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<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/three-things-big-line-lights-up-flames>

Three things - Big offensive night for Jets Nikolaj Ehlers was one of four Jets with a multi-point night

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG – Wednesday night at Canada Life Centre, the Winnipeg Jets played their final home preseason game and left with a 3-2 win. Nino Niederreiter scored twice including the game winning goal, Nikolaj Ehlers, Simon Lundmark and Kyle Connor scored the other goals for the Jets. Ehlers (1G, 1A), Mark Scheifele (2A), Gabe Vilardi (3A) and Niederreiter (2G) all had multi-point nights. The Jets will wrap up the preseason Friday in Calgary.

1. EHLERS

The Jets have been working a lot on their special teams throughout training camp and one of the new looks is having Nikolaj Ehlers on the top unit. In the first period, the Danish forward worked his way into the low slot and one-timed a Gabe Vilardi pass behind Dustin Wolf to tie the game at one. Not long after that, Ehlers spotted a wide-open Nino Niederreiter in front of the Flames net, and he quickly beat Wolf for a 2-1 Jets lead.

2. LAMBERT

Brad Lambert played his fourth preseason game tonight as he continues his quest to stay with the Jets. Lambert centred a line with Nikita Chibrikov and Nino Niederreiter and saw some power play time as well. The 20-year-old ended the night with an assist and one shot on goal in just under 12 minutes of ice time.

3. HELLEBUYCK

Like his teammates, Connor Hellebuyck didn't have the best night during an 8-5 loss to the Minnesota Wild last Friday. Hellebuyck made 21 saves on 29 shots that night. The Vezina Trophy winner had a much better time against the Flames on Wednesday after allowing two goals on 10 shots in the first, he didn't see a whole lot of action over the final two periods. With the Jets up 3-2 in the third, he made a big stop on Daniil Mirmanov and finished the evening with 16 saves on 18 shots.

Canadian Press

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/niederreiter-scores-twice-for-jets-in-pre-season-win-over-flames/>

Niederreiter scores twice for Jets in pre-season win over Flames

By Canadian Press

The Winnipeg Jets turned hard work on the power play into a key goal in a 5-2 win over the Calgary Flames in an NHL pre-season game Wednesday.

Nikolaj Ehlers scored Winnipeg's first goal with the man advantage to tie the game 1-1 midway through the first period.

"We've been working on it and there's still some things that we need to figure out," Ehlers said. "Overall, we created a lot of chances today and when we lost (the puck), we're doing everything we could to get it back. That was very positive."

Nino Niederreiter scored twice and Gabriel Vilardi had three assists for Winnipeg. Simon Lundmark and Kyle Connor each scored a goal and Mark Scheifele contributed a pair of assists to the win.

Niederreiter broke a 2-2 tie with a go-head goal from the front of Calgary's net at 6:28 of the third period.

"That is (Niederreiter's) office," Ehlers said. "He thrives in there. To get a guy like that going, that's exciting for us."

Vezina Trophy winner Connor Hellebuyck made 17 saves in his second pre-season start for Winnipeg (2-2-1).

Winnipeg iced mostly a veteran lineup, while the Flames were evaluating players on their roster bubble.

Martin Frk and Justin Kirkland scored for Calgary.

Expected regular-season starter Dustin Wolf made 22 saves in his third pre-season appearance for the Flames (5-1-1).

"I think we hung in there for two periods pretty well," Flames assistant coach Brad Larsen said. "I thought we did a lot of good things and we just ran out of gas there in the third."

Veteran defenceman Tyson Barrie, who signed a professional tryout contract with Calgary, played a team-high 21 minutes 24 seconds in his fourth pre-season game.

He was paired with Kevin Bahl, who made his Flames debut after his acquisition in a June trade with the New Jersey Devils for goaltender Jacob Markstrom.

"It felt good. Kind of felt surreal, just changing it up and being with another team," said Bahl, whose lower-body injury kept him out of earlier pre-season games.

Bahl felt chemistry with his defensive partner Barrie.

"He's really smart and he's just very poised out there," Bahl said.

A 2-2 tie after the first period remained that way heading into the third.

Frk's tip of Jake Bean's shot from the point put the visitors on the scoreboard first at 8:04 of the opening period, but the Jets responded with two quick goals.

Ehlers beat Wolf at 10:47 for a power-play goal.

"Real good quick puck movement," Jets head coach Scott Arniel said. "That was kind of the reason we kind of want to see Nik in that hole there. That was a pretty quick shot he got off."

Niederreiter made it 2-1 at 12:21 when he lifted a backhand shot past Wolf.

But Kirkland made Winnipeg pay for a turnover and beat Hellebuyck with two minutes left in the opening period.

Lundmark gave the Jets a 4-2 lead at 14:17 of the third period and Connor scored on Wolf just over two minutes later.

UP NEXT

Both teams conclude their pre-season schedules with a rematch Friday in Calgary.

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/after-showing-struggles-has-time-run-out-for-lambert-to-make-jets-roster/sn-amp/>

After showing struggles, has time run out for Lambert to make Jets' roster?

By Jacob Stoller

WINNIPEG — You can't sugarcoat that Brad Lambert struggled in his fourth pre-season game.

Aside from a heads-up assist to Simon Lundmark late in the third period, which marked the Winnipeg Jets' fourth goal in their 5-2 win over the Calgary Flames on Wednesday, the 20-year-old centre wasn't noticeable in a positive way. A combination of turnovers and ill-timed passes — many of which would've been intercepted in an NHL regular-season game — negated opportunities to provide offence. His trademark footspeed was seldom on display, at least in a flashy way, as the Jets' 2022 first-round pick was seldom able to generate runway when carrying the puck.

And defensively, losing several puck battles along the wall — including one sequence where he got called for a hook — added salt to the wound. While there were some flashes of improvement in the third period, including a between-the-legs shot attempt in-tight and a strong read to intercept an opponent breakout pass, it wasn't enough to make someone walk away from that game thinking 'that guy is going to make the team out of camp.'

At this point in camp, you'd expect Lambert to look that good in a game against an assortment of bubble NHL players and minor leaguers. But he didn't. And with the 2024-25 regular season being just a week away, one has to wonder if Lambert's run out of time to make the opening night roster.

It appears the second-line centre ship has sailed, with Vladislav Namestnikov appearing to cement himself in that spot alongside Nikolaj Ehlers and Cole Perfetti. So, is that it? Is there a point in keeping him around with the big club if he's not in a top-six role? In theory, the Jets could still carve out a role for Lambert if they veered away from a traditional top-six / bottom-six configuration.

"There's lots of that, where you have three lines of skill and you've got a line that can kill penalties and shut down the opposition and play a physical role. So yeah, you can go down that road," Arniel told reporters on Tuesday morning. "I'm not really tipping my hand where I'm going, but that is a possibility."

Realistically, though, the only way the Jets are doing that is if Lambert pushes the envelope and proves he deserves a roster spot. But has he truly shown enough to bank on him being a meaningful NHL contributor? So much so that it'd be better for his development to have him in the NHL, playing 10-12 minutes a night, as opposed to being the go-to guy in the AHL? While Lambert's recorded three points in four pre-season games, just one of those points have come during five-on-five play. And better yet, Lambert's play hasn't elevated to the level you'd expect as we creep closer to October and exhibition play gets closer to resembling real NHL action.

