by dishing it off to Vilardi down low in the offensive zone — where he scores the majority of his goals.

Option 3: Kyle Connor — Vladislav Namestnikov — Cole Perfetti

This might be the most unlikely scenario, given that the Jets have been reluctant to separate Connor and Mark Scheifele. But Connor and Perfetti looked good together during short stints together — additionally, Ehlers-Scheifele-Vilardi posted a 57.1 per cent expected goals for last year while Connor was sidelined with an injury, (according to Money puck.com) — and their games complement one another well. Like Perfetti, Connor is a cerebral player who's easy to read off of and Perfetti can set up the lethal sniper in optimal spots.

The Athletic

<https://www.nhl.com/news/scott-arniel-enjoying-transition-as-winnipeg-jets-coach>

Winnipeg Jets training camp: Projecting Cole Perfetti's production and a focus on special teams

By Murat Ates

WINNIPEG — Cole Perfetti was swarmed by his teammates, disappearing into a mass of blue and white jerseys at centre ice. There were stick taps, cheers and pats on the back. The 22-year-old forward was finally at Winnipeg Jets training camp after signing a two-year, \$3.25 million AAV deal on Monday.

“No one wants to miss time, no one wants to miss camp,” Perfetti said. “From the get-go, I've always wanted to be a part of it from Day 1 and obviously that wasn't the case. I just tried to get it done in a good time and just make sure I'm not missing too much — that was the biggest thing for me. I wanted to be back with the guys. I wanted to be in the room with the group.”

Perhaps just as excited may have been new Jets head coach Scott Arniel, who is eager to see his lineup at full strength.

“We talked about getting some (different) looks when it comes to lines, using some different people,” Arniel said. “Now that he's here, I get to do that.”

Perfetti is an immediate supplement to a forward lineup that Arniel wants to take beyond last season's performance. At even strength, systems will be tweaked as opposed to revolutionized. Perfetti will be part of that, playing left wing on one of Winnipeg's top two lines — a decision Arniel says was made to spare Perfetti some of the heavy, down-low lifting of a centre while putting the puck in his hands more often in transition.

Perfetti is good at both blue lines and more effective on the walls than he gets credit for but his biggest strength is holding onto the puck in traffic before finding the most dangerous seam to teammates in open space. He scored almost at will during one-on-one and two-on-one drills at the end of practice, with one particularly striking backhand deke going bar-down on Eric Comrie.

So what kind of team is Perfetti joining partway through camp?

Winnipeg spent the bulk of Perfetti's first practice working on special teams and, while he took a third unit backseat to most of the power-play work, Arniel made it clear that there's a big role available for him this season. The Jets' biggest changes are going to come on their special teams — and rightfully so, given bottom-third results in both contexts. Winnipeg's power play has changed and the “bumper” position in the high slot will be filled by multiple players. Nikolaj

Ehlers played in that role with Kyle Connor, Mark Scheifele, Gabriel Vilardi and Josh Morrissey, and Perfetti will get a look there, too.

How exactly is Winnipeg revamping its power play? What kind of role will Perfetti play in that — and what's a realistic points projection for him in an expanded role this season?

We'll get into systemic changes, Perfetti projections, the latest round of cuts and insight into Winnipeg's new-look penalty kill in Tuesday's training camp observations.

Projecting Perfetti's stats

If Perfetti scored 38 points in 71 games last season, what should Winnipeg expect now? Prorating his games played total to 82 yields 44 points, but Perfetti is likely to receive a boost in ice time under Arniel — both at five-on-five and on the power play. If he merely maintains last season's scoring rates of 1.81 points per 60 minutes at five-on-five and 3.88 points per 60 minutes on the power play — and if he gets middle-six ice time — Perfetti is due for a scoring bump.

As one example: Perfetti could finish as low as eighth among Jets forwards in five-on-five minutes and still play an extra 90 seconds per game this season compared to last. If he makes that leap, while taking the spot vacated by Sean Monahan on the power play, there's a good case for 49 points in total — 32 points at five-on-five and 17 more on the power play. And that's if Perfetti doesn't improve at all in his fourth NHL season. A conservative guess should suggest a 50-point-per-82-game floor, with lots of room for improvement based on his own development. It's normal for 22-year-old players to take bigger steps forward as they adapt to the rigours of the league.

Will Perfetti get that opportunity, though?

