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<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/02/10/first-practice-offers-glimpse-into-how-jets-winnipeggers-will-fit-into-4-nations-lineups>

First practice offers glimpse into how Jets, Winnipeggers will fit into 4 Nations' lineups

By: Mike McIntyre

There really are no wrong answers, given the elite collection of talent assembled in Montreal for the start of the 4 Nations Face-Off this week.

But Monday provided the first glimpse of how coaches plan to use four skaters with strong ties to Manitoba.

Winnipeg Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey was paired with St. Louis Blues rear-guard Colton Parayko at the first Team Canada practice. Morrissey was also being used on the second power play unit along with defenceman Shea Theodore (Vegas Golden Knights) and forwards Mark Stone (Vegas), Mitch Marner (Toronto) and Brayden Point (Tampa).

Speaking of Stone, the Winnipegger found himself in the plum position on the top five-on-five forward line with Sidney Crosby (Pittsburgh) and Nathan MacKinnon (Colorado).

Another local product in Seth Jarvis of the Carolina Hurricanes was on the third line with Point and Brad Marchand (Boston). His stall was also between Crosby and Connor McDavid (Edmonton) inside the team's locker room.

On the American side, Jets winger Kyle Connor took top line reps beside Jack Eichel (Vegas) and Matthew Tkachuk (Florida).

Jets goaltender Connor Hellebuyck will also be the starter for team USA when they get their tournament underway on Thursday against Finland. Canada begins play on Wednesday against Sweden.

It's a four-team round-robin, with the top two advancing to the championship game, which will be held on Feb. 20 in Boston.

There were rumblings Jets centre Mark Scheifele could be a late addition to the Canadian roster to replace Crosby, who missed the last two Penguins games with an undisclosed injury. However, Crosby was a full participant at practice and declared himself good to go.

Scheifele and the rest of his teammates are now on a break from NHL games until Feb. 22. The Jets will resume practices on Feb. 21.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/02/10/moose-look-to-build-on-success>

***Moose look to build on success
Blowout win over Iowa seen as a confidence builder***

By: Mike McIntyre

The surging Winnipeg Jets are enjoying life in the NHL's penthouse suite. It's a much different story for the struggling Manitoba Moose, who find themselves fighting just to stay out of the basement of the AHL standings.

What's been going wrong on the farm this season?

"I think there's been times where we've had the execution and it hasn't gone in the net. I think over time, if that continues to be the trend and you're getting the chances but it doesn't go in, that can start to fester and carry over," Moose assistant coach Morgan Klimchuk told the Free Press.

"And confidence, it's a buzzword in hockey but you really see it."

In that sense, the rather fragile Moose will be hoping their most recent outing can become a trend, rather than just a blip. A season-best offensive eruption on Sunday afternoon led to a 7-2 rout over the Iowa Wild — their 13th victory in 41 tries this year which has them ranked 31st out of 32 teams.

"A great response. I think for the most part, all the way through the game and all through our lineup you had guys playing the right way, on the right side of the puck, winning foot races and winning battles and executing. A lot of really good plays made out there," said Klimchuk.

"When you play that way through the lineup and don't cheat the game and you have the success that we did, it should instill a lot of confidence in our group that we can do that against really anybody. That will be our message going forward."

It can be difficult to have both your NHL team and AHL team running red-hot at the same time, but the nearly first versus worst situation happening in Winnipeg is also on the extreme side of things.

To be clear, development is the name of the game at the minor-league level, with team success not nearly the priority it is in the NHL. You also want your players — especially young prospects — to be in a positive environment, and all that losing can take a toll.

Just ask forward Brad Lambert, who has been on a bit of an emotional roller-coaster. He'd spent the past couple weeks on recall with the Jets and got into the lineup last Friday night, contributing an assist (the second of his NHL career) in a 4-3 win over the New York Islanders.

That was Winnipeg's eighth consecutive triumph, tying a franchise high, and left the Jets alone on top of the NHL with a sizzling 39-14-3 record heading into the two-week break for the 4 Nations Face-Off.

Since Lambert is exempt from waivers, the Jets sent him back to the Moose so he could continue gaining valuable experience. He was in the lineup during Saturday afternoon's 3-1 loss

to the Wild to kick off the two-game weekend series, a game played in front of 3,841 fans (compared to 14,685 the night before) as the Moose fell to 12-26-2.

It was, both literally and figuratively, night and day.

Fortunately, Lambert and his teammates had a little more to celebrate in Sunday's rematch. The 21-year-old, who was the 30th-overall draft pick in 2022, had three assists and looked like a player brimming with confidence after his latest taste of NHL action.

"For sure. Even bigger than confidence was just being up there, getting comfortable with that, even just watching the games and learning from those guys," Lambert said of the Jets.

"It's a great group of guys to be around them and learn. That's always a good experience."

With Adam Lowry and Morgan Barron still nursing injuries, there's a good chance Lambert could be up with the big club prior to their next game on Feb. 22. For now, he's focused on the remaining four games of this six-game homestand.

"I think we've shown that we can play with the best of them when we have everyone and we have our "A" game. I think for us it's just finding that consistency and doing it night in and night out," Lambert said of the Moose.

Lambert is now tied for the team scoring lead (19 points) along with fellow Jets recall Parker Ford, who scored his first NHL goal in his first NHL game in Boston and was also sent back to the Moose following Friday's game. The 24-year-old undrafted college free agent potted two goals on Sunday against Iowa to give him a team-leading 13.

Other key contributors in Sunday's game include players with NHL experience such as defenceman Dylan Coghlan, who had two goals and an assist; Axel Jonsson-Fjallby, who scored twice; Mason Shaw, who had a goal and an assist; and Dominic Toninato, who had two helpers.

The Moose will need a lot more of that in the second half if they wish to push for a playoff spot.

"I think finally pucks started going in for us, and we played a good 60 minutes," Lambert said of lighting the lamp early and often and what it might do for the team's overall confidence.

"It's huge. We've had a lot of chances in games before. I think the difference was we were getting those rebounds, where in some other games they've kind of been laying there and no one really gets to them, just driving that net, getting pucks there and bodies there and creating some chaos."

Manitoba remains the lowest-scoring team in the AHL, now with 97 goals in 41 games, but perhaps they can build off this eruption.

"We know what we have in the room. We know the type of players we have and what we can do," said Coghlan.

It's worth noting Iowa currently sits 30th in the AHL standings, so it would be premature to hang much on one victory. The next two games against Texas (on Wednesday and Friday night

Canada Life Centre) will be a much better test, considering the Stars sit seventh-overall in the AHL at 26-14-3.