How a three-scoring line approach would look

Kyle Connor — Mark Scheifele — Gabriel Vilardi
Cole Perfetti — Vladislav Namestnikov — Nikolaj Ehlers
Morgan Barron — Adam Lowry — Mason Appleton
Nino Niederreiter — Brad Lambert — Alex Lafallo

On paper, this type of lineup has the potential to be lethal. It also solves a problem the Jets ran into last year with Cole Perfetti, where the Jets were unable to squeeze some youthful skill into their lineup due to him not solidifying himself as a top-six forward, or fitting the mould of a bottom-six forward.

Granted, it goes without saying that Lambert would have to earn the trust of Arniel for this potential lineup configuration to come to fruition. Sure, the Jets could still try this out to start the year and see what happens but once the real games start, Arniel is going to lean on players he trusts. And if Lambert isn't one of those guys, he won't be getting ice time alongside two established NHLers.

Vilardi Is Poised For A Breakout Year

You never want to glean too much from pre-season, but man, does Gabriel Vilardi ever look poised to hit another level.

He's looked dynamic in exhibition games, driving five-on-five play in impressive fashion.

"His passing ability, his vision, his ability to hold onto pucks — is elite," Arniel said after Vilardi recorded three assists on Wednesday night. "When he does that, he opens up ice for other people. Sometimes he'll have two defenders on him and that creates some of those holes."

Vilardi is coming off a promising year where he recorded 22 goals and 36 points in 47 games — that's a 38-goal, 63-point pace across an 82-game season. The biggest X-factor for Vilardi will be if he can remain healthy, as the 25-year-old — who missed time last year due to an MCL Injury and an enlarged spleen — has never played a full 82-game season.

Since the start of the 2022-23 season, Vilardi ranks tied for 12th in five-on-five goals per 60 minutes (1.25) among skaters that played at least 500 minutes, according to NaturalStatTrick.

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5800735/2024/10/03/winnipeg-jets-2024-25-season-preview-playoff-chances-projected-points-roster-rankings/>

Winnipeg Jets 2024-25 season preview: Playoff chances, projected points, roster rankings

By Sean Gentille, Shayna Goldman and Dom Luszczyszyn

The Winnipeg Jets will go as far as Connor Hellebuyck takes them.

That's what we said last year, bemoaning an otherwise average roster while praising one of the league's premier goalies. It's what we're going to say again this year.

This is Hellebuyck's team, and it turns out you can have a pretty damn good one with one of the absolute best goalies in the world at the helm. A career year certainly helps.

It also means that the team is at the whim of the most volatile position in hockey, making its forecast far less stable than others in the same tier.

The projection

Despite a 110-point season, the Jets' preseason projection has managed to jump only 1.5 points compared to last year.

Why? It's a matter of viewing Hellebuyck as stronger than his forecast prior to the 2023-24 season — but regressing from last season's actual total. With a repeat, the Jets would be closer to a 102-point projection.

On top of that, the team around him looks slightly worse due to some offseason changes that serve as a modest downgrade relative to a season ago.

Either way, it turns into the same story: Without Hellebuyck, this team isn't that impressive and lands closer to 90 points. The likelihood of repeating or bettering last year's total sits at just 7 percent.

A lot of Winnipeg's success hinges on just how good Hellebuyck can be. Any step back from his already rosy forecast is bad news. Just being solid probably won't be good enough — Hellebuyck needs to be elite.

We expect he will be, but it means the team in front will really have to step up to turn the Jets into a contender. Right now, they look like a solid playoff bet, but that math can change quickly if Hellebuyck doesn't play up to his lofty expectations.

The big question

Can the Jets be more than Connor Hellebuyck?

It's tough to sum up the Jets' situation, for good or ill, any more succinctly than this: For two consecutive seasons, Connor Hellebuyck's preseason Net Rating has been higher than the rest of the roster's. Like, the whole thing. All of it. The goalie is great, more often than not. Everything else, though, tends to hover between mediocre and decent, and the end result is too often something short of championship-caliber.

Last year, they made it work. Hellebuyck had the best regular season of his career, leading NHL starters in save percentage and putting up almost 41 goals saved above expected. The latter

isn't just a career high — it's the seventh-best mark in the analytics era. He won the Vezina Trophy in a walk, and he deserved as much.

Meanwhile, the Jets were one of the strongest defensive teams in the league, carrying a plus-30 Defensive Rating into the playoffs. The top six, while still not ideal for a playoff team and falling particularly short at the top of the roster, had a few players providing legitimate offensive value; the bottom six was stacked with stout defensive players; and the blue line was led by a guy who popped up on some Norris ballots. The mix didn't quite feel right, but it seemed to be close enough.

Then, they ran into the Colorado Avalanche, and after a wild 7-6 win in Game 1, the air left the balloon. Hellebuyck put up a sub-.900 save percentage for the second straight playoff series, the skaters scored eight times in four straight losses and the season was over. After a summer without much in the way of improvements, it's time to wonder whether they can pull off something similar in 2024-25, except with a different result.

And it's time, once again, to say "probably not." A roster that started the summer without goals to spare is weaker by virtue of Sean Monahan (plus-3 Offensive Rating in 2023-24) and Tyler Toffoli (plus-4) walking in free agency. Defenseman Brenden Dillon is gone, too, and while Dylan Samberg seems like a capable second-pair replacement, there are questions about who will take his spot on the third pair. The plan seems to be asking more of Hellebuyck — and at some point, that becomes unreasonable. (They've also taken a hit at the backup spot, by the way. Laurent Brossoit, who's put up a .918 save percentage or better in four of his last six seasons, left for a shot at starting with the Blackhawks. Kaapo Kahkonen, outside of a few moments with the Sharks in 2021-22, has never looked a fraction as capable.)

"Probably not," though, isn't "definitively no." We're not talking about the Sharks or the Ducks here. We're not talking about the Blues. There are a few spots with squint-and-you-can-see-it potential; Cole Perfetti, a 19-goal scorer as a 21-year-old last season, could break out on the top six. Maybe the combo of featured minutes and a contract year is enough to turn Nikolaj Ehlers from a Computer Boy favorite to a full-blown star.

What's more likely, though, is that the Jets, their fan base and Hellebuyck himself are in for more of the same. They'll hope he stays healthy enough to start 65 games or so, hope he stays fresh enough to win a bunch of them, hope they score enough to make the postseason and hope things are different once they get there. Maybe this time it'll work.

The wild card

Can Dylan Samberg step seamlessly into Brenden Dillon's top-four role?

Bringing Dillon back, capable a player as he's been over his career, didn't make sense for Winnipeg. That was partly due to cost — he signed with the Devils for three years and a \$4 million average annual value — and partly due to the presence of Samberg, whom the model projects to be flat-out better in 2024-25. Not by an insignificant margin, either; he's carrying a projected Net Rating of plus-1 compared to Dillon's minus-5. The former is what you need on a second pair. The latter is in line with a league-average sixth defenseman.

