

## **Winnipeg Free Press**

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/10/19/little-tribute-crosby-visit-make-for-special-sunday>

### ***Little tribute, Crosby visit make for special Sunday***

By: Mike McIntyre

There will be no Sunday scaries for the Winnipeg Jets.

In fact, it's shaping up to be a memorable day at the downtown rink.

First off, the 4-0-0 hockey club is hosting the annual visit from Sidney Crosby, which is always a special event. Puck drop at Canada Life Centre is set for 2 p.m.

"Always fun," Jets centre Mark Scheifele said following Saturday's practice. He took media on a bit of a trip down memory lane.

"I still remember the first time I played against him, we were in Pittsburgh and our line started and Sid's line started. I was 20 years old and I won the faceoff."

Scheifele turned to his bench, a smile as big as the Red River on his face, as then teammate Chris Thorburn gave him gears.

"Obviously a huge fan of his. He just keeps on getting better and better. A guy I respect so much and love to watch. It's always fun playing against him," he said.

Crosby, 37, has averaged at least a point-per-game in every season of his career, which began in 2005 when he was selected first overall. He has six points, including one goal, in six games so far this year.

Winger Nikolaj Ehlers, who spent two years playing junior hockey in Nova Scotia, admitted he still gets star-struck seeing No. 87 on the same sheet of ice.

He also shared a story he can now look back on and laugh, about how he broke his wrist during a 2019 game against the Penguins as his follow-through on a shot struck Crosby's posterior,

"He was kind of turning his ass into me and my wrist hit him and that was it for me for the next seven weeks," said Ehlers. "He's a guy you love watching. Growing up. Still. He's a great player. Everyone sees that."

Secondly, a beloved former teammate in Bryan Little is set to be honoured in a pre-game ceremony. Little will sign a ceremonial one-day contract with the Jets, then officially retire with the franchise that drafted him 12th-overall in 2006.

"Very excited," said Scheifele.

"Littsy was such a big part of me developing. Watching him play, making me a better player, he was an awesome guy. Very quiet, keep to himself guy but one of those guys who just went at it

every single day and gave it his all and a guy that I respect so much. He made an impact in not only just me but a lot of other guys' hockey careers and lives. It's going to be an awesome day."

Little's career ended in 2019 when he suffered a catastrophic ear/head injury after he was struck by an errant shot from Ehlers. However, his remaining contract didn't expire until this past July 1, which is why this ceremony is just happening now.

The Jets are coming off a dominating 8-3 victory on Friday night over the San Jose Sharks which kept them perfect in the young campaign. The Penguins lost 4-1 on home to the Carolina Hurricanes to fall to 3-3-0.

"You're sort of going to get that lion with the thorn in the paw kind of deal," predicted Jets assistant coach Davis Payne.

"We expect them to be ready to go. As a motivated group, they've been playing some real good hockey, especially (Crosby and Evgeni Malkin), they're the ones that lead the charge. We're going to need to tighten up some of the things that we addressed this morning.

"It's all about limiting opportunity, limiting chances, and limiting space for world class players because we all know what they can do when they get it. So it's not going to take one guy. It's going to take everybody."

One thing Winnipeg would like to see continues is a red-hot power play that went 4-for-7 against the Sharks and is now a sizzling 7-for-14 on the year to lead the NHL. Payne, who was hired this past summer to revamp the unit, is obviously loving what he's seeing.

"We know we're going to deal with some good killing and some pucks that don't go our way. We just want to continue to focus on our principles, the mindsets, the pace we want to do things," said Payne.

"So far we've made some progress with that. We just gotta make sure we continue with that learning curve, because as the season goes on teams get better, the killing gets better. And then you get playoffs and the killing's even better. And we're going to have to be as well."

It's not just quality, but quantity: The Jets have been on the power play twice as many times as they've been short-handed, going 6-for-7 so far on the penalty kill.

"I think the one thing our team has done a very good job of is to play with pace and to play with the puck. To attack areas of the ice (where) opponents are forced to potentially take a penalty," said Payne.

Scheifele said it all begins with strong five-on-five play, which Winnipeg had in spades against San Jose and will look to keep going.

"We were all over them. When you get the puck in the O-zone and you have control of the puck, that's when you draw penalties," he said. "And when you have a lot of good players like we have, you take advantage. I think it shows, first of all, getting that amount of power plays in the first place and then capitalizing on them."