“They’re hard to play against with the puck, offensively they’re very gifted, special teams are good,” Klimchuk said of Texas.

“But reflecting on what gave us success (Sunday), both special teams were good, five-on-five throughout the lineup it was consistent, honest hockey for our group. If we play that way it doesn’t really matter who we play against.”

That will be followed by two games against the Milwaukee Admirals on Sunday and Monday afternoon.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/hockey/jets/2025/02/10/salomonsson-turning-heads-with-moose>

Salomonsson turning heads with Moose

By: Mike McIntyre

There has not been a ton of positive news coming out of the Manitoba Moose this season. Elias Salomonsson would be a notable exception.

The 20-year-old defenceman from Sweden is enjoying a successful rookie year, even if it included a nearly two-month absence after suffering a right shoulder injury when he was on the receiving end of a big hit during a Dec. 6 game against Belleville.

Now back to full health, Salomonsson had two assists on Sunday afternoon in a 7-2 victory over the Iowa Wild and showed why he is viewed as the best blue-line prospect currently in the Winnipeg Jets pipeline.

“It was a long time to be sidelined,” Salomonsson told the Free Press following the game. “But I’m happy to be back and getting back up to pace. Feeling better and better.”

Salomonsson initially thought he might just miss a few weeks, but his recovery ended up taking more time.

“I stayed in Winnipeg the whole time and worked out with the trainers and stuff. It was great,” he said. “I had my girlfriend here, too which made it a little easier to be alone when the guys were on the road.”

Salomonsson returned just in time to represent the Moose at the AHL All-Star last week in Palm Desert, Calif.

“An awesome experience,” is how he described it. “I met some different players from other teams. A couple of Swedes, too.”

The 55th-overall pick from the 2022 draft was back in Manitoba’s lineup as they resumed the second half of their schedule on Saturday afternoon in a 3-1 loss to Iowa, then took the rematch 24 hours later to improve to 13-26-2.

“We’ve been struggling a little bit, but it’s nice to get a bounce back game,” said Salomonsson. “I think if we play like this, and get more consistent over time, we’re going to win more hockey games.”

No question they have a better chance with Salomonsson in the lineup.

Consider this eye-popping statistic: On a team filled with top young forward prospects such as Brad Lambert, Nikita Chibrikov, Parker Ford and Chaz Lucius and several forwards with NHL experience such as Dominic Toninato, Axel Jonsson-Fjallby, Jaret Anderson-Dolan and Mason Shaw, it is Salomonsson who leads the Moose in points-per-game.

The right-shooting skater is now up to 14 points (3G, 11A) in 22 games which has him fifth for all AHL rookie defencemen in points-per-game (minimum 20 games played) and 18th among all blue-liners in the league.

“Sally plays in all situations. Special teams, five-on-five, and he’s hard to play against” said Moose assistant coach Morgan Klimchuk.

“He’s hard to play against with the puck. He’s hard to play against without the puck. He’s a huge contributor to our group and we’re excited to watch him grow.”

The Jets have used nine defencemen so far this year, including Dylan Coghlan who is now skating with the Moose. There’s a good chance Salomonsson may have already made his NHL debut if not for the injury.

“I don’t think you can spend any time worrying about that. I just focused on getting back and getting back into games,” he said. “I’m actually feeling better now than I did before the injury. So I think that’s a good step.”

Whether a late-season NHL call-up is in the cards remains to be seen, but there’s no question Salomonsson is a big part of the future. He’s got size (6-2, 189 pounds), skill and even some snarl — not to mention a healthy perspective on what an unexpected detour in his development might mean.

“I think it’s good and bad to have those injuries,” he said. “You learn from it. That’s going to happen. And I think it’s going to help you along your career.”

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/not-the-olympics-not-all-jets-glued-to-tv-for-4-nations-event>

'Not the Olympics': Not all Jets glued to TV for 4 Nations event

By Paul Friesen

Some care about the 4 Nations Face-Off more than others and some plan to watch more than others.

Going into this week’s tournament, the Winnipeg Jets players we checked with have one thing in common: They all planned to get away from this Winnipeg winter.

“Somewhere nice and warm,” is how forward Nik Ehlers put it when we asked him a while back.

Ehlers considered a trip home to Denmark, but instead was going to take a vacation with his sister, who’s been working in Miami for the last year.

As for the tournament between Canada, the U.S., Sweden and Finland, Ehlers won’t exactly be glued to the broadcasts.

“I care because we’ve got guys in it,” he said. “But, how do you say that without sounding... it’s not for the hockey. Yeah, it’ll be four really good nations going at it, but you’re missing the Russians, you’re missing the Czechs.

“And you’ve got the Olympics coming up. You can ask any other player in this league they would much rather go to an Olympics.”

Ehlers wasn’t alone in that sentiment.

Nino Niederreiter was part of a group of Jets who’ll be down in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico.

He doubted the tournament would even be shown there, and it didn’t sound like he was going to lose any sleep over it.

It’s a different story with teammate Neal Pionk, who’ll spend the break in Florida and planned to catch as much of the tournament as he could.

“I don’t watch a ton of hockey outside the rink, but I’ll be watching this,” Pionk said. “I’ll be dialled into every game. It’s the first time it’s been true best-on-best in a long time. Plus we’ve got a lot of the boys in here playing in it. So I’ll be tuned in, even if it’s Finland-Sweden.”

It’s not quite a true best-on-best event, as NHL stars like David Pastrnak of Czechia, Leon Draisaitl of Germany and a slew of Russians aren’t in it.

There are three Jets playing, though: Defenceman Josh Morrissey for Canada, forward Kyle Connor and goalie Connor Hellebuyck for Team USA.

“I want Crosby, McDavid, Morrissey on Canada versus Hellebuyck and Kyle Connor on the U.S. — I’m watching that for sure,” Pionk said. “I’ll find a TV.”

Ehlers agreed it’ll be fun to watch his teammates and other marquee NHLers square off against each other.

“Hopefully it’ll be competitive,” he said. “I believe it will. Because there’s a lot of really good players that want to win. There’s definitely some pride. You represent your country, that’s always going to be a huge pride moment. It’ll be good. But it’s not the Olympics.”

What it is: an attempt to whet the international hockey appetite for next year’s Olympics, which the NHL will take part in after holding players out of the last two Winter Games.

The NHL is also bringing back the World Cup of Hockey, sidelined since 2016, with plans to space it two years after each of the next two Olympics.

The timing of the break — the Jets have a full 11 days without so much as a practice — doesn't seem ideal for Winnipeg, as it interrupts a season-high eight-game winning streak.

