

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/02/18/welcoming-manitobas-diverse-communities-a-priority-for-jets>

Welcoming Manitoba's diverse communities a priority for Jets True North expands heritage nights to feature multitude of cultures

By: Mike McIntyre

Ron Cantiveros recalls sitting in his living room a few years ago, the World Junior hockey tournament on television, when his five-year-old son turned around with a question.

"Would you be proud of me if I played for Team Canada?" asked little Lorenzo.

The easy answer, of course, was a resounding "Yes." But the reality, as Cantiveros explained, was much more complicated. There were barely any Filipino kids playing minor hockey in their area at the time, let alone at the highest levels of the sport.

Of the approximately 70 kids playing Timbits that year through Seven Oaks, as Lorenzo was, only a handful had Filipino lineage.

"Fast forward to today. I'm a U9 volunteer head coach. On my team, there are six Filipino kids. In our U9 house league there are 14 kids across five teams," said Cantiveros. "We could form a full U9 house team, which is incredible."

That's just the tip of a rapidly growing international iceberg.

There are 240 Filipino and South Asian kids alone enrolled in the "First Shift" program in Winnipeg which Cantiveros and other volunteers help run — a massive jump from 60 when it first began in 2023. These are largely new Canadians who are being exposed to hockey for the first time through the free six-week program run out of the Hockey For All Centre.

"We can't keep up with registration. It's wonderful to see," said fellow co-ordinator Ganni Maan.

"Hockey has long been a unifying force in Canada and somehow polarizing where access is concerned. Representation in the sport as players, leaders, and fans creates a stronger sense of belonging and inclusion for our community."

The Winnipeg Jets see it, too. The NHL organization is playing a key role by working closely with the community to ensure the team is doing its part.

"Obviously our population is changing," said Dorian Morphy, the senior vice president, Brand and Chief Marketing Officer for True North.

"We're trying to cultivate an inclusive culture where every Winnipegger, every Manitoban feels valued and is welcome to our game and our team."

Five specialty nights will be held this season, which is the most they've ever had. Filipino Heritage Night, South Asian Heritage Night, Ukrainian Heritage Night and Winnipeg Aboriginal

Sport Achievement Centre Night have already come and gone, while Black History Night is set for Monday as the Jets host the San Jose Sharks.

An ambassador for each culture has been identified to work closely with True North on every detail of these nights, which are far from a one-and-done as Morphy explained.

"It's really a multi-step, multi-year process and strategy," he said.

There's also a strategic business benefit for an organization that is trying to ensure it is viable long-term in hockey's smallest market, especially after its season-ticket base has taken a big hit in recent years. If the face of your market is changing, finding ways to reach new potential fans is essential.

"But it's just about growing the game and making it more inclusive and really celebrating that, at the end of the day," said Barrett Paulsen, the director of community relations.

"When we're at a game or a whiteout party, we're all the same. We're all hockey fans. And the world's a better place."

Unfortunately, not everyone shares that view, and there has been some backlash directed their way. A sad sign of the times, for sure — but one that won't get them to back down.

"We're simply just celebrating a culture within our city. How can you hate on that, right?" said Morphy. "I think we've stood pretty steadfast on that. Populations in Winnipeg need to feel included. And we need to do this."

The Free Press spoke with each cultural ambassador about the history, importance and impact of these nights.

WASAC night

This is the OG partnership with True North, which dates back to the "Little Moose" program created in 2005 when WASAC co-founder Kevin Chief and True North co-owner/chairman Mark Chipman, among others, hashed out a plan to reach more Indigenous kids in the community.

That eventually expanded to the first WASAC night seven years ago, which was the first of the cultural nights to be launched.

"Obviously it helps the Jets to be more inclusive and have more butts in the seats by exposing people to the game, but I have never thought of this as anything but genuine from the team over there," said WASAC executive director and cultural night ambassador Trevor LaForte.

"This is not just lip service, not just ticking off a box. There's a genuine commitment from Mr. Chipman and the organization to this."

