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<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/01/09/samberg-back-on-the-blue-line>

Samberg back on the blue line Jets D-man returns from broken foot to face Kings

By: Mike McIntyre

It's been nearly seven weeks since Winnipeg Jets defenceman Dylan Samberg stepped in front of a Steven Stamkos slapshot and paid a very painful price.

"I had that feeling where you just know it was broken," Samberg said Thursday as he spoke for the first time since the Nov. 23 injury against the Nashville Predators.

The 25-year-old defenceman spent about two seconds on the ice before he jumped up, hopped to the front of the net on his right foot and somehow completed a penalty killing shift — including getting in front of another Stamkos one-timer that mercifully missed him.

"Sometimes there's not much you can do about it, where you get hemmed in the zone there and you don't want to leave your team to a five-on-three," Samberg said of gutting it out.

"Sometimes you just have to battle it out."

A hockey player's mentality, no question.

"I don't know, it all happened so fast, I was more worried about my foot than the next shot. I happened to be in the lane. Sometimes you've got to block two," Samberg said.

"At that point there's not really much you can do. Just take it with a grain of salt and work hard to try and get back in shape. Now we're here."

The Jets will welcome Samberg back to the lineup on Friday night as an eight-game homestand that is 1-1-1 so far hits the midway mark with a visit from the Los Angeles Kings. He got through a pair of full-contact skates this week without issue and will take his usual spot on the second-pairing beside fellow Minnesotan Neal Pionk.

"What did I miss most? How quiet it was in the locker room," Pionk said with a chuckle. "No, we missed his presence, especially on the PK, shot blocking stuff. Obviously as a D partner, we have a lot of chemistry, so you miss some of that stuff."

The Jets went 11-8-2 in the 21 games without Samberg after going 17-4-0 in the 21 games with him in the lineup.

"He has earned the opportunity to become a top four defenceman the last few years," Jets head coach Scott Arniel said of Samberg, who has six points (3G, 3A) along with 18 penalty minutes and a plus-12 rating this season.

“Him being able to go against top-six forwards, his footwork, his ability to close, be physical and be heavy on those guys makes such a difference. He is a key piece for us and when you lose those guys, they are hard to replace.”

There was more good news on Thursday, as Josh Morrissey was a full participant in practice and is good to go against the Kings. Winnipeg’s No. 1 blue-liner left Tuesday’s 5-2 win over Nashville after running into teammate Mark Scheifele and crashing into the post. It appears the damage was limited to a charley horse and nothing more.

Haydn Fleury initially took Samberg’s spot beside Pionk, only to suffer his own injury on Dec. 23 which has kept him out of the lineup. That opened the door for Logan Stanley to move up, and the towering blue-liner has really struggled at times — especially in the most recent outing against the Predators.

Now, Stanley moves down to the third-pairing with Dylan Coghlan — who has taken the spot of the injured Colin Miller — while Ville Heinola will be a healthy scratch after arguably his best outing of the year against Nashville beside Coghlan which included recording his first point (an assist) in 14 games.

“I really liked how they both played. But I really liked what Cogs did, more than anything,” Arniel said, noting he wanted a lefty-righty combination against the Kings.

Heinola-Coghlan would have checked off that box, of course, but it’s clear the team’s priority is to keep playing Stanley at this point. Arniel said he’s “not married to” Stanley and Coghlan together, which potentially opens the door for a Stanley-Heinola pairing that we’ve seen a few times so far this year.

It’s worth noting Fleury (non-contact jersey) and Miller (on his own) have resumed skating in recent days, so the blue-line could soon be extremely crowded provided nobody else gets sidelined.

As for Samberg, he knows his role and that means getting right back in shooting lanes and hoping for the best despite having ample recent evidence of the risk involved.

“I’ll always have that one shot in the back of my mind, but that’s part of the game, that’s part of my role to block shots on the penalty kill. You gotta do what you gotta do,” he said.

However, to help the cause he’s now added an all-encompassing shot blocker to his skates, after previously leaving the top part uncovered (which is where Stamkos’s shot hit him).

“I’ve got a Transformer skate now, pretty much,” said Samberg.

The 43rd-overall pick from the 2017 NHL draft previously broke his right foot playing hockey several years ago, which helped him anticipate what this process would be like.

“Recovery was pretty much the same. There’s only so much you can do, it takes a while to get back on the ice, you have to make sure it’s healed a certain amount,” he said.

“There’s only so much you can do in the gym for that time. It’s not like a muscle where you can do all this needling stuff and other stuff. It’s just a bone. You have to wait for it to heal and take it day-by-day.”

That can be tough mentally, although Samberg said his team’s continued solid play made it easier to digest.

“We’ve got a good team in here. They were an easy watch over the past six weeks,” he said.

Samberg also credited his wife, Destiny, who convinced him to make some TikTok videos over the last few weeks, including ones where Samberg was lip-syncing and dancing.

“I had a feeling that was going to come up,” he said when asked if he’s now a social media star. “My wife’s big into it, and she’s been bugging me for a while to do it. It was more of a late Christmas present for her. We had a lot of fun doing it.”

At 28-12-2, the Jets are certainly enjoying life. Now, after playing just once in the past five days, they will face the Kings, followed immediately by the Colorado Avalanche on Saturday night in a rare back-to-back on home ice.

With no travel involved, the Jets may switch up the usual order and have backup Eric Comrie face the Kings, with starter Connor Hellebuyck going against the red-hot Avalanche who have been climbing the Central Division standings and just beat Comrie and the Jets 5-2 on New Year’s Eve in Denver.

“It’s a great test. Two really good teams in the West. We’re excited for it,” said Pionk. “We’ve got to bring our best against these two teams.”

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/01/10/flex-specs-and-heft>

Flex, specs and heft

Whether sticking with what they know or branching out into cutting-edge technology, Jets players put a lot of thought into their ‘lumber’ selections

By: Ken Wiebe

Long gone are the days of walking into the local sporting-goods store, pulling a Sher-Wood PMP 5030 off the rack, eyeballing the curve, checking its length and flex, as stiff as it was, and plunking down \$20 for the (actual) piece of lumber.

In today’s ultra-competitive hockey world, a stick, costing upwards of \$400, is often a custom-made, carbon-fibre piece of equipment tailored specifically to a player’s size, shape and position.

Sure, the physics behind shooting the puck are the same — turning potential energy into kinetic energy — but the permutations are seemingly endless. The stick’s weight and whippiness (flex),

along with the shape of the blade's toe, height of its heel and degree of its curve are all factors waiting to be dissected down to the minutest details. For a physicist, it's simply a question of basic science. For a hockey player, it's the equivalent of searching for the Holy Grail.

We asked seven Winnipeg Jets — four forwards and three defencemen — about what they look for when choosing their most critically important piece of equipment. It's an approach that mixes together mad-scientist experimentation, superstition and tried-and-true practical evaluation.

And it's a process that comes with its own shorthand language, where terms involving degrees of flex and blade patterns are reduced to numbers and famous players' surnames. Professional athletes tend to stay mum about their trade secrets, however, ask a player about their choice of lumber, and a story is sure to quickly follow.

But make no mistake — finding the right stick is serious business. Much like a musician searching for the perfectly crafted instrument, so too does the hockey player.

Top-line centreman Mark Scheifele remembers going to the store as a youngster and picking out the stick of his favourite player.

"Yzerman curve. First ever. We were big (Steve) Yzerman fans," Scheifele says of the Detroit Red Wings superstar from the 1980s and '90s.

"I used a P88 for a while, the (Eric) Lindros pattern, when I was a kid, and for the longest period of time through junior, and then switched to the (Adam) Oates curve about eight years ago and I haven't changed since."

The Yzerman curve, one of three original composite patterns produced by stick maker Easton in the 1990s, was known as a 'banana curve' due to its huge bow in the middle of the blade. Meanwhile, the Oates model is known to facilitate accurate passing, powerful shooting and deft puck control. It's considered a good choice for all-around players.

Scheifele, now in his 12th NHL season, had a long discussion several years ago with skills coach and Hall of Famer Oates about finding the perfect stick specifications.

"It's not just about shooting, it's not just about passing, it's about being able to do every little thing," Scheifele says. "Whether it's taking a puck off the wall, handling a pass (or) making a backhand pass. It's about having everything available to you."