"It'll feel like training camp coming back," Pionk said. "It might be an adjustment. The only counter to that is every team goes through it, so there's really no excuse."

Pionk figures those playing in the 4 Nations might have an advantage when they get back because they've stayed engaged in high-end competition.

The Jets will hold three days of practices beginning on Feb. 19. Their next game is Feb. 22 in St. Louis.

Ehlers doesn't see the time off throwing a wrench into his team's season, saying it's not much more than the usual all-star and player breaks of the past.

"Between games might be two weeks, but the break isn't," he said. "It looks longer than it is. It'll be great. It'll be much-needed... get a little breather, get back and be ready to play the fun stuff."

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6122030/2025/02/10/winnipeg-jets-nhl-trade-deadline-targets/?onboarded=true>

Winnipeg Jets trade targets: 10 new options emerge as the deadline nears

By Murat Ates

The Athletic's updated trade board is out and a lot of the names on it make sense for the Winnipeg Jets.

We've already discussed players who remain relevant — Rasmus Ristolainen, Scott Laughton, Brock Nelson, Kyle Palmieri and Ryan O'Reilly, to name a few potential fits — but the Mikko Rantanen, J.T. Miller and Marcus Pettersson trades are starting to create ripple effects.

So forget about Nelson's speed or Palmieri's power move for a New York Islanders goal during Winnipeg's 4-3 win on Friday. Here are 10 players we have yet to discuss for the first-place Jets, from big defencemen such as Jamie Oleksiak to Cup champions such as Brayden Schenn, to young defencemen, big scorers and Swiss Army knife players.

Here are 10 options for Winnipeg, how the Jets could use them, their contract details, the realism factor — or lack thereof — and more.

Also in this series: [Forward trade targets](#) | [Defence trade targets](#)

Rickard Rakell, RW, Penguins

Age: 31

Contract: \$5 million cap hit, eight-team no-trade clause, UFA 2028

Usage: First line at five-on-five, first-unit power play

Production: 25 goals, 23 assists, 48 points in 56 games played

Rakell hit the 30-goal plateau twice during his long career in Anaheim and is on pace to do it again for Pittsburgh this season. I wouldn't count on that kind of production to last in Winnipeg. Rakell has scored on 17 percent of his shots this year — roughly one and a half times his career average — while playing more often than every forward in Winnipeg except for Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor. Rakell also played more of his minutes with Sidney Crosby than any other Penguins player — by some distance — and I'm skeptical that he's more than a secondary scorer. Maybe it's the Nikolaj Ehlers-Vladislav Namestnikov-Cole Perfetti line's hot streak, or maybe it's the Penguins' usage gassing Rakell's numbers, but I find myself less interested in Rakell than I thought I would be. I'm guessing the three years left on his \$5 million contract are worth more to a middling team than a contender such as Winnipeg.

Carson Soucy, LD, Canucks

Age: 30

Contract: \$3.25 million cap hit, full no-trade clause, UFA 2026

Usage: Third pair at five-on-five, second-unit penalty kill

Production: 2 goals, 6 assists, 8 points in 54 games played

The first version of my defence trade targets piece had originally featured new Canucks defenceman Marcus Pettersson, with the caveat that Josh Morrissey and Dylan Samberg weren't about to be knocked out of their spots and that Pettersson was too good for the third-pair job. Vancouver traded for Pettersson, forcing us to pull him from the piece, and now the Canucks have signed Pettersson long-term. The ripple effect — other than extra work for my editor — is that Vancouver appears to be making Soucy available.

Soucy is closer to an ideal fit to play left defence on Winnipeg's third pair. He has a long track record of physical, stay-at-home success — most recently in Seattle — but his Canucks playoff numbers alongside Tyler Myers give me pause. Vancouver got less than 30 percent of the shots with the duo on the ice, implying that Soucy isn't an ideal bet to go toe-to-toe with elite top-six competition. If Soucy played sheltered, third-pairing minutes in Winnipeg, it's possible that he'd win them — just as he did alongside Will Borgen and Justin Schultz as a Kraken. I'd understand interest but think there are better options.

Bowen Byram, D, Sabres

Age: 23

Contract: \$3.85 million cap hit, RFA 2025

Usage: First pair at five-on-five, second-unit power play, second-unit penalty kill

Production: 7 goals, 21 assists, 29 points in 54 games played

Buffalo has nearly \$20 million committed to Rasmus Dahlin and Owen Power until the early 2030s. If that weren't the case, it would be tough to come up with a sensible reason for them to move on from Byram — a 23-year-old, left-handed defenceman they trust to play big minutes — so soon after acquiring him. Byram isn't UFA eligible until 2028, although his big minutes, arbitration rights and 27 even-strength points suggest a big raise is on the way this summer. I'm not sure what his defensive ceiling is but Byram comes with fleet feet, multiple seasons of team control and enough even-strength production to think there's value in him even if Morrissey takes top power-play minutes for years to come. The Sabres traded Casey Mittelstadt for Byram last season. I'm skeptical they get a return for Byram quite as good as Mittelstadt so it seems their best play is to keep him — assuming they can sign him this summer.

Oliver Bjorkstrand, RW, Kraken

Age: 29

Contract: \$5.4 million cap hit, 10-team no-trade clause, UFA 2026

Usage: Third line at five-on-five, second-unit power play

Production: 15 goals, 20 assists, 35 points in 56 games played

Bjorkstrand is the one player on this list who is not on our trade board. He's included primarily because subscribers keep mentioning him as a countryman and international teammate of Ehlers. If Bjorkstrand is acquired, according to the fan theory, Ehlers will stay.

It's a fun thought — Bjorkstrand and Ehlers on opposite wings, with the latter convinced to spend a few more seasons in Winnipeg while he's still an elite five-on-five scorer and power-play threat. Their centre could be anyone from Namestnikov to Perfetti to Brad Lambert — next year — and create plenty of secondary scoring at even strength.

The tricky part? Bjorkstrand is one of Seattle's most effective play drivers. It's been eight years since he finished a season under a 20-goal pace. The Kraken are also trying to make the playoffs — if not this season, then next — and have spent money on Chandler Stephenson and assets on Kaapo Kakko to round out their top-nine forward group. I think there are other Kraken players more likely to be available, including someone Winnipeg has been interested in before.

