

The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2024/dec/02/the-jets-are-the-nhls-hottest-team-so-why-cant-they-fill-their-arena>

The Jets are the NHL's hottest team. So why can't they fill their arena?

By Colin Horgan

“From our standpoint, the game has never been healthier,” NHL commissioner Gary Bettman told CNBC in November. He had stopped into the network’s Times Square studio to talk about the latest team valuations and the league’s future TV and streaming deals. The outlook for both is broadly good. “Our competitive balance, how good the game is, is what’s fuelling ratings, attendance, partnership growth in terms of sponsorships – the whole package is working together,” Bettman continued. All of which is mostly true, except for when it comes to the NHL’s best team, the Winnipeg Jets.

To be clear, the Jets – valued at just over \$1bn – are excellent where it should really count: on the ice. Winnipeg have surprised most with their hot start this season. The Jets went 18-6-0 through the end of November and sit atop the Western Conference and the league. The 2024-25 Jets are the fastest team to reach 15 wins in a season and also the first team in NHL history to win 14 of their first 15 games. A solid team for many seasons on defence and in goal, the Jets have now found their scoring touch, outscoring opponents 94 to 63. It’s an exciting time to be a Jets fan, with seemingly few reasons not to watch each game day.

Yet, the Jets are struggling to get sell-out home crowds. With room for 15,321 for an NHL game, the Jets were only averaging around 13,760 fans per game in mid-November, according to one tally. That’s up from their average last season – 13,490 – but still short of where the best team in the league might expect to be. But this has been the story in Winnipeg for years. Ever since the NHL returned from the Covid-19 pandemic-imposed break, the Jets can’t fill seats, despite icing playoff-bound teams. It’s been a marked departure from the prior nine seasons, each of which the Jets played to capacity or over-capacity home crowds. What changed for Winnipeg? In a weird way, nothing.

“It’s one of the questions I get asked most often when talking to people across Canada about the possible return of the NHL to Winnipeg. Could we support it by selling out the building every night and generating enough corporate support?” Paul Friesen wrote for the Winnipeg Sun in April 2011, shortly before the Thrashers left Atlanta for Winnipeg to become the new Jets. “Short-term, yeah, I believe we could,” he wrote. But “long-term support for the NHL here is another kettle of fish. Two keys to any NHL franchise are the sale of seats and suites.” Friesen concluded that the corporate money would be there, but that ticket prices for regular fans would be too high.

The opposite occurred. Upon their return, the Jets prioritized ticket sales to fans, including those who’d held tickets for the Manitoba Moose, the AHL team that had moved into the Jets’ old home arena. Thousands more joined an online ticket queue. The team sold 13,500 season tickets in three minutes. “Mark Chipman and David Thomson may have signed the \$170m cheque to bring the NHL back to Winnipeg, but the team’s real owners are its fans,” the Sun crowed. Indeed, when the paper polled readers that spring, the majority (65.3%) said they’d got their season tickets in the online rush. Twenty percent had been Moose season ticket holders. Just 6.6% said their employer had been a Moose corporate sponsor.

For nine years of sell-out hockey, the corporate money didn't seem to matter. But, over time prices steadily rose, for tickets and at the concessions, and the season ticket base dwindled. The Covid-19 pandemic made everything worse, as Winnipeggers, like many others, were hit hard by inflation. Between the return of the NHL after the pandemic and last spring, the once 13,500-strong season-ticket base was down to just 9,500. Jets owner Mark Chipman told The Athletic in February, months after the team's ownership group, True North Sports and Entertainment (TNSE), had begun pushing business leaders in Winnipeg to promote season tickets, that those numbers were still not high enough. "I wouldn't be honest with you if I didn't say, 'We've got to get back to 13,000,'" Chipman said. "This place we find ourselves in right now, it's not going to work over the long haul." It sounded like a threat.