"He just has so much knowledge about what you need to be able to do as a player, especially as a centreman. That was where the conversation started and it's always a continual conversation."

Several years ago, Scheifele's then-linemate Blake Wheeler was going through a lengthy goal-scoring slump and decided to switch his blade pattern, which soon resulted in an end to the drought.

Scheifele hasn't done anything quite as drastic during his career.

“Not really. I’ve found what I like,” he says. “I fidget with heights a little bit, depending on how I’m feeling and all of that stuff, but pretty much stick to the standard.”

Despite the tweaking, the stick’s shaft height has to be precise, otherwise Scheifele will notice.

“If it’s like a millimetre off, I feel it out there,” he says.

While many young players opt for lighter sticks with more whip (a lower flex number), Scheifele has chosen to buck that trend, using a 100 flex.

“I’m still a guy that’s old-school. I like a little heavier stick, to feel like there’s something in my hands, but I know a lot of the younger guys have gone to very, very light sticks,” he says. “I have a pretty stiff stick. For a centreman, with faceoffs and battles, it gives me the best range for everything.

“I’ve tried (sticks with flex in the 70s), but it just feels like a junior stick in my hands. I don’t know how guys do it, but to each their own.”

An antenna usually goes up when young players trying to establish themselves in the NHL are called into the coach’s office. Did they do enough to make an impression? Are they going to be sent down to the minors? It was no different for Jets defenceman Haydn Fleury when he was trying to crack the Carolina Hurricanes’ lineup.

Once he noticed his sticks in head coach Bill Peters’ office, he had a good feeling.

“I had just made the team. I got into his office and all of my sticks were there and he said, ‘your stick is too short.’... In junior, I could get away with a smaller stick.”

It was not a matter up for debate. Fleury gave the longer stick — about an extra inch in length — a test drive and hasn’t looked back.

“Honestly, the length has pretty much stayed the same since the day he told me,” he says.

When it comes to flex, the change occurred in junior hockey, when he was starring for the WHL’s Red Deer Rebels.

Although Fleury was enjoying plenty of success, he was breaking sticks like they were going out of style, so he moved from an 87 flex to a 95.

“During my 18-year-old year, I probably broke 80 sticks,” he says. “I was getting bigger and stronger. I was just too strong to use the stick anymore. They were just snapping left and right.

“I’ve tried 100 (flex) since, but I don’t like it. The 95 is perfect for me.”

How often Fleury swaps out his lumber goes back to that rookie season in Carolina, when a former Jets player offered up a piece of advice.

“Lee Stempniak was like ‘it’s the NHL, use a new stick every game,’” Fleury says. “So, I’ve used a new stick every game since then.”

Fleury has stuck with the same curve for most of his playing career, but he’s made a slight tweak this season, adopting the curve used by his former Tampa Bay Lightning teammate, Nikita Kucherov.

“There’s a nice little pocket in the blade for the puck to sit. That’s the biggest thing I’ve noticed. It works for him. I don’t know if it works as well for me, but I’ve really liked it so far.”

Fleury has one other personal preference when it comes to his stick — he doesn’t tape a knob at the top of the shaft.

“I don’t know why you would have a knob. I feel like I would grip my stick down here instead of gripping my stick up here. You still see a couple of guys with really big knobs (like Winnipegger Mark Stone of the Vegas Golden Knights), but for the most part, you see guys going away from a big piece of tape at the end.”

In 2021, Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey made a significant change — and it involved going back to the future.

Not as far back as the era of actual wooden sticks, but to an older version of the Bauer model he used in his first year with the WHL’s Prince Albert Raiders.

“I’ve always been a gear nerd and have always been kind of tinkering with stuff, trying to find a little something here or there. A different feel, a little bit of an edge,” he says. “Probably in the summer of 2021... I just had a thought to try an old model I had used a little bit back in the day. It was stick construction from around 2010. I got to try this old stick, to see what it was like to use. I loved it and decided to roll with it.

“Basically, it’s heavier than most of the other guys’ sticks by quite a bit.”

It may have been an oldie, but it’s proven to be a goodie for Morrissey, who has seen his offensive numbers jump dramatically while working his way onto many Norris Trophy ballots the past two seasons.

Morrissey isn’t sure how much longer he’ll be using the retro stick but notes veteran players like Kucherov and Steven Stamkos are also sticking with the same technology.

“There’s not many guys using that construction anymore, so I think Bauer would probably love me to get out of it at some point, so they can get rid of the old moulds,” says Morrissey, who uses the same curve as Scheifele, but a left-handed version.

It’s not that Morrissey is averse to change, it’s more about how the puck feels on the blade.

“There’s science that the new ones produce more energy, but when I feel the puck, it’s been a little bit different,” he says. “So, I’ve got a bunch of samples to try and get into the new stuff, because I do think there are probably some benefits to going with a lighter stick. But then there’s probably some benefits to having a little heavier one, too.”

As for the flex of his stick, Morrissey has dropped down from an 87 to an 82 — though that number could be a bit deceiving.

“I’ve changed the flex a little bit. I also find because it’s an old construction, they’re a lot stiffer,” he says. “If I’m sampling a new stick that’s coming out, they’re way lighter and way whippier, so I would sample a 100 flex or a 95 because it relates more. Technically, I’m using 82 but they’re stiffer than that.”

Jets defenceman Dylan DeMelo recalls a story from his minor hockey days that still makes him chuckle. He had a coach who forbade players from purchasing the high-end composite sticks that were all the rage at the time.

“They were starting to make their rounds, but our coach was old-school. He said no one is using a composite stick,” says DeMelo, who didn’t use that type until he was about 13. “It was pretty funny. We would go to these tournaments and these travel kids would have the latest Bauers and we had the wood sticks, and we would beat them. You could tell they were a little rattled about it.”

When DeMelo arrived at the junior level — he played for Mississauga Steelheads in the OHL — he remembers the thrill of seeing his name printed on the shaft of a stick for the first time.

“I thought that was pretty cool. I showed my buddies and stuff — and they thought that was pretty sweet.”

DeMelo has stayed true to the CCM model he used when he broke into the professional ranks in the American Hockey League. While it’s nice to have options, sticking with what helped him reach that level just made sense for DeMelo.

“I’ve tried other sticks, but when you use something for so long, there’s some familiarity there,” he says. “All of the sticks are great, it’s just about finding what works.”

What has changed over time is the length. While a longer stick helps for defending, particularly as a youngster, the pro game requires a stick allowing for a greater range of applications.

“As you get older, you realize a shorter stick helps with puck handling and being able to have your vision and stuff like that.”

So, what’s the difference between now and then?

“I used to use a stick at kind of mustache level,” he says. “Over time, I’ve gone down to just under my chin. That’s a substantial difference over time, but it happened gradually. You

definitely can't go that big (all at once). You have to (do a little bit at a time), because it's an adjustment."

The tinkering also applies to his blade curve.

"Three or four years ago, I changed my pattern and I changed it again this year, to a bit different model and I've enjoyed it so far. Essentially, I would say it's a little less of a toe curve. The lie (the angle between the shaft and blade) is a little different too, so there's a little more blade on the ice."

Lastly, DeMelo lowered his flex slightly as well, starting at 100 and landing at 95.

"It just felt like you can get the puck off (your stick) a little faster on your shots from the point. Time and space was a bit more of an issue when turning pro, but I found if I tried to go down to a 90 flex, it was a little too flimsy. Pucks were sailing on me. I even found I was sailing my passes, when you were used to snapping it, being heavy with that bottom hand. So, I need a little bit of that stiffness. For slap shots too, you've got to grip it and rip it."

Like Morrissey, Jets captain, centreman Adam Lowry, is a bit of a throwback when it comes to sticks, preferring an older-style construction.

"It takes me a while to change. For one, I like the stiffness down low, just for faceoffs. I've used the same curve since I was 12. There's not really a whole lot of magic to my stick."

It hasn't been for a lack of experimentation. Lowry tried out several newer models during the off-season before opting for the status quo.

"It's cool to see the new technology, but for whatever reason I always go back," he says. "Some of it has to do with deadlines to order. It's right when you're getting into the thick of things for the summer, before you've really shaken off the rust (of the off-season). You have to make a decision."

