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Practice Notebook - Sept. 30, 2024

Mark Scheifele will have a key role on the power play and penalty kill this season

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG – Another day of training camp, another day of working on special teams for the Winnipeg Jets.

The Jets had two groups on different rinks to start practice on Monday before merging the two. Despite the time crunch that comes with a quick training camp, Davis Payne and Dean Chynoweth are doing an excellent job getting their systems across to the players.

“We've had a chance to do it in the games,” said head coach Scott Arniel after the skate this morning.

“There's a lot of good video that both Davis and Dean showed before practice of us executing some of the new things we are implementing. And it was good execution. I liked a lot of what I saw.”

It would be unfair to expect things to go smoothly in every one of the four preseason games so far. After all, you are not seeing anything close to what the Jets roster will look like when they start the 2024-25 campaign in Edmonton. But there are signs things are clicking on the PK side of things.

“As you've seen from some of the exhibition games, there's been kills, power plays that look sharp, entries, entry denials, things like that. And then there's been times where the read is just been a little off,” said Adam Lowry.

“So, I think the more reps we get now before we get into these final two preseason games, will be huge, and then hopefully we don't take a lot of penalties against the Flames, but it certainly is going to be a good test starting the season against the Oilers.”

There might not be a better challenge to see where the penalty kill is than starting with the defending West champs. After all, the Oilers power play is the envy of many franchises. The Jets will go back to using Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor on the penalty kill. There are examples all over the league as to just how effective using offensive minded players can be.

“I think it looks when talking to Dean with having (Sebastian) Aho killing in Carolina, and you don't necessarily need to get in shooting lanes. I think sometimes the big fear is you lose a key player. They have to eat a one timer because they're 20 feet off,” said Lowry.

“And he kind of mentioned that with how smart those guys are and their reads, oftentimes they can get in the lanes, or they can kind of intercept passes, just anticipating, you know, knowing

what the power play guys can expect. And you know, when they get the puck, they can make things happen.”

As for the power play, the entries during practice today looked really good. Going back to the game in St. Paul on the weekend, Arniel liked those and the effort during faceoffs as well.

“You got to have a jump mentality. And I thought, you look at that game in Minnesota, our face off losses, we were great on our recoveries. We had a couple of real good ones that we showed (on video). That's the starting point. If you lose it, it goes down the ice,” said Arniel.

“The next thing is, you got to get into the zone and get yourself ready to go. And if you're spending all your time breaking out, obviously, it's not very advantageous to be on the power play. So, our execution and our details on our entries has been really good. And so far, I mean, we'll see again, we get into Wednesday's game, how it looks against Calgary, and keep working on that.”

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<https://www.nhl.com/news/topic/season-previews/winnipeg-jets-2024-25-season-preview>

Jets season preview: Counting on Hellebuyck, balanced scoring Forward Perfetti expected to play bigger role under new coach Arniel

By Derek Van Diest

The 2024-25 NHL season starts Oct. 4. With training camps underway, NHL.com is taking a look at the three keys, the inside scoop on roster questions, and the projected lineup for each of the 32 teams. Today, the Winnipeg Jets.

Coach: Scott Arniel (first season)

Last season: 52-24-6, second in Central Division; lost in Western Conference First Round

3 KEYS

1. Not-so-new coach

Scott Arniel spent two seasons as an associate to coach Rick Bowness, so there will be some semblance of continuity for the Jets this season. Bowness retired after the Jets were eliminated from the Stanley Cup Playoffs in the Western Conference First Round by the Colorado Avalanche last season, and Arniel was hired to replace him May 24. Arniel inherits a talented team that briefly took over top spot in the NHL standings last season in January. “It might be difficult for him moving into the head coaching shoes when he was an assistant for the same team, so it's going to be a fine line for him how he's going to handle it, but I'm positive he's going to do great in that situation,” forward Nino Niederreiter said in August at the NHL European Player Media Tour in Prague. “He's vocal, he wants to win and he has the passion for the game, and I think the assistant coaches he added (Davis Payne, Dean Chynoweth) are going to be a great addition for him.”