So far, the only place the Jets look like they're headed is to the playoffs. And the ticket sales are, apparently, improving. "We are seeing growing momentum in the business community with respect to season ticket memberships," Krista Sinaisky, a TNSE spokesperson, told the Guardian via email in November. The Jets "are not relying on just any one strategy" to get the team back to 13,000 season ticket holders, Sinaisky wrote, adding that "we are focused on selling more tickets to the business community and are developing new ticket packages tailored to companies of all sizes" – an initiative Sinaisky said that "will be launched in the coming weeks."

It's not over for the Jets – far from it. And, for the record, Bettman isn't worried. Shortly after Chipman's comments last winter, Bettman arrived in Winnipeg to woo the corporate types. "I'm not sure why people are now speculating that somehow we're not going to be here," Bettman wondered aloud in a news conference. "We're not operating under the sword of Damocles or on a razor's edge," he said. But he's wrong, there. Every NHL team, like most major sports franchises, struggles with a dual identity, existing simultaneously as both a soulless corporate entity fixated on profits, revenue, ebitda, and debt – that is, the things that get you on CNBC – and as a much more human enterprise, embodying hope, joy, sadness, and community. You could argue the Jets, by virtue of their dedication to their fan support, represent a more human franchise than others. But because of that, the edge they ride is very real, and thinner than most.

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/12/02/jets-hit-patch-of-turbulence-but-not-hitting-panic-button>

Winnipeg Jets hit patch of turbulence, but not hitting panic button

By: Mike McIntyre

A rough patch? No question. Regression to the mean? That remains to be seen.

However you wish to describe it, the last few weeks have not been kind to the Winnipeg Jets. The losses are starting to pile up — a season-worst three-in-a-row, and six over the last nine games.

The injuries are piling too. Shutdown defenceman Dylan Samberg is out indefinitely with a broken foot. Flashy winger Nikolaj Ehlers is in the hands of doctors for his lower-body issue. Top

two centres, Mark Scheifele and Vlad Namestnikov, are clearly playing through ailments. We believe another top defenceman, Dylan DeMelo, is as well.

Throw in a road-heavy schedule spanning three time zones that has shown no mercy — the Jets have had to board an airplane after 11 straight games, and they'll do that three more times this week before they can finally unpack their bags and settle in the same city for more than one outing — and this can officially be classified as a significant stretch of turbulence.

Time to hit the panic button? Hardly.

We knew this was going to happen at some point. The Jets weren't simply going to cruise through the entire season without some bumps along the way. Fortunately for them, a historic 15-1-0 start that had them flying in NHL first class helps absorb the current dip.

Now the key is making sure this doesn't spiral out of control, starting with Tuesday's one-game "homestand" against the St. Louis Blues.

Based on up-close observations over the just-completed six-game journey, here are six keys to getting back on track.

1. Paging the top line

It was not a good road trip for the trio of Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Gabe Vilardi.

Scheifele had twice as many minor penalties (four) as points (two), and his two assists were both secondary ones on empty-net goals. He only had nine shots in the six games and was a minus-four.

After starting off strong in Pittsburgh with his first-ever Gordie Howe hat trick, Connor went quiet with no goals and just three assists in the following five games. Vilardi also scored against the Penguins, then just had one goal (on the power play in the 4-1 defeat to Los Angeles) the rest of the way.

Add it all up and that's not nearly enough for the trio, who were repeatedly outclassed by the brightest stars of their opponents.

Coach Scott Arniel actually took Vilardi off the line late in Sunday's 3-1 loss in Dallas, replacing him with Namestnikov. That likely was just temporary, but changes could be coming if the top line can't get out of neutral. These are proud players and leaders, so we shouldn't expect this to last much longer.

2. Power outage

The Jets could compensate for a quiet stretch from the big guns if other areas of the game were clicking. Specifically, a power play that was the toast of the league through the first month.

It's now gone cold (2-for-14 over the last five games) as teams seem to have figured out what the Jets are up to. That includes 0-for-5 in the last two losses where the game was still very much for grabs and a timely goal, or two, could have turned losses into wins.