The night itself has grown to be a true festival, one that includes everything from fiddlers and dancers and throat singers and musicians to land acknowledgments (the Jets were the first team to do this), logos and merchandise and national anthems done in Indigenous languages.

"It's pretty cool to see that on a Hockey Night In Canada broadcast," said LaForte.

There is also the grassroots effort to get more kids involved in the sport through funding and mentorship, which is evident through the Winnipeg Jets Hockey Academy run by former WASAC member Murray Cobb.

“Seven years ago I had no idea how this would be received. We could not have dreamt that it would go the way it has. It’s really beautiful,” said LaForte.

“The pride it’s bringing to the Indigenous community, to Indigenous children, to show off their heritage and be proud of it... I don’t take those things lightly.”

Black history night

Representation is important. And Black History Manitoba was looking for an assist in that direction. The Jets, it turns out, were happy to oblige.

“It was an easy sell,” said Nadia Thompson, who serves as chair of the organization and also took on the ambassador role in 2022. “The Jets have a unique opportunity to connect with young boys and girls who want to play hockey but are scared to or have stopped because of the colour of their skin.”

Now in its third year, the annual night has been aligned with Black History Month. On Monday, the Jets are bringing in former 1.0 goaltender Eldon (Pokey) Reddick — who was the second black netminder in NHL history.

Like they do with all cultural nights, several unique touches have been added to make it authentic including musical performances (the One Voice choir will do the anthems), and in-game entertainment (Drum Café Winnipeg and The Hi-Life Steel Orchestra will perform during intermissions).

Specialty food items will be available, as Rob Thomas, a local chef with Caribbean roots, offering up cultural cuisine such as Jamaican patties, jerk pork sandwiches with plantain chips and jerk chicken poutine.

There are also limited-edition jerseys and other merchandise in which profits are shared with organizations.

“One of the things we strive to do is connect history with present day and a lot of young people specifically don’t realize the connection of black history and hockey,” said Thompson.

“This has been a great platform to use to talk about the hardship, discrimination and racism that existed prior to the NHL opening their doors to black people and to this day.”

The Jets also offer up free and discounted tickets to the communities to allow for exposure to a game that might not otherwise happen.

“We think that we’ve opened doors and started a conversation with True North that reflects and acknowledges the disconnect that black people felt with the hockey league and True North itself because they didn’t really think that there was a connection there and that they felt like they weren’t seen,” said Thompson.

“I feel like by doing these initiatives you open that door to say ‘Yes, we see you, we acknowledge you, and we want to share what you have in your culture with what we do and how

we present the hockey league.' The Winnipeg Jets are a diverse team and as much as it's their job to play hockey they also have a responsibility to show their commitment to the community and that includes the black community."

Filipino heritage night

Cantiveros is the son of immigrant parents and has been a Jets fan going back to the 1.0 days. He didn't need to be sold on the sport.

"But there are also new immigrants who have never known hockey and that's where we're trying to reach new audience and new fans in that sense," he said.

The Jets approached him about being an ambassador, a role the vice president of marketing at the Filipino Journal takes seriously.

"I've always looked at this through the lens of it being more than just a one-night thing," he said.

Not only has the sport exploded in popularity among young players, the impact of the night is tangible. Dallas Stars forward Jason Robertson, who is the second Filipino American to make the NHL, took the time to meet with locals when his team was in town for the first event in November 2022.

"If you had asked me three years ago what I would have envisioned, this would not have even been close," said Cantiveros. "It's a testament to the engagement that the Jets are behind."

South Asian history night

This one came as a result of Maan, a Jets season ticket holder, being invited to serve on the inaugural Jets Advisory Council which was soliciting ideas about the hockey club's community engagement initiatives.

"One of my key goals is to grow the game of hockey and celebrate the rich history and contributions of diverse communities in Winnipeg. I want to create opportunities for every child who dreams of playing hockey to have access to the sport, regardless of background or resources," said Maan, who took on the role of ambassador.

"This initiative was a perfect fit, aligning my passion for hockey with my proud appreciation for our culture and community. It provided an incredible platform to celebrate our shared love for the game while also ensuring greater representation and inclusivity within the sport."