Jamie Oleksiak, LD, Kraken

Age: 32

Contract: \$4.6 million cap hit, 16-team no-trade clause, UFA 2026

Usage: Third pair at five-on-five, first-unit penalty kill

Production: 4 goals, 9 assists, 13 points in 57 games played

Winnipeg has been keenly interested in Oleksiak in the past. One expects the Jets to remain interested in him as the 6-foot-7 veteran defenceman approaches unrestricted free agency in 2026. He's not a surefire top-four defenceman anymore but remains well clear of Logan Stanley as a third-pairing option on the left side. The Jets clearly value Stanley's size — note that Stanley hasn't come out of the lineup since Adam Lowry's injury — but would be better off if that size came with Oleksiak's ability and experience. If the acquisition cost and ensuing expectations were kept reasonable — Oleksiak has decent odds to be a good third-pairing defenceman in Winnipeg but asking for more is a risk — he could be a smart addition. It may also be worth noting that he made the Stanley Cup Final with Rick Bowness in 2020. The concern is that, like Stanley, most of Oleksiak's teammates post better results away from him than when they play together.

Casey Mittelstadt, C, Avalanche

Age: 26

Contract: \$5.75 million cap hit, UFA 2027

Usage: Second line at five-on-five, second-unit power play

Production: 9 goals, 23 assists, 32 points in 57 games played

The other half of the Byram trade makes an appearance on our trade board. Colleague Chris Johnston reasons that Colorado is clearly willing to get creative in its quest to improve itself. That seems sensible to me: Mikko Rantanen for Martin Necas was the sort of trade that made me do a double take when I saw reports of the news.

The part that doesn't seem sensible is that Winnipeg would be a trade fit for Mittelstadt. The Avalanche and Jets are both in "win now" mode, suggesting that Winnipeg would need to send a quality player from its own roster to make things work. Plug Mittelstadt between Perfetti and Ehlers on Winnipeg's second line and it looks good on paper but what if Ehlers or Perfetti has to be moved to make the acquisition? There is also the matter of most Mittelstadt line combinations in Colorado struggling to win the flow of play battle. He clearly has offensive chops but chemistry seems to be an issue and he doesn't come with the 200-foot game of, say, Ryan O'Reilly.

Brad Marchand, LW, Bruins

Age: 36

Contract: \$6.125 million cap hit, eight-team no-trade clause, UFA 2025

Usage: Second line at five-on-five, first-unit power play, third-unit penalty kill

Production: 20 goals, 24 assists, 44 points in 57 games played

Marchand is a Bruins legend, a Stanley Cup champion, a playoff performer and a pest, and tends to be thought of in terms of top-line excellence alongside Patrice Bergeron and David Pastrnak.

That's obviously not the role he's been playing with Boston this season. He's played more with Charlie Coyle and Elias Lindholm than with Pastrnak and his ice time is more in line with Perfetti and Ehlers than with top-line players. This is normal. Marchand is 36 years old. His game is in decline, but the peak from which it is falling is so high that he'd top the playoff wishlists of many contending teams — and add a missing element to Winnipeg.

Marchand is one of the best pests with top-end skill on the planet, in the tier below Matthew Tkachuk and above almost everybody else. He's scored well over a point per game over his last seven playoff runs and managed 10 points in 11 playoff games last year. His status in Boston (and his eight-team no-trade clause) makes the idea of a trade almost beyond comprehension and yet, with the Bruins outside the playoff cut line, here we are. I'd recommend waiting for more clarity in the Eastern Conference standings before getting too worked up about the possibility.

Brayden Schenn, C, Blues

Age: 33

Contract: \$6.5 million cap hit, full no-trade clause, UFA 2028

Usage: Second line at five-on-five, second-unit power play, third-unit penalty kill

Production: 11 goals, 21 assists, 32 points in 56 games played

Schenn has a full no-trade clause and three seasons left on his contract after this one. I think his placement on our trade board is more about the Blues gauging interest than St. Louis shopping him outright: Schenn's trade protection drops to 15 teams next season, increasing St. Louis' options, so I think they'd have to be blown away to trade him. He'd also have to be ready to move on, enjoy Winnipeg as a long-term option and believe he could help the Jets contend for the Cup. That last item seems a certainty; the others don't. I could see the Jets being interested if the option existed, though: Schenn should be a capable two-way player even at 33, while he won a Cup in 2019 and played a big role in the Blues' six-game series win against Winnipeg along the way.

Ryan Donato, F, Blackhawks

Age: 28

Contract: \$2 million cap hit, UFA 2025

Usage: Middle six at five-on-five, first/second power play

Production: 19 goals, 18 assists, 37 points in 53 games played

Donato has been productive for Chicago, albeit in a bigger role than he'd get in Winnipeg. He can play all three forward positions, is known for his competitiveness, plays with a shoot-first mentality and comes without trade protection. That could make the versatile American an interesting rental for a lot of teams. Chicago has used him with several different linemates and he seems to produce with all of them; his underlying numbers read like a higher-event Namestnikov but Donato has more finish. I'm torn between thinking Donato's offensive ability makes him an upgrade — which it does — and thinking the Jets should be more ambitious if they change their second line. At the same time, one of the best things about Namestnikov is the way he competes as hard as he can in every role Winnipeg uses him in; one more player like him wouldn't be a bad thing.

Ryan Strome, C, Ducks

Age: 31

Contract: \$5 million cap hit, UFA 2027

Usage: Second line at five-on-five, first-unit power play

Production: 7 goals, 23 assists, 30 points in 54 games played

Most Jets fans' memories of Strome will not be positive. He was the player whose knee-on-knee hit interrupted Connor's 2023-24 season. Strome, who received a major penalty for the play but no suspension, is primarily known for his playmaking, which is why we're discussing him here. Strome has set teammates up for goals almost as often in Anaheim as he did during four productive seasons in New York. He's struggled to keep the Ducks afloat at five-on-five and isn't a strong faceoff option — like Namestnikov, whose job he'd need to take — but Strome's offensive instincts could help the Jets' second line. I'd prefer more sandpaper from any No. 2 centre acquisition but Strome's contract term could help beyond this season.'

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6123297/2025/02/11/winnipeg-jets-nhl-trade-deadline-assets/>

Ranking the Winnipeg Jets' top 10 trade assets: Which ones could be in play?

By Murat Ates

The Winnipeg Jets have earned the right to go shopping at the trade deadline — again.

Kevin Cheveldayoff and Larry Simmons have built a league-leading team with unique cap space: \$2.7 million now, \$7.7 million by deadline day. Scott Arniel steered the Jets so far away from a January/February slump that they've won eight games in a row heading into the break. Meanwhile, Connor Hellebuyck is at the height of his powers, the power play is historically good and Winnipeg's even-strength defence grades out in the top five in shots and expected goals allowed.

