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<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/arniel-feels-good-about-second-line>

Arniel feels good about second line

Arniel: "They have good puck skills; they all have good offensive instincts."

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG – The line of Vladislav Namestnikov, Nikolaj Ehlers and Cole Perfetti is nothing new. The trio played 18 straight games together at the beginning part of last season. They know each other and the coaching staff is counting on them to provide at both ends of the ice.

"First, it's kind of each guy, individually, getting themselves up to speed, getting their conditioning, getting their touches. Fetts (Perfetti) was late to the party, so they were a little bit behind on that," said Scott Arniel.

"That's why I tried to get them a lot of practice time together, a couple of games together. Fetts is up and running now. I feel good about that group."

Ehlers who is entering his 10th NHL season in Winnipeg, likes the potential of this line but knows there is a lot of work ahead to get to where they want to be after a couple of preseason contests together.

"I mean, obviously the two games that we played together haven't been great. We're talking. We're trying to find a way to make things happen and spend more time in the o-zone by creating some more room for each other in any way we can, and supporting each other as well, when we need to," said Ehlers.

"So, we got some work to do. They're obviously two great players. Played with Vladdy a ton. Played with Fetts, quite a bit as well. So, it's a puzzle that we're trying to put together right now, but it's an exciting challenge. And we're all good. We love each other, so we have fun with it as well. So, it's a good challenge."

Namestnikov and Ehlers have 20 years of NHL experience combined, Perfetti is entering his third full season and obviously has an appreciation for his veteran linemates and what they bring to the table.

"Vladdy is just so smart and just makes the right play all the time. So, it's really easy to play with him, he plays the right way, and you know where he is going to be, very predictable," said Perfetti.

"Fly the plays he can make are incredible. His vision of the ice and his speed, not many guys can do what he can do. I am similar in that sense as I am a pass first kind of guy, on this line there are three passers."

So how do three pass first guys come together to get that much needed shot first mentality?

"It's just making sure that we're not passing up on shots. There are times when you have time to pass and when we have a good look, we're going to make sure that we're taking it. We're not looking for the back door pass, we're not looking for one more pretty play," said Perfetti.

“Everyone can see the ice on this line very well. It’s just finding that soft spot on the ice, one guy getting the puck, making the play we all know that we can make and then delivering it to the net. I think we are all going to have that shot first mentality.”

Another bonus in Perfetti’s mind when it comes to his linemates is that they like to have fun. According to both Perfetti and Ehlers, Namestnikov is pretty funny. As for Ehlers, while he might be hard on himself in the pursuit of winning, he also understands that its important to keep things light.

“When things aren't going well in games and practice, like you guys said before. This is my 10th year now, sitting and saying some bad words, that doesn't work,” smiled Ehlers.

“So, you try to joke around and have a little fun and loosen up a little bit and try to go out there the next shift and be better. So, I try.”

The Jets have a top line that can win games all be themselves with Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Gabe Vilardi. But that line obviously can't do it all. That's where the Namestnikov line will be expected to step in.

“As an offensive guy, I’ve always been counted on to produce for the team. Nothing has really changed in that sense. I think our first line is pretty elite and they get all the tough matchups,” said Perfetti.

"There is going to be nights we're going to be relied on to produce for the team and I think we want that. It's good pressure right? You want that kind of pressure, you want to be relied on. You want to be the ones that can contribute on the score sheet, you want to help your team win."

Not only will the Namestnikov, Perfetti and Ehlers be looked upon to provide offence starting Wednesday in Edmonton, Arniel touched on the big challenge in front of them as they face two of the world’s best players in Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl.

“We've also had a conversation; they're probably going to see 29 or 97. That's a big responsibility. No different than Lowry, if he has to do it, or Scheif. You have to know what your responsibilities are if you don't have the puck,” said Arniel.

“And vice-versa, make them, make the other team have to defend. They have good puck skills; they all have good offensive instincts. Try to, as much as possible, win that zone battle where you're in the opposition end more than you're in ours.”

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/10/08/hard-work-just-beginning>

Hard work just beginning Arniel's ascension to Jets head coach a decades-long journey

By: Ken Wiebe

First, it was Ted Sator.

Then John Tortorella chimed in and finally, Rick Dudley shared a similar sentiment.

At the time, Scott Arniel was still a productive player with the Buffalo Sabres, nearly hitting 20 goals during consecutive seasons (1988-90).

In separate conversations with Sabres head coaches (Sator and Dudley) and an assistant (Tortorella), a familiar theme emerged and quite frankly, Arniel didn't quite know what to make of it.

"They all said have you ever thought about coaching after you're done playing? I wasn't sure if it was a shot that I was no good anymore as a player," Arniel said earlier this week. "But they all said to me, 'You should think about it. You'd be a good coach when you're done.'"

Although Arniel wasn't ready for retirement, he took those words to heart and eventually made his way down the suggested path.

It's been a long and winding road, but Arniel is set to embark on the latest chapter of the journey as head coach of the Winnipeg Jets, who visit the Edmonton Oilers on Wednesday in their 2024-25 regular season opener.

Arniel's connection to Winnipeg has been well-documented. He was drafted by the 1.0 version of the Jets in the second round in 1981 and made the NHL club as an 18 year old along with his junior linemate and best friend Dale Hawerchuk.

That arrival coincided with Tom Watt being named head coach and one of Arniel's first conversations with him is one that still resonates today.

"He said, 'Son, how do you play 10 or 15 years in this league?' And he proceeded to work with me to be able to do that," said Arniel. "Myself, Dale (Hawerchuk), Brian Mullen, Jimmy Kyte, Dave Ellett. There were a whole pile of us. It was a young team that was going to be part of the future and he took great pride in teaching us how to play the whole game, not just one part of it. He taught me to be a complete player."

