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Practice Notebook - Sept. 29, 2024
"I wanted to ramp up what we were doing."

By Mitchell Clinton

WINNIPEG – After spending the first eight days of training camp in two big groups, Sunday marked the first time that the number of players on the roster was low enough to require just one.

But head coach Scott Arniel made sure that one group got right back up to pace after Saturday's off day.

"I wanted to ramp up what we were doing," said Arniel.

"I wanted to try and take the compete level up like it's a game. Guys are getting reps with each other and it was a lot of what I was looking for."

The 75-minute skate contained large segments of five-on-five, four-on-four, and three-on-three play, with the latter two being parts of the game the Jets haven't had much time to work on early in camp.

Winnipeg's next game isn't until Wednesday when they host the Calgary Flames in the second last preseason game on the calendar.

"We have a few days here to really focus and hone in on all our power play, penalty kill, all our systems for everyone," said Dylan Samberg.

"Usually a guy like myself, I don't get to see a lot of four-on-four or three-on-three, so it's fun to play in that. It's good for a lot of guys that don't get an opportunity to play in a moment like that, if something were to happen, they're able to do that if need be."

The full line rushes, with some rotation going on due to uneven numbers of forwards and defencemen, looked like this:

Connor-Scheifele-Vilardi
Perfetti-Namestnikov-Ehlers
Niederreiter-Lowry-Appleton
Barron-Kupari-Iafallo
Gustafsson-Toninato-Jonsson-Fjallby
Anderson-Dolan-Lambert-Chibrikov/Shaw

Morrissey-DeMelo
Samberg-Pionk
Salomonsson-Miller
Fleury-Coghlan
Kuzmin-Bauer
Lundmark

Earlier in the day, Winnipeg assigned three players (Daniel Torgersson, Parker Ford, and Domenic DiVincentiis) to the Manitoba Moose, and also loaned Brayden Yager and Colby Barlow to their junior teams.

The exclamation mark on Yager's camp was his goal in the preseason loss to the Minnesota Wild on Friday night as well as his on-ice skills session with Mark Scheifele after practice early in the week.

"Yager was complimentary of Scheif and the stuff he helped him with," said Arniel. "He has potential. He's another guy. Go back to junior - I don't know what kind of team he's going to have - but same as Barlow, get a chance to go play World Juniors, go dominate, be that elite player, and let things move forward from there."

As for Barlow, this was the 19-year-old's first true camp with the Jets. The 2023 first-round pick was sick for all of last September's training camp.

"He recognized there is a whole different level of pace," said Arniel. "He got to play in the American League last year when he came up with the Moose and learned a bit then. The hard part is when you go back you take your foot off the pedal and kind of relax. He needs to make sure that every day is a learning day for him, a growth day, whether that's in the weight room or on the ice.

"Try to make sure he's gaining as much as possible in learning experiences through this coming season so when we see him next year, he'll be one year older, more experienced, and a little bit longer down the line."

SUNDAY TRADITIONS

The talk in the room over the last couple days – especially around the golf enthusiasts like Dylan Samberg - has surrounded the Presidents Cup and the back-and-forth nature of this year's event, hosted in Montreal.

While the singles matches on Sunday will determine whether the United States or the International team takes home the prize, Samberg says another sport will be getting a lot of screen time on Sunday.

Football.

Specifically, the Minnesota Vikings against Mason Appleton's Green Bay Packers.

Samberg says Appleton is pretty outnumbered in the Minnesota-filled Jets room.

"All the guys that like the Vikings are kind of poking him a bit this morning," Samberg grinned, before doing an impression of the Vikings Gjallarhorn.

"Skol Vikings!"

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<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/09/29/heinolas-wonky-ankle-stanleys-surgical-knee-raise-doubts-about-jets-battered-d>

***Heinola's wonky ankle, Stanley's surgical knee raise doubts about Jets' battered D
Battered blue-line, roster questions among this month's hot topics for Free Press hockey
writers***

By: Ken Wiebe and Mike McIntyre

We knew there would be plenty of cuts coming when Winnipeg Jets training camp began. That's just inevitable when 53 hopefuls must be reduced to a maximum 23-man roster by opening night.

But it's the unexpected ones made by local surgeons — to Ville Heinola's ankle and Logan Stanley's knee — that have provided the biggest headlines around here so far.

News that both defencemen are shelved for at least a month has created plenty of opportunity with the hockey club, but also plenty of concern about the state of the suddenly battered blue-line.

Not surprisingly, that subject came up plenty when we opened the monthly Free Press mailbag. Hockey writers Ken Wiebe and Mike McIntyre are here to answer your questions and, perhaps, calm your fears.