As Maan explained, the return of the Jets in 2011 led to an increase in interest within the large South Asian community — but tickets weren't exactly easy to come by in those early years.

That's changed dramatically, and having a night to celebrate their culture is a point of pride.

"For younger generations, especially youth who are growing up balancing both cultures, it's incredibly meaningful. Events like South Asian Heritage Night allow them to see themselves reflected in the North American mainstream while deepening their appreciation for their roots," said Maan.

"It reinforces that they can embrace both their South Asian heritage and their Canadian identity with confidence."

South Asian performers, dancers, and dhol players (Winnipeg Punjabi Arts Academy) which recognize pioneering elders throughout the game have become staples, while graphic design students at Maples Collegiate have helped facilitate game production logos and materials.

"This initiative is so important because it shows hockey truly is for everyone to enjoy. It provides an opportunity for people in our city to connect, celebrate diversity, and build a stronger sense of community," said Maan.

"Every NHL team has the power to bring communities together and the responsibility to connect Canadians of all backgrounds through hockey, and True North has embraced that responsibility wholeheartedly. Their commitment to inclusion is more than just words; it's about taking action."

Ukrainian heritage night

The new kids on the block, are fresh off their first night held last month. Ambassador Yury Kruk was approached by the Jets last summer as he helped run the Ukrainian Kyiv pavilion at Folklorama.

As Kruk noted, there is already a rich local hockey history in their culture, thanks to NHL legends such as Billy Mosienko and Terry Sawchuk.

The idea was to reach those who haven't yet been exposed to the sport and provide them with an opportunity.

"They've done an awesome job. The amount of effort they've put into all these heritage nights actually took me by surprise," said Kruk.

"When you show up and everything is blue and yellow and you see dancers walking around in cultural attire within a Jets game, it invigorated the community to be able to celebrate itself as being Ukrainian."

The Hoosli Ukrainian Male Chorus rocked the house with their rendition of the anthems while folk/punk fusion band Zrada performed during the intermissions and showed "Ukrainians aren't just perogies, holubsti and polkas," said Kruk.

The next step in the partnership will be trying to follow in a similar vein as the Filipino and South Asian communities and introduce newcomers to the sport by getting them on skates.

"We'd love for them to become lifelong lovers of hockey," he said.

Winnipegjets.com

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/morrissey-ready-for-intense-battle-thursday>

Morrissey ready for intense battle Thursday

Josh Morrissey and Canada will have their rematch with the U.S. on Thursday

By Jamie Thomas

BOSTON – Josh Morrissey has played in some huge games in his career. The gold medal game at the 2015 World Juniors, the 2017 World Hockey Championship gold medal game and Game 7 in Nashville in the second round of the 2018 Stanley Cup Playoffs.

As Morrissey and Canada get set to play for the championship at the 4 Nations Face-Off in Boston on Thursday, the Calgary product can look at some of his Canadian teammates who have won Stanley Cups and Olympic gold medals like Sidney Crosby, Brad Marchand and Drew Doughty.

“For example, yesterday’s game (against Finland), obviously, we need to win that game in regulation and secure a spot in the final. And everyone’s focused, everyone’s ready to go,” said Morrissey.

“But you just see whether it’s Marshy or Sid or Drew’s professionalism. But also, they’re relaxed with focus. So that radiates throughout the group.”

That 5-3 win over Finland at TD Garden put Canada in a place where everyone expected them to be, in a winner-takes-all game against the Americans.

“It’s what we’ve been working for, to have an opportunity to be in this game. And it was obviously exciting game for us yesterday,” said Morrissey.

“We needed to win that game to have this opportunity. So, we’re all stoked, and just can’t wait to get to Thursday.”

One of the big challenges for Morrissey and Canada will be solving the goalie at the other end of the ice, Jets teammate Connor Hellebuyck, the favourite to win another Vezina Trophy and possibly his first Hart Trophy. Hellebuyck has carried his stellar play into this tournament, and he constantly frustrated Canada in the 3-1 U.S. win on Saturday making 25 saves.

