

## **Winnipegjets.com**

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/hellebuyck-named-second-star-of-the-week>

### ***Hellebuyck named second star of the week***

By Winnipeg Jets PR

WINNIPEG, October 14, 2024 – The Winnipeg Jets, in conjunction with the National Hockey League, today announced that goaltender Connor Hellebuyck has been named the NHL's Second Star of the Week for the week ending Oct. 13.

Hellebuyck, 31, began the week with a 30-save shutout in a 6-0 win over the Edmonton Oilers on Wednesday. On Friday, the reigning Vezina Trophy winner stopped 25 of 26 shots in Winnipeg's 2-1 overtime victory against Chicago. Finally, Hellebuyck recorded 26 saves in Sunday's 2-1 overtime win over the Minnesota Wild. The Commerce, Mich. native finished the week a perfect 3-0-0 with a 0.66 goals-against average and a .976 save percentage.

Hellebuyck won his second Vezina Trophy and his first William Jennings trophy last season and he was also named to the NHL's First All-Star Team. He leads the NHL in wins (T-1st: 3) and saves (81) and has helped Winnipeg to the first 3-0-0 start in franchise history.

This is the first time this season and the fifth time in his career that Hellebuyck has been selected in the NHL's Three Stars of the Week. He is the first Jets selection in 2024-25 after three Jets were selected in 2023-24.

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## **Winnipeg Sun**

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/1015-billeck-jets-main>

### ***Jets' Eric Comrie thankful for never being handed anything***

By Scott Billeck

Nothing's ever been handed to Eric Comrie. His father made sure of that.

"He understood what it was like to have nothing, and he raised me like we had nothing," Comrie said.

In reality, his family, which has produced three NHL players, along with brothers Mike and Paul, had everything.

Comrie's father, Bill, opened what's now known as The Brick in 1971. In 2012, he sold the business to Leon's Furniture Ltd. for \$700 million while Comrie played junior hockey in Tri-City in the WHL.

Not that Comrie would have felt the windfall.

There may have been hundreds of millions in the family's coffers, but the goaltender never knew a time growing up when he wasn't made to earn everything he was given.

Do nothing? Expect nothing in return.

"He taught me what it was like to come from nothing and to work hard every single day," Eric said. "It's the greatest thing he ever gave to me."

That gift has defined Comrie's professional career, including the long, winding road to being an NHL regular that no riches could have paved.

It makes sense, then, that when asked about winning the Jets backup job this season, Comrie mostly talked about having to work even harder now to ensure he doesn't lose it.

His dad wired him that way.

Growing up, Comrie couldn't remember doing something out of the norm of his friends and classmates. He rode the same buses, did the same activities and was tasked with the same responsibilities.

"I saw hard work and associated that with success," Comrie said. "This position is very fickle. They could find someone new right away. So it's about being prepared, doing the best I can, and just performing to the best of my abilities."

So when the Jets signed Kaapo Kahkonen just a couple of hours after Comrie was brought back into the fold on July 1, Comrie wasn't worried about the competition it immediately created.

"It didn't matter to me," Comrie said. "I knew I had to come in and earn a spot. I think that's the best way to be. It's the way hockey should be. Nothing should be given. Everything should be earned. That's how I look at life."

Comrie believes that anything less greatly diminishes his chances of success. It's part of the lesson his father taught him.

So he chases the hard things in life instead, drawn to them because he feels they make him a better person.

And that's helped him continue to push.

Comrie didn't become a full-time NHL backup until the 2021-22 season. The Jets drafted him in the second round in 2013.

It took him nearly a full decade, years spent in the minors, and a wild couple of seasons living out of the waiver wire suitcase before he made it.

His career-best numbers behind Hellebuyck a few years ago earned him a multi-year deal with the Buffalo Sabres. However, injuries and a three-goalie setup stunted his chances of success.

Throughout it all, Comrie leaned on his family, a tightly-knit group that often communicates daily.

It's a blended bunch, with his dad having sons Mike, Paul and daughter Cathy with his first wife, who passed away in 1990 after battling cancer.

