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<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/12/09/jets-struggle-without-ehlers>

Jets struggle without Ehlers Results while dynamic winger injured make case for re-signing pending UFA

By: Mike McIntyre

The Winnipeg Jets have been getting a glimpse of life without Nikolaj Ehlers lately as the flashy winger remains sidelined with a lower-body injury.

It hasn't been pretty.

They've only won two of the (mostly) six games he's missed, scoring just 13 goals in the process. The power play has gone from potent to punchless in the form of an ugly two-for-18 rut.

In three of the four Winnipeg losses — in Vegas (the game Ehlers got hurt), in Dallas and on Sunday at home against Columbus — the score was tied in the third period, the outcome still very much up for grabs. Those are ones where a game-breaker like Ehlers can be so valuable. Instead, the Jets came away with nothing.

Might they have been able to snatch a victory or two along the way if Ehlers was in the lineup? We'll never know, but it certainly would have increased their odds.

Ehlers, 28, was off to a terrific start and on track to have the best season of his now decade-long career, with 25 points (9G, 16A) in his first 24 games. He's never been a point-per-game player, coming closest during the COVID-impacted campaign in 2021 with 46 points (21G, 25A) in 47 games.

When he's healthy — and that's unfortunately been an issue now in parts of five different years even though he did play all 82 last year — Ehlers is as dynamic as they come, with a mix of speed and skill and savvy instinct that is hard to replace. Impossible, really.

When it comes to the power play, Ehlers was feasting in the "pop" position and was a major reason the Jets had the No. 1 unit in the league. Without him, those numbers have taken a hit as they often struggle even to gain entry into the offensive zone and get set up.

Cole Perfetti has replaced him on the top unit and simply doesn't have the experience, nor the speed, to replicate what he does. Ehlers is never afraid to shoot the puck, either, and the Jets have been guilty of over-passing and trying to get too cute at times in his absence.

At five-on-five, Brad Lambert was summoned from the Manitoba Moose to take Ehlers' spot beside Perfetti and Vlad Namestnikov. Although he showed some promising glimpses — the dynamic Lambert might be the closest thing the Jets have to a reasonable facsimile of Ehlers — the 20-year-old didn't record a point in four games and was sent back to the AHL on Monday afternoon.

Nikita Chibrikov, 21, was called up to take his spot, and the Moose's leading scorer (13 points in 19 games) appears next in line to try to help fill the void.

Ehlers is in the final year of his seven-year, US\$42-million contract and set to become an unrestricted free agent next July 1. A compelling argument can be made that seeing how the team looks without him lately has increased his value. No doubt his agent will have that mindset.

A multi-game stretch without Ehlers in November and December is one thing. Are the Jets prepared to absorb his loss for good? If so, how?

It's impossible to predict how this might play out. Other drafted-and-developed core players such as Mark Scheifele, Connor Hellebuyck, Josh Morrissey and Kyle Connor never got to the point of playing a single game in their pending UFA seasons as they inked lengthy contract extensions.

In that sense, has this already reached the point of no return for Ehlers, the ninth-overall pick from 2014?

The Jets did lock up trade addition Nino Niederreiter last December after he'd played a couple months in the final year of his deal, so perhaps that could happen with Ehlers.

It's also possible the Jets simply let this play out, the way they did with defenceman Dylan DeMelo last year, and then re-engage before he can hit the open market. Of course, you need two to tango, and there's no telling how Ehlers feels about all of this. He's brushed off questions since training camp about the issue and clearly has no interest in discussing it publicly.

One thing is clear: With the salary cap set to rise significantly, Winnipeg should have no problems finding a way to make the money work.

With the Jets still in great shape at 20-9-0 overall, we can probably rule out moving Ehlers at the trade deadline, the way they did with UFA Andrew Copp a few seasons ago when they were not in the playoff race. The worst-case scenario here is they use him as their own "rental," even if it ultimately means getting no assets in return should he eventually sign with another club.

Ehlers has plenty of company, as forwards Namestnikov, Mason Appleton and Alex Iafallo and defencemen Neal Pionk, Haydn Fleury and Dylan Coghlan are also pending UFAs. If nothing else, that's a lot of motivated skaters who are playing for their next contracts.

The good news for the Jets is their sizzling start to the year, winning 15 of the first 16 games, gave them plenty of cushion to absorb some bumps along the way such as the temporary loss of Ehlers, who went down awkwardly after trying to hit Golden Knights forward Pavel Dorofeyev on Nov. 30.