Winnipeg has won 12 straight regular-season games dating back to last season, which ended with eight straight triumphs heading into the playoffs.

Payne wouldn't reveal if there could be any lineup changes coming.

So far, the Jets have rolled the same 18 skaters in every game, with defenceman Dylan Coghlan and forward David Gustafsson the healthy scratches. And goaltender Connor Hellebuyck has played every second while Eric Comrie waits for his first start.

For what it's worth, there were no changes to the line rushes during Saturday's on-ice session, which lasted about 40 minutes.

After wrapping up this homestand, the Jets will hit the road for three straight games next week — Tuesday against the St. Louis Blues, Thursday against the Seattle Kraken and Saturday against the Calgary Flames.

### **Winnipeg Sun**

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/not-goodbye-but-a-see-you-later-for-long-time-jets-centre-bryan-little>

#### ***Not goodbye, but a see you later for long-time Jets centre Bryan Little***

By Scott Billeck

Nikolaj Ehlers doesn't believe Sunday afternoon will be a goodbye for Bryan Little. Rather, it will be more of a see you soon.

The long-time Winnipeg Jets centre will be honoured by the team ahead of their matinee game with the Pittsburgh Penguins.

Little, who hasn't played since November 2019, signed a one-day contract in September to retire as a member of the Jets — the organization that drafted him 12th overall in 2006 while the team was still in Atlanta.

"I wouldn't say it's a goodbye. For us, it's not a goodbye," Ehlers said. "He loved the city of Winnipeg. He loved playing here. So I don't believe tomorrow is the last time you're going to see him in Winnipeg. He's a fantastic guy, on and off of the ice. Everyone saw what he could do on the ice. Off the ice, he was a guy that was, undercover, really funny. He's a guy I miss having in the room."

Little suffered a career-ending ear injury on Nov. 5, 2019, when an errant shot off Ehlers's stick caught him in the side of the head during the third period of a game against the New Jersey Devils.

Little, 31 at the time, was rushed to hospital and required nearly 30 stitches to close a wound near his left ear. He later had surgery to repair a perforated eardrum.

His six-year contract extension, signed in September 2017 and traded to the Arizona Coyotes in 2022, expired on July 1. He signed the one-day deal with Winnipeg on Sept. 27.

"It's big, of course," Ehlers said of the chance for the Jets and their fans to honour Little. "He's a guy you see once in a while. Schitzy (one of Little's nicknames) was a guy I played a lot with

during my first years. I loved playing with him. We've had some good times together. And there's still some guys in this room that played with him and have good memories with him. We're excited to see him (on Sunday). And he's also getting what he deserves. Still love the guy."

Little, who will turn 37 next month, and Ehlers were linemates during the latter's early years in the NHL.

"I would say Schitzky was more of a quieter guy," Ehlers said. "But when you went to him and you had something, on the ice, off of the ice, he was always there to help.

"He was unbelievable to play with. He was a smart player. He knew where to be. He did all of the right things and played the right way, with the right mindset, for the team. I learned a lot from him. A lot that I took with me. He's a fantastic guy."

Little, second on the franchise list with 843 games played, profoundly impacted Mark Scheifele's career, especially during its infancy after Scheifele was made the team's first pick following relocation in 2011.

"Littsy was such a big part of me developing," Scheifele said. "Watching him play, making me a better player, he was an awesome guy. Very quiet, keep-to-himself guy but one of those guys who just went at it every single day and gave it his all and a guy that I respect so much.

"He was a consummate professional that just came in every day with a purpose. No matter if it was a good day or a bad day or things were going good or things were going bad, he came in and worked his (butt) off. That's something that we all respected and loved about it. He just did it in his own space and you knew he was there to work every day. Learning from a pro like that was huge for me as a young guy, just trying to break in and learn what it takes to be a pro. He was awesome."

Little's last goal in Jets uniform came at the Heritage Classic at Mosaic Stadium in October 2019.

The Jets won the game that night against the Calgary Flames in overtime, with Little putting the finishing touch on a cross-ice feed from Kyle Connor on a two-on-one.

"That game had snow and that atmosphere was fantastic," Scheifele said. "That's a game I'll remember. And for it to end with him scoring the game-winner was amazing and something I'm sure he'll always remember and will always be on my mind, too."