One of the biggest issues lately has been gaining the offensive zone and getting set up, with the Jets often spending a good chunk of the two minutes trying to establish control. The absence of Ehlers is certainly felt, but others need to step up and adjustments have to be made.

3. The need for speed

You know what really stood out Sunday? How slow the Jets looked as a team. Obviously missing Ehlers played a role, but it just seemed like the majority of players — with the notable exception of Rasmus Kupari — had heavy legs and were skating in quicksand.

Winnipeg wanted to play faster this year, and they have for the most part, which has helped them come at opponents in waves. Hopefully a bit of rest and recovery can provide a much-needed recharge.

Scratching a smooth-skater like Ville Heinola in favour of someone like Logan Stanley doesn't help matters, either.

4. Oh, what a rush

The snail's pace of Winnipeg's recent play has been in sharp contrast to how the Golden Knights and Stars burned them repeatedly off the rush — including the game-winning goals late in the third period on Friday and Sunday. That's something the Jets need to clean up. And fast.

Whether it's smarter defensive reads, removing some degree of risk or having forwards do a better job of helping out, this is likely a major area of video review and discussion right now.

5. Practice makes less imperfect?

Winnipeg has had one practice in the last dozen days. That's sub-optimal, especially when certain aspects of the game start going south and some fine-tuning is required.

It could have been two, but Arniel cancelled a planned skate last Tuesday in Los Angeles to give his group a bit of an extra breather. It backfired, as the Jets came out the next day with arguably their worst outing the year, mustering just 14 shots. Following the game, Arniel blamed himself, suggesting he hadn't done a good enough job of getting his group ready.

The Jets did practice Thursday in Las Vegas, and they've at least responded with two stronger efforts, albeit still in a losing fashion.

Although the Jets have four games in the next six days beginning Tuesday, there are skates planned for Wednesday (prior to flying to Buffalo) and Friday (prior to back-to-back weekend games in Chicago and then at home to Columbus).

Given the current state of their game, those could be valuable.

6. Be patient

All things must pass, and the Jets are getting close to the light at the end of the tunnel. Yes, they'll continue to play at least every other day through Dec. 14, but at least they get a stretch of four straight at home beginning Sunday. At that point, Winnipeg will have played 11 of 13 in enemy territory, spanning three time zones.

There's still much to like about this group, along with plenty of talent and depth.

No doubt the Jets hope that once the schedule lightens up a bit — both in terms of quantity of games and also quality of opponents — they can start taking advantage and, perhaps, heal some of those nagging bumps and bruises before they become bigger issues.

Despite this recent swoon, the sky isn't falling. Just as the Jets probably weren't as good as their highest of highs, they're not nearly as bad as their recent record might indicate.

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/sinking-jets-hope-to-end-slide-against-revitalized-st-louis-blues>

Sinking Jets hope to end slide against revitalized St. Louis Blues

By Paul Friesen

Reeling from a road trip that reeled them back to the NHL pack, the Winnipeg Jets will try to avoid the return-to-home letdown when they take on the visiting St. Louis Blues (11-12-2) on Tuesday.

On their first three-game losing skid of the season, the 18-7 Jets face a division rival riding the wave of a coaching change.

Jim Montgomery has guided his team to a 2-0-1 mark since taking over from the fired Drew Bannister, with road wins over the struggling New York Rangers and high-flying New Jersey Devils, followed by a 3-2 overtime loss at home to Philadelphia.

The Jets are coming off losses in Dallas (3-1), Vegas (4-3) and Los Angeles (4-1), dropping their record to 3-6 over their last nine games.

In his first taste of adversity, head coach Scott Arniel has decisions to make, most notably on the blue line.

A move to replace the slick, puck-moving Ville Heinola with big, nasty Logan Stanley the last two games didn't pay off, with Stanley taking three minor penalties in the loss to Dallas on Sunday.