So yes, it makes sense to talk about upgrades.

We've covered forward targets like Brock Nelson, Ryan O'Reilly and Scott Laughton. We've looked at options on defence, like Rasmus Ristolainen and Jamie Oleksiak. And we're going to

keep at it as the deadline approaches and the Jets' plans crystallize. Most recently, we've circled back on even more options in the wake of recent trades. Factor in the likelihood that some teams who still have playoff hope today will run out of it by March 7 and there are many, many theoretical ways for the Jets to upgrade their roster.

What we haven't discussed is the cost. What would the Jets send the other way?

The three best teams in Jets 2.0 history — 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2023-24 — all traded their first-round pick to upgrade their club. The 2018 Paul Stastny acquisition cost a first-round pick and a well-regarded prospect in Erik Foley. The 2019 Kevin Hayes trade cost a first-round pick and energy forward Brendan Lemieux, who was ranked eighth by Corey Pronman among Jets prospects at the time. Sean Monahan cost the Jets their first-round pick last season (and would also have cost a third-round pick had the Jets won the Cup).

It makes all kinds of sense to believe the Jets' first-round pick is available once again. Will it move? And what else does Winnipeg have to go shopping with this year? Today, we rank the Jets' top trade assets and discuss how likely they are to be moved before the March 7 deadline.

1. Cole Perfetti, F, 23 (Winnipeg Jets)

Status: Untouchable

Stats: 11 goals, 23 assists, 34 points in 56 games played

Storyline: None of the Jets' previous blockbusters saw Winnipeg send a top young player off their NHL roster — and not due to a lack of asking by rival clubs. When Winnipeg drafts and develops a player of Perfetti's calibre, they keep him. Fans and rival clubs will ask about him; nothing in Jets history suggests Perfetti will be moved now. He's on a level above Jack Roslovic at the same age, who the Jets made every effort to keep prior to the Patrik Laine trade — and he wants to be here, while Roslovic ultimately did not. Also noteworthy: Perfetti's bridge deal is part of what gives the Jets the cap space they have to work with now.

2. Elias Salomonsson, RHD, 20 (Manitoba Moose)

Status: Untouchable

Stats: 3 goals, 11 assists, 14 points in 23 games played

Storyline: Winnipeg has never moved its top prospect at the trade deadline. It isn't going to start with Elias Salomonsson, who has put together an AHL season that suggests an NHL trajectory like that of Dylan Samberg. (Some observers see Salomonsson developing even further than that, noting he's still just 20 years old, but we'll save that debate for another day.) What's clear is the Jets aren't going to cut ties with their 2022 second-round pick; he's developed too far beyond expectations, his ELC runs for two seasons after this one and Salomonsson looks like he'll become a long-term contributor to their blue line.

3A. Brad Lambert, C/RW, 21 (Manitoba Moose)

Status: Essentially untouchable

Stats: 3 goals, 16 assists, 19 points in 32 games played

Storyline: Brad Lambert has struggled to control AHL action on a Moose team that's been starved for offence. I expected more than that; Lambert is in a three-way tie with Parker Ford and Mason Shaw for first in Moose scoring with 19 points in 32 games after picking up 55 points in 64 games last season.

There is still so much to like. Lambert can still fly. His puck skills are strong. He's made a habit of early arrivals and late departures from Jets practice, demonstrating a hunger to improve that's not lost on the Jets powers that be. I can't imagine Winnipeg trading Lambert, despite his lack of offensive explosion. He's Nikolaj Ehlers' heir-apparent, if Ehlers departs and Lambert's career path goes well, and his one assist in five NHL games comes in limited minutes.

If a great player with a great contract became available, perhaps a first-round pick and Lambert could open that door. I think that's a moonshot beyond reasonable expectation; I'd expect Winnipeg to hold on to its guy.

3B. Brayden Yager, C, 20 (Lethbridge Hurricanes)

Status: Essentially untouchable

Stats: 20 goals, 39 assists, 59 points in 37 games played

Storyline: Thus ends the list of untouchable — or essentially untouchable — trade assets. Brayden Yager is tearing apart the WHL, exactly what a 20-year-old top prospect should do, and Winnipeg should be pleased to have such a well-regarded prairie product in its pipeline. Yager projects to be a No. 2 or No. 3 centre on a winning team and his defensive habits are good enough to suggest two-way success in the NHL. There's even a lens through which Yager is less likely to be traded than Lambert: Yager was acquired for Rutger McGroarty, whose lack of desire to play in Winnipeg should make Yager a non-starter in trade talks. (I don't expect either to be moved.)

5. Winnipeg's 2026 first-round pick

Status: Available for the right price

Storyline: I'm splitting hairs to rank the Jets' 2026 first-rounder higher than the 2025 edition. Firstly, the league sources I talk to seem to think next year's draft class is going to be a bit better than this one. Secondly, Winnipeg is first place in the NHL two-thirds of the way through this season. We don't know how the season will end or how the playoffs will sort out the draft order, but the information we do have points to the Jets drafting late. There is a greater range of possibilities for next year's pick and almost all of them place it higher in the draft.

6. Colby Barlow, LW, 19 (Oshawa Generals)

Status: Available for the right price

Stats: 28 goals, 20 assists, 48 points in 47 games played

Storyline: Colby Barlow's production has continued to track upward since we ranked Winnipeg's top prospects in December. He's torched the OHL for 10 goals and 10 assists for 24 points in 14 games since Jan. 1, climbing from 38th in goal scoring to 16th in that time frame. It's the kind of production expected from a player who turns 20 on Valentine's Day and is enough to alleviate some legitimate concerns facing Barlow's long-term trajectory — notably when Barlow is not scoring goals, does he have enough layers to his game to help his team win? Oshawa is competing for first in its division and could put together a strong playoff run; Barlow's role in that could revive some of the post-draft hype.

As much as the Jets would love to see Barlow build more dimension to his game, Winnipeg tends to be patient in situations like this. Barlow's shooting ability is special — not just for his age or league but among hockey players in general. I think it would take a lot for the Jets to move on from him now, as it did when they traded Foley as part of the Stastny package back in 2018.

7. Winnipeg's 2025 first-round pick

Status: Available

Storyline: The Jets don't trade their first-round picks lightly. They're well aware that their scouts don't get as many darts to throw as other teams — particularly in years when Winnipeg goes shopping at the trade deadline — and draft picks are especially important when a team is not a premier UFA destination. That said, Winnipeg does need to send assets out if a major upgrade is coming back. I think the Jets will ultimately decide this team is too good — and cap space is too plentiful — not to trade this pick, assuming they find the fit they're looking for.