Arniel says yes, calling Perfetti a top-six forward and emphasizing his potential to have a bigger impact this season.

"Last year, he put together a real good, solid season and he's got to back that up again and be consistent and do that on a nightly basis," Arniel said. "I think he recognizes now how he needs to play. He knows now that he's facing the other teams' top defencemen and their top forwards. Whether it's with the puck or without it, he has to do things in a quick level, at a high level, and he has the hockey smarts to do that. He's excited about where he's gonna be."

It seems to me that we're heading for an Ehlers, Perfetti, Vladislav Namestnikov reunion this season at even strength. But what about those power-play minutes?

Davis Payne's power play

Winnipeg's power play is going to look different this year. If new power-play coach Davis Payne gets his way, we can all be wary of reports which cast the personnel in a fixed light. Players are going to move this year, changing positions as a power play continues.

It might be that Scheifele takes up his longtime position on the left wing boards for a moment, with Vilardi down low, Ehlers (or Perfetti) in the slot, Connor on the right and Morrissey at the point. Maybe there's a shot and a puck recovery on the other side of the ice, though. Now you're just as likely to see Vilardi on the right flank, Scheifele in the middle and Ehlers on the far side. The unit will shift positions depending on circumstances and depending on its attack point. Last year, there were times when you'd see the Jets' top unit recover a puck and work to get

everyone in their original position, with the puck on Scheifele's stick on the half-wall. This year, you're going to see the unit adapt to the situation instead, looking to create multiple attacking options no matter where the play begins.

"We're not reinventing the wheel," Arniel said. "They've played it somewhere, or a look of it. It's not so much the positioning — whether it's power play or penalty kill — it's the stick detail, it's the attack the net mentality."

Do you remember the Scheifele to Vilardi to Monahan passing play, ending with Monahan taking a one-timer from the slot? You might see it again, except with Ehlers shooting from the slot — or Scheifele, with the puck first moving from Vilardi on the right to Connor down low. When you have more players than the other team, you need to create more options than they can defend; every little wrinkle can help.

One other change you're going to see takes place when the Jets are set up on either flank. Let's say Ehlers is on the left wall and attacking downhill. Instead of two options — shoot or look for Connor backdoor — you'll see all four of his teammates funnel toward the middle of the ice. In a situation like this, Ehlers can shoot or play it to Connor or to Scheifele for a deflection in the slot or to Vilardi across the ice. Success will be defined by movement off the puck — when a player doesn't have it, they will be more aggressive funnelling to the middle to present themselves as options — and by each puck carrier's ability to read the play ahead of them, pick the most dangerous option, and execute their play of choosing.

This is not revolutionary in an NHL sense; it catches the Jets up to best practices. Still, it's easy to look at last year's power play — 22nd in the NHL, even with the post-Monahan uptick — and complain about a sense of stagnancy. The Jets look ready to leave that complaint in the past.

"They know when a certain look happens that 'I need to be here, I need to get to this point, I need to be an outlet in this situation,'" Arniel said.

Winnipeg's first unit on Thursday consisted of Scheifele, Connor, Ehlers, Vilardi and Morrissey. Ehlers frequently found himself in the high slot and spoke to the challenge of playing a new role.

"You obviously have your set plays and all that but there's also times where you kind of read off what Scheif does with the puck," Ehlers said. "What KC's going to do? Is he going to come down and attack? Is he going to throw it down to Gabe? Then I need to kind of slowly move up to a quiet spot where I can get a shot off if it goes to Gabe and to me. Do you move back door? I'm trying to figure all of that out right now. Like I've said, I've never played that spot. I'm excited to learn."

For all of the variety, it does seem as though Scheifele on the left and Ehlers in the middle could be a frequent look. Ehlers talked about studying the games of Brayden Point, Patrice Bergeron, Sam Reinhart and Sebastian Aho to learn from the masters of the high slot position.

"He has quickness to get there. He also has a quick release," Arniel said of Ehlers. "I want to see what it looks like. He's going to be in there (Wednesday against Edmonton)."

Arniel shared that Perfetti is a candidate for the same job. Alex Lafallo will also get a look. The Jets are still in their experimentation and evaluation stage of implementing Payne's power play.

Winnipeg's second power-play unit on Tuesday consisted of Lafallo, Brad Lambert, Namestnikov, Nino Niederreiter and Neal Pionk.

Dean Chynoweth's power kill

One immediately obvious wrinkle to the Jets' penalty kill this year? Scheifele and Connor.