Let's dig in:

1. Our defence is worrisome. A lot of extra forwards. We need a defenceman. Agree?
@mark51978393

MCINTYRE: The Jets were the league's top defensive team last season, winning the Jennings Trophy for surrendering the fewest goals against during the regular season. The sensational play of Vezina Trophy winning goaltender Connor Hellebuyck was a big reason for that.

I would argue that so, too, was the remarkable health of Winnipeg's back end, which made it through the 82-game marathon unscathed. The one exception was Heinola's broken ankle, which came in the final pre-season game, but that quickly spelled the end of the club's bad luck.

Obviously it's a different story this year, with Heinola now needing to go back under the knife to remove an infected screw, and Stanley messing up his meniscus while doing an off-ice warm-up.

Worrisome? Sure. Time to hit the panic button? Not at all. Haydn Fleury and Dylan Coghlan were brought in this summer to provide some depth, and both players are now likely to get a chance to show whether they can realize the type of lofty expectations that followed them earlier in their careers.

Colin Miller is also going to get the opportunity that never came his way late last season after he was acquired at the trade deadline, and young rearguards such as Elias Salomonsson and Simon Lundmark have moved up the depth chart as well.

The good news is Heinola and Stanley might only miss a couple weeks of the season if their projected timelines don't change. But I suspect general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff is keeping a close eye on what else might be out there — whether it be on the waiver wire or by trade. I

just don't expect him to rush into anything, as the Jets have enough runway here to take a more cautious approach.

You're right about having a lot of forwards, which is going to lead to some tough decisions in the coming days. But that's a good problem to have. As we're seeing with defencemen, you can never have enough depth.

2. What about signing Justin Schultz, two-time Stanley Cup champ and veteran of 745 games with a right-handed shot? @204knowledge

WIEBE: It's a bit surprising to see Schultz still out there as an unrestricted free agent. He had seven goals and 26 points in 70 with the Seattle Kraken last season after recording seven goals and 34 points in 73 contests with the Kraken the season prior. He's someone who can run a power play and has always been a puck-mover, but he's never been considered someone who excels in the defensive zone.

Schultz won't add much when it comes to physical play either, so I personally don't see it as a fit right now. The injury issues that the Jets are dealing with for at least the next month involve players who are projected to play mostly on the left side and I think that's where the organization could be looking at some point, whether it's with a trade, waiver claim or a similar free-agent signing like the one you suggested.

3. Do you think Chevy has any interest in Winnipegger Jett Woo, a right-handed D-man and a high draft pick in 2018? RAY

MCINTYRE: I was a little surprised to see Woo expunged from Vancouver Canucks camp so quickly, as the 24-year-old was placed on waivers last week. The fact he cleared the next day says that the Jets, and 30 other teams, all took a pass.

One thing to remember with waivers is you can't just claim a player and stash them on your farm team as insurance. You have to keep them on your active roster, or else they go right back on waivers (and can be re-claimed by the original team).

Woo, a 37th-overall pick, certainly has some intriguing tools.

In addition to being a right shot, he can put up points (career-high 31 in 62 AHL games last year with Abbotsford) and he plays with an edge (93 penalty minutes). He's still waiting to make his NHL debut, and I thought that might happen at season when I was in Vancouver on the eve of a Canucks vs Jets game and he got called up from the minors. We had a great conversation that day, and I could see how excited he was at a chance that ultimately never came.

Bottom line: I don't think, at this point, Woo is a better option than Winnipeg's current best seven options, even with Heinola and Stanley out. Which is why no claim was made. But perhaps at some point down the road Woo could be wooed to Winnipeg. It would be a pretty cool story, for sure.

4. Why didn't the Jets sign former Manitoba Moose player Kyle Capobianco, who was top D-man in the AHL last season, to a contract this season? Did they even make him an offer? Now, he's with the Dallas Stars, as you know. I thought he would be a good fit with the Jets this season. MARTIN

MCINTYRE: In a word, opportunity. Or lack thereof for Capobianco last season, due entirely to Winnipeg never having a need to dip into its defensive depth because of good health.

By all accounts Capobianco was the perfect teammate, never complaining once and, as you know, excelling in his play with the Moose to the tune of a career-high 54 points in 69 AHL games.

Not surprisingly, other organizations took notice. For the Jets, they simply couldn't guarantee a path for Capobianco. They wanted to find a spot for Heinola, who was no longer waiver exempt, and they were high on the likes of Miller, Fleury and Coghlan as well.