8. Next-tier professional prospects (Nikita Chibrikov, Chaz Lucius, Dom DiVincentiis)

Status: Available to various degrees

Storyline: There has to be a tier at which players get moved. Brendan Lemieux had scored 12 points in 53 NHL games and was almost 23 when Winnipeg sent him to New York as part of the Hayes trade. In today's terms, he was a more accomplished (and more abrasive) version of 24-year-old Parker Ford, who is still perceived as a prospect by many Jets fans. Nikita Chibrikov and Chaz Lucius turn 22 in February and May, respectively; they're better prospects than Lemieux was but are far from untouchable.

9. Next-tier draft capital (Second-round picks in 2026 and beyond)

Status: Available

Storyline: This is the wallet from which Cheveldayoff most likes to shop. He picked up Nino Niederreiter for a second-round pick, Vladislav Namestnikov for a fourth-round pick, Dylan DeMelo for a third-round pick, and Tyler Toffoli for picks in the second and third rounds. Depending on how the market plays out, don't put it past Winnipeg to acquire — and potentially even retain — useful roster players without spending his first-round pick. That's a valuable skill — a big part of what gives Winnipeg its opportunity now.

10. The next generation (Kieron Walton, Kevin He)

Status: Available to various degrees

Storyline: There are some brilliant stories among Winnipeg's next tier of prospects. Players like Kieron Walton and Kevin He are outperforming their draft positions so dramatically that it's worth wondering if their careers surpass some of the more famous prospects on this list. The more recent the draft pick, however, the further away the NHL impact; I think Winnipeg is a good bet to remain competitive but uniquely good here and now. Connor Hellebuyck turns 32 this May; every Hart Trophy-calibre season is worth prioritizing.

Bonus: Ville Heinola

Status: Dubious

Stats: 0 goals, 1 assist in 16 games played

Storyline: Ville Heinola is 23 on a team whose next youngest defenceman, Dylan Samberg, just turned 26. If it feels like Heinola has been around forever, it's because he played eight NHL games on a sparse 2019-20 Jets blue line when he was 18. He's played a few NHL games in every season since then but is better known for the games that he has not played: the month spent on Winnipeg's 2021 taxi squad (without playing in the AHL or NHL), the time missed to ankle surgery in 2023-24 and the subsequent infection of that ankle this season. The 16 games

Heinola has played this year are a new career high for him, but he hasn't played since Jan. 16 against Seattle.

Winnipeg's next game is Feb. 22, meaning Heinola will have gone over a month without playing a hockey game at any level — despite being healthy — for the second time in his career. Combine those circumstances with consecutive season-opening injuries and Heinola has not played 10 consecutive games in a row at any point in his NHL career. That's a brutal way to develop a prospect; in fact, it is a great way to not develop a prospect.

Heinola's trade value is minimal. His \$800,000 AAV contract expires after next season. His earliest UFA eligibility is 2028, meaning Winnipeg can do what it likes with respect to managing Heinola's future. As a person, he'd have every right to be frustrated with that. But Heinola is probably worth more to the Jets as a depth defenceman heading into next season's training camp than as a trade asset today. And when was the last time a Cup-contending team traded defensive depth away at the deadline?

The efficient, calculated play is to keep Heinola. His road has been rough — and the Jets are partly at fault — but he is a young player under contract, with multiple years of team control.

They might trade him all the same.

Sportsnet. ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/how-hellebuycks-path-to-nhl-prepared-him-for-new-challenge-at-4-nations-face-off/>

How Hellebuyck's path to NHL prepared him for new challenge at 4 Nations Face-Off

By Jacob Stoller

WINNIPEG — Connor Hellebuyck got hooked on bass fishing as a teenager.

What started as a leisurely activity with his grandfather morphed into a hobby that got his competitive juices flowing. When he was a junior in high school, he got his older brother, Chris, into it, and the two frequently competed against one another. Eventually, they each pulled in a friend, and the four of them would participate in weekend tournaments.

“It got very competitive but it was just so much fun, especially when you start to realize how much skill goes into it,” Hellebuyck told Sportsnet during a one-on-one interview. “And my favourite thing on this planet is getting better at things.”

You'd be hard-pressed to find an NHL player who spent so much time mastering a skill other than hockey at a young age. But Hellebuyck had an unconventional road to stardom, a stark contrast from his Team USA teammates at the upcoming 4 Nations Face-Off. He's the only member of Team USA that didn't play in the USHL, World Juniors or for the U.S. National Team Development Program.

“I actually had no idea about any of that,” he said. “I was just playing public high school hockey and enjoying it.”

Hellebuyck's father, Chuck, wasn't one of those dads who taught his kids how to skate before they could walk. Connor and Chris were first introduced to the sport by playing roller hockey with their cousins. The boys went on to play at the house league level for several years, despite attracting interest from higher-quality leagues.

"With what was involved and the cost, I was like, 'I can't do this,'" Chuck said. "I just wanted the kids to have fun. That was the most important thing."

But once Connor was 10 years old, it was clear he had outgrown house league. So he joined a AA travel team — a step below AAA hockey, the highest level for his age group.

"I was never on the best team," the Jets goalie said with a laugh.

But he wasn't complaining. Connor had attended AAA tryouts and, while it was clear he was up to par, Chuck didn't love all the politics that came with playing at that level. Neither did a young Connor.

"I remember he made a comment that he didn't feel like there was a team aspect with it. It was very, kind of, not cutthroat — those weren't his words — but he just wasn't comfortable with all of it," Chuck recalls. "He was like 'Dad, I kind of just want to go back to my team.' He always got along with his teammates and was such a team guy. He wanted to play together, as a team, and win."

As the years went on, Chuck met people who played AAA hockey growing up and said they lost a passion for the game

"To me, it just reinforced that I did the right thing for the boys," Chuck said.

Developmentally, playing at a lower level benefitted Connor, too. At the AAA level, he likely would've shared a crease with another goalie and, given how well-structured those teams were defensively, he wouldn't have faced a heavy shot workload. At the AA level, however, he was pelted game-in-and-game-out, providing him the chance to get countless reps as he learned how to anticipate where a shot would go, control rebounds and see through traffic.

"Fifty shots a game was nothing for him," Chuck said. "And he loved it."

Despite playing at a lower level, Connor always made it known that he was steadfast about becoming a professional hockey player. While Chuck appreciated the sentiment, he always told his two hockey-loving boys to have a backup plan in case hockey didn't work out.