2. Connor Hellebuyck

The reigning Vezina Trophy winner is entering the first season of a seven-year, \$59.5 million contract (\$8.5 million average annual value). Hellebuyck was outstanding last season, going 37-19-4 with a 2.39 goals-against average, .921 save percentage and five shutouts in 60 starts. He struggled in the playoffs against Colorado (1-4, 5.23, .870 in five games) but will be relied on heavily again this season. Winnipeg's fortunes will be directly correlated to Hellebuyck's play, and there is little reason to believe he won't be able to put together another impressive season.

3. Balanced scoring

Winnipeg had 12 players with at least 30 points last season and will need similar contributions throughout the lineup to remain competitive in an improved division. Center Mark Scheifele is back after leading the Jets with 72 points (25 goals, 47 assists) in 74 games, but they lost forwards Sean Monahan (Columbus Blue Jackets) and Tyler Toffoli (San Jose Sharks) to free agency and will need to make up the lost offense internally. Forward Cole Perfetti, who signed a two-year, \$6.5 million contract (\$3.25 million AAV) last month as a restricted free agent, is expected to play a bigger role, and Winnipeg is hopeful that he'll improve on the 38 points (19 goals, 19 assists) he had in 71 games last season.

ROSTER RUNDOWN

Making the cut

Forward Axel Jonsson-Fjallby played 26 games for the Jets last season and had five points (two goals, three assists). He played the majority of the season with Manitoba of the American Hockey League, finishing with 30 points (12 goals, 18 assists) in 41 games. The 26-year-old has an opportunity to stick with Winnipeg and is expected to contribute in a bottom-six role.

Most intriguing addition

Kaapo Kahkonen is expected to back up Hellebuyck after signing a one-year, \$1 million contract as an unrestricted free agent July 1. The 28-year-old is entering his fifth full NHL season and will be asked to take some of the load off the No. 1 goalie. Kahkonen was 6-20-3 with a 3.81 GAA and .895 save percentage in 31 games (27 starts) with the San Jose Sharks before being traded to the New Jersey Devils and going 1-4-0 with a 2.51 GAA and .923 save percentage in six starts.

Biggest potential surprise

Gabriel Vilardi was limited to 47 games last season because of injuries, finishing with 36 points (22 goals, 14 assists). If Vilardi can stay healthy, he is capable of having a breakout NHL season. He is expected to play a top-six role.

Ready to contribute

Rasmus Kupari had one assist last season, when a shoulder injury limited him to 28 games. But the forward is healthy and is expected to contribute in a bottom-six role.

Fantasy sleeper

Vilardi, F (average draft position: 174.0) -- He had the best points-per-game average of his NHL career (0.77) last season with the Jets but flew under the radar in fantasy because he was limited by injury. If Winnipeg's top line of Kyle Connor (led Jets with 34 goals in 65 games),

Scheifele and Vilardi stays healthy over a full season, Vilardi could be one of the League's biggest full-fledged breakout players. -- Pete Jensen

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/09/30/the-korean-kid-looks-for-a-hockey-home>

The Korean Kid looks for a hockey home Sanghoon Shin hopes to catch on with Moose in his quest to play in NHL one day

By: Mike McIntyre

Forget about the road less travelled. Sanghoon Shin is on a rather unprecedented hockey journey, one that has landed the South Korean right here in Winnipeg.

The 31-year-old is attempting to keep his NHL dream alive by trying out for the Manitoba Moose.

"I am lucky to be able to come here," he told the Free Press on Monday following the start of AHL training camp.

Shin is a fascinating story. He fell in love with hockey as a child growing up in Seoul, watching his older brother play the sport, and clearly has some natural gifts along with a tireless work ethic that has earned him praise at plenty of stops along the way.

"Big reason is my brother. He kept working hard, and I just followed him," said Shin, flashing a big grin which shows off a missing top tooth courtesy of an old hockey-related injury.

Easier said than done, considering there were only a handful of rinks to skate at growing up.

"I have been very proud of me. And to see younger hockey players in Korea following me a lot," said Shin. "I'm always talking to them, telling them 'You can do it, you can do it.'"