“Playing in front of him my entire career basically has been, obviously outstanding. He makes us look good in Winnipeg and makes our team, he’s a massive part of our team. So, you know, I think that’s something we focus on a lot, obviously, with whether it’s Helle or any goalie you’re playing in front of, is trying to clear rebounds and allow the goalie to see the puck,” said Morrissey.

“If these top goalies can see the puck, it’s pretty hard to score on. So, again, kind of to my prior answer, I think that’s what you try to do offensively against great goalies, is get to the front of the net and make that job to see the puck more difficult.”

With all the emotions that came out in the opening nine seconds of their last meeting, it could be hard to match what we saw at the Bell Centre, even with a championship on the line and Canada looking for revenge. But it is clear that we are in for another physical battle on Thursday.

“Most exciting game I’ve ever been a part of, this past Saturday. So, I think both teams, the way they play, play fast, play physical,” said Morrissey.

“It’s going to be intense, obviously, discipline is key, in big games like that. So, I assume, again, it’s going to be physical. It’s gonna be intense. Both teams will want to set the tone early.”

In short tournaments like this, teams have to come together quickly in order to win. Canada has had a roller coaster ride from the exciting opening night overtime win over Sweden, the gruelling, physical battle that they lost to the U.S. and taking a must-win game against Finland.

"I mean, I think each game, obviously, in a short tournament, guys are building chemistry, and we've been, I think, getting better each game, trying to implement the systems that the coaches have for us, and just continue to build the game that we want to play," said Morrissey.

"So again, we're going to have to go to another level on Thursday night. But we've definitely been building as this tournament's gone on."

ICE CHIPS

The Americans will be without Charlie McAvoy who is out with an upper body injury, Jake Sanderson replaced him in the loss to Sweden and will do so on Thursday. The United States will have Quinn Hughes around as well, but the Canucks defenceman cannot play unless there is another injury on the American blueline. USA head coach Mike Sullivan believes that Matthew Tkachuk, Brady Tkachuk and Auston Matthews should be able to take part of Thursday's final. Both teams treated Tuesday as an off-day from the ice.

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/morrissey-canada-off-to-4-nations-final>

Morrissey, Canada off to 4 Nations final

MacKinnon scores twice, Binnington makes 23 saves to lead Canada to Thursday's final

By Jamie Thomas

BOSTON, MA – Canada jumped out to a 4-0 lead in the second period and held on for a 5-3 win over Finland to put themselves in Thursday's final at the 4 Nations Face-Off at TD Garden. Nathan MacKinnon (2G), Connor McDavid (1G, 1A), Sidney Crosby (1G, 1A) and Sam Reinhart (3A) all had multi-point nights for Canada. Jordan Binnington made 23 saves for Canada in his third straight start at this tournament. Mikael Granlund had two goals for Finland who scored three times in the third period to cut Canada's lead to one before Crosby scored an empty net goal to ice the game.

MCDAVID, MACKINNON AND CROSBY

Finland had plenty of confidence heading into this afternoon's contest after hanging in with the Americans for 40 minutes and then beating their rival Sweden in overtime. The Finns got off to a good start today, but Roope Hintz gave the puck away to Connor McDavid at the Finnish blueline and McDavid ripped a wrist shot past a screened Kevin Lankinen to give Canada a 1-0 lead. Nathan MacKinnon made it 2-0 just 46 seconds later, as Sam Reinhart chipped the puck past Esa Lindell and MacKinnon swooped in and beat Lankinen low stick side.

Canada led 3-0 heading into the second period and MacKinnon added his second goal of the afternoon and third of the tournament and that it turned out to be the game winner. The big three combined for six points and helped Canada get another shot at the Americans on Thursday.

"To see what he (McDavid) did on the first goal of game. He just kind of circled out and got it and (Mark) Stone gave a great screen," said Canada coach Jon Cooper.

"Meeting with those guys last night, to win hockey games, you have to be so selfless. But it's weird how you have to tell the players, at times to be selfish and being selfish you have to shoot it, and MacKinnon did it twice."