While the Jets killed them all off, including an extended five-on-three, it still produced nine minutes of playing on their heels.

While acknowledging Stanley has to stay out of the penalty box, Arniel didn't sound ready to take him out of the lineup.

"He's not going to get any better sitting in the press box," the coach said after the Dallas game. "He needs to be in our top six."

Heinola was coming off ankle surgery and also needs some time to get back up to speed.

There's also a question up front.

Winger Nikolaj Ehlers missed the Stars game with a foot injury and was to get a further evaluation from Jets doctors on Monday.

David Gustafsson took his place on the roster in Dallas, playing on the fourth line with Alex Lafallo moving up to the second.

It's Winnipeg's top line and its power play that's gone into hiding, at least on the scoreboard.

Mark Scheifele hasn't scored in six games, while Kyle Connor has come up empty the last five.

The Blues could be just what Connor needs, though. In 24 career games against them, he's scored 14 times, including the winner in their previous meeting this season.

With the extra man, the Jets have nothing to show in their last five tries and just four goals in their last 28 power plays.

"Our power play now needs to get a spark again," Arniel said. "It's part of what happens with the season. But like I said, we've got to get home and get in our own beds, kind of refresh... get our minds to where they need to be for another divisional opponent."

With the Dallas game and this one in mind, Arniel made sure he'd have Connor Hellebuyck available in goal for both Central Division foes, playing Eric Comrie in the Vegas loss.

Hellebuyck's career record against the Blues is a sparkling: 16-5-2 – including a 3-2 win in October – with a 2.03 goals-against-average, .929 saves percentage and four shutouts.

Expected St. Louis starter Jordan Binnington is 3-7-1 against Winnipeg.

'We are the hunted team': Jets cooling off after sizzling start

On paper this is a mismatch of sorts, the Jets ranked third in average goals per game (3.76), the Blues 30th (2.48).

Winnipeg is second in the NHL in goals against (2.52), St. Louis is 22nd (3.16)

But recent trends don't favour the home side, as the Blues have points in four of their last five games.

It's not exactly the start of a home stand for Winnipeg.

They'll head out for games in Buffalo and Chicago on Thursday and Saturday, respectively, the culmination of 11 away games in their last 13, overall.

As defenceman Neal Pionk put it: "Do some laundry and go back on the road."

With either a much-needed win packed away, or a slightly higher level of angst.

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/jets-prospect-yager-tobas-bjarnason-get-shot-at-team-canada>

Jets prospect Yager, 'Toba's Bjarnason, get shot at Team Canada

By Paul Friesen

Just one Manitoban and one Winnipeg Jets prospect have a shot at joining Team Canada for the World Junior Hockey Championship.

Goalie Carson Bjarnason of Carberry, Man., is one of four goalies invited to the selection camp, to be held in Ottawa Dec. 10-13.

Bjarnason, 19, is in his fourth season with the Brandon Wheat Kings of the Western Hockey League. He's a second-round draft pick of the Philadelphia Flyers.

Forward Brayden Yager, the soon-to-be 20-year-old acquired by the Jets from Pittsburgh last summer, is one of 18 forwards to receive a Team Canada camp invitation.

Winnipeg's return in the swap that sent disgruntled prospect Rutger McGroarty to the Penguins, Yager was part of last year's Canadian team that lost a quarterfinal to Czechia, recording two goals and three assists in five games.

The 5-foot-11, 180-pound native of Saskatoon has been playing for Moose Jaw of the WHL this season, but on Monday he was part of a five-player trade that sent him to Lethbridge.

Yager had 11 goals and 19 assists in 21 games with Moose Jaw.

He was a first-round pick of the Penguins in 2023, attended Jets camp this year and was sent back for another year of junior hockey.

Jets first-rounder Colby Barlow, playing for Oshawa in the Ontario Hockey League, did not get a Team Canada invitation.

The World Junior Championship gets underway in Ottawa on Boxing Day.