Lowry's role as a checking forward also plays into the type of stick and curve he employs. His stick flex (102) is the second stiffest on the team behind defenceman Logan Stanley, who uses a 115.

"Once in a while, I'll mess around and try new sticks. Last year, for a little bit, I tried a different curve. It was a P92 with just a little more toe (curve), then I realized there was a little too much dangle in my game, so I went back," Lowry says. "I always joke that I sacrifice some offence in my stick for better defence."

"It's one of those things where I feel I could probably get shots off quicker and things like that going down (in flex). Some of the great goal scorers are using 82 flex or 77 flex and (they weigh) 210 pounds. The stick whips and they get so much performance. They can shoot from any position."

Does being involved in a lot of stick battles mean Lowry goes through more lumber than most players?

“No, I would say that’s all personal preference. Some guys want a new stick every game. I remember (former teammate) Patrik Laine had a power-play stick. He wanted the extra pop.

“He was using 80 to 100 sticks in a year, whereas I still re-use quite a few sticks. If it goes through a game and it feels fine, I’ll use it for the next one and generally, I cut and tape a few at the same time, so I don’t have to go through that process for a week or two.”

Having a father, Dave Lowry, who played nearly two decades of pro hockey (he’s currently an assistant coach with the Seattle Kraken), Lowry remembers the first time he got to try out the new stick technology.

“My dad would collect sticks for us,” Lowry says. “Generally, he would ask players on the other teams (for the sticks) we wanted. He knew quite a few guys around the league, so we have a pretty good collection. His collection is even better than the ones gifted to us.

“I remember my first one-piece was a Marc Savard (Easton) Synergy, cut down and spray painted black at the bottom third of the stick. I was 10 or 11 and it was like a 100 flex. I couldn’t flex that thing at all, but it was pretty special.”

Jets forward Gabe Vilardi is a fan of consistency when it comes to his sticks. He’s used the same curve since minor hockey and doesn’t plan on switching.

He made one tweak during the off-season though, dropping from an 87 flex to an 82.

“I just wanted to get more whip. I gave it a try in the summer and I really liked it, so I’ve stuck with it,” Vilardi says. “Last year, it felt like I was scoring a lot in tight and I wanted to score from distance a bit more.”

Vilardi scored his 19th goal of the season on Tuesday against the Nashville Panthers — putting him well on pace for a career high in goals — so it appears the change is working well.

“I just think as you get more into the season, the games pile up and having the whippier stick for me is allowing me to get more on my shots,” he says. “It’s not so much the release, but the power behind the shot.”

When does he know it’s time to swap out a stick?

“Unless I break it or something happens and I feel superstitious,” he says. “Maybe if I should have had a goal, I’ll switch.”

His tape style? It’s white and re-applied constantly.

“I change my tape job after every period. I’ve got to do that. I just think you have to have it fresh.”

As a youngster in Whitby, Ont., Cole Perfetti is part of a generation that grew up using whippier sticks.

“I use a 77, but it’s cut down to probably an 84 or 85, so it’s still pretty whippy. I like that because I like to be able to get (a shot) off quickly,” said Perfetti, now 23.

As for the blade pattern, Perfetti started out with the Stamkos model but in recent years has switched to the P14 style that was favoured by Winnipegger Jonathan Toews when he won three Stanley Cups with the Chicago Blackhawks.

“The stick has changed a little bit, but the pattern is the same,” says Perfetti, before breaking down the intricacies. “A little bit mid-to-toe, as it gets further down to the toe, the curve has a little more to it. It’s a small blade. I don’t know why, it’s just something I’ve always used.”

Whether he’s riding a heater or working his way through a dry spell, Perfetti doesn’t often stray from using white tape on his blade.

“I’m 95 per cent white tape. I was back and forth growing up, but since I’ve gone to pro, I’ve been pretty much all white.... I just like the way the white tape looks on my stick. It just catches my eye properly.”

While white is his go-to tape colour, he doesn’t have the same loyalty to a particular stick.

“If I’m not liking it, then I’ll change it up. A lot of it has to do with how the tape is doing. If it’s mid-period and the tape is falling apart, I’ll change it. All of my sticks are cut and everything is exactly the same, so I don’t mind going back and forth. It doesn’t bother me. Just get a fresh one.”

Jets equipment manager Jason McMaster has the difficult job of ensuring players are never short on sticks, but that’s not to say it’s a free-for-all.

Despite the misconception NHL players get their sticks for free, it is an ever-increasing expense absorbed by the teams.

“I’m not going to give you the number,” McMaster says. “It’s been a slow climb (since the Jets returned to the NHL in 2011) and it’s my job to keep that within a tolerable number for the organization.

“But the players are in the NHL, so they need what they need. You’ve got to take care of the players, take care of the organization and make sure everybody is happy.”

McMaster stores each player’s specific stick information in a database and always has a handle on how many sticks are in stock and when he might need to place another order with the various companies favoured by players.

Bauer is currently the most popular brand with the Jets. CCM has moved up to No. 2, while Warrior is No. 3 — though it was tops not long ago. True brand sticks are also on the radar, but are not as prominent among Jets players.

“For the regular season and training camp, I budget 82 (sticks) per player,” McMaster says. “Some guys use more than that and some guys use pretty close to that. It always balances out.”

When it comes to how often guys are going to the rack to grab a new twig, there’s a wide variation.

“It depends on the player. For some guys, it’s a new stick every game. Some guys use a new stick every two to three games,” he says. “It depends on how the stick feels. Sometimes, they’ll get a stick that just doesn’t feel right, so they’ll change sooner. But if it’s feeling really good, they’ll run with it.”

McMaster has witnessed a “crazy” evolution in technological advancements, dating back to his days in the WHL in the early 2000s.

Today’s sticks, while much lighter (most weigh just under a pound) are relatively durable compared to the early days of composite sticks, though some still explode at inopportune times because of the high-contact nature of the sport, not to mention the speed at which the puck travels.

“It depends on how intense a battle they get in. These guys want to be sure the stick doesn’t have a hairline crack in it, if you give a guy a cross check and it snaps in two,” McMaster says. “You’ve got your offensive players that need to make sure the stick stays in one piece when you get that shot.

“There’s no guarantee, obviously. You can get trauma to the stick during a game and you don’t realize it and you take that next shot and it’s going to happen.”

When asked how particular players can be about the finer details of their sticks, McMaster just smiles.

“We give them the eyebrow raise once in a while, but they know,” he says. “It’s impressive how in tune they are with their sticks.”

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/arts-and-life/2025/01/10/geared-up>

Geared up

Fondness for game-worn garb goes way back for Jets’ retail manager of player-used equipment

By: David Sanderson

Chalk one up for Roger Öhman, a Swedish-born defenceman selected in the second round, 39th overall, by the Winnipeg Jets, at the 1985 National Hockey League Entry Draft.

In 1988, Pat Lelliott, then 23, attended a hockey-memorabilia auction hosted by legendary sports announcer Ken (Friar) Nicholson.

While game-worn jerseys from Jets stars such as Dale Hawerchuk, Paul Maclean and Randy Carlyle proved to be out of Lelliott's price range, the budding collector successfully bid on a No. 27 jersey issued to Öhman for the 1987-88 pre-season, the 215-pound defender's lone appearance with the club.

"If I remember correctly, it was something reasonable like \$40, and that's where it all began for me," Lelliott says.

Skip ahead 37 years.

Lelliott is currently the person primarily responsible for running the Jets' game-used retail program, one of the most successful undertakings of its kind in the NHL.

Ahead of every home game, the married father of one helps to set up a sales booth inside Canada Life Centre, loaded to the hilt with verified jerseys, sticks, locker-room hoodies... even the odd pair of Connor Hellebuyck goalie pads.

"Everybody who works at our booth loves talking to fans and providing useful information to anybody interested in getting into the hobby," Lelliott says, seated in the downtown rink's main concourse, 90 minutes before a scheduled tilt between the Jets and the visiting Ottawa Senators.

"But if there's one thing we especially enjoy, it's greeting the little ones who stop by to try on their favourite player's gloves or pants. Seriously, the look on their faces is absolutely priceless."

Lelliott was in his early 20s when he became a Jets season-ticket holder. His seat was in one of the Winnipeg Arena's two upper decks and, "get this," he says with a laugh, cost him a mere \$300 for what was then a 40-game regular-season home schedule.