Shin is quick to credit Jim Paek, the NHL's first Korea-born player who played 270 games with the Pittsburgh Penguins, Los Angeles Kings and Ottawa Senators between 1990-1995, for being a mentor and motivator. Paek's career also included a nine-game stop in Manitoba with the Moose in 1996-97.

Paek was the head coach of Korea's national men's team at the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, which Shin competed in.

"It was a big experience. I was proud to be an Olympian and play with Olympic players," said Shin, who stayed close to home, playing in a Korean pro league against teams from China, Japan and, at one point, Russia, until deciding in 2021 to head to North America.

First stop was Atlanta, where he signed with the ECHL Gladiators and had a solid rookie season with 22 points (13 goals, nine assists) in 31 games, including goals in seven straight.

He fell in love with the community, which has a large Korean population, and had an even better sophomore season in 2022-23 with 52 points (30 goals, 22 assists) in 70 games, which was third-highest on the team.

That put him on the radar of the Moose, who have scouts at that level in addition to their new ECHL affiliate in Norfolk.

“He scored 30 goals, so there’s definitely something there,” said Moose head coach Mark Morrison.

Consider him intrigued by Shin, a right-shot forward who stands just 5-foot-8 and weighs 170 pounds.

“Not a traditional path, for sure not. I thought he looked really good out there,” Morrison said after watching him up close for the first time.

“Down the line, you just never know when you’re going to need a depth guy that might be able to put the puck in the net. If you’re going through a drought that’s the kind of guy you’re looking for. He definitely showed some skill on the ice out there.”

Shin returned home last year to play for HL Anyang of the Asia League Ice Hockey, with 34 points (16 goals, 18 assists) in 32 games while serving as alternate captain. Now he’s back, having signed for the coming season with the ECHL affiliate in Norfolk.

That led to him being extended one of nine professional tryout offers sent out by the Moose. With the Winnipeg Jets still having 36 skaters in camp, including about a dozen who will eventually end up with Manitoba, it’s a way to bolster the early numbers for the AHL club.

“We get a chance to see some guys that the management team has done some scouting for,” said Morrison. “It’s good for us to get a look at those guys and see what kind of game they have.”

Shin, who describes his speed and shot as his biggest strengths, is hoping to make the most of the opportunity.

“I have never played AHL. I hope to sign here. I am trying my best at this camp,” he said.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/09/30/nhl-pre-season-plagued-by-injuries>

NHL pre-season plagued by injuries

By: Mike McIntyre

It's become a hot topic as several stars — from Drew Doughty to William Nylander to Patrik Laine — have gone down with injuries before the puck drops for real on a new NHL season.

Is any potential reward worth the risk of having key players appear in what are, at least for them, rather meaningless preseason games beyond working off some rust? And, by extension, are lengthy training camps necessary in an era when the modern athlete is already showing up in tip-top shape?

"It's a really hard question to answer," Jets forward Nikolaj Ehlers, who might just be considered an expert on the subject considering his history, told the Free Press on Monday in a candid, one-on-one conversation.

Two years ago, Ehlers had a regular camp, played in several preseason games and felt 100 per cent only to suffer a sports hernia in the first regular-season game that would cost him three months of action.

Conclusion: Gearing up for meaningful games by getting some reps couldn't protect him from injury the second things started to count.

Last year, Ehlers suffered a significant neck injury while lifting weights just as camp was set to begin, missing all exhibition contests but making it back just in time for the start of the season, one in which he appeared in all 82 games for the first time in six years.

Conclusion: Sitting out camp didn't spell doom. Far from it, in fact.

"Last year was the first time I kind of had to jump right into the regular season. And I was fine," said Ehlers. "But it does take at least a game to get into the timing of it all. And the game-like situations, the game conditioning and so on."

So where does Ehlers, who has played in two of Winnipeg's first four preseason games this fall, stand on the issue?

"There's pros and cons. I do like a game, at least one game, before it gets going," he said. "You need at least a game — at least I do — to get into the timing and all of that. But you also don't want to get injured in preseason. But you can get hurt at any time."

A bit of damned if you do, damned if you don't.

The Jets officially began training camp on Sept. 19, which is exactly 20 days before the 2024-25 season begins Oct. 9 in Edmonton. They have two preseason games remaining this week — at home to Calgary on Wednesday, and then visiting the Flames on Friday night.

