

## **Winnipeg Free Press**

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/01/23/arniel-pushes-the-right-buttons>

### ***Arniel pushes the right buttons Jets response to dressing down after Utah stinker could be turning point for club***

By: Mike McIntyre

There were peaks. There were valleys. We're not just talking about the beautiful scenery in the two Central Division cities that hosted the Winnipeg Jets this week.

Let the record show in addition to an excruciating 5-2 loss against Utah on Monday and an exciting 3-2 overtime triumph against Colorado on Wednesday, there were encouraging signs surrounding the hockey club that perhaps this year could be different after all.

You don't need to remind these Jets they've done a face-plant in two consecutive playoff appearances despite strong regular-season results, a product of their play slipping at the worst possible time. They're also well aware the final verdict on this current campaign will ultimately rest on their fate this spring.

That likely explains why head coach Scott Arniel was so irate after Monday's stinker in Salt Lake City.

It wasn't the fact they lost — there have been plenty of those already this season, and there will no doubt be more to come — but it was how it went down that had him so disturbed.

A return of some old habits which can be a recipe for disaster had Arniel spitting fire. The kind of loose, sloppy and, dare we say, selfish play he's occasionally had an up-close look at the last two years as an assistant coach and that he's now responsible for ensuring is wiped from the collective DNA.

So the Jets' first-year bench boss pulled out a club you can probably only use a couple of times a season before it loses its effectiveness, one which carries a degree of risk, no doubt. He publicly read his team the riot act.

Make no mistake: For Arniel to go as far as to call their effort "embarrassing" and "horses—t", you can be certain even stronger language was used behind closed doors.

There was a time, not that long ago, when such a message likely would not have been received well by Jets players. Remember how poorly many of them handled former coach Rick Bowness shredding them after a quick ouster from the 2023 post-season, with an exit interview day with media that turned into a gripe session?

That was then and this is now. As alternate captain Josh Morrissey said following Wednesday's dandy in Denver, this type of tough-love accountability from Arniel is exactly what they need in their ongoing bid to be the best version of themselves.

"We want to be pushed like an elite team," Morrissey said.

Arniel's next move was to cancel a scheduled practice Tuesday to give players a chance to reflect rather than a more old-school approach which might have involved a lengthy bag skate without pucks.

All of which made their response so pivotal. If they had come out against Colorado with a similar poor performance that was well below the standards they've set, then what? Where do you go from there as a coach?

Instead, the opposite happened. A workman-like effort, no sense of panic when they fell behind early, no cheating the game or looking for easy offence. The result was two hard-earned and much-needed points.

Most importantly, it was a return to a more familiar form.

"That's sort of the growth of our team, part of our leadership group, knowing that we had to be a lot better than we were," Arniel said following the game.

"Nobody was happy with how we played in Utah. Just to come out like we did and play as strong as we did, to keep a real good hockey team, keep their offensive chances down and just kind of stick with the game plan, it was a strong effort by everybody."

Now it's incumbent on the Jets to keep their foot on the gas and show what happened in Utah is truly the rare exception, rather than anything resembling the norm.

"We have been an elite team this year, so we have responded well when we haven't had our best games this year so far," Morrissey said of being up for the challenge.

Up first is a chance to right their recent wrongs Friday night against the same Utah club that will come in on a back-to-back, having played Thursday night in Minnesota against the Wild. That will be followed by a Sunday afternoon rematch with the Calgary Flames, who downed the Jets 3-1 last Saturday to start what would become a two-game losing streak.

Winnipeg has 33 regular-season games left to try and get their game where they'll need it once the stage becomes bigger and the stakes get higher. Thanks largely to that historic 15-1-0 start — which has now been followed by a 17-13-3 run — they have put themselves in prime position and sit on top of the Central Division and Western Conference standings.

It would be incumbent on them to try and stay there. That would avoid a likely first-round matchup with one of Colorado, the Dallas Stars and the Minnesota Wild, with two of those likely to join Winnipeg in the divisional top three and the other a good bet to finish as the first wild-card.

Being the top seed would mean playing the second wild card, which at this point is shaping up into a multi-team turtle derby between the likes of Utah, Calgary, the Vancouver Canucks and the St. Louis Blues.

Of course, all of that is a worry for another day. For now, the Jets must remain focused on what they can control. Do that, and they should be well-positioned to try and exorcise some playoff demons come mid-April.

Perhaps, when it's all said and done, they'll look back at these few up-and-down days in the mountains as a significant moment in their season

## **Winnipeg Sun**

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/arniels-jets-need-to-save-up-cause-playoff-times-expensive>

### ***Arniel's Jets need to save up, 'cause playoff time's expensive***

By Paul Friesen

If the Winnipeg Jets were a kid saving up for a big purchase, they made a nice bank deposit this week.

But only after frittering away a few dollars two nights earlier.

The Jets' overtime win in Denver on Wednesday came after one of this team's worst nights of the season in Salt Lake City.

Playing the NHL team with no name, the Jets played a generic, no-name brand of hockey, dropping a 5-2 decision head coach Scott Arniel called horsebleep and embarrassing.

The game against Colorado was a chance to respond, to climb the mountain, and find their real selves again.