Bill remarried in 1994. Eric was born in 1995, and brother Ty in 1997.

Mike, a third-round pick in 1999, played 589 NHL games, while Paul, drafted in the ninth round by the Tampa Bay Lightning in 1997, played 15 with the Edmonton Oilers during the 1999-00 season.

"My family has had to earn a couple of spots in their career," Comrie said. "My brother Mike, brother Paul know how to do that."

"They just said go out there and do the best you can every single day. And if you perform your best, you can earn a spot and they will make room for you. It's not about beating a guy, doing that. It's about doing the best you can and earning a spot."

Head coach Scott Arniel witnessed the work ethic firsthand during training camp.

"He earned the opportunity just like everyone else," Arniel said.

It's how Comrie builds his confidence.

He admits he doesn't have much swagger. He earns his belief in himself through — you guessed it — hard work.

Coming back to Winnipeg also offered familiarity and comfort. Those two things help.

"I know these guys trust me," he said. "I worry about that sometimes. And I know they trust me, and they have faith in me. Wade (Flaherty) trusts me. (Hellebuyck) trusts me. That really helps build that inner confidence and that inner drive, the wanting to succeed for this group."

## **CBC Manitoba**

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/winnipeg-jets-season-tickets-1.7350815>

***Winnipeg Jets see modest rise in sales of season tickets over previous year  
500 more season tickets bring subscriber base to 10,000; more work to do, club says***

By Bartley Kives · CBC News

The Winnipeg Jets are reporting a modest increase in season-ticket sales, marking the end of a five-year slide that sparked concerns about the long-term viability of the smallest market in the National Hockey League.

The Jets' season-ticket base in 2024-25 is approximately 10,000 season-ticket equivalents, which comprise both full-season, half-season, quarter-season and smaller multi-game packages, says Norva Riddell, the vice president in charge of sales and revenue for True North Sports and Entertainment.

That represents an increase from a base of approximately 9,500 in 2023-24, a level True North chair Mark Chipman described in February as unsustainable in terms of generating enough revenue to ice a competitive team.

The increase of about 500 season tickets represents about \$2.6 million in additional ticket revenue, according to a CBC News analysis of the team's listed ticket packages.

Riddell says the Jets also held on to about 95 per cent of its season ticket holders from 2023-24, the best retention rate True North has experienced since before the pandemic.

"We're excited to see the positive momentum that we're getting. But make no mistake, we understand that we're not done," Riddell said on Friday at Canada Life Centre prior to the Jets' home opener against the Chicago Blackhawks.

"It's nice to see that we've calmed the decline and that we're seeing the upswing now, but it's not done by any means. There's just still so much work left that we have to do."

True North remains about 3,000 season tickets away from its goal of restoring its subscription sales base to 13,000 season-ticket equivalents, a level equal to what the club enjoyed for the first eight seasons after the NHL returned to Winnipeg in 2011.

A variety of factors contributed to the bleeding of season-ticket subscribers between 2018 and 2023.

The average consumer in the Winnipeg market has less purchasing power than they did prior to the pandemic, simply by virtue of wage growth not keeping up with inflation. The pandemic itself also deprived some paying fans of income and allowed others to learn they could live without watching hockey in person.

A series of customer-experience surveys conducted by True North revealed some fans had safety concerns about downtown Winnipeg, while others had complaints about their experience inside Canada Life Centre, including the quality of the concessions in the arena and the length of time it takes to enter the building in the dead of winter, Riddell says.

Some fans also complained the club's season-ticket offerings were too inflexible in that they required fans to purchase more games than they could afford, she said.

#### *Assumptions verified*

Riddell calls the feedback beneficial because it verified assumptions the organization already had about the quality of the customer experience at Jets games.

She says True North has made a concerted effort over the past two years to rectify that problem by offering more flexible ticket packages, taking over management of its concessions and instituting new security measures that speed the flow of entry into games, among other changes.