"Could we shorten it? Sure. But I don't think there's a lot of guys in here complaining about the length," said Ehlers.

"You want to get back with the guys and you obviously want time to figure out the chemistry with the new guys and get them integrated in the team. For guys that play two games, three games

in the preseason, you go a long time with practicing and you kind of want to get into it. That's like the not-so-fun part. You want to play games, but you want to be ready for that puck drop on day one. I think the length of camp is what it is. There's no complaints."

As Ehlers correctly noted, injuries can seemingly come out of the blue. Winnipeg had two defencemen undergo surgery last week, and neither Ville Heinola (ankle) or Logan Stanley (knee) got hurt during game action. But common sense suggests the odds increase once competition is introduced.

Doughty (broken ankle, at least three months), Nylander (head, day-to-day) and Laine (knee, undisclosed) are all recent proof of that.

Jets coach Scott Arniel believes his club has found a happy medium by playing just six preseason games. Some teams have as many as nine.

"At the end of the day for me, six gives us that practice time and maybe reduces some of those chances of injuries happening," said Arniel. "But those things happen, you just never know when it's going to hit you. I like the six number. Our players like it too. It gives a good balance and ratio of practices to the game and gets us set for next week when we start."

Arniel noted it's a much different time compared to when he played during the 1980s and training camp would typically last about a month, giving players ample runway to get into shape after slacking all summer.

"These guys are 12-month-a-year athletes, they're working out all the time. Not so much back then," he said.

Of course, don't tell young Jets prospects like Brad Lambert, Nikita Chibrikov or Elias Salomonsson that the preseason is not necessary. This is their chance to get noticed, to send a message to management that they're ready for more responsibility.

"I think it's hard because you have these young guys that come up. They kind of get to see what it's like a little bit playing in the NHL, what level and speed it is, the reads and all that," said Ehlers.

"I think most of the games are for the young guys that come up and kind of want to show what they can do in this league. They want a chance at cracking the team, and you've got to have that, too. It's tough."

The danger can come when you have an eager young player wanting to prove himself — like Toronto Maple Leafs minor-leaguer Cedric Pare — who crosses paths with an established veteran like Laine who is simply trying to get his legs under him. The result, as we saw on Saturday night, can be disastrous.

Laine went down in a heap after taking a knee-on-knee, and he's now on crutches and in a leg brace. It's a horrible blow to a beloved former member of the Jets who missed the majority of

last season dealing with both injury and then mental health issues which involved entering the NHL's player assistance program.

A summer trade to Montreal was supposed to provide a much-needed clean slate.

"I know what it feels like. You come back, you feel good and you get ready to go and something happens again and you're out for a long time again. You feel like it's a cycle that just won't stop. You feel like you can't get out of it," said Ehlers, who is one of Laine's best friends and speaks with him almost daily.

"Obviously for Patty he was in a good mindset. Excited to play for Montreal, and I think they were excited to have him as well. It was a fresh start. But again, injuries happen. I've already talked to him. I know he's obviously rattled right now, but he's also focused on getting back even stronger. And that takes some mental strength as well. That's a good thing. He's in a good place, even though this happened."

The Jets return to practice on Tuesday. They still have 36 players in camp, including the injured Heinola and Stanley, and must cut down to a maximum of 23 healthy skaters in the next week.

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/jets-salomonsson-impressing-at-camp-in-contention-for-opening-night-spot/>

Jets' Salomonsson impressing at camp, in contention for opening-night spot

By Jacob Stoller

No player stands to benefit more from the opportunity available on the Winnipeg Jets blue line than Elias Salomonsson.

Heading into training camp, Salomonsson was hardly discussed as a frontrunner to crack Winnipeg's opening-night roster. But with Ville Heinola and Logan Stanley on the shelf for the next few weeks and the 20-year-old Swedish defencemen having an eye-opening training camp showing — Salomonsson is now firmly in the running.

"You can see the growth of the young man," Jets coach Scott Arniel said after Sunday's practice. "He's getting more and more comfortable each day. He's a big prospect for us. We've often talked about the other forward [prospects] but he's kind of gone under the radar [as] a prospect we'll probably be relying on [soon]."