"That's the growth of our team, part of our leadership group, knowing we had to be a lot better," is how head coach Scott Arniel put it after the 3-2 OT win. "Nobody was happy with how we played in Utah. Just to come out like we did and play as strong as we did ... keep their offensive chances down and just stick with the game plan, it was a strong effort by everybody."

It was also one more exercise designed to pay off in the spring, when the Jets simply have to buy some more time in the Stanley Cup tournament for this regular-season success to mean anything.

Another early exit, like last year's against these same Avalanche, will reduce whatever record Winnipeg produces to an empty echo of playoff failures past.

Like coaches everywhere, Arniel has to walk a line with his public comments after bad games. On one side, players hear what he says, feel challenged and respond.

On the other side — see their response to Rick Bowness after a meek playoff exit in Vegas two years ago — they feel publicly insulted and lash out.

Evidently, "embarrassing" and "horsebleep" fell on the productive side of that line.

Players have told me Arniel is always pushing for more, never satisfied, always looking to get better.

Those buttons can be tricky, too.

“We want to be pushed like an elite team,” defenceman Josh Morrissey told reporters in Denver, post-game. “And we have been an elite team this year. So we have responded well when we haven’t had our best games so far.”

The biggest difference in the Jets the last two games: Going from being on their heels to being on their toes.

“When we are on our game, we are aggressive,” Morrissey said. “Each guy is on his toes and playing with pace and competitiveness. That is something we can control every night. And we just didn’t feel like we had it in Utah.”

That the Jets won three of four games against the Avs this year can’t hurt if they meet in the first round again.

Then again, as Nic Ehlert reminded us a few games ago, it needn’t help, either.

“You look at last year, we sent a message with two games to go or whatever it was,” Ehlert said that day.

He was referring to a 7-0 win in Colorado in Game 80 last season.

“And ended up being out after five games,” he continued, recalling the playoff meltdown. “The games you end up playing in the playoffs are the ones that really matter, not the ones three months before.”

In some ways, then, these are practices for those.

A chance to solidify habits, perfect systems and learn how to move on from a bad one — or even avoid it happening altogether.

It’s a savings account for the playoff payoff.

### *FILLING THE VOID*

The loss of captain Adam Lowry in the Utah game (he’s expected to miss at least a couple of weeks) leaves more than a leadership void.

When the lineup is healthy, Lowry anchors Winnipeg’s top checking line, not to mention the top penalty-killing unit.

They probably wouldn’t have beat the Avs if they hadn’t killed off both their infractions on Wednesday.

“We got in lanes, we didn’t let them have that first shot, the shot that they probably wanted best,” Arniel said. “From there, whether it was a rebound or a loose puck, we did a good job of jumping on them.”

The PK unit will be hard-pressed to keep this up: in their last seven games, it’s been good on 13 of 14 chances to move into 14th place in the league.

### *LIST? WHAT LIST?*

The Jets remain one of just three teams that have yet to play in a shootout this season, along with Toronto and Edmonton.

The league leader going into Thursday's games was Philadelphia, with six. Colorado has been in two.

The way the Jets attack three-on-three overtime, Arniel wasn't spending a lot of time planning his list of players for a potential shootout on Wednesday.

"I'm pretty sure that it was going to end before the five-minute mark," Arniel said. "Actually in my history here, it ends, usually. You're seeing a lot more of that in the league, goals being scored. We do have a list, but I haven't looked at it in a long time."

Winnipeg's last shootout was two Octobers ago, in Montreal.

That was their only one last season, also the lowest number in the league.

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/may-he-bleeping-rest-in-peace-a-tribute-to-jets-legend-tom-mcvi>

### ***Winnipeg in his heart: a tribute to Jets' legend Tom McVie***

By Paul Friesen

It was, without a doubt, the greatest interview I ever did. And it had nothing to do with me.

It began with Tom McVie telling me he doesn't eat lunch but works out two hours a day, and ended with this: "Well, F-off, then. Goodbye."

In between, an hour or so of stories that I've kept on a mini-cassette ever since, stories told in that gravelly baritone, laced with colour, with that booming laugh and with enough expletives to fill an arena – all of which went silent early this week.

The first person to coach the Jets in the NHL and the last man to coach a Winnipeg team to a pro hockey championship – the Jets of the World Hockey Association – McVie died at his Vancouver home on Sunday.

He was 89.

The news got me digging out that cassette to revisit a conversation from 21 years ago.

It was in the last days of the old Winnipeg Arena, McVie in town to visit old haunts and friends.

That morning had marked the first time he'd stepped into the Arena since then-Jets GM John Ferguson fired him 24 years earlier.

"I was walking around below all by myself, and I'm not ashamed to admit, it just brought a tear to my eye," McVie told me. "I used to spend 15 hours a day in that rink. I just loved it there."

While he may have been fighting back tears that morning, he was known more for serving up barrels of laughter wherever he went.

The stories he told me that day, legends by now, grew taller as he told them.

Like the first time the Jets hosted the Montreal Canadiens, on Dec. 15, 1979.

It was Tuxedo Night in Winnipeg, a chance to show off this agriculturally-based town as something more, something worthy of hosting the class of the NHL.

That game also marked the comeback of legend Bobby Hull.