When Arniel was traded to the Sabres, he had the opportunity to play for legendary Scotty Bowman, who is considered by many to be the best to ever do the job.

Arniel still marvels at Bowman's ability to work his magic in matching lines, something that's far more prevalent today than it was back then.

"It's unbelievable how dialed in he was, with who was coming over the boards for the opposition, what defence pair was on the ice," said Arniel. "His bench management was probably one of the best things about him. He was an outside-the-box thinker all the time about the game and that's why he lasted so long."

The opportunity to be a player/coach with the International Hockey League's Houston Aeros in 1995-96 laid the groundwork for coaching being a profession Arniel felt he could pursue.

"Then the bug really hit me. Designing practices, watching video, having your hands a little more involved in what the day-to-day business was. It just kind of grew from there," Arniel said. "In the summertime, during the last three or four years I was still playing, I would go to coaching seminars and coaching clinics."

“Whatever it was, I wanted to be a sponge. To see what I’m missing and to see what else was out there. What else can I learn to get better?”

Late in that 1995-96 season, Arniel was traded to the Utah Grizzlies — whose assistant coach and assistant general manager was Kevin Cheveldayoff.

The Grizzlies captured the Turner Cup championship that spring and Arniel wondered if it might be time to pursue coaching.

Instead, he signed with the Manitoba Moose and played three seasons in the IHL before Randy Carlyle hired him to be an assistant coach with the organization.

“I was off and running. It worked out perfectly for me,” Arniel said. “That was my way of getting into this business. It keeps me close to the game. You’re not a player, but it’s the next best thing for me. You’re still in the heat of it, you’re in the heartbeat of what’s going on around you. Staying in hockey, the way I have, has been very rewarding.”

His NHL coaching odyssey has included assistant or associate coaching jobs with the Sabres, New York Rangers and Washington Capitals — where he worked with Lindy Ruff, Alain Vigneault and Peter Laviolette, among others.

He also spent time in the American Hockey League as a head coach with the Manitoba Moose (including a run to the Calder Cup final in 2009) and Chicago Wolves along with his season-and-a-half as bench boss of the Columbus Blue Jackets from 2010 to 2012.

“Everybody has an influence on you in different ways. You take bits and pieces,” said Arniel. “So, I can’t say it’s been one person. But it’s amazing how much you take from people.”

Working with Rick Bowness the past two seasons in Winnipeg is something Arniel won’t soon forget. Bowness, who spent more than three decades as either a head, associate or assistant coach in the NHL, stepped down as the Jets coach in the spring.

“I can’t be grateful enough or say enough for how much he mentored me the last couple of years to help get me ready for this,” he said.

When reached in Florida on Tuesday, Bowness reiterated his belief that Arniel was ready to take over the reins.

“Our first (head coaching) job is always the toughest,” said Bowness. “We all make mistakes. The important thing is to recognize them and then take the steps to correct them. Arnie has been working really hard at that.

“He knows the game, he knows the X’s and O’s. His communication skills are very good. He’s honest and that’s what the players want. For you to be up front with them.”

Arniel recognizes how rare opportunities are to be an NHL head coach and he’s planning to make the most of his second chance.

Getting to do it in his adopted hometown is an obvious bonus, though he knows the hard work is just beginning.

“I didn’t take the job just to be a head coach. I took the job to win here,” said Arniel. “I know what this city has gone through, what the province has gone through. You see the Bombers having so much success and that’s awesome. You see how the city and the province rallies around them.

“I was around here a little bit in 2018 when (the Jets) went on their run (to the conference final) and it’s time for us to be one of those teams. Why can’t it be us?”

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/2024/10/08/a-tough-test-to-start-season>

***A tough test to start season
Jets expecting Oilers to bring their formidable best***

By: Mike McIntyre

EDMONTON — Forget about dipping their toes in to test the waters. The Winnipeg Jets are being tossed straight into the NHL’s deep end to start the new hockey season.

Although Game 1 of 82 is hardly sink or swim, a strong showing here on Wednesday night against a talented Edmonton Oilers team many pundits believe will be lifting Lord Stanley next spring would at least make a sizeable splash.

“We have to be ready to go,” said Scott Arniel, who will make his official Jets head coaching debut at Rogers Place.

“And it isn’t just a handful of guys on our team being their best. It’s all of our guys being ready to go. It’s all of those little details we’ve been stressing through camp, through practice. The hard work we’ve put in here the last couple of weeks, now we gotta do it on a consistent basis, shift after shift, against a really good hockey team.”

It has been 162 long days since the Jets played a meaningful game and you get the sense players and coaches are tired of talking about the past, specifically their speedy exit from the playoffs that essentially sent a terrific 2023-24 campaign swirling down the drain.

“We’re excited for this year. We’re kind of over last year,” winger Nikolaj Ehlers said following the team’s skate in Winnipeg.

“We’ve talked about it, got through it. We know what we need to do to give ourselves a better chance of being in the right place. We got the team to do it. So it’s about everyone buying in and doing the right things, the guys staying in the right mindset and having fun.”

No doubt the sight of Connor Hellebuyck in the dressing room Tuesday afternoon brought the joy level up a bit. The reigning Vezina Trophy winner had been away from the team for a few days tending to a personal family matter. but was back in time to have a quick on-ice workout with goalie coach Wade Flaherty before hopping on the charter to Edmonton.

Hellebuyck will get the start in net against Connor McDavid and company.

