

## **Winnipeg Free Press**

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/02/19/canada-u-s-showdown-cant-miss-viewing-for-jets>

### ***Canada-U.S. showdown can't-miss viewing for Jets***

By: Mike McIntyre

It's not a stretch to suggest the 4 Nations Face-Off has been a smashing success, not only creating a palpable buzz within the hockey community but throughout the sports — and, at times, political — world as well.

The inaugural best-on-best event, which reaches its summit Thursday night with an epic championship battle between Canada and the United States, was the talk of the Winnipeg Jets dressing room Wednesday as the team returned from its extended break.

"I think overall the tournament's kind of blown my expectations out of the water," said Jets captain Adam Lowry. "There's been some real remarkable hockey. You just see how pure, how fast, the game is. Still, at the same time, physical."

Lowry is no stranger to dropping his gloves on occasion, so it's no surprise to find he was a big fan of the first nine seconds of last Saturday's round-robin game between Canada and the U.S. which featured three fights.

"I think the way the crowd responded, and just the general hockey fan, kind of drove up the nationalism, the pride, the patriotism, and just the compete," Lowry said.

What might these two rivals do for an encore, with the stakes even higher?

"I can't lose," Lowry said of who he's cheering for. Not only does he have teammates on both sides — Josh Morrissey is shining on Canada's blue-line while goaltender Connor Hellebuyck and forward Kyle Connor are American stars — but Lowry was born in Missouri and raised in Calgary, resulting in dual citizenship.

"Honestly, I'll watch it as a fan. Having played for Canada at the World Championship I slightly lean to cheering for them. But with Helle and KC good friends, I hope they all just have great games," said Lowry.

"I hope for a close game, some great entertaining hockey and all three of them come back feeling good, feeling healthy and with the confidence ready for a big second half. But really looking forward to that game. It's going to be another great one."

Jets centre Mark Scheifele was on the Team Canada radar right up to the start of the tournament as a potential injury replacement for Sidney Crosby, whose status was unknown at the time.

"I don't know how close it was. Obviously there were guys that were banged up and they talked to me a few times just to let me know what was going on," said Scheifele.

"They were great about it. Obviously I was there if they needed it, so that's about it."

The call never came and Scheifele went on his pre-planned California vacation. However, he's been watching proceedings closely — including some outstanding play by Crosby to help lead the way.

"He's absolutely fantastic," said Scheifele.

"I still remember watching him when I was a kid, Hockey Night in Canada. He's a fantastic player and a guy I look up to immensely. He deserves all the credit he gets. He's amazing. He's an amazing guy, hard worker, does everything and is a consummate professional. It's obviously awesome to see a guy like that being rewarded."

Jets head coach Scott Arniel admits there's been some nervous moments, especially given the intensity of games which has resulted in several injuries and close calls to players. Obviously, the high-flying Jets would like to get Morrissey, Hellebuyck and Connor back in one piece.

However...

"As a fan it's unbelievable. The intensity, the skill level, the games themselves are so exciting," Arniel admitted.

"I've been such a fan watching this, all the games have been so exciting. You're seeing offensive top-end skill guys defending, dumping pucks in, having to battle. Doing all the things that they have to do to help their country have success."

Hellebuyck has been a standout, allowing just two goals on 47 shots in his two appearances. Morrissey has really stepped up for Canada, even taking over top power play duties for a game when Cale Makar missed due to illness. Connor has been quieter, with one assist through three games while playing limited minutes in a bottom-six role.

"I talked to all three of them before they left. It's all about absorbing, being around all those real good players, guys that have won Cups," said Arniel.

"As a fan it's unbelievable. The intensity, the skill level, the games themselves are so exciting."  
—Scott Arniel

"Those are experiences that we're hoping they bring back here. Whether it's now, or at the end of the season and playoffs, that these are experiences that they can lean on and learn from."

Arniel was asked for a prediction and would only go so far as to say he hopes for overtime. Might we see a repeat of the fireworks right off the hop again?

"I was just blown away it was happening. It just shows you how much pride is in all those players, putting that jersey on for your country. Whatever it takes," said Arniel.

"I don't think you're going to see that. I think it's going to go up one more notch, if that's possible. I think they kinda got that out of the way, so to speak. Man, I'm excited to see that game Just to see the best on best like that, man there's a lot riding on it. Bragging rights for another year anyways. It'll be special."

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/02/19/high-flying-and-refreshed-jets-gear-up-for-nhls-home-stretch>

## ***High-flying and refreshed, Jets gear up for NHL's home stretch***

By: Mike McIntyre

A few things have changed for the Winnipeg Jets since we last saw them on the ice nearly two weeks ago. For example, pretty much every player is sporting a noticeable tan after spending the 4 Nations Face-Off break in various tropical hot spots around the globe.

“Shovelled snow the whole time. That’s why my face is a little red,” head coach Scott Arniel joked Wednesday, clearly not wanting to let the facts get in the way of a good story.