Sports Illustrated magazine sent a writer to cover the occasion, while the game was to be broadcast coast-to-coast. That forced an earlier start time, and when Hull showed up late for the pre-game warmup, McVie told him he wasn't playing. Rules are rules, after all.

"He was mad... he pulled his tie off – I thought we were gonna go at it," McVie said. "Out the (bleeping) door he went."

Minutes later, in came Fergie, the emotional former enforcer with the Habs and then-GM of the Jets.

"It's not lit, but he's got a cigar in his mouth," McVie recalled. "His (bleeping) face is like tomato juice. He casually says to me, 'Where's Hull?' I said, 'Oh (bleep), he came in late so I told him he wasn't playin.' He said, 'Hey, quit (bleeping) around. Where is he?' I said, 'I guess you didn't hear me. I said he (bleeping) came in late and I told him he can't (bleeping) play.'"

McVie went on to describe Fergie losing his temper and kicking at his office door.

"And it's one of those wooden, hollow doors," he said. "His foot goes right through the (bleeping) door and comes out the other side. And now he can't get his leg out, and he's (bleeping) hopping around... he just goes (bleeping) crazy."

Before storming out, McVie's boss and childhood friend asked whether McVie knew it was Hall of Fame night in Manitoba, with local legends receiving their awards.

The coach's reply: "I don't give a (bleep) if I'm getting' an award. He ain't (bleeping) playin'."

Next, Fergie reminded McVie the game was being broadcast from Newfoundland to Victoria.

McVie: "I don't give a (bleep) if it's shown right around the world. He ain't (bleeping) playin'."

Did he realize it was Tuxedo Night and had been sold out for months?

"It would have been sold out anyway," McVie shot back.

"And now he (bleeping) kicks the door again and he (bleeping) walks out and he's (bleeping) red," McVie said. "And he comes back and he says, 'OK, I'm (bleeping) leaving. But I'm going to ask you one more (bleeping) thing.' I said, what's that? He says, 'Do you know he's one of the (bleeping) owners of this (bleeping) team?'"

"I said, 'Well, geez, I didn't know that.'"

And so it went, the stories coming like pitchers of draft at a guys' night out.

There was the time when he was a minor-league player with the Portland Buckaroos of the old Western League, in the early 1960s. The team was in Los Angeles and coach Hal Laycoe had called a meeting for noon, beside the hotel swimming pool.

"I used to be a springboard diving champ," is how McVie casually starts the story. "So I'm on top of the hotel. He's walking around, and I'm the only guy not there. He's looking at his watch... the guys are sitting on the deck chairs. They know I'm (bleeping) up there. But he don't know. With about a minute to (bleeping) noon, off the building I go. With all my clothes on. I hit the (bleeping) pool... and just scared the sh— out of him. And then up I come out of the (bleeping) water with all my clothes on and I sat down on the deck chair and said, 'Well, I'm on time.'

"The (bleeping) team, they were literally laying on the (bleeping) deck, howling."

My conversation with McVie wasn't all laughs.

Some 10 months earlier, he'd lost his wife, Arlene.

"Probably the greatest hockey wife that ever lived," he said. "We moved 42 times in 47 years. And she not once (bleeping) complained."

Originally from Trail, B.C., McVie was a hockey nomad, but Winnipeg was always special to him, in part because of its underdog status.

Calling himself the Rodney Dangerfield of hockey, he always felt counted out, too.

He recalled one night in Atlanta, where a rugged Flames team was having its way with the Jets, both on the scoreboard and with their fists.

He was so incensed, he climbed over the glass towards the Flames bench to challenge coach Al MacNeil.

"I felt that they weren't only beating up the Winnipeg Jets hockey team, they were beating up the city of Winnipeg," McVie said. "I really felt bad for that. I love this town."

The season after the championship, the Jets, Oilers, New England Whalers and Quebec Nordiques joined the NHL, McVie guiding Winnipeg to 20 wins.

The next year, the wheels fell off.

McVie says Arlene saw the writing on the wall before he did.

"No, it'll be alright," he recalled telling her. "The owner said they've got a five-year plan. She says, 'Well, how come they gave you a two-year contract?'"

"I'm not too (bleeping) good at math," he acknowledged. "But that don't add up."

I finally told McVie I'd better let him go.

He tossed one last F-bomb at me and hung up.

Six years ago, we connected again. By then he'd got his name on the Stanley Cup, as a pro scout with Boston in 2011.

His one shining moment as a coach, though, is what he still cherished the most.

"Getting my name on the Stanley Cup is a tremendous thrill. It took me 55 years," he said. "But winning that championship, after I was out of hockey, and the way people in Winnipeg treated me and the team and those players... just amazing."

## **Global Winnipeg**

<https://globalnews.ca/news/10975653/analysis-winnipeg-jets-health/>

### ***ANALYSIS: Health key for banged-up Jets as they approach 50 games***

By John Shannon CJOB

We've all been witness to the Winnipeg Jets' roller-coaster ride in the past few weeks. We've seen the frustration on the players' faces and heard it first-hand from head coach Scott Arniel.

"Playing 60 minutes," "playing with urgency," "playing consistently" are the phrases we've heard from everyone. Cliches? Yes. True? For sure. By the way, in the dog days of January, I think we are hearing it from 32 teams.