Dillon's age works against him there, but it's not the only factor. No Jets defenseman had fewer goals allowed per 60 (real or expected) while he was on the ice than Samberg, and he managed that while taking significantly more responsibility in terms of zone exits. He kills penalties, too.

Why shouldn't the Jets see how his game plays a bit further up the lineup? Hey, if it works, they'll have themselves a \$1.4 million solution behind Josh Morrissey on the left side.

There are reasons to wonder, of course. Samberg, 25, was sixth among the Jets' regular defensemen last season in ice time, and he truly was playing against third-pair competition. We account for that as best we can, but you don't know how good a player can be in a bigger role until he actually proves it. Sometimes, a good third-pair guy is just that.

It's worth a shot for the Jets, though, if only because the alternative — paying the 35-year-old version of Dillon several million dollars for several years — didn't make much sense in context with the rest of the roster.

The strengths

While some recent Stanley Cup champions are proving it's possible to win without a true ace in net, that rule doesn't apply to everyone. Some teams are built around their elite goaltender, like the Jets.

Hellebuyck is a franchise pillar in Winnipeg; he's their backbone and most valuable player. While some things went south for him again in the playoffs, the Jets should expect another excellent season from him.

Winnipeg's No. 1 is coming into the 2024-25 season as the reigning Vezina Trophy winner. Hellebuyck raised the bar from an impressive 2022-23 season with even more sparkling numbers. He gave his team a chance to win with 43 quality starts in 60 outings and led all starters with a .921 save percentage.

Hellebuyck's outstanding season, and the four strong years before that, pushes his Net Rating to a league-leading plus-20 among netminders. That number is a game-changer for the Jets. Their goalie strength ranks first in the league — and that's despite Kahkonen's minus-7. And it gives Winnipeg's Defensive Rating the boost up to third in the league at a plus-23.

Hellebuyck has some defensive support to help push that number to this season's projected heights.

It starts with Morrissey, who put together one of the best seasons of his career in 2023-24. As hyped up as Morrissey was in 2022-23, his defensive game had holes, dragging down his overall value despite an excellent offensive season. Last year, he rounded out his game to provide more steady defense while still driving this team offensively from the blue line. Morrissey earned 5.7 scoring chance contributions per 60 last season, according to data tracked by Corey Sznajder — the same number as Roman Josi, for context.

Morrissey enters the 2024-25 season with a team-leading plus-15 Net Rating. Not only is that truly top-pair caliber, but his projected value is good for seventh in the league among all defensemen. We pushed him down a bit for the Player Tiers based on feedback around the league, but after last season, the model is a big fan. If he keeps it up, a third straight year as a Norris hopeful is in the cards.

Dylan DeMelo is the perfect complement to Morrissey on that top pair. He isn't as offensively inclined as his partner but can be counted on to help lead the breakout out of the Jets' zone with control. The real strength of his game is his defensive acumen. With a plus-4 rating, he has proven that he can be a No. 2 defenseman and navigate through heavy usage with Morrissey.

Samberg looks like the stabilizer the Jets need for their second pair. He defends the blue line to limit rush chances and can retrieve pucks to help get the Jets out of their own zone. If his steady play can help get more out of Neal Pionk, it should solidify Winnipeg's top four. The two earned a 58 percent expected goal rate in their 154 five-on-five minutes together last year, which is an encouraging start.

Up front, the Jets should have some offensive support on the wings, and Ehlers is a big part of that. He's an excellent puck-mover who can drive play for the Jets and do some real damage in the offensive zone as a dual threat. Ehlers tends to be one of the most effective scorers in Winnipeg, even if his usage hasn't always matched that. With a plus-9 Net Rating, Ehlers is a luxury on the second line. But if the Jets are willing to lean on him more and finally deploy him on the top power-play unit (which appears to be the plan), he could take his value even higher.

Now that his contract situation has been resolved, Cole Perfetti also looks poised to take a step forward. He's a reliable forechecker with the skill to develop into more of a scoring threat. If Gabriel Vilardi can build on last season (and stay healthy), these two could add a spark to the top six.

Nino Niederreiter's two-way game is a real plus on the third line and helps form a hard-checking line. But maybe the most pivotal player there is Adam Lowry. He's one of the best shutdown centers in the league and can take on tough minutes against top competition to help free up the top six. As much as the Selke Trophy has become an award for two-way play in recent years, Lowry was that good defensively to earn some votes last year.

The weaknesses

While the Jets have a lot of skill on the wings in Ehlers, Perfetti and Vilardi, their biggest problems come from the top of their forward group.

Kyle Connor and Mark Scheifele simply cannot be the best and most important forwards on a team with Stanley Cup aspirations.

Connor is smooth in transition, is a volume shooter, and has a ton of finishing talent. He rebounded on the scoresheet last season with a top-10 goal-scoring rate. But at his core, he's a pretty one-dimensional offensive threat. It seemed like there was a chance he had more to offer, to add more oomph to his game besides his shooting ability. But his last few seasons say otherwise, which is why he's trended even further down the Player Tiers project to 4C.

One executive called him an "empty goal scorer." Another added that "he doesn't give a s— about defense." There's a reason the Jets did a lot better last year when Connor was out of the lineup.

While Connor's plus-9 Offensive Rating leads the team, it's below the threshold a contending team should want for its leading winger. And his lackluster defense brings him down even further.

It hurts the top line that Scheifele is in a pretty similar boat. He's a pass-first center who also can help the Jets get into the offensive zone with control, which has helped him stay pretty consistent on the scoresheet each season. But his defense remains a major weakness that's only getting worse. It fell to a new low this season, and his minus-3 Defensive Rating is one of the worst in the league among forwards.

Stack them together as a 1-2 punch, as the Jets tend to, and they add up to a collective plus-13 Net Rating that ranks 24th in the league amongst other top two forwards. The average playoff team gains more than double that from its No. 1 center and winger with a combined plus-30 Net Rating.

Maybe taking on more short-handed responsibility will tighten up their defense and have a ripple effect on their even-strength play. But that isn't something the Jets can bank on until these players prove otherwise.

Put together Connor, Scheifele and Vilardi together as a first line, and there's even more trouble. In almost 200 five-on-five minutes last season, they earned only 38 percent of the expected goal share and were outscored by opponents.

A simple fix could be swapping Ehlers and Connor to reunite a combination that had a lot more success in their minutes last season. Or the coaching staff will have to figure out some tactical adjustments to try to maximize its flawed stars.

It's even more problematic that the Jets don't have legitimate center support behind Scheifele on the second line. Vladislav Namestnikov can help facilitate play with his zone entries and forechecking but is better suited for a bottom-six role. Sure, the Jets can upgrade at the deadline like they did last year with Monahan, but they're still going into the season with a noticeable weakness.

Some depth issues extend to the back end, too.

The third pair of Logan Stanley (when healthy) and Colin Miller lacks on paper, with a combined minus-12 Net Rating. Neither threads the needle offensively nor has the chops to thrive defensively. The coaches will likely have no choice but to heavily shelter the third pair again this year because neither player looks capable of handling a bigger role. But that can leave someone like Pionk exposed on the second pair if Stanley-Miller gets the cushiest of minutes and Samberg struggles to lift his game. Don't forget he's not experienced in a top-four role, either.