Little will be honoured with the pre-game ceremony before puck drop on Sunday at Canada Life Centre.

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/sidney-crosby-still-leaving-long-time-nhlers-starstruck>

### ***Sidney Crosby still leaving long-time NHLers starstruck***

By Scott Billeck

Sidney Crosby is the rare NHLer who still keeps long-time players starstruck.

Mark Scheifele and Nikolaj Ehlers are included in the latter.

"I feel like you still get it," Ehlers, a 10-year NHL veteran, said Saturday as the Jets put in their final preparations for Sunday's matinee against Crosby's Pittsburgh Penguins.

"Obviously, you're focused during the game and so on. But you're out there for a faceoff, and you see him, you know you have to be careful out there. There are still guys in this league that you still get a little starstruck."

Scheifele, playing in his 14th season now, still remembers first lining up against Crosby in the faceoff circle more than a decade ago.

"We were in Pittsburgh, and our line started, and Sid's line started," Scheifele said. "I was 20 years old, and I won the faceoff, and I turned to the bench, and (former Jets forward Chris Thorburn) gave it to me. He said, 'You had the biggest smile on your face.'"

"Obviously, a huge fan of his. He just keeps on getting better and better. A guy I respect so much and love to watch. It's always fun playing against him."

Crosby's mystique in today's game is unparalleled.

The 37-year-old is playing his 20th campaign this season, a career that's spanned 1,278 games and touched three decades heading into Sunday's game.

Earlier this week, Crosby became just the 10th player in NHL history to score 1,600 points. He's the fifth fastest to reach the mark after Wayne Gretzky, Mario Lemieux, Marcel Dionne and Jaromir Jagr.

"The one thing that you leave the game always recognizing is his competitiveness and his ability to engage in the battle and not only win those territorial situations with skill and speed but also competitiveness," Jets assistant coach Davis Payne said, having spent the last 15 years behind an NHL bench.

Payne said the Jets need to be wary of a Penguins team that dropped a 4-1 decision to the Carolina Hurricanes on Friday night.

"You're sort of going to get that lion with the thorn in the pot kind of deal," Payne said. "We expect them to be ready to go tomorrow. As a motivated group, they've been playing some real good hockey, especially (Crosby and Evgeni Malkin), they're the ones that lead the charge."

"So it presents a different and more difficult task than (Friday's game against San Jose). We're going to need to tighten up some of the things that we addressed (on Saturday morning). It's all about limiting opportunity, limiting chances, and limiting space for world-class players because we all know what they can do when they get it. So it's not going to take one guy. It's going to take everybody."

The Penguins are 3-3-0 on the year.

They won't have former Jets prospect Rutger McGroarty in the lineup after the 20-year-old, traded in the offseason to Pittsburgh for prospect Brayden Yager, was sent down to the AHL earlier this week.

**Sportsnet.ca**

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/jets-notebook-second-lines-chemistry-growing/>

### ***Jets Notebook: Second line's chemistry growing***

By Jacob Stoller

WINNIPEG — Nikolaj Ehlers, Cole Perfetti and Vladislav Namestnikov will be the first ones to tell you that their line struggled through the first three games of the season.

They were heavily outshot and out-chanced during five-on-five play. Collectively, and individually, they were out of sync. Getting from the defensive zone into the offensive zone — let alone sustaining pressure once there — was a challenge, with bobbled pucks and intercepted passes in the neutral zone mitigating opportunities to create offence.

“Everything was just congested,” Namestnikov said after Friday’s 8-3 win over the San Jose Sharks.

Ahead of Friday’s game, Ehlers spoke to reporters about how, as a line, the three had conversations about how they can create more opportunities, put pucks in the right spots and support one another.

They wound up doing exactly that.

The fact that they each racked up points — Perfetti and Namestnikov finished with four and Ehlers registered three of his own — was one thing, but the way they drove five-on-five play was the most encouraging. They didn’t allow a single shot attempt against and they were able to penetrate the neutral zone with ease.

“All three of them were at their best. There's been games where — maybe it's a period — one of them is going. Two of them are going. It was never all three. And tonight, it was all three right from the start,” Arniel said.

Ehlers and Perfetti, especially, were cooking in transition.