Winnipeg's star forwards are going to take a penalty-killing role, using their speed to attack pucks early and create pressure situations for opposing power plays. They're also going to take a bit of the load off Adam Lowry's duo.

"Last year, (Lowry) had to go out and take almost all the faceoffs, (Monahan) as well, but we didn't have a right side," Arniel said. "Scheifele is a good faceoff guy. We always found last year that everybody — because the power play gets to choose the side they're on — they kept going to our right side all the time. This helps."

Longtime readers of the site will remember Scheifele posting strong penalty-killing results with Blake Wheeler in 2018-19. Lowry still got the bulk of the heavy lifting but Scheifele and Wheeler were able to attack puck carriers early on their entry attempts, generating turnovers and helping to keep the puck out of Winnipeg's zone. Scheifele's 45.1 short-handed faceoff win percentage from that season to now is also right in line with Lowry's 44.8 percent rate. (It's hard to be above 50 percent when outnumbered unless you're Patrice Bergeron, who managed to hit 52.9 percent, but that's a digression.)

Lowry and Mason Appleton will continue to be the Jets' first-unit PK forwards. They'll be encouraged to be more aggressive this year than last, although we'll need to get a longer look to see other changes. For now, it's clear that Scheifele and Connor will give Winnipeg a new, "power kill" dynamic, in line with Dean Chynoweth's work in Toronto (ranked sixth in the NHL during Chynoweth's tenure) and Carolina (ranked first in the NHL during Chynoweth's tenure). It shouldn't be a surprise, I suppose: Mitch Marner, William Nylander and Auston Matthews all played a substantial role in Toronto's penalty kill.

Arniel says the goal is to be more aggressive.

"KC has done it before. Scheifele has hockey instincts. He's done it before. He's actually looking forward to the responsibility," Arniel said. "If he comes over the boards first, or the second or third rotation, I just want to give these guys reps and I want them to get chances in the exhibition games and see how they do."

Latest cuts

The Jets trimmed their roster by 12 players on Tuesday, leaving the following 40 players in camp (plus Ville Heinola, who is expected to start the year on injured reserve).

The players are sorted by jersey number, with the horizontal line denoting Group "B" as per Tuesday's lines.

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/09/24/special-teams-overhaul-underway>

Special teams overhaul underway

Jets thinking outside the box in effort to improve penalty kill and power play

By: Mike McIntyre and Ken Wiebe

It appears the Winnipeg Jets are willing to think outside the box when it comes to fixing their not-so-special teams.

The first glimpse of that occurred Tuesday with nearly 90 minutes of on-ice training camp work focusing exclusively on the power play and penalty kill, which both struggled mightily last season.

Led by first-year assistant coaches Davis Payne and Dean Chynoweth, it didn't take long to see some significant changes.

The PP, for example, included Nikolaj Ehlers on the top unit in a new spot in the high slot, along with Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor, Gabe Vilardi and Josh Morrissey. The idea is to create more motion and unpredictability.

"You obviously have your set plays and all that but there's also times where you kind of read off what Scheif does with the puck. What KC's going to do. Is he going to come down and attack? Is he going to throw it down to Gabe?" Ehlers explained of the options that potentially open up.

"Then I need to kind of slowly move up to a quiet spot where I can get a shot off if it goes to Gabe and to me. Do you move back door? I'm trying to figure all of that out right now. Like I've said, I've never played that spot. I'm excited to learn and that's why we had a practice like (Tuesday)."

Ehlers has often been relegated to the second power-play unit during his tenure in Winnipeg, so getting PP1 minutes — as he heads into the final year of his contract — is a welcome development. He noted the success that Brayden Point (Tampa Bay), Sam Reinhart (Florida), Patrice Bergeron (Boston) and Sebastian Aho (Carolina) have had in a similar position.

"I'm going to do my best to learn how to play in there and I haven't played in that spot ever," said Ehlers.

"I think the way that we want to play on the power play is the mindset that I have. The attack, get the puck to the net, create loose pucks and get the rebounds," he said. "So for me, it's exciting. Obviously it is going to be different from the way that we've played over the years."

With those five players likely set in stone as the top unit, there was plenty of competition for the second fivesome. Forwards Cole Perfetti, Nino Niederreiter, Vlad Namestnikov, Alex Iafallo, Brad Lambert, Nikita Chibrikov and Brayden Yager all took turns along with defencemen Neal Pionk and Colin Miller.