He continued seeking out game-used gear in the wake of his Öhman purchase, to the degree that when a save-the-Jets campaign was launched in the spring of 1995 to prevent the team from leaving for Arizona, he willingly donated items from his own closet to a fundraiser being run by a local radio station.

Following the loss of the Jets, Lelliott immediately switched his allegiance, both fan-wise and pastime-wise, to the Manitoba Moose, which relocated to the city from St. Paul, Minn., for the start of the 1996-97 International Hockey League season.

In 2001, the Moose, owned by True North Sports & Entertainment, joined the American Hockey League as a minor-league affiliate of the NHL's Vancouver Canucks.

During the inaugural season of the new partnership, the team unveiled a dark-blue alternate jersey that closely resembled what was being worn by the parent club. The uniform was a hit,

not only with Winnipeggers, but also with jersey enthusiasts from across North America who began pestering the Moose's front office, wondering how to get their hands on a game-worn version.

This was back when internet auction houses were still in their infancy, Lelliott says, and because he was already comfortable with sites such as eBay, he mentioned to a friend of his who worked for the Moose that he might be able to help them with online sales, if they were at all interested. It turned out they were.

He ended up assisting the Moose — “I wouldn't say worked for” — until 2011, when the Jets returned, resulting in the Moose's transfer to Newfoundland, where they toiled as the St. John's IceCaps until 2015.

Owing to his long association with True North, Lelliott approached the powers-that-be midway through the Jets' first season back in Winnipeg, to again offer his expertise at marketing game-worn jerseys and such.

He was tasked with organizing one sale at the tail-end of that campaign, followed by 10 or so each in the following two seasons. Since October 2014, the booth, a subsidiary of Jets Gear, the team's retail wing, has been a constant at every home game.

“Most of the (NHL) teams do yearly equipment sales, usually at the end of the season, but from what I've come to understand, we might be the only team in the league that does it, game-in and game-out,” says Lelliott, who works full-time outside of his association with the Jets.

One of the questions Lelliott and his associates field most is how often do game-worn jerseys and similar items come up for grabs?

As it turns out, this is the point in the season when it starts to get busy for people in their line of work. Mid-January is generally when NHL clubs begin swapping out the jerseys players have been wearing since the beginning of the current campaign, in favour of fresh sets of duds they'll sport until the playoffs get underway in mid-April.

(On average, every team is issued two sets of home and away jerseys at the start of the season, and two more of each at the halfway mark, along with a pair of alternates, in the Jets' case, the heritage blues.)

It isn't up to the players how often they change jerseys, it's a decision for the team and league, Lelliott explains, when one wonders if a forward or D-man might want to hang onto a specific top for superstitious reasons, if they're riding a personal goal or assist streak.

“NHL players do get to keep two of their jerseys for their rec room or whatever — that's a fairly recent development covered in the collective agreement — but the rest come to us.”

It's no surprise to learn Jets jerseys bearing the name and number of team leaders such as Kyle Connor and Adam Lowry carry the heftiest price tag — one of Mark Scheifele's away jerseys is currently commanding \$2,500 at truenorthshop.com — but Lelliott points out if a fan is in the

market for a jersey that truly looks game-worn, they might opt for that from a reliable third or fourth liner.

“You won’t pay as much for an (Mason) Appleton or (Alex) Lafallo, but let me tell you, from the scuff marks on the crest and whatever, you’ll know that player was working hard, each and every shift.”

Also, if the cost of a jersey, many of which are specifically tailored to a player’s wants (for example, former Jets goalie Ondřej Pavelec had Velcro straps sewn into his so it wouldn’t flop around), doesn’t fit one’s budget, there are still bargains to be had. Game-used socks, home and away, are currently available for \$10, and officially documented pucks are priced as low as \$9.99.

“Even the warm-up jerseys aren’t overly expensive, and for beer-league guys like me, they look super sharp when you wear them for your own game,” Lelliott says, adding he has shipped memorabilia to Jets fans living as far away as Europe and Asia.

Lelliott is admittedly biased, but when it comes to certification, he says the Jets provide shoppers with the best letters of authenticity in the league, “period, end of story.”

Along with a jersey you get a hard-shell folder containing an eight-by-10 print of the player-in-question plus a documented serial number with a photo of where on the underside of the jersey said number is stamped.

“I’ve taken them to memorabilia shows across North America and to a collector, they tell me they’re the most impressive they’ve ever seen.”

And although Lelliott’s is a part-time position, he fully agrees with the saying, find a job you love to do and you’ll never work a day in your life.

“I feel very privileged and truly appreciate the opportunity the Jets have given me to interact with fans on a regular basis. That and if you’d told me in ’96 when the team was packing up to leave that I’d be assisting a local NHL club with its equipment sales in 2025, I’d have said you were off your rocker.”

(If you can’t make it to down to Canada Life Centre to have a look at what’s available, Lelliott will be setting up a display on the Jets’ behalf at the PegSpo Sports Collectibles Expo, which will be staged at the RBC Convention Centre on March 8.)

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-get-inspirational-defenceman-back-on-the-blueline>

Jets get ‘inspirational’ defenceman back on the blueline

By Gordon Anderson, Winnipeg Sun

When you know something is seriously wrong, you just know.

After missing nearly seven weeks, Dylan Samberg is expected to make his return to the lineup when the Jets host the Los Angeles Kings on Friday night.

“Pretty much right when it hit me. I had that feeling where you just know it was broken,” Samberg said of the Steven Stamkos blast that broke his foot back in November. “At that point there’s not really much you can do. Just take it with a grain of salt and work hard to try and get back in shape. Now we’re here.”

While on the penalty kill the rearguard dropped in front of the Stamkos heater on Nov. 23 in Nashville. The 25-year-old stayed on the ice and continued to battle, despite the pain.

It was probably not the wisest decision but, sometimes, an exit strategy doesn’t present itself when it’s needed.

“Yeah, sometimes there’s not much you can do about it, where you get hemmed in the zone there and you don’t want to leave your team to a five-on-three,” Samberg said. “Sometimes you just have to battle it out.”

Samberg was clearly on autopilot when it came to his dedication to the job as he tried to block another Stamkos blast just seconds later.

“I don’t know, it all happened so fast, I was more worried about my foot than the next shot,” Samberg said. “I happened to be in the lane. Sometimes you’ve got to block two.”

To lightly paraphrase defenceman Neal Pionk, that sequence is the stuff where legends are made.

“On the bench, we don’t know how severe the injury is at the time,” Pionk said. “Later, after the game, when you find out the bone’s broken. That’s pretty incredible. It brings a little inspiration. Any shot block like that, you see the guy is in pain, especially a guy like Dylan, it’s inspirational to see him not only get up on his own power but to finish the shift and not even cause a whistle. That’s pretty tough.”

The #54 in Jets silks is going to get himself into another situation that will require some kind of self-sacrifice. The only question is when. He says he’s mentally prepared to block more shots. After all, at 6-foot-4 and 215 pounds, his job is to get down and dirty.

“Well, I’ll always have that one shot in the back of my mind, but that’s part of the game, that’s part of my role to block shots on the penalty kill,” Samberg said. “You gotta do what you gotta do.”

The American d-man missed 21 games. In that span, the team compiled an 11-8-2 record. In his absence the team dropped a season-high four consecutive games between Nov. 27 and Dec. 3. The Jets also won four straight, along with a pair of two game winning streaks.

Heading into Thursday night league action, the Jets (28-12-2) are tied with the Washington Capitals for the second-best record in the league with 58 points, one point in arrears of the Las Vegas Golden Knights. Points percentage wise, the Jets are alone in third at .690.

Samberg says the team's overall performance during that lengthy stretch of time allowed him to quell the desire to return early, allowing him to fully heal the tender tootsies.

"No, they were good about that, making sure I wasn't rushed back," Samberg said. "Obviously it's a serious injury where you want to make sure, with it still being early in the year where you still have that second half of the season to go. They were really good about it, making sure you're fully prepared to come back and I'm feeling good."

Jets head coach Scott Arniel said the club is pleased to have the Saginaw, Minn., resident back in the lineup, as he can do many different things on the ice at an exceptional level.