MAKAR RETURNS

Cale Makar missed the biggest game of the year on Saturday and called it one of the toughest decisions of his career not playing against the United States. The 2022 Norris Trophy winner returned to the lineup and led all Canadian blueliners in ice time (23:57), shots of goal (4) and tied with Josh Morrissey for the most blocked shots (4).

THE REMATCH

Canada's win sets up the final that many predicted and anyone outside of the Sweden and Finland was hoping for. The Canadians will get another chance to beat the United States after losing to them on Saturday 3-1 but this time it will be for the championship. In the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver, the U.S. beat Canada in the round robin only to lose the gold medal to them thanks to the golden goal by Sidney Crosby.

"The last thing we wanted to do was go home today or tomorrow, whatever. Whoever we're playing in the finals, obviously, it's going to be the Americans," said MacKinnon.

"We'd love to play them again, we feel we could beat those guys. We plan on playing a little bit better."

The Hockey News

<https://thehockeynews.com/nhl/winnipeg-jets/latest-news/jets-morrissey-to-face-hellebuyck-and-connor-in-4-nations-face-off-final>

Jets' Morrissey To Face Hellebuyck and Connor In 4 Nations Face-Off Final

By Julian Gaudio

After Team Canada beat Finland 5-3, they booked their place against Team USA in the 4 Nations Face-Off final.

Canada jumped out to a quick 3-0 lead in the first period after goals from Connor McDavid, Nathan MacKinnon and Brayden Point. MacKinnon added his second of the game and third of the tournament in the second period to further separate themselves from Finland. Finland attempted to make a miraculous comeback, cutting the lead to just one goal before Sidney Crosby added the empty net goal to ensure the win.

Josh Morrissey was once again held off the scoresheet but recorded 19:12 of ice time, third among defenders on Team Canada behind Cale Makar and Devon Toews. The Winnipeg Jets blueliner was able to record two shots on goal and four blocks.

With the win, Canada sets up a rematch against Team USA, and Morrissey will be looking for revenge over his teammates Connor Hellebuyck and Kyle Connor.

USA will take on Sweden tonight, but the result will have no effect on the tournament. USA has clinched first place in the round robin, and Sweden, even if they secure a regulation win, would lose the head-to-head battle against Canada.

Canadian Jets fans will likely be hoping to see Morrissey and Canada prevail, but a sense of pride will likely be felt watching Hellebuyck and Connor hoist the trophy and walk away with gold medals if the Americans are victorious.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/nhl-trade-deadline-plans-western-canadian-teams-biggest-needs%7E3082133>

NHL Trade Deadline Plans: Western Canadian teams biggest needs (VIDEO)

TSN Hockey analyst Frank Corrado joins Jay Onrait to break down what the Vancouver Canucks, Edmonton Oilers, Winnipeg Jets and Calgary Flames need ahead of the NHL trade deadline.

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6132109/2025/02/18/winnipeg-jets-stretch-run-ehlers-morrissey-arniel/>

This Winnipeg Jets season is worth celebrating — whatever its final chapter holds

By Murat Ates

When Paul Maurice stepped down from the Jets' No. 1 job in December 2021, Winnipeg held on to a playoff spot but a lot was going wrong.

Blake Wheeler's captaincy took a top-down approach. Maurice's coaching tenure had outlasted its effectiveness. Winnipeg's players didn't play for each other as much as they could — a sentiment articulated by Paul Stastny when the Jets missed the playoffs at the end of the season.

Winnipeg is so far clear of that misery that it may seem strange to talk about it now. These Jets love playing together, winning together, putting the best power play in the NHL together, and playing good team defence in front of the presumptive three-time Vezina Trophy winner together. They're earning their wins collectively, while getting star turns at key moments from Kyle Connor, Josh Morrissey, Mark Scheifele, Gabriel Vilardi and Nikolaj Ehlers, among many others.

This invocation of 2021-22 is done with purpose, however. The seeds of Winnipeg's growth were made possible by that team's playoff-missing misery.