"Our specialty teams have to get better. If you don't work at them, don't go through them, you're not going to make any gains," Jets coach Scott Arniel said of making it a priority at this stage.

"The biggest thing now is we have numbers. It allows you to have a lot of bodies. We had three power play units, so it allowed us to have a really good pace during the power play. We're going to do this again in another week — when the numbers will be reduced maybe a little bit."

The most interesting development Tuesday came when Scheifele and Connor began taking turns as a penalty killing duo — a move Arniel said will continue into the new campaign.

“We talked about being a little more aggressive on our kill,” said Arniel.

“KC has done it before. Scheif has hockey instincts. He’s done it before. He’s actually looking forward to the responsibility. If he comes over the boards first, or the second or third rotation, I just want to give these guys reps and I want them to get chances in the exhibition games and see how they do.”

Ehlers may also work into the mix.

“The one thing about top-end skill guys, they have great instincts of where the next play is going and they have a tendency to jump those plays,” said Arniel.

Winnipeg finished tied for fourth in the regular-season last year in spite of a power play (22nd) and penalty kill (21st) that was in the lower-tier of the league.

“We’re not re-inventing the wheel,” Arniel said of the changes.

“It’s not so much the positioning — whether it’s power play or penalty kill — it’s the stick detail, it’s the attack the net mentality, it’s the return of our penalty killers, how fast they work to get back. It really is about some of the little detail stuff that we’re trying to hammer home so that those four guys on the penalty kill are on the same page, and vice versa on the power play — those five guys.”

FIRST CUTS COME DOWN: The Jets have made their first training camp cuts, with a dozen players sent packing on Tuesday.

Forwards Kevin He, Jacob Julien, Connor Levis, Markus Loponen and Kieron Walton have all been returned to their respective junior teams. Forwards Chaz Lucius, Henri Nikkanen and Danny Zhilkin are headed to the Manitoba Moose, while forward Ben King and defencemen Dylan Anhorn, Dawson Barteaux and Ashton Sautner have been released from their professional tryouts and will join the Moose on their AHL contracts they had previously signed.

“They all got in games. I just asked them what they thought. It was amazing how every one of them said how faster, bigger, stronger... and that’s what I said to them as well, that’s the progression,” said Arniel.

“Now it’s about making sure they don’t waste a year, that they go back to junior, they go back down to the Moose. Don’t waste a year. Go back and work on the things you have to work on. We have lots of people that are going to help them with things in that area, what they need to improve.”

The moves leave Winnipeg with 41 players still in camp — 23 forwards, 13 defencemen (including the injured Ville Heinola) and five goaltenders. The Jets have four preseason games remaining, with the next one Wednesday against the Edmonton Oilers at Canada Life Centre.

Winnipeg must get down to a maximum of 23 healthy skaters in time for the Oct. 9 season opener.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/09/24/perfetti-settles-for-bridge-deal-determined-to-prove-long-term-value-to-jets>

'It's time to focus on hockey'

Perfetti settles for bridge deal, determined to prove long-term value to Jets

By: Ken Wiebe and Mike McIntyre

Cole Perfetti is happy to have his first taste of the business side of the pro game behind him.

Fresh off signing a two-year bridge deal that carries an average salary of US\$3.25 million, the 22-year-old received a round of stick taps when he ventured onto the ice with his teammates at Winnipeg Jets training camp on Tuesday.

"It's nice to be back in camp and with the guys," said Perfetti, who missed the first four days of on-ice sessions while negotiations were ongoing. "It sucks missing time. So, it's just great to get that contract done and now it's time to focus on hockey."

What took so long for everyone to find some common ground?

"I think just trying to find a number that worked for both sides. I think obviously it's the business and my first time through it all so I was kind of learning as we went along," he said.

As difficult as it might be to hear your employer has a different view of your worth, Perfetti said there's no lingering hard feelings. Several other Jets, including teammates Josh Morrissey and Kyle Connor, have gone through similar experiences.

"You have to understand it's a business and they're not just going to give away money for no reason, it's simple, everyone understands that. So it's just trying not to take it personal," Perfetti said.

"Obviously you know where you stand compared to other guys and you want to be in that range."

Perfetti won't be in the lineup on Wednesday for the home preseason game against the Edmonton Oilers, though head coach Scott Arniel said he will suit up against the Minnesota Wild on Friday night.