“The best team in the West,” is how defenceman Neal Pionk described the Oilers. “They proved it last year and they were one win away from winning the Stanley Cup. They’ve got the two best

players in the world. It's always a fun challenge and it's always a fast-paced game between us and Edmonton."

Funny thing is, the Oilers sure didn't look elite in the first few weeks of last year, going 2-9-1 in the first dozen games which led to an early coaching change as Kris Knoblauch replaced Jay Woodcroft.

Just don't go reminding the current group of the big hole they were forced to dig themselves out of — or how painfully close they came to winning it all only to fall in seven games to the Florida Panthers.

"Enough about last year. Enough about last year," a clearly irritated McDavid told Edmonton media on Tuesday.

"It's about this year. We've talked a lot about last year. A lot of questions about it. I've answered all of them. We're moving on. It's about this year. There's definitely lessons that you learn that we'll take from last year and remember this year. But last year is over and done with and we're starting a new year."

That sure sounds like a player ready to come charging out of the starting gate, doesn't it? For obvious reasons, the Jets are preparing to see the best version of their former Smythe Division rivals.

"They got off to a slow start but then they were one of the best teams in the league for that long stretch in the second half," said Arniel, who attributed much of that success to sensational special teams.

"All of a sudden, they got in that groove. We were in that groove last year as well. When you're feeling good about yourself and as a hockey team, the way you're playing night in and night out, things take care of themselves."

This is the second year in a row Winnipeg opens up in Alberta. They'll be looking for a different outcome after falling 5-3 to the Calgary Flames last October. The Jets started 1-3-0 before going on a tear and finishing 52-24-6 before losing to the Colorado Avalanche in their opening round playoff series.

Just like Edmonton, Winnipeg fancies itself a legitimate championship contender and has returned most of the same faces from a year ago.

"We're going to have to play fast. They're quick. They've got some people that can close on you," said Arniel.

"We talked about coming out of our end, our neutral zone regroup, that we're not holding onto pucks, not going D-to-D, not slowing things down. We want to play fast. We want to make them defend."

Edmonton has the NHL's oldest roster, with an average age of 30.3 based on the opening-night lineups submitted to the league. That alone tells you this veteran, experienced group is very much in "win now" mode. Winnipeg is tied for 14th-oldest at 28.6. The rebuilding Buffalo Sabres are the youngest squad at 25.3.

The Jets have lost three consecutive season openers in enemy territory, with the last triumph coming in 2018 against the St. Louis Blues.

They'll return home after this one-game trip and play the next four at Canada Life Centre, starting with Friday night's visit from the Chicago Blackhawks. The Minnesota Wild, San Jose Sharks and Pittsburgh Penguins will also be stopping in to say hello.

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/jets-season-preview-willing-running-it-back-be-a-step-forward>

JETS SEASON PREVIEW: Will running it back be a step forward?

By Scott Billeck

The Winnipeg Jets are in a weird position heading into the 2024-25 season.

Their roster isn't getting rave reviews, and predictions aren't exactly favourable. Such is the plight of a team that didn't improve, at least on paper, over the offseason.

Yet, here stands the local hockey club, ready for their season opener against the Stanley Cup runner-up Edmonton Oilers, fielding almost identically the same roster they trotted out a year ago at this time.

Before general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff started to tinker, that roster went 30-12-5, bagging nearly 70% of the available points until Sean Monahan arrived in early February.

Why wouldn't a season similar to the 52-win, 110-point, fourth-place showing last time out be in the cards?

If only it were as simple as a little cut-and-paste job.

The roster isn't an exact replica. The offseason losses are more significant than some are giving credence to. Other teams in the division have taken steps to improve. And there's no promise the Jets will encounter a similar set of variables as last year, when their defence was healthy for much of the year, and several of their players experienced career-highs statistically.

For that to happen, a lot has to go right, and they will try to improve with a less talented version of themselves.

The pressure never ceases in a Canadian market.

Last season, the Jets suffered their lowest attendance since arriving from Atlanta in 2011 and haven't given their fans much hope after crashing out of the playoffs in five games to the Colorado Avalanche.

All they achieved through 82 games meant nothing. They were eviscerated. Their top-five finish in five-on-five goal-scoring ceased after Game 1, and their brutal special teams were exploited.

And there's nothing new and shiny to be found. No top-tier prospect is breaking into the big club, not that anyone should have anticipated such a thing happening.

Since the 2018 NHL Draft, the Jets have graduated just three players (Ville Heinola, David Gustafsson and Cole Perfetti), and only two (Gustafsson and Perfetti) have seen significant games.

That left a sour taste in the mouths of some fans, who believed Cheveldayoff's proclamation of opportunity for the team's prospects on July 1 after missing his targets when free agency opened.

In fairness, opportunities were given in camp. It's debatable whether anyone came out and earned a spot. However, sending three top prospects with waiver exemptions down would always be the path of least resistance, and this team paved that road.

Let's take a look at five storylines heading into the season.

1. Can the same forward group take the next step?

If you compare Winnipeg's opening night roster from a year ago to the current one, nothing's changed up front. Not a single player.

On the one hand, this team finished tied for fifth in five-on-five goals, although their expected goal totals would have dropped them to the middle of the pack.

On the other hand, a step forward feels optimistic, especially after the team spent a first-round pick to solve their second-line centre vacancy in February and used additional picks in search of more scoring with the acquisition of Tyler Toffoli.

They knew they needed more scoring, and it was nowhere near enough when the playoffs arrived.

For now, Winnipeg is a two-scoring line, two-checking line team.