And so when the Stars offered the 27-year-old a two-year, US\$1,550,000 contract, with all of that money guaranteed regardless of what level he plays at, you can see why he'd jump at the chance.

Would it be nice to now have him around given what's happened in camp with the Jets? Sure. But hindsight is 20-20, and now we'll see if others can step up.

5. Any word if Winnipeg Jets head coach Scott Arniel still plans on a 22-man roster? Matt H.

WIEBE: Ultimately this decision will be made by Cheveldayoff and company, though Arniel caught the attention of reporters following the first day of on-ice sessions at training camp when he brought up the possibility of carrying 13 forwards and seven D-men when a question about the composition of the roster was posed.

Now, it's important to remember that Arniel gave that answer before the Jets lost Heinola and Stanley for at least a month. Why does that matter? The reason the Jets were considering rolling with a 22-man roster since it would allow them to accrue more cap space as the season moves along until the NHL trade deadline.

Cap space is an incredibly valuable asset, especially for teams that choose to go all-in at the deadline. Since neither Heinola or Stanley are expected to need LTIR, their salaries are going to count against the salary cap when the season begins, even though they won't be on the active roster.

Might that encourage the Jets to ensure they go with 22 players? It's possible, though several depth players in the competition for spots around the periphery of the roster require waivers, so that might also end up being a consideration. As of right now, Fleury and Coghlan look like locks to be on the opening-day roster (with Elias Salomonsson starting in the AHL as he prepares for his first season in North America), so carrying seven D-men instead of eight won't be an issue.

The bigger question will be if the Jets want to carry 14 forwards, which would allow Brad Lambert to break camp with the Jets along with Rasmus Kupari and David Gustafsson.

Other veterans still battling for the 13th or 14th forward jobs include Jared Anderson-Dolan, Mason Shaw, Axel Jonsson-Fjallby and Dominic Toninato. Given how the depth is being tested on defence, the Jets may be a bit more reluctant to risk losing a forward on waivers before the season begins.

6. If you were to look into your crystal ball, who would you predict could have a breakout season? RYAN

WIEBE: The Jets have several players on the projected roster who will be looking to level up, including Cole Perfetti, who inked a two-year contract last week. I suspect he's going to be moving to the 25-plus goal and 55-plus point range this season as long as he's healthy. That would be an impressive step forward.

Speaking of health, I wrote about Gabe Vilardi last week and he was very open about his motivation to play more regular-season games (his career-high is 63).

For me, the chance for the biggest jump in production belongs to Vilardi, who was still fifth on the Jets in goals with 22 last season.

He could comfortably be in the 36-to-42 goal and 70-to-75 point range if he plays close to 80 games.

MCINTYRE: Those are good bets by Kenny.

I'm going to say Miller, who has already scored twice in the pre-season and has a rocket of a shot that I expect will get plenty of time to shine at both five-on-five and the power play this season.

Miller isn't the fastest skater, but he's mobile enough to get around the ice and no doubt is eager to show he can help this club. I wouldn't be shocked if he hits double-digits in goals, something he did back in 2017-18 with the Vegas Golden Knights during their magical expansion year (which included beating the Jets in the Western Conference final).

7. Last season, the Anaheim Ducks ran a sort of load management program with Leo Carlsson to start the season. They kept him on the roster, but he didn't play in every game and his role was different game to game. Could the Jets do something similar with Brad Lambert? Maybe play second line some games, fourth line some games, with some press box games when the schedule gets tough (three in four days or four in six days). @AavcoCup

WIEBE: In what is a copycat league, you can be sure that executives from around the NHL took notice of what the Ducks were doing with Carlsson. The idea of load management has been much more prevalent in the NBA than the NHL to date and I suspect that will continue moving forward.

As it pertains to Lambert, I could see his role changing game-to-game should he either break camp with the Jets or even move his way into the lineup on a regular basis as the season moves along. But I don't see the Jets needing to give Lambert rest over the course of the schedule as a way to help keep him fresh.

Because he's a late December birthday, Carlsson was 19 for the bulk of the season, while Lambert is set to turn 21 this December.

All to say that while the rigours of an NHL season are always going to be a consideration, I don't expect the Jets would be overly concerned about Lambert playing closer to a full season — given his time spent in the AHL and his long playoff run with the Seattle Thunderbirds during his time in the WHL after coming over to play in North America.

On an unrelated note, I do wonder if additional NHL teams begin to consider using load management a bit more for veteran players — or if we see more situations like when Zach Parise signed with the Colorado Avalanche in January.