"He has earned the opportunity to become a top-four defenceman the last few years and with him being able to play those minutes, we will see how his minutes go tomorrow, but him being able to go against top-six forwards, his footwork, his ability to close, be physical and be heavy on those guys makes such a difference," Arniel said.

In 21 skates this year the left-shot has three goals and three assists and is a plus-12.

Arniel also likes the chemistry Pionk and Samberg have developed this season. The Jets hope things will click into place for the duo when they hit the ice for the first shift sometime after 7 p.m.

"And there is the chemistry with Pionk that was big," Arniel said. "And then the penalty kill, that is the main part of it. He is a key piece for us and when you lose those guys, they are hard to replace."

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/its-logan-stanley-over-ville-heinola-jets-arniel-kings-and-avs-provide-stiff-test-samberg-loads-up-on-shot-blockers>

It's Logan Stanley over Ville Heinola: Jets' Arniel ... Kings and Avs provide stiff test ... Samberg loads up on shot blockers

By Paul Friesen

You could almost hear the collective sigh of relief as the Winnipeg Jets hit the practice ice on Thursday.

There was all-star defenceman Josh Morrissey, in full stride, in full uniform – no non-contact yellow – and showing no sign of the injury that caused him to leave Tuesday's 5-2 win over Nashville.

Coupled with the return of Dylan Samberg from a broken foot, the Jets will have as healthy a blue line as they've had in a while when they host the L.A. Kings on Friday.

Morrissey will return to his spot alongside Dylan DeMelo on the top pair, while Samberg snuggles in next to Neal Pionk on the second.

"There's certain reads that we have, I can tell what kind of play he's thinking or what play he's going to make," Pionk said. "Little stuff that you read off all year."

That leaves head coach Scott Arniel a third unit to toy with.

His decision is to leave Logan Stanley in the lineup ahead of Ville Heinola.

Stanley and Dylan Coghlan will make up the last pair.

"It's just going to be that way," Arniel said. "But I really liked what Coughs did, more than anything. I want a lefty-righty. I'm not married to that, but I do want it against LA."

Heinola and Stanley both shoot left, while Coghlan is a righty.

So Arniel's default position was leaving Coghlan in and choosing one of the other two.

At least for this game.

Litmus test

The next two games will test the Jets' structure, resolve and probably their patience.

The Kings are the only NHL team with a better goals-against-average than Winnipeg: 2.50 to 2.52.

"Big, defensive team," Arniel called them. "One of the best defending teams in the league when it comes to the analytics. They're a team that obviously is playing extremely well, especially since the last time we saw them. You're going to have to fight for every inch. For us to get offence we're going to have to get inside.

"We're going to have to work."

The Jets last played the Kings back in late November, losing 4-1.

L.A. has won four in a row and are 6-2-2 in their last 10.

To prepare, Arniel had his crew doing a drill they call "the trench" at Thursday's practice, where they set up a net near the side boards, at an angle to the corner, and hold two-on-two battles.

"It just puts guys in tight situations," the coach explained. "We're going to get into these against L.A., and I want to just tone ourselves up, get ourselves into a situation where you're working with a partner."

The next night it'll be division-rival Colorado, more of an offensive powerhouse who were 7-2-1 in their last 10 going into a Thursday night tilt in Minnesota.

"We'll talk about them on Saturday," Arniel said. "L.A.'s a really good challenge for us right now. We can score goals, but they're really good at defending."

The Jets are ranked third in scoring (3.62 goals per game), the Kings 13th (3.11), the Avalanche seventh (3.33).

Transformer man

Samberg, coming off that broken foot, says he's adding even more shot blockers to his skates, protecting the area on top of his foot that suffered the break.

"I've got a transformer skate now, pretty much," he joked. "I've got the whole nine (yards), with shot blockers protecting that. A couple small spots I had to trim out... now I've got the entire skate covered."

While he'll try to pick up right where he left off, his defence partner knows standing in front of the next shot won't be easy.

"Oh, it's tough," Pionk said. "The first one's going to be tough to sit in front of. It's like coming off the summer, getting into that first game. It might take a shift or two but I'm sure he'll transition real nice."

"Part of the nature. Part of the DNA. We've been doing it our whole lives."

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/does-jets-hellebuyck-deserve-hart-trophy-consideration/>

Does Jets' Hellebuyck deserve Hart Trophy consideration? (VIDEO)

The Hockey Central panel breaks down some picks for the major NHL awards at the midpoint of the season, including whether Cale Makar could pick up his second Norris Trophy and whether Connor Hellebuyck could win both the Vezina and the Hart.

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/590/the-fan-hockey-show/jets-powerplay-improvements-with-davis-payne-mailbag-questions/>

Jets' Powerplay Improvements with Davis Payne + Mailbag Questions (AUDIO)

Matt Marchese and Mike Futa kick off The FAN Hockey Show with former NHL player Anson Carter. They discuss the rise of NCAA hockey, his memorable game-winning goal review from the 2003 World Championships, Connor Bedard's potential, Jonathan Toews' ideal team fit, and their belief in the Toronto Maple Leafs. In the mailbag segment, they answer questions from the text line (21:11). Finally, Winnipeg Jets Assistant Coach Davis Payne joins to talk about his role

with the team, their successful power play, Gabe Vilardi's growth, and the differences between working for Canadian and American teams (46:42).

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6044881/2025/01/09/winnipeg-jets-hellebuyck-morrissey-nhl-grades/>

Winnipeg Jets midseason report cards: Hellebuyck and Morrissey lead goaltending, defence

By Murat Ates

Let's start this report card piece with a series of "ifs."

If Winnipeg Jets scout Tavis MacMillan hadn't traveled 1,000 miles to watch Connor Hellebuyck play ...

If Hellebuyck hadn't stood on his head that weekend in Texas ...

If MacMillan hadn't had the good sense to scout those games in plain clothes — without the Jets logo — or if Hellebuyck hadn't been a teenager wired to make obsessive, incremental improvements in his game ...

Years later: If Kevin Cheveldayoff had panicked, trading Hellebuyck for dimes on the dollar during a difficult 2023 Jets offseason that saw Pierre-Luc Dubois traded and former captain Blake Wheeler bought out ...

Or how about this one: What if Hellebuyck hadn't loved Winnipeg?

It took many twists, turns, great bounces, hard work and a lifetime of Hellebuyck's dedication to his craft — plus the work of multiple scouts, executives and teammates — but Hellebuyck remains the Jets franchise goaltender almost 13 years after Winnipeg drafted him. He's signed four Jets contracts, outdueled multiple competitors and won multiple Vezina Trophies. He could win the Hart Trophy this season — or come close — partly because he doubled down on his own processes after the worst playoff results of his career. What if he hadn't been so self-assured? (Or courageous enough to bet on himself, if he was not, in fact, sure?)

Perhaps most importantly to his team, Hellebuyck loves Winnipeg. What if he were "just" an elite goaltender who hadn't loved to fish?

Hellebuyck is not the only reason Winnipeg is a top NHL team. That narrative hasn't been true since 2020, when he kept the Jets in playoff contention despite one of the most depleted defence corps in memory. He is the team's top player — again — but not alone in his contributions to the team's success.

He's also the third-fastest goaltender in NHL history to win 300 games, the second-fastest goaltender in history to combine 300 wins and 40 shutouts, and the fastest U.S.-born goaltender to win 300 games.

"For the longest time I was just playing," Hellebuyck said after achieving his latest milestone. "Taking it day-by-day, having fun, working hard and trying to get better. As you get a little older in this league and things start to happen and you start to achieve some things, that kind of sets in and you start to realize that you're doing some great things."

Hellebuyck has accomplished his personal milestone list — 500 games played, 300 wins, 40 shutouts — with the same team, in the same city, in front of the same fan base, and the beauty of that is not lost on him. He was seen grabbing at the Jets crest on his jersey after Tuesday's win, gesturing at the fans still celebrating, showing his appreciation.

"They've been with us through the start of this," he said. "I was trying to give them a piece of that emotion that I was feeling. ... Going through what this city has gone through over the last couple of years, and going through it with them, seeing how big we are in the community and how much people care about us, it's hard not to start to feel connected. And as time goes, you just grow stronger and closer."

You will not be surprised when you see his midseason grade.