Winnipeg's top two lines (Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Gabriel Vilardi, and Vladislav Namestnikov, Nikolaj Ehlers, and Cole Perfetti) will be tasked with heavy lifting.

Vilardi, a restricted free agent next July, missed two extended portions of last year and played just 47 games. Connor also missed significant time, with a knee injury capping his games played at 65. With both healthy, they could each score 40. Vilardi will cash a big cheque if he can.

The hope is that Perfetti takes the next step and that his 19-goal, 38-point output — much of which occurred in the first half last year — not only improves a year later but doesn't hit a 23-game snag as it did in the second half.

Those who skated with the 22-year-old this summer said he looked poised to take that next step. After missing the first few days of training camp, Perfetti looked bigger, faster, and stronger.

Adam Lowry's third line, with Nino Niederreiter and Mason Appleton, needs to produce. That will depend on health. With all the injuries, the line didn't play together as much as it would have liked.

Niederreiter is a perennial 20-goal scorer who fell a couple of goals short of that mark last season. Appleton had a career year, and Lowry is always good for 10-15. They're a solid checking line with offensive upside when together.

Morgan Barron, Rasmus Kupari, and Alex Iafallo must provide more offence. Head coach Scott Arniel expects Barron to take another step, but his role is limited in Winnipeg's current configuration.

Kupari had just one assist in 28 games. Iafallo, meanwhile, put up decent numbers and can play anywhere in the lineup.

His versatility is great, but his \$4 million price tag on the fourth line isn't ideal. He may be trade fodder if the Jets aren't in a playoff spot near the deadline, with his contract expiring next July.

2. How does this team handle the losses of Dillon, Schmidt?

These two departures seem to fly under the radar.

Brenden Dillon was Winnipeg's best defender in the playoffs, a veteran who knows how to win, and one of their few players who plays physically. They miss that immensely.

Nate Schmidt's contract was too much to pay for a third-pairing guy, but Schmidt's third-pairing numbers were solid. With Dylan Samberg for much of the year, the duo had a plus-eight goal differential (19 for, 11 against) in 500-plus minutes together at five-on-five.

The hope is that Samberg's evolution will include moving into Dillon's top-four role. Samberg isn't as physical, but he's as sound defensively, if not better.

Samberg will work with Neal Pionk, who enters a contract year.

"There's guys that I'm hoping and expecting them to play bigger roles and also take on more responsibility and also mature one more year," Arniel said Monday.

The hope is that Colin Miller and Hadyn Fleury can pick up the slack, at least until Logan Stanley and Ville Heinola are healthy.

The team has high hopes in Heinola, a puck-moving blue-liner with offensive upside, including on the power play. They still believe Stanley can play a physical game befitting of someone nicknamed "Stanimal."

Miller should stick regardless. He had a great camp, has a bomb of a shot, and can play with the second unit on the power play.

That leaves Fleury and fellow offseason depth addition Dylan Coghlan to duke it out for the sixth spot each night until the injured pair return.

Winnipeg's top duo of Josh Morrissey and Dylan DeMelo remains unchanged.

They were great last year, and Morrissey is looking to take another step offensively after his 10-goal, 69-point season. That would put him back in the Norris discussion.

3. Can special teams finally be special?

The hope lies in Winnipeg's two new assistants: Davis Payne, who replaces the fired Brad Lauer running on the power play, and Dean Chynoweth, who will head up the penalty kill.

Winnipeg finished with the 22nd-ranked power play (18.8%) and the 21st-ranked penalty kill (77.1%) last year, and Colorado torched them on both sides of the ledger in the first round.

The preseason is what it is, but both the power play and penalty kill were better.

Nikolaj Ehlers is now on the top power-play unit, something fans have wanted, seemingly, for years. Playing the bumper role, the Jets looked great when they played with their top unit assembled. It was snappy, efficient and lethal.

The penalty kill is more of a power kill now, with players like Scheifele and Connor expected to see time. Aggression is kind, and with any luck, some added shorthanded scoring will come.

4. In Hellebuyck they (must) trust

If there's one truth heading into this season, it's this: the team will only go as far as their No. 1 goalie will take them.

Winnipeg's success and failure, as it has for many seasons now, rests on the shoulders of Connor Hellebuyck.

He's the reigning Vezina Trophy winner, an award he won for a second time in June after backstopping the team to a 37-19-4 record with a .921 save percentage, a 2.39 goals-against average and five shutouts.

His numbers, along with a sterling record (15-5-2, .927, 2.00) from backup Laurent Brossoit, helped Winnipeg win the William M. Jennings Trophy, given to the team that allows the fewest goals in the regular season.

Hellebuyck's workload could creep back into the mid-60s this year. Brossoit's numbers, as gaudy as they were, weren't enough to start more than 22 games.

Load management will be even more critical this season if Hellebuyck starts for the Americans at the 4 Nations Face-Off in late February.

The Jets were a solid defensive team last year, giving up a league-low 199 goals (which includes two shootout winners). To be successful, they must buy back into that defence-first mindset. It's a proven winner and a system they can trust, at least in the regular season.

Hellebuyck also played a massive part in that, saving an NHL-high 33.1 goals above expected — 11 more than his nearest competitor.

That translated into team success, with Hellebuyck's 5.52 wins above expected, nearly two ahead of second place.

His regular-season statistics are among the best of his generation. His playoff statistics are among the worst.

A Conn Smythe would look much better than a third Vezina.

5. What will it look like at the box office?

Winnipeg's attendance issues caused such a stir last season that NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman had to come and check it out for himself.

Of course, that visit was downplayed as Bettman's yearly visit to all of the NHL's 32 clubs. The timing couldn't have been worse, especially after veiled threats of the team leaving from co-owner Mark Chipman.