Less than five minutes into the game, we saw Perfetti, situated on the left wing in the neutral zone, pull off a perfectly timed cross-ice saucer pass to a streaking Ehlers on the right side, which led to a zone entry and scoring chance. Later in the first period, a near-identical sequence took place but this time, Ehlers walked in and sniped home his second goal of the game. The chemistry between the two was undeniable. And the way the two generated offence on Friday, even if it was in a rather meaningless game against the lowly Sharks, provides hope that Ehlers may finally have a suitable running mate on the team’s second line.

“He's very calm with the puck,” Ehlers said of Perfetti after Winnipeg’s practice on Saturday. “He's not a guy you want to give time and space because he's going to find that open guy and he's going to make a great pass that leads to a great chance.”

When sizing up the Jets, who remain undefeated, one could argue that Perfetti and Ehlers are the two biggest x-factors. Their bottom-six — led by one of the NHL’s best shutdown lines in Adam Lowry, Mason Appleton and Nino Niederreiter — is rock solid. We know the team’s first

line of Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Gabriel Vilardi, despite their defensive flaws, can produce offence. But that second line has always been a question mark. And Perfetti and Ehlers are going to make or break how effective it is.

### *Powerful Power Play*

Winnipeg currently has the best power play in the NHL, boasting a 50 percent conversion rate on the man-advantage.

Now, obviously, that number will regress. But there's no denying how night-and-day the Jets' power play is from last year, when they ranked 22nd.

"We want to have multiple options so the penalty kill can't have that sort of anticipation of where that next play's going," said Jets assistant coach Davis Payne.

In years past, that was the Jets' downfall. Over the previous two seasons, especially, it was quite clear that Kyle Connor was the anticipated trigger-man in nearly every situation. Connor is still a focal point of the power play but with the addition of Ehlers in the bumper role — or as Payne calls it, 'the pop guy' — the Jets have added another dimension.

"He's got world-class skill," Payne said. "With his ability to operate with pace, whether it's to enter with pace, whether it's to support with pace, whether it's (making) a decision with the puck quickly. That's the skill set that that area of the ice requires. Whether it's a shot, whether it's a relay to a different shot option — he's done a real good job of that. Also understanding that we want his pace to get to different areas of the ice so that we can attack off of both sides."

### **Yahoo Sports**

<https://ca.sports.yahoo.com/news/winnipeg-jets-aim-stay-undefeated-130000474.html>

### ***Winnipeg Jets Aim to Stay Undefeated, Overcome History of Losing When Playing Pittsburgh Penguins Sunday***

By Jake Tye

The Winnipeg Jets look to extend their winning streak to five games and stay undefeated when they play host to the Pittsburgh Penguins Sunday afternoon. The Penguins offence, that ranks top ten in goals-per-game (3.50), will clash against a Jets defence that has allowed the fewest goals in the league (5) so far this season.

Pittsburgh's bleeding defence has made an impact with the third-most goals allowed this season (25) through their first six games. It should be an opportunity for the Jets to continue their offensive hot streak as they rank first in power play percentage (50%) and second in goals-per-game average (4.50).

Hockey legends Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin have helped the Penguins dominate in this matchup over the years with a 17-5-0 record in their last 22 games versus the Jets. Malkin has started off the season red hot with a pair of goals and nine assists for 12 points through his first six games of the season.

Winnipeg's Mark Scheifele will look to counter-act Malkin with some offence of his own as the longtime Jet is out to one of the best starts of his career with four goals in as many games along with three assists for seven points.

The Jets second line heard the media chatter about their lacklustre start to the season and followed it up with Cole Perfetti, Vladislav Namestnikov and Nikolaj Ehlers contributing five goals in their 8-3 win over the San Jose Sharks Friday night. Perfetti looks to stay hot versus the Penguins, who he has three points against in five career matchups.

Pittsburgh is expected to start ice cold netminder Tristan Jarry, who sports a 5.45 goals against average through two starts so far this season but has a deadly record versus Winnipeg. The 29-year-old has a record of 5-1-0 with a goals against average of 1.16 and a save percentage of .960 in six career games against the Jets. The always reliable Connor Hellebuyck should get the crease for the Jets and will make for an exciting goaltender matchup.

Catch the game on Sportsnet at 2:00 PM MT, or catch the live broadcast on Power 97, the FM home of the Winnipeg Jets. Tickets are reasonable for Jets versus Crosby and the Penguins with the lowest pair being sold at roughly C\$81.