The 6-foot-2 right-shot defenceman hasn't looked out of place in the three exhibition games he's suited up for, including two games where he was skating on the left side.

"You can see the poise — he's not panicking under pressure," said Jets defenceman Colin Miller, Salomonsson's defence partner on Sunday. "That's a big thing once you get to this level. Everything's happening so much quicker. Other teams are pressuring you that much quicker."

Salomonsson hasn't been shy to make his mark, either, delivering a healthy and hard check to Winnipeg's captain Adam Lowry during Sunday's scrimmage.

"I'm a stay-at-home defenceman that can move the puck," Salomonsson told Sportsnet.ca on Sunday. "I think I can play with anybody."

Salomonsson's game may not be the flashiest — don't expect him to be skating the puck end-to-end and generating scoring chances — but he possesses a highly sought-after toolkit. If there's one word to describe Salomonsson's game, it's 'sturdy.'

"He's a competitive kid. He's probably lined up to be more of a shutdown kind of defenceman. Especially being a right shot, they're hard to find. Lots of organizations are always looking for those type of players," Arniel said.

The 2022 second-round pick is coming off a massive 2023-24 campaign, playing a pivotal role in Skelleftea AIK winning the SHL championship. After posting two goals, 11 points and averaging 17:00 TOI in 39 regular season games, Salomonsson was exceptional in 16 playoff games — registering the fourth highest Corsi-for percentage of any teammate (54 per cent) while logging a team-high 23:13 TOI per game. To put those figures into perspective, he was one of just eight U-20 players who played in 20-plus SHL games last year.

Stylistically, though, it's a different game in Sweden — where they play on Olympic-sized ice.

"You've got more time when you have the puck over there," Salomonsson explained. "Here, you have to make a decision much quicker and have the next play already in your head before you get the puck."

While there's no doubt that Salomonsson has more upside than the veterans he's competing with — such as Haydn Fleury and Dylan Coghlan — it doesn't mean he's a lock to earn a spot. The question becomes, will the Jets give him leeway through trial and error to get acclimated to the NHL? That could be the biggest barrier to Salomonsson earning a roster spot out of camp, let alone the fact that he'd have to play on his off side.

Is The Gus Bus Running Out Of Gas?

Rasmus Kupari appears to have a leg-up on David Gustafsson in the battle for the Jets' fourth-line centre role.

Gustafsson — who won 54.6 per cent of his faceoffs last year — has spent considerable time on the wing during training camp. Kupari, on the other hand, has been given ample opportunity down the middle alongside Alex Iafallo and Morgan Barron, the team's presumptive fourth-line wingers.

"[Kupari] is one guy that hasn't gotten a lot of reps in the middle of the ice," Arniel said after Wednesday's pre-season game against the Edmonton Oilers. "Obviously [with] injuries and then being the 13th forward last year — he's another guy [where] I'm trying to ramp up his minutes. I

want to see him play. I really want to see if he's our fourth-line centreman. I know what Gus can do — I'm not taking away [anything] from Gus at all — but I really want to see [Kupari].”

Since those comments, Kupari has continued to get reps alongside Barron and Lafallo, while Gustafsson has been taking line rushes alongside the likes of Dominic Toninato and Axel Jonsson-Fjallby, who project to play for the AHL's Manitoba Moose this season. During Monday's special teams-focused practice, Kupari was centring the team's second penalty-kill unit alongside Mason Appleton, while Gustafsson was a winger on the team's third unit.

Even considering that Kupari had limited opportunities, it's strange seeing him getting so much runway for the fourth-line centre role. Not only is Gustafsson an asset in the faceoff circle but he's a solid forechecker who, like Barron and Lafallo, can create offensive pressure off the cycle. Kupari is a lightning-fast skater but his decision-making – in all areas of the game - is rather suspect.

Second Unit Scoring

With Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor, two power-play pillars, killing penalties this year — Winnipeg's second power-play unit will likely be deployed for more than just the final 20-30 seconds of a man advantage.