In reality, Bettman's visit was used for meetings with Winnipeg's corporate sector, hoping they would buy into what the Jets were selling.

We won't know what that looks like until the season's dog days.

The Jets have made several game-day improvements, including a shiny new sound system. There are all sorts of ticket packages and promo nights.

But the truth around these parts is they need a winner on the ice.

The opening night roster will not inspire ticket sales, especially since none of the team's youth hopefuls made the roster.

New speakers and giveaways only go so far in a hockey-smart market when you ask folks to spend hundreds to come to a game.

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5820367/2024/10/09/winnipeg-jets-camp-captain-special-teams/>

What we learned at Jets camp: Captain conversation, special teams revolution, more

By Murat Ates

The question posed to Winnipeg Jets captain Adam Lowry came with a prickly premise.

As the 2024-25 season begins, it seems the Jets players whose back-checks are never in question — whose defensive execution is unflappable — are not a consistent threat to hit the scoresheet. On the other hand, it seems the players whose offensive talents can take over games — most of the top six forward group, for example — are not great defensively.

Can the Jets win without addressing this imbalance between offence and defence?

Lowry's full answer was thoughtful and articulate.

"In a salary cap world, you can only have so many superstars," he said in a recent one-on-one conversation. "You task other guys to step outside of their skill set and overachieve a little.

"Every team has strengths and weaknesses. It's about how can you, as a team, as a system, get extra value out of things. When you look at two years ago to now, our defensive metrics, if I had asked you two years ago do you think we can move from 29th in inner slot shots against to

a top-10 team, did you think we had the defensive horses? I know we had the goaltending but did you think that we had enough guys to buy in?"

Full disclosure: I did not. Still, Winnipeg did improve year over year. We wrote about it at length. And the Jets gave up the fewest goals in the NHL last season.

"Individually, maybe we don't necessarily have a Connor McDavid, a Nathan MacKinnon — someone that can turn a series on its head — but that's where I think we have to double down on our systems, in our scheme," Lowry said.

Lowry then spoke to the gaps between Winnipeg last season and Winnipeg as an elite team. The Jets need to maintain last season's defensive accomplishments, which isn't necessarily a given, and they need to improve elsewhere on the ice. The Jets' special teams need to be worlds better. When teams like Colorado change the way they play — from a rush-heavy team during the season to a heavy forechecking, net-driving team in the playoffs — the Jets need to adapt.

The regular season will come with growing pains. The playoffs are a different animal altogether.

"Colorado changed their style. They became a heavy puck retrieval team. It was something — not that we were surprised — but when you watch them historically, they were a really good rush team, especially that top line," Lowry said. "Even that top line, they were willing to dump the puck, they were willing to forecheck. They won their forecheck battles. They didn't really give our D a lot of time to break the puck out. We didn't slow them down enough to give our D that chance. And they certainly won the special teams battle."

We spend a lot of time at The Athletic playing with the concept of "optimal." Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Gabriel Vilardi are great offensive players, for example — and can each contribute in certain defensive roles, to varying extents — but when they played together last season the Jets were outscored.

Winnipeg's top line didn't get as many pucks out of their own zone as they needed to (and it was a trouble spot again during preseason.) Even with better health and more familiarity in year two, there is no guarantee Scheifele's line wins its minutes.

So we poke. We prod. We write essays about how Scheifele's numbers — not analytics, but the number of real goals he creates and the number of goals other teams score against the Jets — get better when Nikolaj Ehlers plays on his line. We try to rearrange the Jets' lines and pairings in a way that supports the numbers we dig up. As journalists and as fans, we play armchair GM — and to be clear, I don't want us to stop. There is a ton of passion, intelligence, and creativity that go into the lineup debates.

But it's not a game that Lowry plays. Nor should it be.

"That's not my place as the player. Coaches get paid a lot of money (and) managers get paid a lot of money to put out what they think is the best lineup, what they think is the most optimal. They might ask for your input but I don't think that it's our job to be going down there and requesting things. We show up at the rink, we see the lineup, and we go out and try to perform to the best of our ability," Lowry said.

“The more you start playing armchair GM, the more you get lost on your process — you coming to the rink to work on your game, to make yourself better, to make your team better. You sometimes take away from that buy-in. You don’t want to be sitting there thinking you should be playing more than ‘X’ guy, or why aren’t you getting this opportunity? I think it’s important that you come in, you’re happy for your teammates and you try to push each other every day — either for more ice time or special teams — and make sure you’re ready to take advantage of it.”

On paper, the Jets are a probable playoff team without an inside track to Stanley Cup contention. Their defence took a hit over the offseason. They could use a bona fide second line centre — an admittedly familiar Jets sentiment — to supplement Scheifele’s offence. They will need to push each other the way Lowry describes if they are going to move beyond the first round of the playoffs for the first time since 2021.

But that’s the exciting thing about this time of year. If Winnipeg goes on to great success this season, the finished product will make the Jets look like more than the sum of their parts. Lowry is right to say we underestimated their growth potential two years ago.

Could we be underestimating them again? Now that we know their day-one roster, let’s start with a look at the biggest takeaways from camp.

1. These Jets are those Jets

The 13 forwards on the chart above are exactly the same 13 forwards that opened last season with the Jets. The defence has promoted Dylan Samberg into Brenden Dillon’s old spot, while Haydn Fleury and Colin Miller make a new third pair. Ville Heinola and Logan Stanley will compete to take Fleury’s job when the team is at full health. The backup goaltender has changed from Laurent Brossoit to one of Kaapo Kahkonen or Eric Comrie, both of whom will be in Edmonton for the season opener along with Connor Hellebuyck.