Back in goal, Kahkonen is another weak link. It could leave the Jets exposed every game that Hellebuyck isn't in net, when the coaches should be trying to lighten their starter's workload. With Hellebuyck's heavy lift being a likely contributing factor to his playoff struggles, the lack of a strong safety net behind him is a real concern.

Last year, the team broke from the usual workload of 80 percent of the games to about 73 percent. The difference is that they had a more reliable backup in Brossoit, who showed he was capable of playing 20-plus games. Kahkonen doesn't instill that same confidence if his game doesn't improve, which could lead to another over-reliant season on Hellebuyck. And that could once again burn him out before the postseason even begins.

The best case

In a contract year, Ehlers finally proves to be the elite impact player in a bigger role, giving the Jets the elite talent up front they've been missing for a long while. Combine that with breakthroughs from Perfetti and Samberg, plus the usual excellence from Hellebuyck and Morrissey — and the Jets are once again one of the league's top teams. And this time they win a round or two.

The worst case

An otherwise middling roster looks a lot worse as Hellebuyck has an uncharacteristically down year that leaves the Jets just outside of a playoff spot.

The bottom line

No team in the league is more reliant on a single player than the Jets — the word “Hellebuyck” appears 24 times in this preview for good reason. That makes the Jets difficult to analyze in any particularly meaningful way. If Hellebuyck plays up to his standard, they’ll have playoff hockey games to watch in Winnipeg. If he doesn’t, they won’t.

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5806185/2024/10/03/predicting-2024-25-season-divisions/>

From Stanley Cup contenders to bottom feeders: Predicting the 2024-25 season

By Sean McIndoe

Fun fact: In the NHL, the “pre” in preseason stands for predictions. We all have to make them, including you — the reader prediction contest is coming later this week, so be ready. For now, it’s my turn to lay my cards on the table, with my annual division-based attempt to dice up the league.

The rules, as always: I get four divisions, with exactly eight teams each. We’ll have the bottom-feeders, the middle-of-the-pack, the legitimate Stanley Cup contenders and then the teams I just have no idea about. Because I enjoy making my own life difficult, that eight teams per division rule is mandatory. (Insert your own joke here about the “no clue” division having all 32 teams in it otherwise.)

We’ll start from the bottom and work our way up...

The Middle-of-the-Pack Division

It’s not a bad place to be as long as you’re passing through. Get stuck here for more than a couple of years, though, and the future starts looking mighty bleak.

Winnipeg Jets

Last season: 52-24-6, +61, lost in the first round.

Their offseason in six words: Arguably the worst in the league.

Why they’re here: Because I need eight teams in each division, and sometimes that means squeezing in a team that I’m not sure fits. The Jets are the best team in this group by a decent margin, at least in terms of last year’s regular-season record. But that team made an embarrassingly easy exit from the playoffs, and this year’s version seems like they’ll take a step back. Betting against Connor Hellebuyck is rarely smart, but unless he’s playing at a Vezina level again this year, I think the Jets take a step or two back.

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5806799/2024/10/03/winnipeg-jets-josh-morrissey-interview/>

How Winnipeg Jets’ Josh Morrissey arrived at the best version of his game

By Murat Ates

WINNIPEG — Josh Morrissey's career trajectory is one of the more stunning arcs in the NHL right now.

He broke into the NHL in 2016-17 as a ready-made second-pairing defenceman, partnering with Dustin Byfuglien to play high-leverage top-four minutes. Morrissey's job was to be the defensive conscious for his famously wild-roving partner; even as a 21-year-old rookie, he seemed ready for it.

When the Winnipeg Jets made the Western Conference final the following season, Morrissey was playing a top-four role again — this time with Jacob Trouba. Together they excelled against Nashville's top line in a seven-game, second-round series win. The Morrissey-Trouba pair did it all over again in 2018-19 (although they were interrupted by Morrissey's upper-body injury the night before the trade deadline).

Then the wheels came off. The Jets lost Trouba, Byfuglien, Tyler Myers and Ben Chiarot the following season. Morrissey was partnered with prospect defenceman Tucker Poolman while other regularly used defencemen on that team included Anthony Bitetto, Luca Sbisa and Nathan Beaulieu. Health has played a factor for Poolman but none of those players are in the NHL anymore. As Winnipeg's team defence suffered, Morrissey's performance suffered as well, but the worst was yet to come.

Morrissey's dad Tom was diagnosed with brain cancer prior to the 2020-21 season. The personal news was hard enough — perhaps the most difficult journey of Morrissey's life. The professional side was difficult, too: Morrissey's biggest fear at a pre-vaccine time of COVID-19 was bringing the virus home to a dad whose radiation and chemotherapy treatments weakened his immune system.

As friends and teammates were preparing for the 2021 season in groups, Morrissey worked out at home and skated on a small sheet of ice at his friend's barn just outside of Calgary.

"It was a cool setup but it was about the size of maybe half a zone — whether the offensive zone or D-zone, whichever way you want to look at it," Morrissey said in 2022. "That was the best I could do. I knew a bunch of guys who were having more normal skates but putting yourself at a little more risk of getting COVID and I wanted to be able to see my dad. I needed to be able to see him do certain things that he couldn't do or help him out."

Tom died in August 2021. His continued encouragement of Morrissey's growth helped make 2021-22 a return to form. Of course, there are so many more things that go into it. Morrissey's mom, Bev Jarvis stepped up. Morrissey changed trainers, not just getting back to where he was before taking a step back but surpassing previous marks in agility and explosiveness. He scored a career-high 37 points in 79 games for the 2021-22 Jets — then more than doubled it with 76 points the following season, emerging as an elite offensive threat at even strength and on the power play. His underlying numbers had gone from that of a third-pairing defenceman (or worse, by some metrics) in 2020-21 to those befitting a Norris Trophy contender.

And yet even as Morrissey's offensive production fell to 69 points last season — and as he fell from fifth in 2023 Norris Trophy voting to seventh in 2024 — he got better as an all-around player. His defensive impact soared.

Morrissey recently sat down with The Athletic to share the reasons for his growth — what he talks about with his coaches, his training, the metrics they focus on and the wisdom that he'd most want to share with young defencemen looking to recreate his journey into the top 10 in the world at his position.

I think a lot of people are still caught up in your points explosion. I'm not sure if everyone has realized you made a big defensive improvement last season. How did you do it?

When I first came into the league, I was primarily in a defensive role: the PK and some five-on-five. I also had a couple of years I don't really judge too much just with COVID and family stuff going on but, since then, I've taken a step forward in my offensive game. The first year this staff came in, they really pushed me to play more offensive and be aggressive and I think it coincided with my game being in a good place when they asked it of me. I also think our team game, defensively, took a big step forward last year.

Personally, I want to be a great all-around defenceman. I want to be counted on offensively, defensively, in all situations. I still think that's what qualifies as the best defenceman in the league. It's not just points. It's both. You have to do both to be that guy. I think I was six points shy last year of the year prior but all of my defensive numbers ... My coaches show me my defensive numbers and the metrics that they look at, the analytic areas that they look at. The whole team improved and I improved substantially from the year before, too. I think it's just attention to detail at both ends of the ice and then picking your spots — not trying to force something when it's not there and not trying to get ahead of the play. They always talked to me that, with my skating and how I read the game, I don't have to get ahead of it. I can let it develop and then go and still be plenty active offensively. All of those things and then our overall team game evolved, too.