Perfetti reiterated he was open to signing a longer-term deal with the organization that drafted him 10th-overall in 2020.

"I love the city. I love this organization. I've tried to say that in the past and show that I wanted to be here. Obviously that wasn't the direction we went and we'll revisit it in two years," he said.

In that sense, Perfetti understands the situation and what it can mean for him moving forward.

"I'm going to use this year to try and take a big step with my game and hopefully play as good as I can and play as good as I can for this team and take that next step," Perfetti said. "A bridge deal is all about, I wouldn't say betting on myself, I would say I have two years to go prove what kind of player you are, what you can do for this organization."

Perfetti is coming off a season that saw him record career highs in games played (71), goals (19), assists (19) and points (38) but he also went through a lengthy offensive drought (zero goals and two assists) in 23 games. There were plenty of signs of the player he can be, though he's coming into this season with plenty to still prove.

"One hundred per cent. Obviously, I wasn't too pleased with how it went personally for me down the stretch," said Perfetti.

"Last year, all things considered, was still a pretty decent year. I started off really strong and proved that I can produce in this league. Obviously it didn't go like that the whole year, but I'm just going to use that as motivation, take the good from it and take the learning curve and try to be the best that I can be."

Perfetti has made an impression on his teammates during his three NHL seasons.

"We're happy for him and happy that he got rewarded for his efforts," said Jets defenceman Dylan DeMelo, who inked a four-year contract extension during the summer. "We think he's a great player and we know we're a different team with him than we are without him.

"He's getting an opportunity to show what he can do. He's highly skilled, he's got very good vision, a very good feel for the game. He's really good on his edges and he sees some plays that other guys don't see. That's a really special talent to have."

Since the Jets used Tuesday's session to focus on special teams, Perfetti's initial linemates still aren't known, though Arniel made it clear he would be on one of the top two lines and one of the power-play units.

The first-year Jets' bench boss has expressed confidence in Perfetti on multiple occasions during the offseason — including several one-on-one chats they had — and he reiterated those feelings on Tuesday.

"He'll be in one of those second-line spots, for sure. He recognizes how he needs to play, he knows now that he's facing the other team's top defencemen, top forwards. Whether it's with the puck or without, he needs to do things at a quick level, at a high level and he has the hockey smarts to do that. He's excited about where he's getting to," Arniel said.

Perfetti was given a shot at playing centre early last season, but Arniel said he'd prefer to start him on the wing this season.

"The hardest part for a centreman in the NHL is that you have to go from your defensive corner — you're in the battle and 90 per cent of the time, you're the low forward — and you've got to get up out of the hole and get into the rush and get to the other end of the rink on the offence," Arniel said.

"And he showed last year playing on the wing, I thought he was real good. He can play both left and right side. He was actually good on the walls. It kind of got the puck in his hands a lot because he wasn't coming out of the hole from the corners. He was actually getting the puck either first or second touch, and now, he's going from blueline to blueline, being able to make plays that way."

Hearing his head coach express faith in him publicly is something that should provide Perfetti with a boost as he moves into the new season.

“Confidence is huge in this league. When you’re confident in your game, your ability and yourself, you’re going to carry that confidence and swagger onto the ice and you’re going to make more plays,” said Perfetti, noting he put on eight or nine pounds of muscle over the summer.

“I think this is the best I’ve ever felt going onto the ice. I put on some weight and feel a lot stronger on the ice, a lot stronger off the ice.”

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-perfetti-relieved-contract-signed-ready-to-prove-long-term-worth>

Jets' Perfetti relieved contract signed, ready to prove long-term worth

By Scott Billeck

Cole Perfetti came to the rink on Tuesday morning, relieved and ready to prove his long-term worth to the Winnipeg Jets.

Perfetti was welcomed back onto the ice with a round of stick taps and was cheered as his teammates circled him after the day’s session ended at the team’s practice facility.

There were \$6.5 million reasons for everyone to celebrate after the 22-year-old signed a two-year bridge deal (\$3.25 million AAV) on Monday night, ending a stalemate that ate its way through four days of on-ice sessions.

“It’s nice to get done,” the forward said. “It’s nice to be back in camp and with the guys. It sucks missing time. So, it’s just great to get that contract done, and now it’s time to focus on hockey.”

Perfetti stuck around Winnipeg while the negotiation process began to overlap with the start of camp, skating privately with some local AHL and ECHL players awaiting the opening of their respective seasons.