There's also hope that his absence won't extend much longer. Initially listed as day-to-day, he was placed on injured reserve last week but is eligible to come off at any time now. Following the 4-1 defeat to the Blue Jackets to open a four-game homestand, coach Scott Arniel was asked by the Free Press for an update.

"There'll be a chance he might be skating this week. We'll see," he said. "Good chance he'll be out on the ice this week."

The Jets took Monday off after a busy stretch which saw them play 10 times over a 17-day stretch. In addition to losing Ehlers, shutdown defenceman Dylan Samberg also suffered a broken foot and is out at least another couple of weeks, while the likes of Scheifele, Namestnikov and DeMelo have been playing through various ailments.

With just three games now over an eight-day span, it's a good chance to rest up and hopefully heal up.

The Jets will return to the ice on Tuesday as they host the Boston Bruins. Might Ehlers be ready to at least take a twirl at the morning skate? Winnipeg also has practices set for Wednesday and Friday this week in between games against Vegas (Thursday) and the Montreal Canadiens (Saturday).

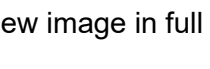
Absence makes the heart grow fonder, and the Jets (and their fans) should certainly be pining for the speedy return of the guy known as "Fly."

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/10908370/winnipeg-jets-analysis-haydn-fleury/>

ANALYSIS: Jets' Haydn Fleury plays unexpectedly important role

By Kelly Moore Global News

ANALYSIS: Jets' Haydn Fleury plays unexpectedly important role - 

Winnipeg Jets head coach Scott Arniel spoke about organizational depth almost from the moment training camp began back in mid-September. One player in particular has stood out in that regard.

Let's be totally honest here: when Winnipeg announced the signing of free agent defenceman Haydn Fleury shortly after the July 1 frenzy abated, was there a single member of Jets Nation who opined the well-travelled veteran was going to be a good pickup for the team?

The seventh overall pick by Carolina in 2014 had the first of several doors of opportunity swing his way when Ville Heinola had to have an infected ankle repaired as camp was just getting started.

In week two, Logan Stanley required surgery for a meniscus tear but returned ahead of schedule four games into the regular season — and Fleury took a seat in the press box.

When "The Stanimal" suffered a mysterious 'mid-body injury' less than a month later, Haydn Fleury returned to active duty Nov. 12 in New York — and has played in all 14 games since, the last seven after being elevated to a top-four role when Dylan Samberg suffered a broken foot blocking a Steve Stamkos slapper in Nashville. There was that door of opportunity again.

In those seven games, the easy-to-cheer-for 28-year-old from Lloydminster — the Alberta side, we're told — has set up four goals, including a couple on deflections by Gabe Vilardi and Adam Lowry.

Fleury has also picked up some of the slack in Samberg's specialty with 16 blocked shots.

The past few games in particular, the six-foot-four-inch, 207-pound rearguard has skated with a quite noticeable growing level of confidence.

Little did we know back on July 4 what level of importance the signing of Haydn Fleury was going to have on the Winnipeg Jets.

Five-plus months later, I think we could agree, it has been impactful to say the least.

CTV Winnipeg

<https://www.chrisd.ca/2024/12/08/winnipeg-jets-columbus-blue-jackets-game-story-loss/>

Bob Odenkirk makes an appearance at the Winnipeg Jets game

By Devon McKendrick

Another day, another moment of Bob Odenkirk enjoying what Winnipeg and Manitoba have to offer.

The Better Call Saul and Nobody star was seen taking in the Winnipeg Jets game Sunday evening.

A celebrity lookalike game on the jumbotron was being played, and the last clip showed Odenkirk sitting in the crowd while an image of Jimmy McGill, his character in Better Call Saul, was shown next to him on screen.

Odenkirk, decked out in a Jets hat and sweater, gave a thumbs up and a small wave to the fans.

Manitoba has become Odenkirk's second home in 2024. He was originally here in the summer filming Nobody 2, a sequel to the 2021 action flick that was also shot in the province.

Now, he is filming Normal, a movie about a man being thrust into becoming the sheriff of a small town after the previous one's untimely death.

The movie is expected to shoot until mid-December.

The Jets game wasn't Odenkirk's only sporting event appearance while in Winnipeg. He also threw out the first pitch at a Winnipeg Goldeyes game in the summer.