What are the metrics that your coaches show you to reinforce your defensive play?

The big thing as a team that we wanted to cut down was slot shots. We did a better job of that last season. Individually, the controlling of chances for and against when you're on the ice, everyone views it differently but I think that's a solid indicator — especially when you're playing against top players. How much of that play are you helping influence positively? Whether that's not being in your own end or less shots, less chances against. Can we close it off defensively as fast as possible? Can we spend as little time in our end as we possibly can? That allows your offensive players to do their thing. I think the biggest thing was trying to end it as fast as I could in the D-zone and then get it going the other way. The main metrics that they're looking at are chances for and against, Grade A quality chances, and trying to limit those.

Morrissey's defensive rating soared last season, via Dom Luszczyszyn's model — with minimal offensive sacrifices

I wonder about the "inside baseball" of it all. Are there specific reads you look at in the offseason as opportunities for improvement?

Yeah, I think so. Let's just say you went out there in a game and were like, "I'm not going to take any risk offensively. I'm going to play it safe. If it's a 50-50 yes or no, I'm definitely saying no. If it's 60 (percent) yes, 40 no, I'm still saying no." Like, what is your risk profile?

Whether it's jumping up, pinching, trying to get a shot through as opposed to just putting it behind the net, dumping it versus holding onto it, trying to make a pass up versus chipping it off

the glass ... All of the places you can possibly play on the ice, you can take let's call it a safer read — a backing off read. I think that, while that's the right play often — it could be the time of the game or who you're out against, length of shift, all of those different things that process into that equation: "I should dump this puck or I should try to make a play or jump into the play," all of those different things come into your head.

If you're trying to produce offensively, you have to — it's not increase the risk but it is, in a way it kind of is. You increase the offensive chance of something happening (for you) too. I think the big thing (for me) was getting up the ice more, making one extra read to try to make a play through the seam or holding onto it a little bit longer or having the confidence to try to beat someone one-on-one on the blue line, all of those things lead to offence. And I don't think that all of those things that lead to offence... They don't have to hurt your defence. When we looked back at my quote-unquote "breakout year," all of those things that led to actual offence didn't increase my defensive risk or make me worse defensively. The things (that impacted defence) were not getting rid of the puck in the D-zone or on a breakout.

Between myself and Arnie (Scott Arniel), heading into last season, what do I want to improve at? Obviously: everything. But specifically, keep the offence and don't lose the defence. Or keep the offence and get better on D. That's what we tried. Again, we got better as a team defensively and I probably benefited from that, too, but I think I was a big part of that as well.

I would like to force an analogy now. Tell me if this fits or not but I'm thinking about changing lanes when there's a car one lane over from you. I used to almost always get into that lane by putting on the brakes and sliding behind the car. Eventually, I realized that if I stayed in the right gear I could also step on the gas and get in front of that car, too — that I'd have more luck if I gave myself the option to go fast or slow and then decide in the moment.

I think everything that I think about during the game, there's kind of a percentage "yay" or "nay." That's how I've always thought about the game. Late in the game, when you're down by a goal, third period, risk goes up, pinching goes up, trying to make a play goes up, etc. Whereas if you're up by one with five minutes left, that probably changes things, too. It's a similar analogy, yes, but I think it was about keeping the offence while being really proactive in trying to defend as well as I could every single day. That sounds like you're going out there sometimes and not trying to defend. That's not what I'm saying. Arnie calls it "taking pride in all areas of the game." As opposed to doing your job in the D-zone, trying to do a great job if that makes sense. How can I get a little bit better defensively? How can I break it out a little bit quicker? What do some of the guys who are really good one-on-one defenders do? Just keeping that knowledge. Sometimes it's going to ebb and flow either way but what I learned was that some of what I was creating on offence wasn't going to impact my defensive game.

I've spoken to young defencemen about growing into full-time jobs or top-four jobs. They talk about how the next step is chaining multiple reads together — about making the stop and then seeing the breakout pass and then seeing the skating route to take. It sounds like you're processing at a level of detail well beyond even that. Looking at your own development, how did you get from A to B?

I think a lot of it is reps. It's practice. It's repetition, it's the mindset. It's thinking about it. It's watching others that you think do it better than you. And then we're obviously in an industry where it's about winning hockey games and executing. So it's about understanding your leash. Let's say you toe-drag someone at the blue line. If you pull it off, you're a hero. If you don't pull it off, you'd better have some leash. If you don't pull it off, that might not be good for you. I think

that's where understanding where you're at in your game, where you're at with your coaches, where you're at with your role. Like, if you just got back in the lineup after being scratched for a couple of nights, I wouldn't say don't try it but maybe it's more of a make-or-break "yay or nay," do you know what I mean? Kyle Connor probably has a little more rope to make that play, but if he (doesn't make) it twice in a row, he'll hear about it from Arnie. You earn that rope or that leeway from executing — from making the play a number of times.

What I would say to those young guys who are trying to advance their game is, "What is the game you want to be? Who do you want to be?" If you want to go from bottom pair to the top four or whatever your (goal) is, how does that game look? What does that game mean? How would you be in that role — and what does that role require? Just do that, then. If that role requires good breakout passes, good net front play, a little bit of PK, maybe power play, maybe not, what does that role entail? And just be good at that. It sounds simple — it's obviously a lot more difficult — but you understand what I'm saying. What is that role? Do it. If that's what the job description is, then that's what you have to be able to do. Figure out from practicing, from watching other guys that do that role, how to be that guy. And just do that. Don't go into it thinking you're going to be a shutdown defenceman and try to play like Erik Karlsson. That's not the role that's required. That's not who you should be. That's how my development went.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/ehlers-steps-up-in-jets-preseason-win-over-flames%7E3003415>

Ehlers steps up in Jets' preseason win over Flames (VIDEO)

Dan Robertson and Kevin Sawyer take a closer look at Nikolaj Ehlers' impressive performance against the Flames, and discuss how strong Winnipeg's power play has looked over their last two preseason games.

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/ehlers-steps-up-in-jets-preseason-win-over-flames%7E3003415>

One Big Question: How can Jets translate regular season success to playoffs? (VIDEO)

Last season, the Jets finished with 110 points, but their playoff run fell short in the first round. How can Winnipeg translate their regular season success into the post season? TSN's Hockey analysts Mike Johnson and Craig Button have more.

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/10/02/jets-douse-watered-down-flames-squad>

Jets douse watered-down Flames squad Special teams click in penultimate preseason contest

By: Ken Wiebe

With the preseason winding down, Jets head coach Scott Arniel was looking for good habits in terms of systems play and structure.

Facing a Calgary Flames squad that was missing a number of regulars, the Jets took care of business in their final home-ice tilt before the games really matter in a 5-2 victory on Wednesday night at Canada Life Centre.

This is the point of training camp when the auditions are nearly complete and the regulars are doing what they can to be sharp for when the regular season opens.

“Yeah, it’s getting closer,” said Arniel. “They’re all talking about how it seems like camp has been going on here for three weeks and they can’t wait to just play the games and then get into next week. Nice to see the big guys like that get themselves off and running.”