Winnipeg needed accountability. Rick Bowness transformed the Jets' leadership group, then talked about how the players who wore the Jets uniform wanted to be in Winnipeg. He grew more emphatic about this point after Pierre-Luc Dubois was traded and Scheifele and Connor Hellebuyck signed matching eight-year extensions. Winnipeg had bought in — and just in time, in a way. Without Scheifele and Hellebuyck, these Jets could be stepping gingerly through a rebuild as opposed to leading the Western Conference by 9 points.

Scott Arniel's coaching impact has been a refinement of what worked, improving upon a better foundation than the one Bowness was given. These Jets have won eight games in a row at a time those Jets often faltered. These Jets have an elite power play — credit Davis Payne for that — and a 14th-ranked penalty kill. Arniel's ability to improve upon the Jets' pre-existing accountability to one another and to their own standards of what makes elite teams tick should not be overlooked. When he seethed after the Jets' loss to Utah, Winnipeg's players didn't sulk.

They took it upon themselves to re-establish their own standards — the standards they came up with in that overlong summer.

There's an alternate version of this story where the Jets players don't have the maturity to accept their former associate coach as their No. 1. This is not that Winnipeg story.

Can it last? Will it last? Will the Jets fade down the stretch, fumbling toward a first-round exit the same way the previous two editions did? These are important questions but obsessing over them comes at a cost.

Whether it's Hellebuyck and Scheifele's age, the team's good health or the sheer number of Jets contracts set to end this summer, there's a chance this is the best version of the Jets we see for a number of years. It makes Kevin Cheveldayoff's trade deadline plans fraught with risk. Some of the players who play enormous roles in Winnipeg's success are scheduled to be unrestricted free agents when the season is over. The concept of a "self-rental" makes sense for a team trying to win the Stanley Cup, but the Jets have to balance their best shot at winning the Cup this season with an eye on sustainable franchise success.

Take Ehlers. The power play wouldn't be what it is without him — he's factored in on a higher percentage of Jets power-play goals while he's been on the ice than any other player. He's second to Connor in points per minute at five-on-five; combine those feats and Ehlers is on pace for a career high in points despite slumping upon return from midseason injury. Ehlers' power-play success hasn't been about zone entries, as one may have expected. It's come from his commitment to puck recoveries and — most notably — his ability to read PK setups and pick them apart with his teammates.

Ehlers saw this play opening up against Ottawa before the faceoff that led to this goal:

That kind of chemistry is difficult to replace. Vilardi's contract expires this summer; his cap hit is about to double. Dylan Samberg is heading for a big raise on his next contract, too. Winnipeg may not be able to sign Ehlers when the season ends.

At the same time, he's too big a piece of their success to send away on a whim. Enjoy the zone exits, the chaos and the elite production while you can; Ehlers' on-ice idiosyncrasies include various kick plays, the willingness to dive to keep pucks in or get them out, and an unpredictable series of high-speed, neutral-zone jazz notes that flatfoot teammates and defenders alike. Ehlers is not everybody's favourite music and that's fine; without him, the second line would still lose its most effective note.

Ehlers is not the only player who may be 26 games plus playoffs away from the end of his Jets career. Mason Appleton helps make Adam Lowry's shutdown line the best version of that line in the NHL. Alex Iafallo is scoring or setting up highlight reel goals almost nightly since getting off the fourth line. Neal Pionk reads his coverage and gets shots through block attempts as well as anyone; only Connor has gotten more first assists per minute than Pionk at even strength. Vladislav Namestnikov has reclaimed his offence with Ehlers and Cole Perfetti, giving the Jets two viable scoring lines and contributing to eight straight wins.

Most of these players are heading for substantial raises whether or not they stay in Winnipeg. This edition of the Jets — its quality, cap space and star power — may be difficult to repeat. That's why Cheveldayoff talks about Ehlers' future in terms of hoping to win the Stanley Cup and then stops himself there.

“There’s nothing more that I’d love to do than raise a Cup with him,” Cheveldayoff said last month. “The business side will be the business side. Where that goes ... that story’s still unfolding.”