CTV Regina

<https://regina.ctvnews.ca/blockbuster-whl-trade-sees-warriors-move-captain-brayden-yager-to-hurricanes-1.7130616>

Blockbuster WHL trade sees Warriors move captain Brayden Yager to Hurricanes

By Donovan Maess

The Western Hockey League's (WHL) Moose Jaw Warriors traded captain Brayden Yager to the Lethbridge Hurricanes Monday.

The deal sees three players and six picks, including two first-rounders, returned to the Warriors.

"This trade brings us two players with experience and good leadership qualities," Warriors' General Manager Jason Ripplinger said in a media release.

Yager was named to Hockey Canada's U20 World Junior Championship training camp roster Monday before the trade.

"We're very excited to be able to add Brayden to our group," said Hurricanes General Manager Peter Anholt. "He is one of the premier players in junior hockey, he's a world junior guy and knows what it takes to win at our level. He is going to be a great addition and is going to help our team in every way."

Making the move from the Hurricanes to Moose Jaw is defenceman Colt Carter (15), goaltender Brady Smith (19) and Lloydminster, Alta. Forward Landen Ward (18).

Goaltender, Jackson Unger, was also traded to Lethbridge.

“Ward brings us more size and plays a hard physical game. Smith has played some big games in the WHL and brings depth to our goaltending position,” Ripplinger said. “In acquiring Carter, we receive a highly skilled defenceman who skates well, has a great hockey sense and will add more depth to our 2009 group.”

Ward was selected in the fourth round of the 2021 WHL Prospect Draft.

In 86 games with the Hurricanes, he has four goals, 10 points, and 159 penalty minutes. This season, he has one goal and two points in 22 games.

Smith, from Cloverdale, B.C., was selected in the sixth round by the Hurricanes in the 2020 WHL Prospects Draft.

In 36 games in Lethbridge, he has a record of 14-11-2-1 with a 3.49 GAA (Goals Against Average) and a .885 save percentage (SV). This season, he has played in 16 games and posted a record of 8-4-1-1 with a 3.31 GAA and an 0.886 SV.

From Drayton Valley, Alta., Coltn was selected in the sixth round at the 2024 WHL Prospects Draft.

He played last season with the St. Albert Sabres U15 AAA and had 25 goals, 30 assists, and 55 points in 34 games, which was the most by a defenceman in the AEHL U15 and was named the playoff MVP and to the AEHL U15 First All-Star Team.

This season with the St. Albert U18 Raiders, he has racked up five goals, 12 assists, and 17 points in 14 games.

“We would like to thank Brayden and Jackson for all of their contributions to our organization and our community,” said Ripplinger.

“Both were key figures to our championship team last season and the years leading up to it. We wish them both all the best in the future.”

The Warriors selected Yager with the third overall pick in the 2020 WHL Prospect Drafts. In 232 games in Moose Jaw, he had 115 goals, 165 assists, and 280 points and leaves tied with Jayden Halbgewachs for fifth on the team’s all-time scoring list.

The Warriors drafted Unger in the third round of the 2020 WHL Prospects Draft.

He leaves the Warriors seventh on the organization’s all-time games played list by a goalie (126), and was tied for the third most wins with 62.

The Warriors next match-up with the Hurricanes is Tuesday Dec. 3 in Lethbridge.

Moose Jaw Today

<https://www.moosejawtoday.com/local-news/blockbuster-trade-warriors-sent-yager-unger-to-lethbridge-for-three-players-six-picks-9893955>

BLOCKBUSTER TRADE: Moose Jaw Warriors send Brayden Yager, Jackson Unger to Lethbridge for three players, six picks

By Randy Palmer

The Moose Jaw Warriors have traded captain Brayden Yager and goaltender Jackson Unger to the Lethbridge Hurricanes in exchange for three players and six WHL Prospect Draft picks.