How far did you make it through that paragraph?

There is a gut reaction resonating through parts of Jets fandom right now. How are these Jets supposed to be any better than those Jets — the ones who followed their 110-point regular season with such a poor playoff performance? Didn’t Kevin Cheveldayoff promise exciting opportunities for Winnipeg’s young players? Was that just a shot across the bow of Rutger McGroarty, whose lack of path to NHL playing time appeared to play a role in his desire to exit Winnipeg?

McGroarty opens the season on the Penguins roster. Brad Lambert, Nikita Chibrikov and Elias Salomonsson begin with the Moose. Apart from injuries to defencemen Ville Heinola and Logan Stanley, Winnipeg’s opening day roster is exactly the one we projected in July.

The counterargument to these complaints comes in the form of last year’s Jets success. As I told Lowry, I didn’t think the Jets had it in them to be a top defensive team or win the Jennings Trophy with the roster they had on hand. Winnipeg opened the season with a nearly identical roster to this one, led the West for large portions of the season and finished fourth in the NHL with 110 points. Clearly success — of the regular-season variety — is well within their grasp.

One note I’ll make on the Jets’ youth: Lambert and Salomonsson played in four preseason games. Chibrikov played in three. While I saw growth in all three players’ games, I don’t think it’s unreasonable for them to start the season in the AHL. And I don’t think McGroarty would have made this team.

2. Regular-season success will be harder to come by. It's also not the point.

Let's approach this back-and-forth from a different perspective. If you were Scott Arniel, a part of the regime that helped Winnipeg improve its team defence in back-to-back seasons, how would you approach the problem of making it successful again as head coach?

You'd want to consolidate the things the Jets were great at during the regular season: five-on-five team defence and Hellebuyck's goaltending excellence. You'd want to size up their biggest weaknesses — the power play and the penalty kill — and do what you could to stop them from letting the air out of team success. And you'd want to find a way to solve whatever issues led to such a stunning first-round collapse.

It's clear Arniel believes in Connor, Scheifele, and Vilardi as a top line. He's optimistic good health and a second year together as a trio will improve their defensive shortcomings. (Recall Winnipeg reached the top of the standings with Ehlers, Scheifele and Vilardi as their top line. It seems possible they're leaving goals on the table by continuing the CSV experiment.) The degree to which his bet on that line pays off — or doesn't — will go a long way towards whether Arniel's Jets can consolidate the defensive improvements they made over the past two seasons. He's going to need to be able to adapt and move off that trio if the results don't follow the hope.

The Jets' biggest challenges might not come from within, though. Put plainly, there are fewer freebies waiting for Winnipeg on their divisional schedule. Nashville, St. Louis, Utah and Chicago all got better this offseason. It's going to be harder to run the table against those teams, making regular-season success more difficult to come by. No one will care if the Jets slide down the standings — as long as they make it out of Round 1 — and Arniel's biggest challenge is to instill a culture of resilience in the face of tough times.

3. The power play is better, but what makes it so?

There is an item missing from most of our discussion about the Jets' power play.

We've been talking about Nikolaj Ehlers as though he's in the bumper position (or "pop" position, as the Jets are calling it this year.)

That's all well and good. He has a good shot and will score if he gets his looks from that spot — and he will get his looks if Scheifele and Vilardi continue their excellence. But watch Ehlers for the full duration of this clip, not just the moment he scores:

Ehlers isn't in the bumper position for the full duration of the play. That's because the Jets have multiple looks on the power play this year. They change looks depending on who has the puck where and what they're reading in front of them.

Ehlers heads into the corner after the initial shot in the clip. Winnipeg recovers the puck and the most important thing to watch is how Ehlers moves into the slot before his goal. When he moves from the top of the crease into the slot, he does so behind the Flames defenceman — who doesn't shoulder-check — and he stops before he gets to the low Flames forward.

In this moment, he illustrates why it's so important for the Jets to move on the power play. In this case, Ehlers has snuck into his spot mostly undetected, but even if the defenceman saw Ehlers approach the slot, his movement would create a decision to make: how high does the defenceman track him? How low does the forward move? These decisions are the types of

things that open up seams — and they're only possible because the Jets skaters are interchanging positions as quickly and intelligently as they do in this clip.

The Jets will have multiple, changing set-ups as they attack from the top of the zone, both flanks and from behind the goal line. I've seen it often enough in practice now to believe they're headed for a substantial improvement vs. what we saw last year.

4. Net-front defence, zone exits will be the Jets' biggest challenge

Winnipeg gave up its preseason goals the same way it gave up goals in the playoffs.

When opposing teams pinched their defencemen up the ice, taking away time and space on the Jets' breakouts, Winnipeg struggled to get the puck out of its own zone. The Jets played long shifts inside their own end because their breakouts were cut short — whether after the first pass inside the zone, at the Jets' blue line or as they tried to carry the puck up ice. We saw that against Colorado to the point of dominance; a less-discussed part of Dillon's exit is the loss of his puck-moving skills in addition to his toughness.

The Jets' new-look PK gave up five goals in six preseason games, continuing last year's playoff tradition of making life tough on the goaltender. It seems one way to score on Winnipeg is to float a shot into the slot for a high-slot deflection.

"If you want to look at our PK it was softer from the point with screen and tip, and they had a couple of those," Hellebuyck said after the playoffs last year. "Another one is they would bring a four-man rush and post up at the corner of the blue line and flip it over to a D-man coming in just with open space. Those two right there accounted for a good portion of the goals, and then tips, but I mean that's kind of the same as the PK."