Powerful stuff

One of the top priorities for the Jets coming into the new season is to improve their special teams play and after using two full days of training camp to work on those units, there have been plenty of signs of progress.

The puck movement on the power play, especially the top unit, was fantastic.

There was plenty of motion and numerous high-quality scoring chances created, one resulting in a goal.

On that first Jets’ power-play opportunity, all five players touched the puck in the offensive zone before the goal was scored.

Kyle Connor found Josh Morrissey up top, he found Mark Scheifele along the left-wing boards before getting the puck down low to Gabe Vilardi and he found Nikolaj Ehlers for a one-timer in the slot.

“You try to find different ways to create chances and score goals,” said Ehlers. “On the power play, you have your set plays but it’s a lot about creativity. Not everything is going to happen exactly how you think it is. That’s the fun part about hockey. You’ve got to be ready to make changes on the ice and we’ve done that pretty well.”

Ehlers is adjusting nicely to his new spot in the high slot and that was an example of how dangerous he can be with the first unit.

Much has been made of the fact Ehlers didn’t score a single goal with the man-advantage last season for the first time in his nine NHL campaigns.

A lot of that had to do with his limited usage on the power play, but Ehlers could challenge and likely eclipse his career-high of seven man-advantage markers if the Jets continue to open up seams the way that they did on Wednesday night.

The Jets also went two-for-two on the penalty kill.

El Nino warning

The Jets will be looking for winger Nino Niederreiter to get back to being a 20-goal guy this season after he finished 2023-24 with 18.

Niederreiter went to his familiar spot in front of the blue paint to deliver a pair of goals on Wednesday.

When Niederreiter is at his best, he's getting to the front of the net and scoring from around the crease.

"That is (Niederreiter's) office. He thrives in there," said Ehlers. "To get a guy like that going, that's obviously exciting for us."

Another injury

Injuries have been a frequent topic of conversation around these parts after the Jets lost defencemen Ville Heinola and Logan Stanley early in training camp, but the forward group has mostly avoided the infirmary to this point.

That changed on Wednesday as David Gustafsson left the contest 6:58 into the second period with a lower-body issue after he was on the receiving end of a hard hit from Flames winger Walker Duehr.

Arniel said Gustafsson would be re-evaluated on Thursday.

Gustafsson is locked in a battle for the 12th or 13th forward jobs and if he's out for any length of time, that could open the door for another player to stick around a bit longer.

Speaking of those in the battle on the bubble, it was a relatively quiet evening for Brad Lambert and Nikita Chibrikov, who combined for two shots on goal and three shot attempts (two for Chibrikov, one for Lambert).

However, with just over five minutes to go, Lambert made a heads-up play to find Simon Lundmark at the left point for the Jets' fourth goal.

"Great pass, so I was just trying to hit the net, and luckily enough it went in," said Lundmark.

Lambert was also called for hooking Flames defence prospect Hunter Brzustewicz on an offensive-zone minor that was of the avoidable variety.

Simon says

There is no award for the prospect that makes the biggest gains in training camp, but if there was one, it would probably belong to Lundmark.

Lundmark, who was chosen by the Jets in the second round (51st overall) in the 2019 NHL Draft, came into training camp with little fanfare — despite a solid American Hockey League campaign with the Manitoba Moose last season.

"I feel like I see the game pretty well. The last couple of years, I have been trying to improve my ability to play hard and win battles. I feel like last season, that was a big improvement for me," said Lundmark.

"Of course I'm trying to show everything and just be a solid defenceman. It's not all about my strengths. I try to do the things I'm less good at, good as well. I'm just trying to be a good all-round player."

Although he isn't flashy, Lundmark has shown poise with the puck throughout training camp and his ability to shift over to play his off side has helped raise his stock, even if he's about to be sent back to the minors in the coming days.

"He's another guy that has to go through waivers, a guy we want to get a look at," said Arniel. "He can play left side as well, which is obviously a bonus. He's a young defenceman that has gotten better every year I've seen him."

Lundmark is a sturdy defender at 6-2 and 201 pounds and as long as his progression continues, he isn't far away from being a call-up consideration.

Extra, extra

Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck went the distance in this one and after giving up two goals on the first five shots on goal he faced, he turned aside the final 14 of the contest. Hellebuyck is slated to start Friday's preseason finale...Vilardi paced the offensive attack with three assists and recorded five shots on goal and eight shot-attempts...Jets D-man Josh Morrissey led all players in ice time with 23:49, including 3:25 on the power play and 69 seconds while shorthanded.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/10/02/journeyman-blue-liner-hoping-to-stick-with-jets>

Journeyman blue-liner Dylan Coghlan hoping to stick with Jets

By: Ken Wiebe

Perspective is proving to be a valuable thing for Dylan Coghlan.

The Winnipeg Jets hopeful is onto his third NHL organization after arriving in a trade with the Carolina Hurricanes this summer and he's come to understand what he needs to focus on to ensure he's not heading down to the minors again.

"Now that I'm a little bit older, I try to take more pride in the defensive side of the game and worry about that first," said Coghlan, who suited up in Wednesday's preseason game against the Calgary Flames. "It's more rewarding when the coach compliments you for a D-zone play than an O-zone play. If you'd asked me that three or four years ago, that probably wouldn't have been the case."

That's not to suggest Coghlan has abandoned the offensive part of his game, it's just that he's worked incredibly hard to become more of a two-way threat.

"The way I shoot the puck can be a threat to a lot of teams' penalty kills," he said. "I've got to find those open spots to get the shots off because when that happens, other plays open up."

Coghlan, who is 6-2 and 207 pounds, is a mobile, puck-moving blue-liner with 103 hits and 89 blocked shots in 106 NHL games.

A high-scoring defenceman with the WHL's Tri-City Americans, Coghlan went undrafted and signed with the Vegas Golden Knights in September 2017.

He returned to the WHL for a final campaign and after two seasons in the American Hockey League with the Chicago Wolves, Coghlan earned his first NHL opportunity during the 2020-21 season, skating in 29 games.

The following year, Coghlan saw more regular work, appearing in 59 games while accumulating three goals and 13 points.

In the summer of 2022, the Golden Knights were looking to shed salary by moving Max Pacioretty to the Hurricanes and Coghlan was involved in the deal as a sweetener.

This introduction to the business side of the game was an eye-opener for Coghlan, who was starting to feel like he'd begun to establish himself as an NHL regular.

"I had never been traded before, so it was new for me and kind of an adjustment," he said. "It was weird. I knew it probably wasn't going to work out in Vegas long-term with the guys that they had there at the time. There was a lot of depth there."

Coghlan was excited about the chance to join the Hurricanes, but that enthusiasm was muted by the fact he got into only 17 games in 2022-23 and one outing last season — spending the bulk of the campaign with the AHL's Springfield Thunderbirds (where he produced 16 goals and 41 points in 61 games).

"I thought there would be a chance to play a lot (with the Hurricanes), but it didn't work out," said Coghlan, who ultimately saw benefits from the opportunity to get more puck touches and increased minutes in the minors. "It was a little bit of adversity, which isn't a bad thing. Going down and waiting for that (call-up). I got one three weeks in, I was excited and thought I was going to play and then I didn't get called up until the last game of the year."