"We can't control the product on the ice," Riddell said, referring to her sales team. "What we can control is pretty much everything else. We can control how we make you feel. We can control how we service you. We can control your experience when you come into the venue."

At the Jets' home opener, season-ticket holder Lonn Vokey said he appreciated the effort, citing discounts on beer for season-ticket holders as an example.

"I just like the changes that they made. They made it more comfortable. They brought in a little more concessions," said Vokey, a season-ticket holder since 2011.

#### *Corporate sales tough to quantify*

What's less clear is how much progress True North has made in selling season tickets to businesses.

In 2023, Chipman said corporate buyers make up a smaller proportion of the season-ticket base in Winnipeg than they do in other Canadian NHL markets.

True North enlists business leaders to help sell Winnipeg Jets season tickets. Riddell says any growth in corporate sales over the past year is tough to quantify, partly because her organization has more work to do in classifying what actually constitutes a business subscriber vs. an individual customer.

"That's a complicated question as it relates specifically to how people choose to designate their seats. You may have a business, but you use the tickets personally," she said.

It's also too early in the 2024-25 NHL season to determine what effect 500 more season-ticket equivalents will have on overall attendance to Jets games.

During the 2023-24 season, the Jets sold an average of 13,490 tickets per game, according to hockeyDB.com. That worked out to 1,831 empty seats at Canada Life Centre, the second-smallest arena in the NHL.

Through two home games this season, the Jets are averaging 13,740 paying fans. Canada Life Centre remains the second-smallest venue, as the Delta Centre in Salt Lake City, home of the Utah Hockey Club, seats 11,131 for NHL games.

#### **The Athletic**

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5450275/2024/10/15/connor-hellebuyck-winnipeg-jets-stats-awards/>

#### ***Why Jets' Connor Hellebuyck is the most underappreciated goalie of his generation***

By Murat Ates and Jesse Granger

Connor Hellebuyck stepped out of his bedroom and flagged down his dad.

For weeks, the Hellebuyck family had been having long conversations with their teenage sons, Connor and Chris, about their futures. Both boys were hockey players of substantial ability but neither played AAA hockey. In the ongoing discussions about which path they should take heading into high school, Chuck Hellebuyck had given them some fatherly advice: "You need to have a backup plan."

The boys ruminated on it. Chris would go on to start a technology business that he runs to this day. Connor had thought about it for weeks, too, and was ready to speak his mind.

“Dad, I don’t have a backup plan.”

“That’s OK. It takes time.”

“Dad, you don’t understand. I don’t want a backup plan. It’s going to distract me. I’m just going to keep going until I make it.”

Chuck remembers the steadfast expression on Connor’s face and the determination in his voice.

“He had given it a lot of thought. I could tell,” Chuck said. “He had listened to me and thought it through but he just didn’t see it working for him. He wanted me to understand that, so he told me. At that point, I guess he was 14 or 15 years old. He was starting to become a young man. I’m just standing there like, I’m still his parent, but who am I to kill a dream?”

Now 31, Connor Hellebuyck has spent the better part of his life fulfilling his childhood dream. He didn’t just make the NHL: the four-time All-Star and two-time Vezina Trophy winner is on a short list for best goaltender on the planet. Hellebuyck has almost transcendental courage in his convictions — freakish even in a league stocked by the world’s most competitive hockey players — and he’s used to naming outlandish goals and then achieving them.

That’s what made his playoff blowout in April so striking. Hellebuyck followed a regular-season Vezina-winning performance with some of the worst playoff numbers in recent memory: five games, 24 goals against. Most of the goals against were deflections after high speed, heavy forechecking control of the play, but sometimes Hellebuyck looked like a substantial contributor to his own misery.

When the series was over, Hellebuyck surprised some observers with a striking claim.

“You’re probably not going to believe when I say I was playing the best hockey of my career.”

Hellebuyck did wonder if he’d put too much weight on his own shoulders. He spoke of a need to re-evaluate his commitment to a team game instead of trying to steal games all by himself. In doing so, it showed a unique level of vulnerability. Then, four months later, the Vezina Trophy winner who rejected his dad’s notion of a backup plan doubled down on himself — again.