The reality of this season in the NHL is that the Jets aren't the only team searching for improvements. Almost every team in the league needs more consistency.

But here are a few things to know about this point in the season: the schedule is hard. Too many games and not enough days. Teams are pushing their players as they vie for playoff spots or even vie just to get into the post-season.

Lots of games, not enough time to recuperate or rehab are facts of life right now. Understand that as every team is in that 50-game range, every guy on the roster is starting to feel it. The bumps and bruises are hurting just a little bit more and they won't go away. In reality, they will feel it until the February break or perhaps the rest of the season.

You pay the price to play this game.

Which leads you to wonder — what price should you pay for finishing first in the division? Is it worth risking injuries and players skating on fumes night after night?

Speaking with Dallas GM Jim Nill earlier this week, he is one of those convinced that winning the Central Division just isn't as important as some people, some fans, believe. Obviously, getting in the playoffs is key, but will it matter which order that Colorado, Dallas, Minnesota and the Jets are in? Particularly, if they aren't close to 100 per cent?

It's something I'm sure that every playoff team has to think about between now and April. If you have a choice of finishing first or finishing healthy, healthy wins.



## **The Athletic**

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6074450/2025/01/24/winnipeg-jets-logan-stanley-mailbag-walton-he-barlow/>

### ***Jets mailbag, part 2: The Logan Stanley debate, big swings and a prospect check-in***

By Murat Ates

There was one topic for this month's mailbag that drew more attention than all of the others combined.

It wasn't the trade deadline, Jonathan Toews, Winnipeg's many pending free agents, its top prospects, systems, or chance to win the Stanley Cup. It was about an affable, polarizing, 6-foot-7 defenceman named Logan Stanley who has become a third-pairing fixture despite many readers' opinions that he doesn't deserve the role. Why does Stanley get the opportunity that he does? What do Kevin Cheveldayoff and Scott Arniel have to say about it — and what do we think of their responses?

Don't worry, we covered those other topics too.

Note: Submitted questions have been edited for clarity and length.

*What is the deal with Logan Stanley? — Marvin L.*

A ton of you asked some version of this question. I chose yours, Marvin, because I saw it first, it had the most likes, and you phrased it like a stereotypical Seinfeld joke about airplane food. The rest of your preamble spoke to Stanley's usage, referencing healthy scratches last year and overuse this season, while wondering why Ville Heinola wasn't getting the same opportunity.

As it so happens, I've had the chance to talk to Kevin Cheveldayoff and Scott Arniel about Stanley in recent days.

"I've never told a coach who to put in the lineup," Cheveldayoff said on Tuesday. "I've never seen a coach make a decision not with the best interest of trying to win."

Cheveldayoff then said that no player is perfect, while pointing out Stanley played 11 games during Winnipeg's 15-1-0 start to the season. Later, when I pressed about the assets sent out of Winnipeg at times Stanley was protected — the losses of Johnathan Kovacevic and Declan Chisholm via waivers and Stanley's expansion draft protection in lieu of Dylan DeMelo — Cheveldayoff bristled. He pointed to Stanley's role on the 2021 Jets that swept Edmonton in the first round of the playoffs and the two goals he scored in Montreal to follow; I think his point was that back in 2021, during Seattle's expansion, Stanley's star appeared to be on the rise.

I bristle at that because I wrote at length in June 2021 that Stanley's most likely career was that of a third-pairing defenceman. A best-case option was that Stanley would squeeze into top-four impact for a couple of years at his peak. I believed in a patient tack with the then-23-year-old defenceman, but Stanley was so demonstrably sheltered and his goals against Montreal so non-indicative of his playoff impact — and the evidence was available at the time.

I should point out that I like Stanley. In our dealings, he's been kind, generous with his time and funny in an understated way. I like the idea of a player with his size and strength and it's fundamental to my values that depth NHL players are among the world's best athletes, full stop.

Winnipeg's investment in Stanley still looks like a hope play to me. He wins his minutes when he plays a sheltered, third pairing role — and that's important — but he also occupies the roster spot that seems most in need of an upgrade. He puts his team shorthanded a lot. His defensive reads aren't fast enough to make up for slow acceleration — and that includes the PK, where opposing units have had success isolating Stanley down low. I like when he jumps into the rush and he's shown signs of knowing when to activate in the offensive zone, but he's also 26 and his ceiling on that front is not sky-high. I don't agree with the vitriol that's sent his way online — whether he's effective or ineffective on any given night, he's a person chasing a dream — but he's made enough defensive miscues for me to think he's a depth defenceman without top-four potential.

So yes, there's substantial sunk cost here. The Jets traded up to take Stanley and have lost assets to make sure they didn't lose him. There's a chance Heinola is next in line on that front. (My opinion on Heinola: He is not the answer right now, either — don't underestimate the impact of time missed due to injury — but he can't develop from the press box.)

Whenever Arniel has been asked about his lineup decisions, he's given answers that struck me as part of the truth. When he told us upon Dylan Samberg's return to the lineup that he was moving away from Heinola with Dylan Coghlan (who had played well against Nashville on Jan. 7) to play Stanley with Coghlan instead, he was asked for his rationale.

"I want a lefty-righty tomorrow," Arniel said. "I'm not married to that, but I do want it tomorrow against LA."