8. Regarding Nikita Chibrikov. I don't know how you keep him off this team. He's been fantastic all of camp and in each pre-season game. Makes you wonder about an Alex Lafallo move for cap savings? @gojetsgo_17

MCINTYRE: I would agree Chibrikov has been one of the standouts so far during camp and the pre-season. His most impressive outing, in my eyes, came in Friday night's 8-5 loss in Minnesota. The Jets dressed a mainly younger, more inexperienced lineup (save for Hellebuyck, who got shelled) against a deeper, talented veteran-laden Wild club. And while several Winnipeg players looked a bit overmatched at times, I thought Chibrikov excelled.

A hard-working assist on Cole Perfetti's first-period goal, courtesy of a strong forecheck, was followed up with a beautiful power play tally of his own in the third period, where he unleashed a blistering shot to beat Marc-Andre Fleury. In between that was plenty of strong, aggressive and determined play.

The thing about Chibrikov is he's got the tools, I believe, to play up or down the lineup. And he's absolutely fearless despite not being the biggest player.

You won't get any argument from me that he's earned more look. I'm just not sure they're going to come right off the hop here. Like it or not, fair or not, contract status (and especially waiver status) is probably going to play a role. And Chibrikov is one of the few forwards left in camp who can go to the Moose without any concerns about a team claiming him.

The Jets have lost several players in recent years on waivers, including Declan Chisholm and Jansen Harkins last year. And, as Kenny outlined above, there's a chance they lose another (or more) this fall.

Chibrikov may ultimately be a casualty of that. However, I don't think it'll be too long — whether it's injury-related or performance-related — before he's with the big club on a more extended basis.

9. It seemed like the speed Colorado brought in the playoffs last season was really tough for the Jets to handle. Do you think the team is better equipped to handle the quicker pace this year with some new players and coaches in place? MICHAEL

WIEBE: After having the opportunity to cover the Western Conference final and Stanley Cup final in 2022 as part of the Avalanche title run, seeing them play fast against the Jets was not a surprise. Guys like Nathan MacKinnon and Cale Makar play at warp speed and they know how to win.

Special teams were also a massive factor for the Avalanche in that series, as was the inability to keep the area in front of the blue paint in front of Hellebuyck much cleaner.

As for the speed specifically, keeping Nikolaj Ehlers immediately is a benefit on the speed front and the potential for Lambert to become a regular would also help on that front. Playing faster doesn't mean bringing a bunch of speedsters onto the roster, it's the ability to think quickly and

anticipate that can also help when the intensity level gets higher and the physical play is on the rise.

With the Jets knowing the importance of commitment to defensive play (which resulted in allowing the fewest goals in the NHL and capturing the Jennings Trophy) last season, the Jets should once again be better equipped for the playoffs. But as Arniel has said on several occasions since being promoted to the top job, the Jets first need to eliminate eight teams in the Western Conference before we get the chance to see if things could be different in late April and into May.

10. USA Today rated all 32 NHL teams as to their off-season moves. Jets were No. 32 and given a grade of D. Any comments? RODGER

WIEBE: We live in an age of immediate gratification and there have been countless times over the course of history where winning the off-season on paper hasn't necessarily translated into success.

Having said that, there's no denying the fact the Jets lost some big-time pieces in free agency, including the best backup goalie in the NHL last season (Laurent Brossoit), a second-line centre who fit in seamlessly and played in all situations after he was acquired (Sean Monahan), a hard-nosed D-man who was a minute-muncher and posted a career-high in goals (Brenden Dillon) and a steady third-pairing blue-liner who provided plenty of steady minutes (Nate Schmidt).

Tyler Toffoli also chose to go elsewhere (San Jose Sharks), but that wasn't unexpected.

It's going to be tough for Kaapo Kahkonen to match what Brossoit did, but he's got potential to take another step in his development.

As for the other replacements, the Jets are mostly banking on internal growth and improved health. Bringing back Miller on a two-year deal could end up being an underrated move, similar to signing Kahkonen (and reuniting with Eric Comrie to provide additional depth between the pipes). Fleury and Coghlan could show the grade was too low by steadying things with the defence corps now that it appears regular playing time could be on the horizon.

The Jets took several swings in free agency to fill the 2C job, including Adam Henrique before he returned to the Edmonton Oilers, but now it's up to Lambert or Vladislav Namestnikov to show that the Jets won't have to look for someone else before the deadline this season.

My personal assessment of the Jets' off-season was probably closer to C or C- at worst, but the true grade won't be known until closer to the midway point of the campaign once we see how the pieces fit and if some of the depth pieces provide more than was expected of them. And the truth is that the Jets are more concerned about slaying some of their playoff demons than winning the off-season in the eyes of hockey pundits.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/09/29/jets-cut-five-players-from-camp>

Jets cut five players from camp

By: Mike McIntyre

Slowly but surely, the Winnipeg Jets starting lineup is starting to take shape.