Joining the Warriors are 2005-born goaltender Brady Smith, 2006-born forward Landen Ward and 2009-born defenceman Colt Carter

The Warriors also recoup a host of draft picks lost in the build toward the 2024 WHL Championship, including a first round in 2025, third round in 2026, fourth round in 2026, fifth round in 2026, first round in 2028 and second round in 2028.

The trade was naturally difficult for Moose Jaw Warriors general manager Jason Ripplinger to make, but it's also one that solves many issues as the team looked to rebuild its list of draft picks.

"These are never easy deals, but where we were with our picks and where we were last year, all the picks that we used, you knew eventually you were probably going to have to do this," Ripplinger said. "You don't want to, but for the franchise moving forward to be where we were last year again, this is something we have to do."

It's hard to describe the impact the two players had on the Warriors in their time with the team, especially last season as key cogs of the WHL Championship run.

"They were a big part of the team from when we drafted them and when they came into the (Regina COVID) bubble as 15-year-olds," Ripplinger said. "They grew up in Moose Jaw, and they're leaving as young men now, but everything in the world comes to an end, and you know what, they'll go down in history as two of the best players to ever play in Moose Jaw."

Ripplinger made sure to let the duo know about their importance to the team when he told them about the trade.

"I asked them when we have the alumni weekend golf tournament to come back, they're alumni forever, and I said eventually one day you guys will be in the (Warriors and Legends) Hall of Fame."

Yager had an absolutely incredible career in Moose Jaw, playing in 232 career WHL regular season games and recording 280 points, including 115 goals and a plus-31 rating.

The 19-year-old forward and two-time winner of the Brad Hornung Trophy as the WHL's Most Sportsmanlike Player was well on his way to another stellar season, as he led Moose Jaw in scoring with 11 goals and 30 points in 21 games.

It was a momentous day for the Saskatoon product, as he was also named to the World Junior selection camp for Team Canada earlier on Monday.

“We’re very excited to be able to add Brayden to our group,” Lethbridge general manager Peter Anholt said on WHL.ca. “He is one of the premier players in junior hockey, he’s a World Junior guy and knows what it takes to win at our level. He is going to be a great addition and is going to help our team in every way.”

Unger owns a career record of 62-49-3-3 with a 3.64 goals-against average and was a

WHL East Division First Team All-Star in 2023-24, going 35-15-0-2 with a 3.08 goals against average, .908 save percentage, and three shutouts.

He saved his best for the post-season though, going 16-1-2-0 with a 2.90 GAA and .910 save percentage as the Warriors won their title.

“Jackson is a championship goaltender and him being in the deal was a big part of us making this trade,” Anholt said. “He’s proven himself as one of the top-end goaltenders in our league, was a first-team all-star last year and we think he is going to steady our goaltending while also being able to help [Koen] Cleaver develop.”

One of the key pieces coming back to Moose Jaw will be Smith, with the 19-year-old netminder having played in 16 of the Hurricanes’ 24 games and going 8-4-1-1 with a 3.31 GAA.

“He’s coming in as a 19-year-old starter, Pete wanted to go with a goalie that had lots of playoff experience it was a good fit for us,” Ripplinger said. “I think Jackson was ready to move on, and this will be a good fresh start for him. Smith can for sure be our starter and help us win some games.”

At 6-foot-3 and 214 pounds, the 18-year-old Ward is expected to bring a physical game to the Warriors line-up and is described on eliteprospects.com as a ‘violent, aggressive winger who creates space with his body’. He has a goal and two points to go along with 39 penalty minutes in 22 games thus far this season and had eight points and 120 penalty minutes in 63 games last season.

“He’s a big, heavy presence,” Ripplinger said. “He’s a guy you don’t like to play against. So he’ll be on our left wing and we’ll be expecting big things from him to create room for our players.”