“Honestly, when I actually had some time to think about it, I really liked my game, I really liked my mindset,” Hellebuyck said at Jets training camp in September. “There’s two different ways to go about it: try and do it yourself or try and rely on a team. The way that I’ve gotten to where I am today is really digging into myself and doing everything I can, which really helps the team in the long run.

“I didn’t really do a whole lot of changing or digging or mental reflecting. I just kind of realized what (I’m) doing is right and stick to it. Don’t deviate from the plan I’ve given myself. Just continue to get better every single day at my details and make sure my game is as consistent as possible. That’s going to help this team win.”

Hellebuyck’s return to excellence after a miserable series was perhaps the most inevitable development for Winnipeg. He’s been simply outstanding to start the season: three straight wins with a .976 save percentage, 0.66 goals-against average and 6.25 goals saved above expected.

Hellebuyck has had remarkable — almost unbelievable — consistency for five straight seasons. Even the best goalies of this era have had down years statistically. Andrei Vasilevskiy has won the Stanley Cup twice and a Vezina, but he posted minus-8.29 GSAX in 2019-20 and struggled for long stretches last season coming off an injury. Sergei Bobrovsky is the only goalie other than Hellebuyck with multiple Vezina trophies since 2010 but had three straight seasons with negative GSAX between 2018 and 2021.

Meanwhile, Hellebuyck is one of only five goalies to post positive GSAX in each of the last five seasons, and he did it with the heaviest workload of the bunch.

When it comes to goaltending, year-to-year statistics are as volatile as any position in any sport. So what is it about Hellebuyck's game that has allowed him to defy the odds?

"His whole game and everything around it is built around things that allow for consistency," said Adam Francilia, a former San Jose Sharks goaltending consultant who has worked with Hellebuyck as a personal coach for nearly seven years. "He has very tangible anchor points to his stance, structure and foundation, so that's a big thing. When you have that it reduces the plus-minus for error and makes it so much easier to identify and correct hiccups."

Francilia is a goaltending biomechanics expert who works with several goalies around the NHL, and he's continually impressed with the details of Hellebuyck's stance and positioning.

"I look at it like a house," he explained. "If you have the best foundation and the best framers on a house, then no matter what else you do the house is going to be a good house. There are finishing details like the carpenter and that kind of stuff, but overall that house is going to stand for a long time. As years go by you want to update your house. The windows or the paint colors, to keep it more updated. The house can evolve but it's still going to be a structurally sound house. For Hellebuyck, that's what his game is built on. He knows exactly everything that is going on, from the feet up to the head. That's a big part of it."

Hellebuyck is a great athlete, but in comparison to other elite goalies, he's not the most explosive or flexible. He doesn't make many of the sprawling circus saves that end up on highlight reels, and his game is underappreciated by many because of it.

Hellebuyck makes saves look easy with proper technique and positioning, even in the most dire of situations. This backdoor save on New York Rangers defenseman Braden Schneider is a perfect example.

Rather than diving across into the splits with his stomach on the ice, Hellebuyck tracks the puck across the slot, rotates his hips and moves across in a controlled manner, led by his stick and gloves. He drops into the butterfly to seal the ice while his body stays tall to seal the short side post, and the result is Schneider has absolutely nowhere to shoot the puck. Not only does Hellebuyck make the save look easy, he's in a perfect, balanced position to freeze the puck after it hits him.

"The IQ level to his game is through the roof," Francilia said. "Look how economically he just rotates. There's very little movement. It's just the internal rotation of the knee. He really didn't do much when you think about it."

Hellebuyck's calm, economical style of navigating the crease also helps him track the puck with his eyes. Francilia also believes the way he holds his head — slightly further back rather than craning his neck out forward — helps him see plays developing.

“If you were going to be in a movie theater to see an incredibly high-paced film, would you rather sit in the front row, where you can't even see the whole screen and everything seems like it's moving twice as fast, or would you rather be sitting further back so you can see the entire screen and the action doesn't look as fast?” Francilia explained. “When you look at Helly, especially his stance and setup, everything that he makes a save with is in front, but his head is still positioned well to see the puck without the tension.”