That hasn't changed. When the Jets talk about boxouts, they focus on timing. They want to pick up their opponents while they're still moving; as hard as it is to defend Leon Draisaitl or Mikko Rantanen at pace, they're next to impossible to move once they're already planted. If Josh Morrissey or Neal Pionk or Dylan DeMelo or Dylan Samberg can engage with top forwards before they get established — and, most importantly, take away their stick — it will take away some of the net-front goals we've seen beat Winnipeg in recent history.

It's hard for me to imagine the Jets don't add a defenceman if they're contending for the playoffs by midseason. The team is too good and the defence looks too troubled — on paper in both cases — to miss a chance to upgrade.

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/10801778/winnipeg-jets-arena-experience-upgrades/>

Winnipeg Jets fans in for new show with upgrades to venue, in-game experiences

By Daisy Woelk Global News

True North Sports and Entertainment (TNSE) is making a breakaway from the old, and looking to score with fans by creating new game-day experiences and venue updates this Winnipeg Jets season.

For starters, it's going to be a lot easier for fans to "jet" into the arena with a new security system.

"You can just walk right through and the system will flag you... if there's anything that's a threat on you. From a security perspective, if there is, then there's a secondary security screening that they would have to go through," said Dawn Haus, the senior vice president of culture and guest experience at TNSE.

She said the AI-assisted system is designed to maximize safety as well as flow into the arena.

"We used to experience lengthy lineups in our vestibules, and people would have to go through and wait for quite a while before that they could come into the building. Now we expect that those really long lines, and long waits, will be alleviated because most people are going to just be able to walk right through."

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While it's a rookie concept to the Canada Life Centre, she said it's already proved itself at pre-season games and concerts.

"We still have items that we identify that cannot be coming into the building. And the system does pick that up and has been caught through security screening," she said.

Once fans make it past security, they'll notice other additions to the arena's roster, including two new concession stands: Carvery Sandwiches and The Sweet Spot.

"We're ever changing with everybody else's changes or trends as far as what we enjoy to eat, we don't want to eat the same thing every day," said TNSE's executive head chef, Richard Duncan. But, he added, the classics haven't been retired.

"If you want burgers, you want the Jet dog, we still have all those offerings, of course."

Once in the arena, fans will be rocked by a Zamboni-fresh sound system with 120 speakers, and a new house band called "Mach 10."

"During the intermissions of the past, it's been a lot of videos and kind of just a theater. But now we've got a bit of a party and the intermissions and the pregame. Nothing like live entertainment there rocking the house," said Kyle Balharry, TNSE's senior director of game presentation.

The switch to the new sound system from the previous 12-year-old one, was made using survey feedback from fans, he said.

"One of the things that keeps coming up is the clarity of the sound in the facility. So we decided to really upgrade the system, give the fans what they want and also the players. It just sounds unbelievable in here now," he said.

Fans will be able to experience all these changes — and more — come puck drop for the Jets' home-opener this Friday, when the team takes on the Chicago Blackhawks.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/10802543/analysis-winnipeg-jets-season-begins-playoffs/>

ANALYSIS: No big off-season splashes, but Jets still poised for success

By Paul Edmonds CJOB

Depending on where you source your information, the Winnipeg Jets are either an easy pick to make the playoffs this season or an equally simple prediction to miss them. There doesn't seem to be any grey area around their finish, according to most pundits.

But as an old NHL coach once said, never confuse activity for achievement. Just because Winnipeg didn't make a summer splash in tinkering with its team via trade or free agency this off-season as others in the division did — like Nashville and Utah — that doesn't at all forecast a falling-off point for the Jets this year either.

For Winnipeg, it all begins in goal with Connor Hellebuyck. Having a two-time Vezina Trophy winner behind you is a starting point the envy of most across the NHL.

As a team, the Jets have been consistent in scoring goals the last three seasons and have shown a marked improvement for two straight years in preventing them. They were the only squad last season to allow fewer than 200 goals against.

In addition to Hellebuyck, the Jets' core consists of six players that have played together for the past seven seasons, growing and maturing into a veteran-laden group with an improved culture and a burning desire to get over the first-round playoff hump together.

And while their head coach, Scott Arniel, might technically be new, his fingerprints have been all over this club for the last two years as an associate. And with a pair of specialized assistants focused on improving the special teams, nothing remotely suggests the Jets are headed for a significant downturn.

Now, it might not be a franchise record 52-win season as it was last year, but the Jets will, indeed, make the playoffs again this season — a third straight, for the record.

And depending on where you source your information, at least from this chair, understanding what we see and sense, there's no grey area in making that prediction.

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/5-questions-winnipeg-jets-must-answer-as-new-season-arrives/>

5 questions Winnipeg Jets must answer as new season arrives

By Jacob Stoller

WINNIPEG — Which version of the Winnipeg Jets will we see this year?

Will it be a magical run like in 2017-18, when they reached the Western Conference Final? A complete dud of a year like the 2021-22 season, which ended without a taste of the playoffs? Or a disappointing and painful first-round exit, like we saw each of the last two years?

The journey to answering that question starts Wednesday night.

But first, these five questions are at the forefront for the Jets as they embark on the 2024-25 season.

Will Winnipeg adjust Hellebuyck's workload?

As always, Winnipeg's season hinges on Connor Hellebuyck.

The "As long as you have Connor Hellebuyck, you have a chance to contend," trope is recycled annually by pundits when sizing up Winnipeg's Stanley Cup aspirations.