Goaltenders

Connor Hellebuyck: A+

Hellebuyck is the best player on the Jets, the presumed starter on a stacked U.S. 4 Nations Face-Off team, and the reigning Vezina and William Jennings Trophy winner. He is the front-runner to win the 2025 Vezina Trophy; if he does, he'll become the first back-to-back winner since Martin Brodeur in 2007 and 2008. He would also become the NHL's only active three-time winner of the award, tying all-time greats like Patrick Roy. (Only 12 goaltenders have won three or more Vezina Trophies.)

Is he the best goaltender in the world right now? Well, he does lead all starters in wins, save percentage and goals saved above expected — leading the latter two stats for the second consecutive season. He has the best case among goaltenders to win this season's Hart Trophy, according to common sense (and to Dom Luszczyszyn in our most recent NHL Awards Watch).

What more can be said?

Eric Comrie: B

Eric Comrie's three wins and six losses in nine games stand out in contrast to Hellebuyck's 25-6-2 record. I think that undersells Comrie's work: His .904 save percentage is 24th among the 64 goalies who have played at least nine games. The Jets haven't given Comrie much run support in his six losses, averaging two goals per game despite averaging 3.6 goals per game overall.

Four of Comrie's six losses have come in the second half of back-to-backs. For context, Hellebuyck's record in that situation is 0-0-0 — Winnipeg has played its starter on the first night of each back-to-back. Call it a perk of being the best in the world.

The eye test is mostly kind. Rewind to New Year's Eve and Colorado beats Comrie with two deflections and on one rebound that followed a seam pass with a lot of puck movement. Comrie's start before that was a 3-2 loss to the Ducks in Anaheim; the first two goals he gave up were deflections during dominant Ducks shifts and the third was Troy Terry's last-minute game-winner on a horrible giveaway.

All of this backstory is my way of saying Comrie's grade was lower until I dug in; I think he's been put in tough spots and has fought hard to keep Winnipeg in games.

Defencemen

Josh Morrissey: A+

Josh Morrissey stunned the hockey world with a 76-point season three years ago, tying Quinn Hughes for second in points by a defenceman. He followed it up with a 69-point performance (eighth among NHL defencemen) and has scored 38 more points in 42 games for Winnipeg this year. This puts Morrissey back on track for a 70-plus point season, makes him the fourth-highest scoring defenceman in the last three years, and completely overshadows the defensive improvements Morrissey has made from his first points explosion to now.

I don't see Morrissey's route to a Norris Trophy — this is the era of Cale Makar and Hughes, Adam Fox and Victor Hedman are also elite — but he's improved his all-around game each season and deserves to be thought of in elite company.

Analytics aren't everything but look at the drama in Morrissey's career arc via HockeyViz. (sG refers to "synthetic goals," which are Micah McCurdy's version of an all-in-one stat. His definition is here.)

Dylan Samberg: A

Dylan Samberg's successful step into Winnipeg's top four was one of the Jets' best storylines before his injury.

He's one of the few Jets defencemen who excels on the penalty kill, making his reads quickly enough and stepping into lanes effectively enough to limit scoring chances: Opposing power plays take a ton of shot attempts with Samberg on the ice, but fewer of those shots make it to the net with Samberg on than any other Jets defenceman. Better still, fewer of those shots turn into goals.

Put another way? Samberg blocks the shots he's supposed to block and wins the net-front battles he's supposed to win. He reads plays like a top-four defenceman and wins battles like one, helping Neal Pionk to his best five-on-five results of the year, too. Samberg's next step will be eliminating some of the puckhandling foibles that occasionally hamper his breakouts. They're few and far between, but not completely gone from his game.

As we wrote earlier this week, his impending return — Friday, most likely — gives Winnipeg stability at his position this season and well into the future.

Neal Pionk: B+

Pionk played a massive role alongside Dylan DeMelo during Winnipeg's 5-on-3 kill against Nashville that earned the standing ovation you saw linked above. Pionk and Samberg are Winnipeg's best second pair, although it seems as though Pionk might need Samberg at least as much as the other way around. His numbers have dropped with a rotating cast of partners from Haydn Fleury, Logan Stanley and a couple of lesser-used, righty-righty pairs with Colin Miller and Dylan Coghlan. Given Samberg played almost all of his minutes with Pionk and Pionk has now played many minutes with more chaotic partners, most models credit Samberg for the pair's defensive excellence.

If that section dragged like a poorly constructed algebra lesson, it might make sense to focus on Pionk's on-ice strengths and weaknesses. He's great at getting shots through from the point; beating the first layer of blocks so teammates can battle for a deflection is an underrated skill that's contributed to several of Pionk's 23 assists.

Colin Miller: B

There are games in which Miller is more effective than either of DeMelo or Pionk and I don't think that would have been reasonable to predict when the season began. I'm not sure if this automatically means he'd be ready to contribute in the top four — I've noticed a few blind passes in the D-zone that have led to trouble against top competition — but it does mean Miller is having a solid overall season despite a revolving door of partners. He's only taken six minor penalties, making him one of the more disciplined Jets defencemen, and his veteran savvy has helped him take on bottom-six competition from the third pair and beat it. He's an ideal third-pairing RHD in a lot of ways and was a good pickup by the Jets last season.

Dylan DeMelo: C+

We've harped at it at length — DeMelo hasn't provided the "coach's porn" of previous seasons. He's not keeping a perfectly clean defensive zone or making instant outlet passes with the same frequency as years past, and he's gotten beaten in transition in a couple of memorable ways. Last year's 32-point outburst could go down as a career high for him. He's on pace for fewer than 20 points this year; most of the drop-off comes from secondary assists; some of that is natural variance and some of it is likely to do with a drop-off in the crispness of his exit passing. I've detailed how DeMelo's game was underrated in the past. I'm not seeing as much of it so far this season.

Dylan Coghlan: N/A

Coghlan has only played in four games, most recently earning praise from Scott Arniel for the way he and Ville Heinola handled heavy minutes when Morrissey left Tuesday's game. It's a tiny sample size so we won't get carried away, but Coghlan has made a big impact with limited minutes. He's been smart in his own end, made good plays in transition and spent most of his time in the offensive zone.

Ville Heinola: C

Heinola's best games put him well clear of the competition for Winnipeg's third-pairing job at left defence. His worst moments make it clear he's a work in progress. He's inching closer to the point at which his offensive instincts help him contribute to real offence, sometimes — but not always — picking ideal times to jump into the play. It's clear that strength is a challenge for him in his own zone; few defencemen box out earlier or with more vigour than Heinola does (and I think his small stature helps him get away with a few extra cross-checks) but there are times when his man still fends him off for a chance. Alex DeBrincat's game-winning goal for Detroit on Jan. 4 was a case of Heinola letting his man get inside position without being strong enough to take DeBrincat's stick away.

The good news? Heinola is learning. When Nashville picked out Jonathan Marchessault for a third-period stretch pass on Tuesday, Heinola tracked Marchessault down, got body position on him and shut down the chance. The Jets are winning his minutes 8-2 at five-on-five, although it's taken some unsustainable shooting and save percentages to achieve that. Whether it happens this season or next, the Jets would benefit from getting a bunch of games in a row from Heinola, ideally with a consistent partner. That hasn't happened yet.

Haydn Fleury: C

Fleury is a great case study of the difference in difficulty between third-pair and second-pair minutes. Fleury prospered early in the season when Winnipeg's coaching staff kept him far away from elite offensive players. He earned the step up to Pionk's partnership when Samberg got hurt and struggled with the steady diet of top six forwards he faced in that role. Winnipeg would be best served if one of Heinola or Stanley claimed the third-pairing left-defence job outright and ran with it (or if a trade acquisition bumped every player one step down the depth chart). In the meantime, he's a good story and a useful pickup if limited to third pair and press box duties.

Logan Stanley: D

Stanley has put the Jets short-handed 11 times this season, tying Morrissey for the team lead. He has played less than half the minutes Morrissey has, making his penalty-taking rate far more striking; Stanley has taken the fifth-most minor penalties per minute of ice time in the NHL.

Stanley plays a regular role on the Jets penalty kill, averaging 1:44 per game. Winnipeg gives up more goals against per minute of his PK time than any other Jets defenceman. Some of this is because of Stanley's slow first step, making it hard for him to get into lanes. Some of it is also because his size provides a screen for Hellebuyck. On Tuesday, a puck was cleared too softly to the point in the buildup to Filip Forsberg's goal.