Perfetti said he learned a lot about the contract process.

“You have to understand it’s a business, and they’re not just going to give away money for no reason,” he said. “It’s simple. Everyone understands that. So it’s just trying not to take it personal.”

“I get to play hockey again, so that’s the biggest thing. I just get to be at the rink. It was definitely a learning process, and (I’ll) just say (I’m) glad it’s over with.”

While he was open to extending his stay in Winnipeg long-term, the Jets never made such an offer during their negotiations.

“It would have been great (to sign long-term),” he said, reiterating his love for the city and the organization.

It's added motivation for Perfetti, who has two years to prove he's worth the commitment.

"You have two more years to prove yourself and go show what you can do on the ice," he said. "I'm going to use this year to try and take a big step with my game and hopefully play as good as I can and play as good as I can for this team and take that next step.

"A bridge deal is all about, I wouldn't say, betting on myself. I would say I have two years to go prove what kind of player you are and what you can do for this organization. That's my goal every day, to just go and be the best player that I can be and revisit this in two years."

Perfetti will have arbitration rights on his side by then, and if he can distance himself from his injury woes that curtailed his first two seasons as an NHLer, and the half-season slump he endured last year, leverage will swing in his favour.

"I wasn't too pleased with how it went personally for me down the stretch," Perfetti said. "Last year, all things considered, was still a pretty decent year. I started off really strong and proved that I can produce in this league. Obviously, it didn't go like that the whole year, but I'm just going to use that as motivation, take the good from it and take the learning curve and try to be the best that I can be."

That's music to head coach Scott Arniel's ears. The bench boss was happy to have another tool in his toolbox on Tuesday.

"For me, as a coach, the other part of it (negotiations) is not my job and I'm glad it's done," Arniel said. "He can get in there and get some games in and get up to speed. So, we're glad it's done."

Arniel and Perfetti chatted several times during the offseason, with the former helping to mend fences with the young player after his tough end to last season.

"His three years with the Winnipeg Jets – the first two were injury years and he didn't get to finish the second half each time," Arniel said. "Last year, he put together a real good, solid season and he's got to back that up again and be consistent and do that on a nightly basis.

"He recognizes now how he needs to play. He knows now that he's facing the other teams' top defencemen and their top forwards. Whether it's with the puck or without it, he has to do things at a quick level, at a high level, and he has the hockey smarts to do that. He's excited about where he's gonna be."

Those conversations encouraged the Whitby, Ont., product, who struggled with his confidence after scoring just a pair of points during a 23-game famine in the latter half of the year.

Perfetti finished with 19 goals and 38 points in 71 games. He was made a healthy scratch 11 times in the second half, and featured in just one game during Winnipeg's swift five-game first-round playoff exit against Colorado.

"Confidence is huge in this league," Perfetti said. "When you're confident in your game, your ability and yourself, you're going to carry that confidence and swagger onto the ice and you're going to make more plays. You're going to feel better on the ice. Having that confidence from

the get-go is big. It's huge for the mental side of it and then you're just going to go out and play your game.

"The biggest part for me is this year, I've got to do my thing. Play my game that got me here to this point. It's really nice to hear that (from Arniel). Obviously, you want that opportunity. Everyone wants more. That's the competitive edge in every one. It's great to hear that. The opportunity is going to be there, now I've got to make the most of it."

When Arniel was hired in the spring, he publicly stated that Perfetti would be viewed as a valuable member of his top-six contingent, with the potential to see significant time on the power play.

Preparing for bigger things, Perfetti was training already in May, working with health and fitness coach Matt Nichol back in Ontario.

Perfetti, who has been labelled "undersized" throughout his young NHL career, packed on another eight pounds of muscle.

"I had some disrupted summers in the past, training-wise, so this summer was great," Perfetti said. "I feel really good coming on the ice. This is the best I've ever felt going onto the ice. I put on some weight and feel a lot stronger on the ice, a lot stronger off the ice."

With the contract impasse behind him, the ball is now in Perfetti's court, with the ink still fresh on his new deal.

"You've got to go and make the most of it," he said. "It's up to me, it will be in my hands. All you can ask for as a player is a chance and obviously, you've got to take it and run. That's my motto right now, with every little bit that I can get is to be the best I can at that role or (with) that little bit of extra ice or whatever the heck it is. It's just (about) being the best that I can with whatever is given."