“There's lots of times – it happens a tremendous amount of times — where your top people draw the penalties and they may have been out on the ice for 30 or 40 seconds,” Arniel said Monday. “You have to have the confidence to throw that second unit out and start the power play off correctly.”

During Monday's special teams practice, Nino Niederreiter, Cole Perfetti, Vladislav Namestnikov, Neal Pionk and Colin Miller made up the second unit.

Winnipeg Jets Second PP Unit (1-3-1 formation)

Niederreiter

Miller – Perfetti – Namestnikov

Pionk

There's a lot of potential for that second unit, especially if Perfetti can solidify himself as a top-six forward this year. Not to mention Miller, who ranked in the 99th percentile in both average and top shot speed last year, according to NHL Edge.

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/winnipeg-jets-want-more-preseason-work-but-not-too-much-for-penalty-kill>

Winnipeg Jets want more preseason work, but not too much, for penalty kill

By Paul Friesen

Two more practice games before the first real test for the Winnipeg Jets' revamped special teams.

Pre-season affairs against Calgary this week — at home on Wednesday, in Alberta on Friday — will give players a chance to fine tune the power play and penalty kill.

The latter, in particular, will be tested right out of the regular-season gate against Edmonton's high-flying power play.

"The more reps we get now before we get into these final two pre-season games will be huge," P.K. stalwart Adam Lowry was saying, Monday. "Hopefully we don't take a lot of penalties against the Flames. But it certainly is going to be a good test starting the season against the Oilers. You want to be ready to go from Day 1."

The Jets need to improve on their ranking for both units, the kill coming in at No. 21 last season, the power play 22nd.

Not only will the Jets be using different players on their power play units — Nik Ehlers on the first one, for instance — they're also trying to move the puck faster, all under the direction of new assistant coach Davis Payne.

"The biggest thing is how Davis is coming at them with the language, the attack mentality, the recoveries," head coach Scott Arniel said. "So it is kind of everybody. Scheif (Mark Scheifele) has some things he's got to do a little different. J-Mo (Josh Morrissey) — whoever it is. There's lots of different things that everybody's got to pay attention to. I like what I see so far."

So does Lowry, even though he goes against them in practice.

"Their entries have looked fantastic," the Jets captain said. "That's one thing Davis has come in and really hammered home. The more he works with them, the more his messaging gets through to them in terms of the understanding and what's expected, it's only going to continue to improve."

Working on the No. 1 power-play unit on Monday were Scheifele, Kyle Connor, Ehlers, Gabe Vilardi and Morrissey.

The second unit had Cole Perfetti with Nino Niederreiter and Vlad Namestnikov, Neal Pionk and Colin Miller on defence.

The potential use of Scheifele and Connor on the penalty kill might have some wincing, but Lowry says the risk of injury can be mitigated.

"You don't necessarily need to get in shooting lanes," he said. "Sometimes the big fear is you lose a key player.... with how smart those guys are and their reads, often they get in the lanes and intercept passes, just anticipating, knowing what the power-play guys can expect."

“And when they can get the puck they can make things happen. Those two guys can make the penalty kill more dangerous.”

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/camp-arniel-challenging-jets-to-find-their-inner-beast>

Camp Arniel challenging Jets to find their inner beast

By Paul Friesen

You'd think once you've seen nine NHL training camps you've seen them all, that a sense of here-we-go-again would set in.

You do the usual drills on the ice, have meetings and video sessions off it and hit the gym when you can.

It's the same old same old, right?

That's not the case, Winnipeg Jets winger Kyle Connor said on Monday, a dozen days into his first Camp Arniel.

“There's a big difference,” Connor said. “I've said this before between coaches, Bones (Rick Bowness) and Paul (Maurice) and Dave (Lowry) when he took over. I mean, the coach comes in and has something to say every single day. Sets the tone for the day. So his personality is different. There's going to be some tweaks... you can see on our power play, P.K., where we've opened up a lot of stuff.”

“But the biggest thing is the overall message from a coach, coming and changing the mindset of the whole team.”

The mindset first-year boss Scott Arniel is trying to instill goes back to what happened to the Jets last spring.

After a regular season that saw them equal a team record with 52 wins, the Jets proved they weren't built for the playoffs, a first-round exit falling far short of the run they made the first time they had 52 points, in 2017-18.