The latest round of cuts came Sunday morning, with five more players sent packing from training camp. Forwards Brayden Yager and Colby Barlow are headed back to their respective junior teams, while forwards Parker Ford and Daniel Torgersson and goaltender Domenic DiVincentiis will report to the Manitoba Moose.

“For me with Colby, this was his first camp. He missed out all of last year with getting sick in training camp and not getting a chance to play in exhibition games,” Jets coach Scott Arniel said of Barlow, the 18th-overall pick from 2023 who played in a pair of preseason games last week.

“Asking him what he thought, he felt better in the second game compared to the first, but just the pace of the game. How little he had the puck and just all the stuff, whether it’s him playing the system or just trying to get to spots offensively to get his looks. He recognized that there’s a whole level, a different pace.”

Barlow, 19, is expected to compete for a spot on Canada’s World Junior team. His Ontario Hockey League rights currently belong to Owen Sound, but there are rumours swirling that he could be traded to another team.

“The hard part when you go back is that you don’t take your foot off the pedal and kind of relax. He needs to make sure that every day is a learning day for him,” said Arniel.

“Whether that’s in the weight room or on the ice. That you don’t get caught out there with those minute (shifts), 20, 30 seconds at half-speed, Try to keep that mentality of 45, 50 second shifts going as hard as you can. Try to make sure that he’s gaining as much as he can through this learning experience.”

As for Yager, the 14th-overall pick from 2023 certainly opened some eyes in his first camp with Winnipeg including scoring a goal in Friday’s 8-5 preseason loss to the Minnesota Wild. The 19-year-old, obtained by the Jets in the Rutger McGroarty trade, will go back to the Moose Jaw Warriors of the WHL for one more year.

“Great skill-set, great shot. Good on faceoffs. He’s a heady kid, always asking questions of myself and the other coaches about playing without the puck,” said Arniel.

“I think the best thing for him, last year he played two exhibition games (in Pittsburgh), but he got to sit and learn from Sidney Crosby. And here he got to sit and learn from Scheif (Mark Scheifele).”

These moves leave Winnipeg with 36 players left in camp — 19 forwards, 13 defencemen and four goaltenders. That includes injured blue-liners Logan Stanley and Ville Heinola. The team must get down to a maximum of 23 healthy skaters prior to the start of the regular season on Oct. 9.

“It was movement by design. We don’t play until Wednesday. They had the day off yesterday. We want them to ramp up,” said Arniel.

“I had a talk with them before. The five-on-five, especially, was all the things we’ve been preaching, what we’ve been practicing, systems-wise. Try to take the compete level up like it’s a game. Guys get reps with each other. It was a lot of what I like. A lot of what I was looking for.”

The Jets will have to cut two goaltenders and, depending on whether they want to start the year with 22 or 23 healthy players, either nine or 10 skaters. At this point, netminder Thomas Milic and one of Eric Comrie or Kaapo Kahkonen is a given, while Dmitry Kuzmin, Tyrel Bauer and Simon Lundmark on the blue-line are a safe bet to be Moose-bound.

But tough decisions are looming on whether Elias Salomonsson breaks camp with the big club — and if he does, at the expense of whom? — along with how the forwards shake out.

Salomonsson would not require waivers to go down, while Dylan Coghlan and Haydn Fleury would. Up front. Brad Lambert and Nikita Chibrikov do not, while Mason Shaw, Jaret Anderson-Dolan, Axel Jonsson-Fjallby, David Gustafsson, Rasmus Kupari and Dominic Toninato all would.

Salomonsson has clearly caught the coach's eye. He's dressed in three of the first four preseason games and now finds himself getting a look inside the top six, which has been given a bit of a jolt with Stanley (knee) and Heinola (ankle) both undergoing surgery last week and out at least a month.

"For a young guy coming over it's great to see that he's catching on with what we're trying to teach, going from the big rink over there in Europe to this ice. I thought every game he's gotten better," Arniel said of Salomonsson.

"He's getting more and more comfortable each day. He's a big prospect for us. We often talk about the forward guys, but he's kind of gone under the radar. He's a prospect we'll be relying on in the not-too-distant future. The thing about him is he does have a good first touch, a good first pass. He's heady, he reads the game pretty well, he's got good feet."

Winnipeg has two preseason games remaining. They'll host Calgary on Wednesday at Canada Life Centre, then travel to Alberta to face the Flames on Friday night.