The two-time Vezina trophy winner is the last of a dying breed — a netminder who continuously shoulders nearly 80 per cent of his team's games and posts elite results. Since 2017-18, no goalie has played more games (423) and faced more shots than Hellebuyck (13,147). And it's not even close.

That's a lot of wear and tear for any netminder, even one as prolific as Hellebuyck. Can the Jets reasonably expect Hellebuyck to dominate in the playoffs after playing 60-plus regular season games? One ought to think fatigue played a part in him posting a .878 save percentage in his 10 playoff starts over the last two years. And given that he'll probably suit up for Team USA at the 4 Nations Face-off in February, Hellebuyck's 2024-25 regular season workload is going to be heavier than usual.

But the real question is — would Hellebuyck be receptive to taking the odd game or two off, even if it's not the second half of a back-to-back, from time to time?

The 31-year-old's seven-year contract extension kicks in this season. And he's not getting any younger.

Can Kaapo Kahkonen be a serviceable backup?

Head coach Scott Arniel isn't going to be comfortable giving Hellebuyck extra nights off if Kaapo Kahkonen can't be trusted.

The 28-year-old Finnish netminder's career stats are nothing to write home about — registering a .899 save percentage through 139 NHL games — but he's had some encouraging moments. Kahkonen made his debut with the Minnesota Wild, posting a .907 save percentage in his first 54 games. He ultimately faded into the background once he joined the San Jose Sharks midway through the 2021-22 season, registering an .892 save percentage in 79 games across the last two-and-a-half years.

But unbeknownst to many, Kahkonen looked pretty darn sharp during a brief stint with the New Jersey Devils last year. He posted a .923 save percentage in six contests — four of which came against playoff teams.

Subtract that period where he was lit up like a Christmas tree in San Jose and Kahkonen has been pretty decent at the NHL level, tallying a .908 save percentage in 60 career games split between Minnesota and New Jersey.

Not a bad guy to take a flier on, especially on a one-year, \$1 million contract.

Will Scheifele and Connor elevate their defensive games?

The Jets are asking Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor to make an impact in unfamiliar territory.

Arniel has placed his two-star forwards on the team's second-penalty kill unit. While the move adds a different layer to their penalty kill, it also serves a dual purpose — it forces the duo to be more defensively conscious.

Dating back to the 2021-22 season, Scheifele and Connor rank in the fourth and eighth percentile, respectively, in five-on-five expected goals against per 60 among forwards that played at least 100 minutes, according to NaturalStatTrick.

Winnipeg's two most decorated forwards are extremely cerebral. And their experience on the other side of the special teams equation will be a huge help.

"As a power-play guy, you kind of know what the other team is trying to accomplish," Scheifele told reporters last week. "So, you have kind of an idea of what their routes might be, what their options might be, and being able to jump on that opportunity."

Will Perfetti, Samberg and Heinola take the next step?

Maybe general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff wasn't talking about Brad Lambert, Nikita Chibrikov and Elias Salomonsson when he spoke back on July 1 about opportunities being up for grabs.

"We talk about roles and guys taking on responsibility, young guys stepping up — we still have Dylan Samberg jumping into the number four (defencemen) spot. We've got Cole Perfetti that we're expecting a lot from. We've got Ville Heinola, when he gets back here," Arniel told reporters on Monday.

Touche.

Samberg, 25, is probably a little too old to be considered a 'young guy' but he's played just 156 career NHL games and has predominantly played in a bottom-pairing role. Until now. His emergence alongside Neal Pionk on the team's second pair is the x-factor to Winnipeg offsetting the loss of Brenden Dillon.

Perfetti, 22, is coming off a roller-coaster sophomore NHL season where went from being a top-six regular, to bottom-six forward to eventually being a press-box regular at the tail-end of the year and for most of the playoffs. A left-shot, he is situated on his off-side adjacent to Nikolaj Ehlers to start the season. Perfetti solidifying himself as a top-six forward is the key to ensuring the Jets' second line isn't just 'Ehlers & the other guys,' but rather, a formidable top-six line in of itself.

Heinola, 23, seems to have the inside track on the team's sixth defencemen spot once he's healthy again. The Jets' 2019 first-round pick has yet to get much runway at the NHL level but the smooth-skating, puck-moving defencemen could add some flavour to the team's third pair alongside Colin Miller. The Jets could use another capable puck-mover on the backend. And if Heinola is an absolute stud, adding a player of his ilk to the top four would be a win (although it's unlikely Arniel would give him that role over the bigger-bodied Samberg, no matter how well he plays).

Will Nikolaj Ehlers sign a new contract?

Ehlers isn't saying a peep about his contract situation. While Cheveldayoff has pulled a rabbit out of a hat before with the Scheifele and Hellebuyck signings from last year, an Ehlers

extension feels even more unlikely than the latter two's extensions did at the time. The 28-year-old is closing in on a decade in Manitoba's capital that's seen him rarely get first-line usage. It's hard to imagine him resisting the temptation of being wined and dined in free agency.

If the Jets are comfortably near or at the top of the central division, they're obviously not trading Ehlers — but what if they're in a race for a wild-card spot?

Jets owner Mark Chipman has made it clear that the Jets won't be rebuilding, however, if the team knows Ehlers is good-as-gone and they're not comfortably in a playoff spot— will they keep him and let him walk away for nothing?

Food for thought: In the event, the Jets are still relatively in the mix for a playoff spot, the emergence of Brad Lambert could make the Jets more comfortable with moving Ehlers mid-year. Winnipeg needs to sell tickets and while Ehlers is a proven commodity, the allure of Lambert's potential could bring more fans in the building. There's a lot of people in town that want to see more youth on the roster.