The implication in that moment was that Heinola-Coghlan was not an option, despite it also being a lefty-righty pairing. Stanley was the go-to defenceman in that scenario and Arniel seemed only to be considering whether his partner would be Heinola, the lefty, or Coghlan, the righty.

Fast forward to Colorado on Wednesday. I referenced Arniel's past preference for lefty-righty pairings when asking what went into the decision to play Stanley on his off-hand side.

"A little bit because he did it last year for us, playing with (Nate Schmidt) and playing with Sammy. (Haydn) Fleury's never played over there and I wanted to get Fleury in the lineup here ... Stan does feel comfortable over there and I hope to see that one-timer come. I remember last year, a few times, Sammy fed him lots and he got that shot off."

Sometimes, the coach wants a lefty-righty. Sometimes he wants Stanley based on specific memories of him playing a small number of games on his off-hand side. Those statements contradict each other a little bit, but not completely — and while I can find evidence of Stanley on the right side with Samberg, all of my lineup cards have Schmidt taking the offhand-side duties.

The bottom line in all of this is that Arniel wants Stanley in the lineup. I think fans would be more satisfied if he simply said so. "We see Stanley's defensive struggles but we believe in his

potential,” he could say. “We’re hoping he can reach that potential and we like his size so we’re going to give him a long runway.”

My read is that Stanley is a must-play option for this coaching staff because they want more size and less action on Adam Lowry’s fight card. If I’m right about that, then Arniel, Cheveldayoff and everyone involved would do a better job of quelling your concerns if they said as much.

I think Stanley gets the opportunity that he does because of his size, the fact that he does fight from time to time, and the fact that few other Jets offer that element. I don’t view him as one of Winnipeg’s best six options on defence, but acknowledge that he’s plus-6 at five-on-five and his struggles have not kept the Jets out of first place in the West.

*Do you think there is any merit in the Jets’ big-swing opportunities such as Mathew Barzal or Elias Pettersson? If the Jets are truly in “win now” mode, do you think a trade of that level would be the best way to accomplish that? — Levi L.*

I think there is merit to taking big swings. Winnipeg has to make its moves knowing it’s not a major player in free agency, so I respect your asks for Barzal and Pettersson, each of whom has several years left on their contracts beyond this one.

I don’t know that those specific players will be moved. In Pettersson’s case, it seems likely that J.T. Miller is moved instead. In Barzal’s, I could imagine pending UFA Brock Nelson being the player who gets dealt. The concept of going big in search of the right player — Nelson? Ryan O’Reilly? Jonathan Toews and then a more expensive defenceman? — speaks to me. It may also be that Winnipeg believes strongly enough in Mark Scheifele, Adam Lowry and Vladislav Namestnikov to seek upgrades at wing instead. The key is sandpaper, skill and an effective use of both to give the Jets’ secondary scoring line a better chance to hold its own at both ends of the rink. We’ll get deeper into the possibilities as the trade deadline approaches.

Jets' trade deadline plans, interest in Jonathan Toews: 5 takeaways from GM Kevin Cheveldayoff

*Is there any chance we see Elias Salomonsson in a Jets jersey before year end? — Paul M.*

I’m here to tell you there’s a chance, but it’s important to keep expectations in check.

Salomonsson has only just returned to Moose practice, wearing a yellow non-contact jersey after sustaining an upper-body injury against Belleville in December. Moose coach Mark Morrison told reporters on Tuesday that Salomonsson could get back into game action during Manitoba’s road trip next week, but isn’t expected to play against Grand Rapids on Saturday.

The Moose need him: Salomonsson has played 17 games, most of the team has played over 30, and the defenceman is still sixth in team scoring.

Here’s the hit that interrupted his stellar AHL debut season.

In a perfect world, the 20-year-old Salomonsson would make a smooth and efficient return to his minute-eating, play-driving AHL excellence. A strong second half from Salomonsson wouldn’t erase all of Manitoba’s trouble but it would be a bright spot during an otherwise arduous season on the farm. The team is 30th in AHL points percentage and 32nd in goals scored. Its veterans haven’t dominated, while young stars Brad Lambert and Nikita Chibrikov are scoring at just over

half a point per game, and now Chibrikov is hurt. Morrison told reporters on Tuesday that he's out long-term with a lower-body injury.

Combine Salomonsson's return from his own injury with Manitoba's struggles, then glance up at the Jets defence where Haydn Fleury and Ville Heinola are having a tough time getting into games, and it's clear a long-term call-up with meaningful NHL playing time is out of the question. Sign me up for a one-game NHL reward, though, if Salomonsson's return goes well — and if Winnipeg has a great playoff seed locked up heading into its April 16 regular-season finale against Anaheim at home. It would be similar to what Chibrikov and Brad Lambert received last season and I think it meant the world to them.

*Blake Wheeler was not in the congratulations video for Connor Hellebuyck. Are there hard feelings between Wheeler and the organization/ former teammates? — Kevin M.*

Wheeler's tenure with the Jets did include conflict with younger players and it's clear from the Unbreakable podcast that he didn't always view his leadership in the same way that his teammates did. I think using Wheeler's absence in the video as a sign of hard feelings is a bit of a reach, though.

I poked around about it all the same.