Carter is a 15-year-old prospect currently playing for the St. Albert Raiders in the Alberta Elite U18 Hockey League, where he has five goals and 18 points in 15 games. The 5-foot-7, 137-pound rearguard suited up for Team Alberta in the WHL Cup this fall, and had 25 goals and 55 points in 34 games playing U15 last season.

“He’s a very highly touted defenseman who maybe was keeping his options open last year until the NCAA opened up,” Ripplinger said. “I believe he’ll be a player that has a bright future with the Warriors here.”

While receiving current on-ice talent for Yager and Unger was all fine and well, it was the future that was a major part of the deal.

With the six draft picks combined with selections made in trades earlier this season, the Warriors are starting to look much improved in the WHL Prospects Draft picture after emptying the tank in their championship quest.

“We’re still missing a couple of firsts in a couple of years, ‘26 and ‘27, but we’ve got multiple seconds, we’ve got multiple thirds, multiple fourths in those drafts so we’re in better shape than what we were, and if we have a chance to fill in other openings, we’ll look at it,” Ripplinger said.

“As a general manager, you look ahead in years to come where you are with your draft picks. We didn’t have a first last year, and I wanted to make sure that we had a first going into the draft this year. Now we have two fourths, two thirds, a second and a first, so it’s looking a lot better.”

Now the Warriors will look toward the rest of the season, with Ripplinger taking a wait-and-see approach to any further deals.

“If anybody comes to me and offers me something, I can’t refuse to look at it,” he said. “But right now, we’ll just hopefully start winning some games here and see where it goes.”

As fate would have it, the two teams and all their new players won’t have long to face each other -- the Moose Jaw Warriors are at the Lethbridge Hurricanes on Tuesday night, with puck drop at 8 p.m. on watch.chl.ca.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/chl/lethbridge-hurricanes-acquire-winnipeg-jets-prospect-brayden-yager-in-massive-whl-deal-1.2213416>

Lethbridge acquire Jets prospect Yager in massive WHL deal

By TSN.ca Staff

The Lethbridge Hurricanes acquired Winnipeg Jets prospect Brayden Yager and starting goaltender Jackson Unger from the Moose Jaw Warriors in a massive Western Hockey League trade.

Yager, 19, was drafted 14th overall by the Pittsburgh Penguins in 2023 and dealt to Winnipeg last off-season in exchange for forward Rutger McGroarty.

The 6-foot centre had played his entire WHL career in Moose Jaw, recording 115 goals and 280 points in parts of five seasons and helped the Warriors win the Ed Chynoweth Cup for the first time in franchise history.

He went on to record three goals and six points in four Memorial Cup games and was named to the tournament's all-star team.

Yager has 11 goals and 30 points in 21 games prior to the trade and was invited to Team Canada's World Junior selection camp beginning on Dec. 10.

Unger, 19, also played his entire WHL career with the Warriors, putting up a career 62-49-6 record with an .892 save percentage and 3.60 goals-against average.

This year, the 6-foot-1 netminder has a 4-11-4 record prior to the trade with a .887 save percentage and 4.36 GAA.

Unger had a 35-15-2 regular season record last season with a .908 save percentage and 3.08 GAA. He went 16-1 in the playoffs with a 2.90 GAA and .910 save percentage to backstop Moose Jaw to the city's first appearance in the Memorial Cup since 1947.

Yager and Unger join a Lethbridge squad that sits seventh in the WHL Eastern Conference with a 12-10-2 record.

Moose Jaw will receive goaltender Brady Smith, forward Landen Ward, defenceman Colt Carter, and six draft picks in return for the two players.

Smith is playing his first full season in the WHL and has an 8-4-2 record with a 3.31 GAA and .886 save percentage this season.

Ward is in the midst of his second full season of major junior and has a goal and two points in 22 games this season.

Carter is the youngest of the trio at 15-year-old and was drafted by the Hurricanes in the sixth round of the 2024 WHL Prospects Draft. He has yet to play a game in the WHL.

The Warriors sit in 10th place in the Eastern Conference with a 6-15-4 record this season.