The mental toll of waiting for a call that didn't come until months later was a difficult challenge to battle through.

"You start wondering when it's going to happen, then it doesn't happen and you get more frustrated," he explained. "But I learned quickly not to worry about that and just focus on what was in front of me."

This was a stark contrast from his first two seasons as a pro, when Coghlan was constantly working at his game, knowing that a lot of work was going to be required before he was even ready for that first crack at the NHL.

When you've been up a significant amount of the three previous seasons, spending time worrying about the things out of your control can spill over into your game, which only makes it tougher to earn that recall you've been working towards.

On July 5, the Hurricanes traded Coghlan to the Jets for future considerations.

"Now, I know I'm ready," said Coghlan. "Now that I'm here, I'm motivated not to go back (to the AHL)."

With the departure of Brenden Dillon and Nate Schmidt, the Jets saw Coghlan as a guy that could bolster their depth on defence — specifically on the right side.

"I knew there was a good opportunity for me here, probably a much better opportunity than in Carolina," said Coghlan, 26, who's from Nanaimo, B.C. "There just weren't a lot of holes there. They don't change their lineup too often. It's been awesome so far, a good fit."

Having been traded before helped ease the transition to the Jets.

"I don't know if it necessarily gets easier the more times that you do it, but you know how to cope with it," Coghlan said.

Jets head coach Scott Arniel says Coghlan has come as advertised.

"He's got good range, good mobility. He's another guy that can shoot the puck," said Arniel, who had Coghlan running the second power-play unit on Wednesday.

Coghlan has been to enough training camps to know he simply needs to put his best foot forward as the Jets prepare to make their final cuts over the next few days.

"I'm taking nothing for granted here," he said. "I try not to think about the bigger outcome. I'm just trying to stay present."

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/vets-shine-as-jets-earn-5-2-decision-over-flames>

Vets shine as Jets earn 5-2 decision over Flames

By Scott Billeck

Rick Bowness is no longer the head coach of the Winnipeg Jets, but a piece of his wisdom lives on around these parts.

"It always goes back to (the fact) players will eventually cut themselves, based on how they play," he once said during a training camp gone by.

It wasn't a standout night for Winnipeg's young-gun hopefuls, including Brad Lambert and Elias Salomonsson. More on that in a bit.

The Jets won their penultimate pre-season game on Wednesday, 5-2, over the visiting Calgary Flames at Canada Life Centre.

Nino Niederreiter scored twice, including the game-winner that broke a 2-2 deadlock in the third period. Nikolaj Ehlers, Simon Lundmark and Kyle Connor had Winnipeg's other tallies.

After allowing eight goals on 29 shots in Minnesota in two periods last Friday, reigning Vezina winner Connor Hellebuyck settled down to make 17 saves for the win.

The Jets wrap up their pre-season slate on Friday in Calgary.

Some thoughts following Wednesday's game:

- Lambert and Salomonsson, who received the majority of the spotlight heading into Wednesday's game, failed to shine in the game as the pressure ramped up. Lambert played the second-fewest minutes in the game at 12:12, trailing only Nikita Chibrikov, who had an even 12. Lambert started the game on a line with Niederreiter and Chibrikov. The idea was to look at a potential third scoring line led by the 20-year-old Finn. There just wasn't much going on there, and Lambert may now be out of runway. Lambert was on the bench for both of Niederreiter's goals, and the lines were jumbled early in the second when David Gustafsson was drilled by Flames forward Walker Duehr, forcing him out of the game. Lambert took a first-period penalty after being out of position in the offensive zone.

- Salomonsson was just OK playing the game on his off-side on the left. The right-shot blue-liner was handed an iffy holding call earlier in the game and played 49 seconds of shorthanded time. With Winnipeg's injury double on the left side — Ville Heinola (ankle) and Logan Stanley (knee) had respective surgeries in the past week or so — an opportunity had opened up for the young Swede. It seems likely Salomonsson will be sent to the Manitoba Moose to hone his craft. It's not a failure for him. He was always in tough coming to North America after playing his junior career on larger European ice back home.

- Is Lundmark a surprise late contender for a spot? He scored a nice goal in the third period, wiring a shot off a Lambert feed for Winnipeg's insurance marker. Lundmark has played more than anyone would have initially considered. He can credit the two injuries for that, with Arniel referring to him as his "swing man" after coming into the lineup after Stanley couldn't go last week. Lundmark has been a steady, responsible defender. However, it seems unlikely he will win a job over Hadyn Fleury or Dylan Coghlan. The latter two players had good outings on Wednesday. Lundmark moved himself into first call-up territory. "I think it's been good," Lundmark said of his camp. "I am just trying to play my best hockey and play hard, do what I'm good at with breakouts and stuff. I feel like it's been good."

- It's crazy what a little movement can do to an otherwise talented power play. The tic-tac-toe that Ehlers finished off from Gabriel Vilardi and Mark Scheifele in the first period was the product of the team taking two full days of training camp to focus on. This year's power play, headed by assistant coach Davis Payne, is a lot snappier than it was under Brad Lauer, who was let go in the off-season. They created chances on their other two chances in the game as well.

- On top of that, as Arniel pointed out post-game, there was a lot that led up to the power play goal that was just as integral as the puck crossing the line. "Winning the faceoff, 50-50 battles that were in the corner kind of got us possession," Arniel said. "And then they made hockey plays. Real good quick puck movement. That was kind of the reason we kind of want to see Nik in that hole there. That was a pretty quick shot he got off."

- I hate to belabour this point, but why did it take so long to put Ehlers there with a plan to use him effectively? Ehlers has looked great in that bumper role.

- Vilardi was dominant all night. He didn't score, but he had chances aplenty and spearheaded the play that led to Niederreiter's second after dropping his shoulder and driving to the net, narrowly missing. He also set up Ehlers from behind the net on his goal, the first of his three assists in the game. A healthy Vilardi scores 40 on this team. Book it.

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/lambert-roster-decision-looming>

Jets' Brad Lambert handling own business with roster decision looming

By Scott Billeck

Brad Lambert knew he could control only one thing heading into training camp: Himself.

“Go to the rink every day and work my ass off,” the 20-year-old Winnipeg Jets hopeful told reporters on Wednesday morning.

The rest?

The coaches hold that in their hands.

They have moved Lambert around the lineup to find a good fit for the skilled forward.

For the Jets’ game on Wednesday night against the Calgary Flames, Lambert was between Nino Niederreiter and Nikita Chibrikov.

Head coach Scott Arniel said Tuesday that he wanted to examine the potential for Lambert to be part of a possible third scoring line when the season opens on Oct. 9 in Edmonton.

Winnipeg’s two top lines appear set, with Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Gabriel Vilardi as the top trio, with Nikolaj Ehlers, Vladislav Namestnikov and Cole Perfetti as the second.

Arniel is keeping his cards close to his chest, but finding Lambert a role where he can use his elite skating, shot and playmaking abilities to produce offence appears to be a priority.

Arniel said Wednesday that Lambert’s year-to-year growth has been “very noticeable.”