I was told that Winnipeg's production team checked in with Hellebuyck about his wish list and then reached out to those people. Hellebuyck asked for fishing buddy Dustin Byfuglien, longtime tandem partner Laurent Brossoit and fellow Michigander Andrew Copp; he didn't ask for Wheeler. It may be that Wheeler is not in Hellebuyck's innermost circle but I wouldn't think of this as a smoking gun with respect to Hellebuyckian hard feelings.

Here's the full ceremony, via the Jets' YouTube account. The part you're referencing starts at approximately 2:47.

*To your knowledge, has Kieron Walton's play caught the attention of the Jets management and development team the way Kevin He's hot start did? Conversely, are you aware of any concern within the organization about Colby Barlow's uneven post-draft play? — Zac H.*

As I understand it, the Jets are happy with many of their prospects this season. They are particularly thrilled with two that you named in your preamble.

Walton is a 6-foot-6, 18-year-old forward with arguably the best post-draft improvement in junior hockey. The 2024 draft saw 186 players taken before him; now he's tied for third in OHL scoring with 70 points in 42 games and has a 20-point lead on teammate Koča Delic for first place on the Sudbury Wolves. Walton can take faceoffs and Cheveldayoff told me on Tuesday that centre is an option for Walton, who has been playing left wing. He's also a power-play force, with 11 goals and 21 assists for an OHL-leading 32 power play points. Based on his size, the assumption might be that Walton is scoring his power-play goals from the net-front, but he sets up mostly on his off-wing where he can blast one-timers from the circle. What more could you want from a sixth-round pick?

It takes only a short scroll down the OHL leaderboard to find He and his 26 goals and 29 assists ranked 16th in points. The Jets' fourth-round pick in 2024 is also exceeding expectations, bulldozing his way to danger areas while playing a tremendous role in Niagara's franchise turnaround. He's the IceDogs captain and has embraced that role, impressing his head coach

with his community involvement as much as with his play on the ice. He's production has cooled of late, falling from 1.5 to 1.3 points per game since December, but he remains second in team scoring.

The disappointment is needing to scroll down to 44th to find 2023 first-round pick Colby Barlow.

Most top prospects produce far better than a point per game in their 19-year-old OHL season, but Barlow turns 20 on Valentine's Day and his 39 points in 41 games underwhelm compared to his scoring ability, draft slot and previous levels of production. He's still an elite finisher with an NHL-ready shot, but I'd expect him to find more opportunities to carve the OHL apart at his age.

The good news is Barlow is heating up with four goals and seven assists for 11 points over the course of a seven-game point streak. If this is the rate he maintains down the stretch — and if he can help his Eastern Conference-leading Generals with meaningful playoff production — his slow first half could soon fade from memory. In the meantime, there are valid concerns that Barlow doesn't have a lot of depth or breadth to his game outside of his world-class shot. He doesn't play with a ton of pace, limiting his forechecking and backchecking ability, nor is he a great defender at the OHL level.

If Barlow's shot is going to be his defining ability, he's going to need to find more opportunities to use it. Otherwise, he'll need to add more layers to his game to help him make an effective pro transition when his OHL career comes to an end.

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6084949/2025/01/24/logan-thompson-jonathan-toews-nhl-rumblings/>

### ***NHL rumblings: Goalie market twists and turns, and what's next on Jonathan Toews?***

By Pierre LeBrun

In the context of the unpredictable goalie world we now live in, we bring you the case of Logan Thompson.

What a trade last summer by the Washington Capitals. But what do you do now with the hottest goalie in the NHL, who just happens to be an unrestricted free agent on July 1?

Sign him, of course. But it's a little more complicated than that.

In 30 years of covering the NHL, I've never heard NHL front offices more unsure and skittish about evaluating goalies and how to spend cap dollars on them.

Thompson, who turns 28 next month, is having a career season, and he's making the league minimum \$766,667 — the last year of a three-year deal he signed in Vegas when he was still finding his NHL sea legs.

You want to talk late bloomer? The Calgary native was playing Canadian university hockey just seven years ago at Brock.

Entering Thursday's games, he was in the top three in the NHL in goals-against average and save percentage and battling Hart Trophy candidate Connor Hellebuyck for goals saved above expected.

“Here’s the thing about him: He’s getting better,” former NHL goalie, goalie coach and current TSN color analyst Jamie McLennan told The Athletic on Thursday. “He’s 27. He’s just coming into his prime.”

Hindsight is everything, of course, but the Caps probably should have tried to sign him a month ago. But the surprising, first-place Capitals have a unique situation on their hands with both of their goalies pending UFAs in Thompson and Charlie Lindgren. They like their goalies. A bit more than a week ago, I wrote that the Capitals were treading carefully as to how they were going to approach the goalies, worried about what it might do if they signed one before the other. Plus they’ve got other pending UFAs on the roster, including a key one in top-four defenseman Jakob Chychrun.

But Thompson has played so well that my understanding is the Caps have indeed engaged more meaningfully of late in talks with his camp, led by agent Allain Roy. I would imagine a perfect scenario would be to try to have him extended before the 4 Nations break.

What’s a fair contract for the hottest goalie in the league these days?

Recent goalies extensions signed by Mackenzie Blackwood (five years, \$5.25 million average annual value) and Joey Daccord (five years, \$5 million AAV) loom large in the conversation, to be sure.