Instead of changing some of the building blocks, Arniel and Co. are trying to change from within, by building a more battle-tested roster.

Those battles play out every day in camp, the coach's message drilled into his players on a regular basis.

“Compete on every aspect,” is how Connor put it. “One-on-one battles is a big thing for him. Beating the guy across from you. Especially the way we're looking at it, is how we can improve in the playoffs? And a big part of that is winning your one-on-one battles and competing.”

“He’s got a real confidence about him, and he fits in real good with this organization and this group.”

Across the dressing room from Connor, and playing over on the other wing, is Nino Niederreiter, who’s been through a dozen or so NHL camps.

The 32-year-old was practising that battle mentality largely on the power play, Monday, as the Jets worked primarily on their special teams, which were also sub-par last season.

“You want to compete for pucks,” Niederreiter said. “You don’t want to gift them easy outs. And being tenacious, if you work at that in practice usually it takes over in games.

“The compete every single night is something we’ve got to make sure we keep doing the right way at all times and not just certain times.”

The Jets will try to find this inner beast with a roster that hasn’t replaced departed forwards Sean Monahan and Tyler Toffoli, the two big trade pickups late last season.

Niederreiter sees no reason to believe that should result in a drop-off during the regular season.

“If you look at the trade deadline... up to that point we were a very good team already,” he said. “So if you take those guys back who left, especially on the forward side, the team is not much different up front.”

On the back end, they let their most rugged defenceman go, in Brenden Dillon.

But with four days to go in camp, Arniel says he likes what he’s seen.

Two final pre-season games will help him resolve his opening-day roster, but the first real test of his challenge to ramp up the competitiveness won’t come until the season opener in Edmonton a week from Wednesday.

“Every day has to be a growth day,” Arniel said. “Every day we have to get better. One, you’re competing hard, but it’s also the guy you’re going against has to do it. He’s got to match it up. If he doesn’t match it, you’re maybe making him look bad or you’re taking the puck away, whatever it might be.

“We’ve talked about trying to make every practice look like a game so when we get into the games it’s a smooth transition.”

The practices, Niederreiter says, are hard. A lot of skating.

“But at the same time very smart with how to push it.”

Monday’s session ended with a mini bag-skate: Players going hard, blue line to blue line and back.

It's not something you'll ever seen in a game, but it carried the theme of Camp Arniel.

"You see every day a skate right at the end, everybody's pushing each other," Connor said. "We understand that we need to get better from within to take that next step."

The bottom line: It can't be the same old same old.

The Hockey News

<https://thehockeynews.com/nhl/winnipeg-jets/players/jets-forward-gabriel-vilardi-set-for-major-role-if-he-stays-healthy>

Jets Forward Gabriel Vilardi Set for Major Role If He Stays Healthy

By Jake Tye

In 47 games last season, Gabriel Vilardi finished with 22 goals and 14 assists for 36 points in his first campaign with the Winnipeg Jets. Despite missing time with injuries, his 0.77 point-per-game average was top four on the team and with a projected first line placement, the young 25-year-old could breakout in a big way.

Veterans Kyle Connor and Mark Scheifele are both elite players and with Vilardi on their wing, he should be able to easily maintain his average if not build upon it.

Over four seasons with the Kings, Vilardi recorded 41 goals and 37 assists for 78 points in 152 games with his point totals growing every season. The Kingston, ON native may not be a world-class superstar but he could prove to be a difference maker if he can contribute 60-70 points for the Jets.

ESPN seemingly believes Vilardi won't be able to stay healthy as they project him for 64 games this season in which he will record 26 goals and 19 assists for 45 points. Yahoo Sports is slightly more optimistic as they have him projected for 31 goals and 21 assists for 52 points. DraftKings Sportsbook also has a over/under of 26.5 goals this upcoming season.

There's a wide variety of predictions for Vilardi this season with the biggest determining factor being his health. Vilardi is yet to have played more than 63 games in a season and shows we are yet to see his full capabilities. The best case scenario is a solid campaign that could hopefully fulfil the missing point production left by the departure of Sean Monahan and Tyler Toffoli, who left in free agency.