“He took major strides last year season with the Moose, and then coming in here, he knew what he’s going up against,” Arniel said.

“He knew that ... he had to be at his best here and show us what he can do. And his biggest challenge, what him and I talk about, is that you know how he goes along and how he lines up against, if it’s Scheifele in a practice, in a five-on-five-drill, if it’s against a Lowry. Those are the guys he’s going to see, those type of skill sets, that type of experience.”

What Arniel could do with Lambert is what makes his chances of making the team even more intriguing.

Having him on a line with Niederreiter and Alex Lafallo, as they did on Tuesday, really gives Lambert a chance to succeed offensively and defensively.

“It definitely helps having a guy (like Niederreiter) that experienced on your line, see what he does and be able to watch him and learn from him,” Lambert said.

Meanwhile, Niederreiter sees a highly skilled player with a lot of confidence in his game.

So, what will it take to make that jump?

“The biggest thing is the decisions he makes between the blue lines, a matter of getting pucks out, pucks in deep and winning your one-on-one battles,” Niederreiter said. “For him, the most important thing for him right now is make sure when to make the play and when not to.

“The games are going to get heavier and heavier as the season starts. You can’t do too many mistakes because they’re going to end up in the back of your net. It’s something that he has to learn over time, but something he also has to make sure he gives himself that time as well, not just play safe the whole time. He’s got to make sure he keeps the confidence up high and makes plays.”

Lambert knows that his defensive work is just as important, if not more so, than what he can do with the puck on his stick.

And that’s where Arniel has seen that year-over-year growth he spoke of.

Lambert has been less flashy in camp, but not less effective.

Manitoba Moose head coach Mark Morrison and his staff deserve credit for moulding Lambert in a way that hasn’t diminished his offensive instincts while making him a better two-way player.

And that has given the Jets a rare chance to have a player develop in the NHL, where his linemates insulate him in such a way that he’s allowed to figure it out, so to speak, on the fly without it being a detriment to the team’s success.

“You don’t see the repetitive mistakes that maybe a young guy would do on a consistent basis,” Arniel said. “So Lambo’s right in that mix. He’s shown tremendous growth there, and where he’s been and where he is now.”

Calgary Herald

<https://calgaryherald.com/sports/hockey/nhl/calgary-flames/three-takeaways-from-the-calgary-flames-5-2-loss-to-the-winnipeg-jets>

Three takeaways from the Calgary Flames' 5-2 loss to the Winnipeg Jets

By Daniel Austin

The result won’t cause any sleepless nights in Calgary.

On Wednesday night in Winnipeg, the Jets trotted out a veteran-heavy lineup while the Calgary Flames left most of their NHL regulars back home.

And for 40 minutes, the guys with Flaming Cs on their chest gave as good as they got.

But after going into second intermission tied, the Flames were overwhelmed by the more experienced Jets and wound up on the losing end of a 5-2 scoreline.

The end result mattered a lot less than the opportunity to get a last long look at a group of Flames players who are fighting for roster spots or starting jobs.

The next couple of days will see the Flames send a number of players down to the AHL for some time with the Calgary Wranglers, so Wednesday marked an important opportunity for guys on the bubble to try to stake their claims to some NHL ice-time.

Did anyone stand out? Here's three takeaways from Wednesday's game:

BAHL-ING OUT

Kevin Bahl played his first game of the pre-season for the Flames on Wednesday, and by-and-large put in a good shift.

Bahl, who was acquired in the trade that sent Jacob Markstrom to the New Jersey Devils, missed the first week-and-a-half of training camp with a lower-body injury and has been slowly working his way up towards full fitness while also getting to know his new teammates.

There's rightfully a lot of intrigue surrounding him though. At 6-foot-6 and weighing in at 230 lbs., he's definitely got the size to make an impact on the Flames blueline and head coach Ryan Huska referred to him as a top-four defenceman earlier in camp. He played all 82 games for the Devils last year, so he's already proven that he can handle regular NHL minutes, too.

It's generally expected that he'll be paired-up with Rasmus Andersson once the season gets going, but Andersson didn't make the trip to Winnipeg and Bahl instead played with Tyson Barrie.

"Ideally he would have played a game or two already, but unfortunately his health wasn't at the level where we wanted to push him," Huska said earlier in the day. "The size is a really big thing, we aren't the biggest back-end so having him out there is important for us. Not to say he's a bruiser or anything like that, but he is a strong man, so helping keep away from the front of our net, making sure he's reliable defensively and at the end of the day a really good partner for whoever he's playing with."

Bahl finished Wednesday's game having played 21:08 and his plus-minus was even. He was solid, and it's what you'd want to see from a guy playing his first game of pre-season.

A SOLID 60

The season-long battle for the Flames' starting goalie job has mostly resulted in a series of solid performances from Dan Vladar and Dustin Wolf – and Devin Cooley, too.

After Vladar played the full 60 minutes on Monday against the Seattle Kraken, it was Wolf's turn to get a full game in on Wednesday against the Jets.

While the 23-year-old did allow five goals, there can't be any complaints about his performance. He stopped 22-of-27 shots and did nicely to turn away some golden Jets opportunities.

There was nothing he could do on either of the Jets' first two goals, with Nikolaj Ehlers firing the puck in from close range on the opener and Nino Niederreiter being left with way too much time alone in front of the net on the second.

And on the Jets' third, Wolf found himself tangled up with teammate Connor Zary and literally couldn't move across the crease. It didn't get any easier for Wolf later in the game, and the Flames will be more worried about the defensive play that led to Jets players finding themselves wide open than Wolf not stopping their shots.

He was otherwise solid, especially in the second period when he turned away a couple dangerous Jets opportunities.

At this point in camp, both Wolf and Vladar have played well enough to give Flames brass confidence if either of them is in the crease.

A betting man would probably put his money on Vladar being the Game 1 starter, but Wolf is going to get lots of playing time this season and the debate about who should be the de facto No. 1 option might continue all year.

STANDING OUT?

The Flames will want to be focusing-in on their every night NHL roster pretty soon, which means there could be cuts coming relatively imminently.

That meant that Wednesday night's game was a last big chance for some on-the-bubble players to make an impact and really give coaches something to think about.

Nobody was bad, really, but there weren't necessarily any standout performances that made you think 'That player must have changed the coaches' opinions', either.

Justin Kirkland and Martin Frk both scored for the Flames, but both of them cleared waivers earlier this week and will be starting the year for the Calgary Wranglers in the AHL.

Hunter Brzustewicz has had a great first training camp with the Flames and did a nice job putting the puck in a dangerous position on Kirkland's goal. His future is bright, clearly, although it is increasingly obvious that he, too, will spend the beginning of the year with the Wranglers. He's 19-years-old, so there's nothing wrong with that.

Neither Matthew Coronato or Jakob Pelletier had especially head-turning games. Pelletier will have to clear waivers if the Flames opt to send him to the AHL, so that's going to be something to keep a close eye on over the next couple of days. Sam Morton was solid, if not spectacular, and the same can probably be said about Walker Duehr.

The Jets had at least 14 NHL regulars in their lineup on Wednesday, while the Flames only had only six guys you'd feel comfortable saying are sure things to be playing regular minutes to start the year in the NHL.