Blackwood, Daccord and Thompson are all around the same age.

Does Thompson end up past both on a new deal?

“I could see him pushing for something with a six in it,” McLennan said. “He’s put himself in a category. If you’re talking about Canadian goaltending and the next one, he might be in there.”

The flip side, of course, is what happened to Tristan Jarry after he signed a five-year deal with Pittsburgh at a \$5.38 million AAV just two years ago, and that’s after already playing in two NHL all-star games. The point being: His NHL track record was more layered than Thompson’s or Daccord’s. And well, there’s also Jack Campbell, who signed a five-year, \$25 million deal with Edmonton back in July 2022.

There are no guarantees, right? But the Caps really have no choice at this point. They probably have to sign Thompson.

“He’s good, he’s got some swagger and he battles in the net,” McLennan said. “I think the Capitals have to pay him.

“I think Thompson has put himself into the conversation of being a top-tier Canadian goaltender, as well. Right now, you’ve got to see it for what it’s worth. The Caps traded for him. He’s delivered for them. They obviously like him. And he’s in his wheelhouse of his prime and getting better. Goalies from 27-32 continue to get better with age.”

#### *More pending-UFA-goalie rumblings*

From a sneaky trade acquisition in Thompson last summer, we go to a sneaky goalie signing in Kevin Lankinen by the Vancouver Canucks before this season.

Lankinen didn't sign his one-year, \$875,000 deal with the Canucks until Sept. 21. His camp was waiting for potential goalie trades to happen elsewhere last summer, which would have opened up jobs with those teams. Those didn't materialize, and Vancouver benefited.

Where would the Canucks be without him given Thatcher Demko's delayed start to the season? Quite a bargain signing, especially considering Lankinen made \$2 million last year with the Nashville Predators.

As The Athletic's Thomas Drance recently wrote, both the Canucks and Lankinen's camp have communicated a desire in preliminary discussions to extend at some point.

But nothing is imminent. Both sides will be better served by having more salary-cap clarity once the NHL and NHLPA confirm that number for next season, but also the Canucks obviously are pretty focused on the J.T. Miller situation. (They also continue to talk to teams about Elias Pettersson.)

But eventually, the two sides aim to get things going for real. I can't imagine Lankinen will want to come in under \$4 million a year. So with Demko with another year on his contract at \$5 million, that's obviously something to consider.

#### *Canes cool off on goalie search*

Frederik Andersen is back playing after recovering from knee surgery, and for now, it sounds like the Carolina Hurricanes have backed off their plan to trade for a goalie.

Few teams called around more on the goalie market than Carolina in the early months of the season. But now they feel they're ahead of where they were entering the season with everyone healthy plus the addition of Dustin Tokarski for depth.

There are only so many trade assets at the Canes' disposal, and right now the focus is upgrading offensively, which is why they're among a handful of teams talking to Vancouver about Miller. If it's not Miller, the Canes will try to add a piece up front before the deadline.

So despite renewed talks with the Anaheim Ducks on John Gibson earlier this season, after having also tried to trade for him over the summer, for now it sounds like Carolina is satisfied with its goaltending. Always subject to change depending on injuries, of course.

#### *Don't expect Toews back this season ...*

Winnipeg Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff created a buzz this week when he mentioned his team's interest in Jonathan Toews. But I think one thing needs to be made clear: My understanding is that Toews isn't planning on coming back this season.

Don't ever bet against a guy with the heart of a lion, but all things being equal, if Toews comes back at all to play in the NHL, I think it's going to be for next season. And it's important to note that even that would not be guaranteed. It all depends on how he feels once he starts to ramp it up.

Having said that, I know that Toews is actually touched that teams have reached out and expressed interest given all his time away. And I do think that playing for his hometown team in Winnipeg would be of legitimate interest to him.

Still, so much remains to play out over the coming months to see where this goes.

**Sportsnet.ca**

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/how-adam-lowry-may-have-altered-jets-trade-deadline-plans/>

## ***How Adam Lowry may have altered Jets' trade-deadline plans***

By Jacob Stoller

WINNIPEG — Once February hits, second-line centre chatter is as inevitable as frostbite in this city.

Dating back to their 2017-18 Western Conference Final berth, the Winnipeg Jets have had a gaping hole, sandwiched between Mark Schiefele and Adam Lowry, on their depth chart. Year after year, they've sought external reinforcements, ponying up a first-round pick and package for the likes of Paul Stastny, Kevin Hayes and Sean Monahan.

And once again, a bonafide '2C' is on fans' trade-deadline wishlist this year.

Vladislav Namestnikov has been miscast as a top-six player. Cole Perfetti has been deployed on the wing all year. And despite Gabriel Vilardi looking like a faceoff ace whenever he takes draws, the Jets aren't shifting to the middle anytime soon.

In a perfect world, Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff pulls a rabbit-out-of-a-hat move that solidifies Winnipeg's pillars down the middle. But that's easier said than done. Especially this year, where the quality of centre rentals isn't great. Take away Brock Nelson — a player the Jets should certainly pursue — and you'd be hard-pressed to find a centre (with limited trade protection) that could conceivably be deployed in a second-line role on a Cup contender.