At five-on-five, Winnipeg has a worse percentage of shot attempts and shots on goal with Stanley on the ice than any other Jets defenceman. He improves to sixth of nine in expected goals and fourth in Winnipeg's share of real goals, but those are alarming process stats for a defenceman who had been kept away from top competition before Fleury's recent injury. He and Miller have outscored opponents 7-1 in almost 200 minutes together, which offers signs of hope in a purely sheltered, third-pairing role at five-on-five. Some of that score comes from an unsustainable .989 save percentage behind them in those minutes; the duo has enjoyed 45 percent of shots and 52 percent of expected goals during those minutes.

Stanley has been at his best in the offensive zone, showing more confidence jumping into plays and picking up three of his six assists in consecutive games to end December. He also plays a physical role that is appreciated by his teammates and is willing to drop the gloves; he may not be the ideal enforcer but he's earned respect by being game.

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6045477/2025/01/09/nhl-attendance-2025-analysis-jets-tickets/>

NHL midseason attendance analysis: Why the Jets are trending up, on and off the ice

By James Mirtle and Hailey Salvian

Editor's note: An earlier version of this story misstated the capacity at Detroit's Little Caesars Arena. LCA seats 19,515 for hockey. The Red Wings have sold 99.7 percent of seats on average. Due to discrepancies between team websites and Hockey Reference, some other teams' capacity data have also been updated: Dallas, Tampa Bay, Toronto, Florida, St. Louis, New Jersey, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Buffalo and the New York Islanders.

The Winnipeg Jets have been one of the biggest stories in the NHL this season on the ice, but there have been some positive developments off it as well.

After Tuesday's win over Nashville, the Jets have the second-best record in the league, with an NHL-best 28 wins through 42 games. Connor Hellebuyck is running away with the Vezina Trophy, and Kyle Connor is on pace for a massive 45-goal, 103-point season.

All that winning has paid off at the gate, as the Jets' attendance is up nearly 12 percent from where it was last season at the midway point.

The context on that jump, however, is that attendance is up from some pretty low numbers a year ago. Winnipeg's issues became a national story last season when team chairman Mark Chipman sounded the alarm on their soft season ticket numbers.

"This place we find ourselves in right now, it's not going to work over the long haul," Chipman said. "It just isn't."

On Jan. 1, 2024, Winnipeg averaged a little more than 12,500 fans per game. A year later, including four sellouts in their last seven home games, they're now up above 14,000 fans per game in a building that seats 15,225 when at capacity.

That's the NHL's biggest jump at the gate, by far — second place is the Detroit Red Wings with a 3 percent increase — and the Jets' 92 percent average capacity currently outranks eight other teams.

But the organization isn't hanging a mission-accomplished banner yet.

"We're pleased to see the positive momentum," said Rob Mallowney, Jets senior vice president of ticket sales and service. "However, we recognize there is still work to be done as a robust

season-ticket base is essential to icing the best team we possibly can and continuing to establish Winnipeg as a strong Stanley Cup contender.”

The organization says season-ticket packages are up roughly 500 from where they were a year ago. The Jets would like to see those package commitments climb another few thousand, however, so that they make up the vast majority of their gate, something they’ve been working toward through new initiatives to improve the fan experience at Canada Life Centre.

Those changes include things like a new game-day stage, an upgraded sound system and improved food and beverage options.

The Jets also listened to the community regarding more flexibility with ticket offerings, such as with a new BizPass program designed “to engage more of (their) business community in season-ticket membership.”

“We are relentlessly focused on having an off-ice experience that parallels the high-end product we have on the ice,” Mullenwey said.

The Jets’ play certainly helps boost the cause, though it’s worth noting they finished last season with the fourth-best record in the league and struggled to attract people to games.

While there has been some talk of the NHL increasing revenue sharing leaguewide, which would benefit small markets like Winnipeg, it’s a positive sign that the Jets are being proactive in trying to get more people out to games rather than waiting on outside help.

A deeper push for the playoffs would certainly help maintain the momentum for the NHL’s smallest market.

That’s the good news on progress for the Jets. But how about everyone else?

What follows below is an analysis of 31 teams across the league, comparing their midseason attendance a year ago with the numbers so far this year.

A few disclaimers regarding these attendance figures:

1. Numbers are taken from Hockey Reference and include all games played through New Year’s Day in 2023-24 and 2024-25.
2. In the event of a discrepancy in arena capacity size, we went with the official number supplied by a team’s media guide or arena website (when available).
3. Utah Hockey Club isn’t included in this piece, as we covered their unique situation in detail in our last attendance look. Because of the club’s relocation from Arizona to Salt Lake City and the different buildings involved, this exercise doesn’t work for them.
4. A few teams have played overseas or outdoor games that counted as “home” appearances. We’re excluding those games from the average attendance figures.

Tier 1: The guaranteed sellouts

Exactly half the league is in this tier, with 16 teams at 98.1 percent capacity or higher this season.

There's a pretty wide range of on-ice success within this tier. Ten of the top 15 teams in the league standings are on this list, including three of the league's top five (Vegas, Minnesota and Toronto).

But there are also five teams in the bottom third in the standings — Montreal, Detroit, Seattle, New York and Nashville — pulling strong attendance figures. Big-market teams like Montreal and New York should come as no surprise, but Seattle has done well to get butts in seats since the team debuted in 2021-22.

The Nashville Predators really stand out among this group. Sure, the arena is in a prime location on Broadway, but their 30th place in the standings hasn't been enough to turn people away.

Yet.

Tier 2: Strong showings (92 percent or more)

This middle group — between 92 and 97 percent capacity — is a bit different from what we saw in November.

The Winnipeg Jets, as mentioned above, are on the rise. The rebuilding Philadelphia Flyers also jumped up a tier. Meanwhile, the Pittsburgh Penguins, Ottawa Senators and Anaheim Ducks all fell to Tier 3.

Tier 3: Room for growth

They're still in the bottom tier — and at the bottom of the standings — but the San Jose Sharks are inching closer to an 80 percent capacity at SAP Center. That's an increase from the past few months (77.5 percent) and a 1.8 percent increase year over year, which isn't far off from the jumps elite teams Florida (2.1 percent) and Washington (2 percent) made.

It's not the same bump Chicago got from Connor Bedard, and the Sharks still have the toughest time filling their arena capacity in the league. But fans are starting to show up in San Jose for Macklin Celebrini, who has been excellent to start his career. They will be an interesting team to continue to track both on the ice and in the stands.

The New York Islanders were among the biggest decliners in the first edition of the attendance tracker but have had a slight uptick to 91 percent capacity, up from around 88 percent. There's still a year-over-year drop, but from November to January, things look a bit better on Long Island — at least as far as attendance is concerned.

Calgary, Ottawa and Pittsburgh are in the mushy middle of the league (again), and their attendance reflects that. The situation in Buffalo is unlikely to change. It'll be worth tracking if

Columbus gets more fans when the Ohio State football season is over, perhaps as soon as this weekend after the Cotton Bowl. (Jinx?)

Year-over-year average attendance

Compared to this point last season, NHL attendance overall is almost flat — down only 30 fans per game. And that's without Utah's numbers included, so consider attendance up now that Mullett Arena's tiny capacity is in the rearview.

The average team is playing to 96 percent capacity this season, one of the higher marks in NHL history, so there is more good news than bad this season.

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6052469/2025/01/10/4-nations-subs/>

Which 4 Nations snubs are making the best cases to be injury subs?

By Chris Johnston

Missing out on an invitation to next month's 4 Nations Face-Off may have provided an extra shot of motivation.

Consider that the top six Canadian goal-scorers since Don Sweeney's management team finalized its roster picks are players who were not among those given a roster spot in early December: Jordan Kyrour (12), Mark Scheifele (11), John Tavares (10), Zach Hyman (10), Jonathan Marchessault (10) and Gabriel Vilardi (10).

That underlines why having such an early roster deadline for the Feb. 12 to 20 tournament isn't particularly conducive to identifying the players in the best form for the event.

It also illustrates the depth of Canada's player pool.

But here's the carrot still dangling in front of the Finns, Swedes, Canadians and Americans initially passed over: The tryouts effectively continue. Injury replacements are permitted right up until the tournament begins. And the management teams are still monitoring the progress of potential replacements.