"When he was 12 years old, I remember him telling me, 'Dad, I don't have a backup plan.' I said, 'That's okay, It takes time to develop that.' And he's like, 'No, I don't want a backup plan. It's going to get in the way. I just want to keep going until I make it,'" Chuck said.

He was taken aback.

"But seeing the seriousness in his face and how he had clearly thought this out, I thought: who am I to kill a dream?"

Connor played AA hockey until his freshman year of high school, when he began playing for Walled Lake Northern High. In Michigan, public high school hockey is widely regarded as a

dead-end on the path to realizing your hockey dreams. Elite talents usually play for private school prep teams, instead, or with the National Team Development Program. Chuck remembers an instance, during one of Connor's high school games, where a parent of another goalie told him that unless your kid was at the NTDP, they had no chance to go anywhere in hockey.

"Just the way he said it — it bothered me," Chuck said. "These were the kind of parents that I avoided. I never bought into that. A person can do whatever they put their mind to."

In a lot of ways, Connor had tunnel vision.

"I knew absolutely nothing," he said. "I didn't know the path. I just had the desire."

And the confidence.

When he was a senior in high school, Connor got a tryout with the USHL's Omaha Lancers. While Chuck says he never felt like Connor had a real shot, the entire experience was eye-opening for him. Connor was a brick wall out there, stonewalling players during breakaway drills.

"Guys were getting frustrated. And I just remember thinking like, okay, he's better than average," Chuck said. "By then, I had learnt about all the levels, and I thought, okay, this is top-level juniors in the U.S. Most of these kids are going to college and he's just frustrating the hell out of these guys."

After wrapping up his high school career, Hellebuyck joined the NAHL's Odessa Jackalopes.

"I would have been happy if he got some sort of partial scholarship out of it — I was never expecting it to lead to what it did," Chuck said.

The rest is history.

Hellebuyck tore up the NAHL, caught the Winnipeg Jets' attention and was selected in the fifth round of the 2012 NHL Draft (Hellebuyck's second year of draft eligibility). He then ascended as one of the best goalies in college hockey, spending two years with UMass-Lowell before turning pro and dominating the AHL.

Since becoming an NHL regular in 2016-17, Hellebuyck has solidified himself as a true game-breaking talent at a position that's straying away from workhorse goaltenders and inching closer toward tandems. This year, he's having a Hart Trophy-worthy season and is a virtual lock to win his third career Vezina.

And this week, he's poised to backstop Team USA in the first best-on-best tournament since the 2016 World Cup of Hockey, where he was a third-stringer for Team North America.

Despite what he's done this year, it's fair to wonder how he'll fare in this setting.

In a tournament where management groups put a heavy emphasis on big-game and NHL playoff experience, Hellebuyck's resume — at both the youth and pro level — isn't littered with post-season success.

His playoff stats over the last two years have been subpar. In last year's Stanley Cup Playoffs — against Vegas and Colorado — Hellebuyck posted an .878 save percentage and a 4.28 goals-against average in 10 games. That Colorado series last year was especially noteworthy, with Hellebuyck saying afterward that he had played his best hockey.

“You can break down the stats however you want, but when I watch those games, I’m liking the product that I’m putting out,” Connor said. “If I keep putting that game forward, the odds are going to be in my favour.”

Connor says he believes the way he played against Colorado was good enough to win that series — things just didn’t shake out that way.

“When he says stuff like that, it’s not off the cuff. It’s not ‘Oh, I think I’m great’ type of arrogance. That’s him studying everything,” Chuck said. “He’s analyzed every shot he’s seen and he’s thought it through.”

But if Hellebuyck comes out and shines at this tournament, those playoff struggles will be far in the rearview mirror.

“It’s going to be a new challenge,” Connor said. “A new level. And I’m really excited because that’s what I love to do — I love to get better. I love to learn and continue to try to be the best.”

Yahoo Sports

<https://sports.yahoo.com/jets-hit-beaches-sitting-first-190000403.html>

Jets Hit the Beaches Sitting First-Place in Just About Everything

By Al Morganti

As the Winnipeg Jets' schedule break already enters Day 3, the fantasy football loving team from Winnipeg will likely all be tuning in remotely to watch Sunday's Super Bowl.

Where they watch from will likely vary from player to player, as the 20-some-odd individuals making up Winnipeg's day-to-day roster are currently off the hook and allowed to travel wherever they so please for the duration of the calendar break that includes the two-week 4 Nations Cup.

Three members of the Jets will be participating in the event, with Kyle Connor and Connor Hellebuyck representing the United States, while Josh Morrissey will suit up for Canada, beginning this Wednesday.

But for the rest of the team, players have already jetted off to various destinations roughly 60 degrees celsius warmer than that of -30° Winnipeg. But for those abroad, managing to find a television playing the big game on Sunday could be a slight challenge.

Challenge, however, has not been much of a word around the Jets' dressing room so far this season. With two thirds of the 2024-25 campaign now completed, Winnipeg sits first, league-wide in points with 81.

The Jets are also first in wins with 39, regulation wins (33), regulation plus overtime wins (39), goals for (202), goals against (134), goal differential (+68), they own the best home record (22-5-3) and are currently riding their second eight-game winning streak of the year.

Kyle Connor and Mark Scheifele are 6th and 13th, respectively, among the NHL's point leaders, while Scheifele sits third in goals scored, with Connor one goal behind him.

The Jets have three players producing at over a point-per-game, with Nikolaj Ehlers joining Scheifele and Connor in that statistical category.

The team has eight double-digit goal scorers and 10 players with over 25 points on the season. Only two players on the team have negative +/- scores, with 11 players boasting a +10 rating or better. Dylan Samberg (+21) and Dylan DeMelo (+26) rank among the league leaders in that category.

Talking about leaders, reigning Vezina Trophy winner Connor Hellebuyck is having himself the best season of his 10-year career.

He leads all goaltenders with 34 wins (eight better than the next best backstop), he has made the most saves of any goalie, while spending the most time on the ice, league-wide. His 2.06 goals against average and .925 save percentage are league bests. Hellebuyck also owns a staggering six shutouts already on the season.

With two weeks off in warmer weather, head coach Scott Arniel hopes his boys in blue return back home in the same shape they left Manitoba. Next up is a test against St. Louis in Missouri on February 22.

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11011742/winnipeg-jets-underdog-analysis/>

ANALYSIS: Despite elite season, Jets embrace underdog role

By Kelly Moore Global News

ANALYSIS: Despite elite season, Jets embrace underdog role - [imageView image in full screen](#)

There is nothing to debate about the Winnipeg Jets having clearly established themselves as an elite team going into the two-week break for the 4 Nations Face-Off.