But what if the Jets don't need a second-line centre? They may already have one in Lowry.

Before Lowry suffered an upper-body injury on Monday (he's out week-to-week), the Jets captain looked excellent alongside Nikolaj Ehlers through a four-game span. Lowry's ability to be a force down the middle, at both ends of the rink, opened up space for Ehlers and enabled the Danish winger to generate several Grade-A chances. Since those two and Alex Iafallo became a line on Jan. 11, that trio has out-chanced opponents 25-10 during five-on-five play.

Now, many of you are probably thinking the same thing: how is a renowned shutdown centre like Lowry — who's never scored more than 15 goals — a plausible second-line centre solution?

For starters, look no further than the impact he's had on him, Nino Niederreiter and Mason Appleton becoming one of the best third lines in hockey. It's no disrespect to Niederreiter or Appleton, but that line, at its peak, wouldn't be what it was without Lowry. The numbers speak for themselves. Dating back to the 2022-23 season, Lowry's 57.07 high-danger Corsi-for percentage and his 57.54 goals-for percentage rank in the 94th and 92nd percentile, respectively, among forwards to have played at least 500 minutes. While he's usually lauded for his ability to handle tough assignments and defend the slot, Lowry's also an incredible forechecker who's able to get the puck to prime scoring areas. He just lacks finishing talent. But that's fine.



His play-driving ability, and noted chemistry with Ehlers, is enough to overcompensate for his subpar raw offensive talent. Sure, that pairing may be unconventional – but sometimes, you’ve got to stray away from the norm.

“A lot of people in hockey think they’re trying to build a puzzle, and certain players can only fit in certain spots,” one member of an Eastern Conference front office told Sportsnet earlier this week. “But that’s stupid. You’re not playing who can build a better puzzle — you’re playing rock, paper, scissors. You either win, or you lose. So whether you have Rasmus Kupari with Ehlers, or Adam Lowry — if that line outscored the opposition, they’re winning for you. It really doesn’t matter how things are configured. The outcome is what matters.”

We also can’t underestimate the value in Lowry developing chemistry with Ehlers — a player that isn’t easy to jell with. For all Ehlers’ flaws, we all know the Jets aren’t going to go anywhere if they aren’t able to squeeze the most out of him. And if there’s any outside shot of this team re-signing Ehlers once he becomes a UFA, keeping him alongside Lowry could help increase those odds. He sure seems to like playing with Lowry.

“He wins a lot of battles. And I think he wants to use my speed as much as possible,” Ehlers said after him and Lowry’s first game together. “He creates a lot of room for me to use that speed.”

According to Garret Hohl, who tracks Jets microstats and shares over at ‘The Five Hohl’ on substack, Ehlers generated 5.5 controlled zone entries through four games alongside Lowry — a sizeable increase from his output pre-Lowry (3.97).

The trickle-down effect of having Lowry as the ‘2C’ stretches far beyond just Ehlers’ usage. It’s led to the formation of the Niederreiter-Kupari-Perfetti line, which has helped the latter two play some of their best hockey of the season. It’ll likely drop Mason Appleton down to a fourth-line role, where his skillset is better suited than when he’s logging heavy minutes while riding shotgun with Lowry.

And above all, it eases the burden on Winnipeg’s front office ahead of the deadline. Assuming Lowry remains with Ehlers, Cheveldayoff will likely be looking for an upgrade on Kupari as the ‘3C’ on that secondary scoring line, or a player that could replace Lowry on a checking line that’s rounded out by Appleton and Niederreiter. That’s much easier than trying to find a bonafide ‘2C’.

Over the last while, the Jets have held pretty firm in having a traditional top-six, bottom-six configuration. But as we’ve seen throughout the year — with the second line of Ehlers, Namestnikov and Perfetti — that hasn’t been ideal. Once the playoffs roll around, there’s no way this team is going anywhere if the Kyle Connor–Scheifele–Vilardi line is the only trio scoring goals. They need a second, and honestly even third, layer.

By keeping Lowry alongside Ehlers, it sets the template for Winnipeg to do that.

Possible middle-six ‘C’ options on other teams

Brock Nelson, New York Islanders: Sure, there’s probably going to be a bidding war – but that doesn’t mean Nelson shouldn’t be their top target. The 33-year-old is one year removed from three consecutive 30-plus goal seasons and is a powerful power forward who scores the

majority of his goals from the slot area. Fun Fact: Nelson's hometown of Warroad, Minn. is two-and-a-half hours away from Winnipeg.

Yanni Gourde, Seattle Kraken: The two-time Cup winner is a hard-nosed forechecker and he could help form a high-end checking line alongside Appleton and Niederreiter. The 33-year-old is two years removed from consecutive 48-point seasons.

Trent Frederic, Boston Bruins: Frederic's style of play embodies exactly what the Jets try to be. Frederic's combination of size, forechecking ability and toughness would be a huge asset in the playoffs.

Jonathan Toews, Free Agent: Now, this would be quite the story. A three-time Stanley Cup champion — renowned for his leadership abilities — coming out of retirement to play for his hometown team? Storybook. Now, while the Jets appear to have interest, Toews is 36 years old and hasn't played since the 2022-23 season. No guarantee that he's a serviceable player, let alone a top-nine piece.