This is different than his approach to discussing Scheifele and Hellebuyck prior to those extensions. Cheveldayoff’s tonal shift to “Helle and Scheif are big parts of our franchise” at the 2023 draft implied a greater organizational commitment to those players than what he’s expressing for Ehlers now. It seems as though the Jets are still trying to decide if they want to make that kind of bet on Ehlers, who must in turn decide if he wants to make that kind of bet on Winnipeg. The uncertainty only emphasizes how important it is to appreciate the moment and the opportunity that the Jets have now.

I opened this opinion piece with a reference to Jets coaching and leadership. Even if all of Winnipeg’s free agents walk this summer, there is a strong foundation in place. There’s a lot on the line for the Jets down the stretch and into the spring, just as there was last year. The players know it now as they knew it then. So let me turn your attention to a conversation I had with Morrissey on a quiet day before last year’s playoffs began.

The Jets had won eight games in a row to finish the season — the best streak among any NHL team — and were favourites against the Avalanche, whom they’d swept in the season series.

The Jets entered last season’s playoffs with momentum and plenty of belief. (David Lipnowski / Getty Images)

Morrissey understood last year’s Jets were a special group.

“This one’s really exciting. Everyone in that room really believes we have a chance to do something special. Everyone believes we can play and beat anyone,” he said that day in April. “We’ve had a great regular season. We’ve done it this year in a different way, probably, than we ever have in the past. What did it was our depth and our defensive play and our team game. Everyone knows, in the playoffs, that those things are massively important.”

The belief was there. Morrissey’s reflection was well-placed, and it was clear it was the product of soul-searching. He’d even spoken to mentors and respected friends (Cup champions chief among them) to establish Winnipeg’s legitimate chance to win.

“When you talk to guys that have won Cups, a common theme I’ve heard is you don’t always know,” he said. “You don’t go into the playoffs, ‘This is the year we’re going to win.’ You don’t always know when it’s going to come. But the more opportunities you give yourself, if you do it the right way and have good teams, you also never know when it might come, too. So why couldn’t it be our year?”

Winnipeg’s season ended five games later.

These Jets are better than those Jets. They’ve avoided many of their pratfalls, improved upon their special teams, gotten another standard-bearing season from Hellebuyck, and have jelled in ways previous iterations of this team did not match.

But it’s still hockey. The next 26 games could bring anything the Jets’ way.

“You learn your lessons as you play the games. The biggest thing this group has done is put stuff behind us,” Arniel said before the break. “Whether a win or loss, whether you individually had a great game or bad game. Whether it’s a shift, we talk more game to game. How we respond the next night is what I’ve always tried to pound away here. Just making sure that you do your homework. We do our teaching and whatnot when things don’t go well. Even when things go well. And then you just move on to the next opponent. The guys have done a fantastic job of staying focused and being in the now.

“We had talked about this season being in three segments — getting off to a good start, getting to Christmas, (then) get out in front of people and hopefully eliminate people. Because you’re chasing that playoff run. Then, the second half — Christmas to now — can be, like you mentioned, the January doldrums. We had a lot of games at home and I love the fact we didn’t take that for granted. We played really well here. Now the big push comes. The last 26 are going to be the stuff that prepares us for game 83.”

The Jets have given themselves a reason to believe and their fans a reason to dream. The NHL is won by teams who give themselves a chance. This pause before the regular season’s final chapter gave me time to reflect; Winnipeg has given itself a chance and looks like it will keep giving itself a chance as the stretch run begins. What more could its fans — or a writer who dreams of covering greatness — have asked for so far?

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/how-everything-fell-into-place-for-jets-after-the-big-trade-with-kings/>

How everything fell into place for Jets after the big trade with Kings (VIDEO + AUDIO)

Jets head coach Scott Arniel joins FAN Hockey Show to revisit the PLD trade to the Kings, bringing back 3 very important pieces in Vilardi, Lafallo and Kupari, who all have big roles with the club, and how everything fell into place since then.

<https://illegalcurve.com/sportsnet-590-the-fan-hockey-show-conversation-with-winnipeg-jets-head-coach-scott-arniel/>

Matt Marchese and Mike Futa were joined by Jets head coach Scott Arniel which runs about 20 minutes starting at the 1:15 mark.