But the Jets still appear to be regarded as a “second tier choice” when the discussion turns to which teams are considered Stanley Cup contenders for 2025.

Check every gambling website, listen to the experts, and the Edmonton Oilers, Carolina Hurricanes, Dallas Stars and Florida Panthers are usually regarded as the top four choices to win it all come late June.

Despite Winnipeg's league-best 39 wins, the number one ranked power play, the highest producing offence on a goals per game basis, the stingiest defence on goals against per game basis, the best goals for and against differential, the second best 5-on-5 differential — and there

are many more categories where this team has excelled — you have to go about eight or nine teams deep before you find the Jets on pretty much every tote board.

And I know that sticks in the craw of the players.

“Being in Winnipeg here and I think being underdogs around the league, we’re not really too concerned about what anyone’s saying about us, good or bad,” Jets (and Team Canada) defenceman Josh Morrissey told 680 CJOB ahead of Friday night’s 4-3 win over the Islanders.

“I do feel though, as guys who have been here for a long time, guys that have been here one or two years, we definitely feel the pride in being here. And that chip on the shoulder that we don’t get the same respect around the league — all the various areas that Winnipeggers and Manitobans don’t get that respect.”

It was a pretty strong statement, to say the least.

But from a pure hockey perspective, despite all they’ve accomplished this season, the Winnipeg Jets have something to prove as a result of their failures of recent playoffs past.

They can’t do anything about that until April. But what they can do, when the schedule resumes in a dozen days, is continue to add to the impressive portfolio they’ve built over 56 games.

And keep that chip Morrissey referenced right where it is.

Daily Faceoff

<https://www.dailyfaceoff.com/news/jets-connor-hellebuyck-keeping-things-status-quo-ahead-of-biggest-tournament-of-his-career>

Jets’ Connor Hellebuyck keeping things status quo ahead of biggest tournament of his career

By Steven Ellis

Winnipeg Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck has never represented the United States in best-on-best international competition. That’s about to change at the 4 Nations Face-Off this month.

He was part of Team North America at the 2016 World Cup of Hockey tournament, but served as the team’s third goalie. Two years prior, he took home top goalie honors with USA at the World Championship before ever playing an NHL game. Since then, he has only played in two games for the Americans, winning both of his starts at the 2017 World Championship behind veteran starter Jimmy Howard.

So this will be the biggest tournament of Hellebuyck’s career – and he’s looking forward to it.

“At this point in the season, start it. Let’s go. I’m ready, I’m waiting,” Hellebuyck told reporters on Monday morning. This is the most practice I’ve had in a long time, so for me, I just want to play some games and it’ll be fun.”

Hellebuyck, 31, is having one of the best seasons of his NHL career. He’s the runaway favorite to take home the Vezina Trophy, entering the 4 Nations Face-Off with a 34-7-2 record and a

.925 save percentage. He's a big reason why the Jets have been near the top of the standings all season long.

Now, he's looking to help the United States win gold alongside fellow star goaltenders Jake Oettinger and Jeremy Swayman. While the stakes might be different, Hellebuyck – the projected starter – isn't preparing for the tournament any differently.

"I know there's different systems going on, you need a little bit of time. But for a goaltender, it's stop the puck," Hellebuyck said. "For me, it's just another day at the office. Obviously, the scheduling is opening up a little bit of free time and some practice time, which I haven't had a whole lot of up to this point. So, I'm just going back to managing my game and doing what I know and how I know to manage myself."

The United States will open the tournament up against Finland at 8:00 PM ET on Thursday evening. While a Game 1 starter hasn't been named for the Americans, many expect Hellebuyck to go the distance as the Americans look to win gold in Boston next week.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/connor-hellebuyck-has-a-strong-argument-for-the-hart-trophy-1.2249893>

Hellebuyck has a strong argument for the Hart Trophy

By Travis Yost

As hockey fans' attention temporarily shifts away from the NHL regular season and towards the 4 Nations Face-Off, one thing remains consistent: goaltender Connor Hellebuyck will have an outsized impact on the outcome.

Unfortunately for Canada, and especially Winnipeg Jets fans, Hellebuyck is switching sides for the next two weeks. The seemingly unbeatable netminder will be manning the crease for the United States, giving the Americans a meaningful advantage in net regardless of their opponent.

That's said with tremendous respect for guys like Jordan Binnington and Adin Hill in Canada, Juuse Saros in Finland, or the triumvirate of impressive Swedish goalies. Heck, even including the American backups in Jake Oettinger and Jeremy Swayman!

We have a clear No. 1 goaltender in the world right now. He's close to securing another Vezina Trophy this season, the third of his career at just 31 years old. He also has a genuine argument for the Hart Trophy this year, with Hellebuyck being the biggest reason why the NHL's best team has sprinted to the top of the Western Conference.

Just how unbeatable is Hellebuyck right now? Even by his standards, this could be the best performance of his career. We have seen Hellebuyck entrench himself as best-in-class over the past few seasons, and he's taken it to another level in 2024-25:

The broader improvement of the Winnipeg defence in front of him has definitely helped — Hellebuyck is no different than any other player in the league, subject to all of the good and bad that happens on the ice when he's out there.

As Winnipeg has improved, so has Hellebuyck. This season is the continuation of a three-year trend where Hellebuyck is erasing goals (relative to league averages) at a clip we haven't seen in some time. He deserves extra credit for doing it in this heightened scoring environment, too:

It's not to say Hellebuyck is the only goalie having an incredible season — Washington's Logan Thompson, Anaheim's Lukas Dostal, and Minnesota's Filip Gustavsson have been electric. But Hellebuyck's coming out on top. Again.

In a hard salary cap league where repeatability (not volatility) differentiates the best goaltenders over many seasons, Hellebuyck is a ship in calm waters. The most predictably great stopper of the puck you will find, and somehow still improving in the peak of his career.

Looking at the betting markets, the Vezina Trophy race is just about over, barring total collapse — Hellebuyck's implied odds to win are close to 95 per cent. He's also made the Hart Trophy a four-horse race, a tightly-contested one right now against Edmonton's dynamic duo of Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl and Colorado's Nathan MacKinnon.

Only two goaltenders have won the Hart this millennium, Jose Theodore and Carey Price, both in Montreal. I think Hellebuyck has a great shot to be the third. Because for as dominant as those three skaters are, more than half of Winnipeg's league-leading goal differential (+68) can be explained solely from Hellebuyck.

But the NHL MVP debate can recommence in March. Right now, attackers from Canada, Finland, and Sweden must come together to figure out what the rest of the NHL hasn't: how to beat Hellebuyck.