The minutiae is what makes Hellebuyck special. Small details in his stance and structure lead to big advantages, but they aren't always the easiest to see. It's likely why he's so criminally underrated.

This save against the Seattle Kraken showcases several of these details.

First, notice how Hellebuyck's glove and blocker are almost neurologically linked to his head, moving together everywhere he looks throughout the play. This allows him to subconsciously maintain good hand positioning to cut off angles for potential shots. Many times a goalie will let his gloves drop down to his side, and NHL shooters make them pay. Those lapses in focus add up over the seasons.

Initially, Hellebuyck drops into the reverse vertical horizontal (RVH) position to seal the ice in case Seattle's Jordan Eberle shoots, but he still remains tall — to cover the top corner of the net — and keeps his weight balanced. It's easy for a goalie in this situation to become over-compressed and lean heavily against his post to make that seal, but Hellebuyck gets to his post while keeping his weight centered.

When Eberle slides a pass across the slot to Jared McCann, Hellebuyck calmly drives his body over to make the save. That happens so quickly because he didn't have his weight loaded into the post. Not only that, when he slides over he's in excellent shape, not sprawled out or reaching with his hands, which opens up holes for the shooter. The result is a save on a bomb of a one-timer that looks far easier than it should, and a puck freeze rather than a chaotic rebound situation.

“That's where Helly is next level,” Francilia explained. “A lot of guys would make that look like a highlight reel save, but they definitely wouldn't smother it. He's so structurally and neurologically sound. That's the difference with Helly versus even some of the other guys that are elite.”

Some goalies are great because of their quick-twitch reactions. Some are great because of their flexibility and athleticism. Hellebuyck is great because of his mind.

“He reads and processes the game as well as anybody ever, I think,” Francilia said. “The processors in his computer are so good. Like, ridiculous. It's so fun having our conversations together when we really dig into goaltending, because you are talking to a high-performance processor, which is one of the things that makes him elite.”

Francilia meets with his NHL goalie clients regularly to go over film from their last several games. When he meets with Hellebuyck, most of the time he has already noticed the mistakes



himself and has potential answers and solutions ready to discuss. That's not usual for most goalies.

"His computer, which is his gift, is like a quantum computing system," Francilia raved. "That's what has allowed him to flourish. He's never going to be set in his ways. There always has to be an evolution. What worked three years ago won't work in the exactitude that it did three years ago, so you have to keep evolving. He has that desire to be the best. There's never an 'I've figured it out' moment."

Hellebuyck has been studying other goaltenders since he was a child. One of the first goalies to catch his eye was Olaf Kolzig during the 1998 Stanley Cup Final between the Washington Capitals and his hometown Detroit Red Wings when Hellebuyck was 5.

Whereas most kids he knew wanted to emulate the spectacular, highlight-reel saves that made most goaltenders famous, Hellebuyck took a different approach.

"By the time he got to high school, he developed his 'big and boring' style," Chuck said. "What he told me was that he'd analyzed how different goalies were saving things, whether it was top level or at our local level — anyone who was having success — and he'd say 'That doesn't work' or 'Yeah, that works' and then he'd work on it until he knew what he wanted."

Hellebuyck's obsession with results over aesthetics since childhood has built his legacy as a top goaltender of his generation. His commitment to "big and boring" has also cost him appearances on highlight shows and subjective "best goaltender" rankings. He can accept that. He has bet on himself and won that bet too many times to worry about other people's critiques.

Hellebuyck is still searching for the Stanley Cup, though, and hasn't stolen a playoff series since the Jets' sweep of Edmonton in 2021. At this point in his career, that pursuit is what fuels him.

"At the end of the day, he wants to be a champion," Chuck said. "He wants the Cup. That's the drive he has. That's the goal. He wanted to make the NHL. He wanted to win the Vezina. Check, check. He wants to win the Cup. Well, he's still working on that one."