With that in mind, we've dug deep on how things have gone for each country's crop of players since the 4 Nations rosters were finalized on Dec. 2, with an eye on identifying those playing their way on to the radar.

No consideration was given to specific roles or fits. This exercise was simply about highlighting the snubs building the strongest case with their recent play.

Finland

Current roster

(Note: Highlighted players were named to the roster as "first six" selections.)

As of now, the Finns appear to be the country most likely to need at least one injury fill-in. Jani Hakanpää hasn't played since the team was announced, and he's only managed to skate in four games all season because of lingering knee troubles. Another player to monitor closely is Erik Haula, who recently sprained his ankle and is expected to be sidelined for a couple of weeks. Patrik Laine missed a couple games due to illness this week, but that does not seem to be a long-term issue.

Next-up forward: Joel Kiviranta

Not only does he have the most goals (six) and points (nine) among snubs since the team was selected, but he's got built-in familiarity with Colorado Avalanche teammates Artturi Lehkonen and Mikko Rantanen. Kiviranta plays the kind of reliable 200-foot game a Finnish coach demands, and he's delivered strong play-driving metrics this season. While he doesn't produce a ton offensively, he's shown a knack for scoring the big goal in the past.

The next next man: Eeli Tolvanen

Next-up defenseman: Urho Vaakanainen

One of just 10 Finnish defensemen to play an NHL game this season, Vaakanainen has emerged as a potential replacement option since landing with the New York Rangers as part of the Jacob Trouba trade on Dec. 8. He was seldom-used in Anaheim prior to the deal but is now logging 15 minutes per night with the Rangers. Vaakanainen is handling regular penalty-killing duty there, too.

The next next man: Henri Jokiharju

Next-up goalie: Justus Annunen

Another player who benefited from an in-season trade, Annunen has performed exceptionally well playing behind countryman Juuse Saros in Nashville after a rough start to the season in Colorado. He's compiled a 3-2-0 record with a .930 save percentage since the Finnish team was initially selected. Annunen would be an easy call if the Finns need to replace a goaltender.

The next next man: Joonas Korpisalo.

Sweden

Current roster

(Note: Highlighted players were named to the roster as "first six" selections.)

The biggest ongoing injury situation in the Swedish camp surrounds goaltender Linus Ullmark, who has been unable to even take the ice for practice since before Christmas because of a back issue. Elias Pettersson has been out of Vancouver's lineup since the holidays with an undisclosed ailment but appears to be on the verge of a return. Rasmus Dahlin (back) and Joel Eriksson Ek (lower body) are playing again after injury absences. Their statuses are worth monitoring closely in case of a setback.

Next-up forward: Rickard Rakell

Rakell has been red hot since early December, scoring 11 goals and 21 points in 17 games for the Pittsburgh Penguins. No Swede has produced more during that time. Most of that offense

has come at even strength for the opportunistic finisher, which should only boost his case if another forward is needed.

The next next man: Mikael Backlund

Next-up defenseman: Oliver Ekman-Larsson

A Stanley Cup winner last season in Florida, OEL's career renaissance is continuing in Toronto. He has the fourth-high total of even-strength points (six) among Swedish defensemen since the 4 Nations roster was selected, and he's delivering strong two-way results while logging more than 20 minutes per night.

The next next man: Adam Larsson

Next-up goalie: Arvid Söderblom

Söderblom's numbers may not sparkle playing behind a bad Chicago Blackhawks team, but it's telling that he has the second-most appearances among all Swedish goalies since the 4 Nations roster was selected. Those regular reps could be useful in the event he needed to be thrown into competition. And he's certainly been holding his own with a 5-6-0 record and .893 save percentage.

The next next man: Samuel Ersson

Canada

Current roster

(Note: Highlighted players were named to the roster as "first six" selections.)

Knock wood, this group remains incredibly healthy. Josh Morrissey left a Winnipeg Jets game this week after losing his footing and crashing into his own net, but he seems to have avoided a significant injury. Beyond that, there's nothing currently on the radar.

Next-up forward: Mark Scheifele

The Jets center had already built a pretty compelling case for inclusion in the original roster and he hasn't slowed down since enduring the disappointment of being left off. Scheifele has compiled 11 goals and 22 points in his past 17 games — matching Sidney Crosby's point total over the same stretch. That's among the best of any Canadian skater in the NHL during that time.

The next next man: Robert Thomas

Next-up defenseman: Vince Dunn

It's been a rough go of late for the Seattle Kraken, but that hasn't kept Dunn from producing elite numbers in a difficult situation. Only Cale Makar (17) and Josh Morrissey (16) have eclipsed Dunn's 15 points since the Canadian roster was finalized, and both of those players have already booked their tickets to the 4 Nations Face-Off. Dunn has exploded for seven goals in his past 17 games.

The next next man: Evan Bouchard

Next-up goalie: Mackenzie Blackwood

Blackwood has unquestionably had the best form of any Canadian goaltender since the 4 Nations roster was picked. He's delivered a sparkling .938 save percentage in 13 appearances — going 9-2-1 for a Colorado Avalanche team that was compelled to sign him to a five-year contract extension almost immediately after acquiring him from the San Jose Sharks in a trade. Blackwood has played so well that there's a case to give him starts if an injury opens the door for him to be added to the roster.

The next next man: Logan Thompson

United States

Current roster

(Note: Highlighted players were named to the roster as "first six" selections.)

The biggest points of concern are Brock Faber and Chris Kreider, who are both currently sidelined with upper-body injuries. Kreider has battled through back issues this season and last played on Jan 4. Team USA is also closely monitoring the status of Auston Matthews, who endured two significant injury absences this season with an undisclosed ailment but has looked good since returning to the Toronto Maple Leafs lineup last weekend.

Next-up forward: Jason Robertson

The top-scoring American snub since the rosters were finalized, Robertson finally seems to have emerged from a sleepy start to the season. He's got 20 points to show for his past 17 games in Dallas. He's also generated more than 2.5 shots per game during that stretch, which is more in line with what we've seen from him during his most productive NHL seasons.

The next next man: Clayton Keller

Next-up defenseman: John Carlson

Leaving the veteran stalwart off the initial roster was one of the more difficult calls management had to make, but his performance hasn't wavered since receiving the news. Carlson has logged more than 23 minutes per night for the Eastern Conference-leading Capitals since early December while delivering an expected goals mark of 58 percent at even strength.

The next next man: Neal Pionk

Next-up goalie: John Gibson

The veteran is quietly having a bounce-back season — putting together a .912 save percentage since early December while seeing regular action for the Anaheim Ducks. Gibson represented his country on numerous occasions earlier in his career and played for Team North America at the 2016 World Cup. He gets the nod here over some up-and-comers who have also played well. The U.S. currently enjoys an embarrassment of riches at the position.

The next next man: Joseph Woll

The Hockey News

<https://thehockeynews.com/nhl/winnipeg-jets/latest-news/jets-chipman-cheveldayoff-crack-thns-100-people-of-power-and-influence>

Jets' Chipman, Cheveldayoff Crack THN's 100 People of Power and Influence

By Carter Brooks

This week, The Hockey News unveiled its annual top-100 list of the most powerful and influential people in hockey for 2025.

Those in the Century Club are ranked in 14 categories of vocation. Many more powerbrokers are identified and profiled within these silos of expertise, from owners to executives to managers to players to media and more. That's all available to find in The Hockey News' Money and Power 2025 Hockey Business Annual.

Although no Winnipeg Jets players found their way onto the list, two members of the front office staff did, those being executive chairman and alternate governor Mark Chipman and general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff.

Chipman, the Jets' co-owner, comes it at No. 24 on the list - relatively high in comparison to other owners, at 10th of the 32 NHL clubs.

Cheveldayoff, who has served as the Jets' general manager since the team came to Winnipeg, is ranked No. 42 on the list - very highly among others in management roles. He is the fourth-ranked GM in the league from its 32 teams.

Despite Igor Shesterkin (No. 41 overall) and Marc-Andre Fleury (No. 83 overall) both being included on the list as goaltenders, Jets' backstop Connor Hellebuyck did not make the top-100 list. He is Winnipeg's highest-profile player and is on pace for his second-straight Vezina Trophy.