“No, I got away. I got some sunshine and got to put my feet up, get relaxed and kind of get set for this next run.”

Let the record show Arniel was in Hawaii, as were a handful of his players. Mexico, Palm Springs and Florida were popular destinations, too.

Now the boys are back in town, and one thing they’d like to ensure remains the same is the level of play they were experiencing before this 15-day pause of the marathon that is the 82-game regular-season schedule.

“Well I’m hoping that we can get there quick,” Arniel said of his group, which went into the hockey hiatus on an eight-game winning streak with a record of 39-14-3 that has them on top of the NHL standings.

An optional skate Tuesday afternoon was followed up with an intense, battle-heavy practice Wednesday morning that was clearly intended to shake off some rust. The Jets will also have on-ice workouts Thursday and Friday before flying to St. Louis to face the Blues on Saturday night.

“These last 26 (games) are a sprint,” Arniel said of the road ahead.

“Obviously there’s still a lot of races on for playoff spots, positioning in your division and conference. We’ve talked about it, we need to come out and get running again here and get back up to where we were and stay focused on what we have to do until the end of the year.”

The Jets got a dose of good news Wednesday as Adam Lowry was a full participant in a regular sweater. The team captain suffered an upper-body injury Jan. 20 in Utah — which happens to be the last time Winnipeg suffered a loss — and has been sidelined ever since.

“It was a pretty innocent play, just falling behind the net and just the way I went into the end wall. I felt something right away,” Lowry said of what went wrong.

“Usually in those instances you go to the bench, you catch your breath and you hope you can play through it. Just felt it the rest of the period and tried to get some treatment on it in the intermission, and then just as I was getting my gear back on I just felt like it was probably in the team’s best interest that I didn’t go back out there and play at 50 per cent.”

Tests revealed a further absence would be required.

“It sucks missing time. You want to be out there battling with your teammates, contributing,” said Lowry, who was tracking for a career offensive year with 26 points (11G, 15A) in 48 games.

“But a ton of guys stepped up. To rattle off eight wins, it’s been awesome to watch the guys and how they played. The structure and the confidence.”

Indeed, an 8-0 record without him had Lowry joking he might have to fight his way back into the sizzling-hot lineup. In reality, he’s expecting to be ready for St. Louis.

“I think the start we’ve had, with the break coming up, it was kind of in the best interest to get back to 100 per cent as opposed to rushing back and just kind of putting a band-aid on it and just dealing with it and having it nag the rest of the season,” said Lowry.

“I think if the break hadn’t come, I probably would have been out a little longer. So fortunate to have kind of these two weeks off.”

Lowry’s return would leave Morgan Barron as the only remaining injured player. He missed the final four games before the break with an upper-body ailment and skated on his own Wednesday morning. There’s no timetable yet for his return.

Saturday’s lineup is also a bit iffy when it comes to the status of goaltender Connor Hellebuyck, forward Kyle Connor and defencemen Josh Morrissey. Those three are all competing at the 4 Nations event, which will end Thursday with the championship game in Boston between Canada and the United States.

It’s almost certain backup goalie Eric Comrie will start against the Blues, but whether Hellebuyck and the others even suit up for the game still has to be determined. Arniel said the plan is for them to meet the Jets in St. Louis “but there could be some adjustments.”

Could the team ultimately tell one or all of those players to take a couple days off to rest up and get ready for Monday’s home game against San Jose instead?

“That will be a conversation for Friday for us. Or with me with you guys. We’ll see where this goes after (Thursday) night. That’s about the best I can say,” said Arniel.

The Jets certainly have the benefit of some breathing room as they lead the Central Division and the Western Conference by nine points. A victory over the Blues would establish a new franchise record for the Jets in terms of a winning streak during a single season.

“It’s nice to have these three practice days before getting into a game. I know the coaches have a good plan for us for the upcoming days. It’s exciting to be back playing hockey,” said forward Mark Scheifele.

“Obviously we know after these breaks the games always mean more, they become more intense. We’re just looking ahead to St. Louis, and we want to start off where we left off. That’s the biggest thing. We want to continue playing the way we were playing.”

## **Winnipeg Sun**

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-return-to-colder-climes-plan-to-remain-hot>

### ***Jets return to colder climes, plan to remain hot***

By Paul Friesen

Hawaii, Mexico and Florida seemed to be the destinations of choice for Winnipeg Jets players and coaches who went on hiatus over the last 10 days.

Fair to say touching down in Winnipeg was a bit of a shock.

“Climate change,” is how Nino Niederreiter put it on Wednesday. “Big-time.”

Wednesday marked the Jets’ return to practice after a break for the 4 Nations tournament, although most players were in town much of this week.

“A 100-degree difference,” defenceman Neal Pionk said of his Florida-to-Manitoba trek. “I think it was 78 (F) when we took off, and negative-20, whatever.”

The Jets hope the hot streak they were on when the break began is only on pause.

Winners of eight straight, their streak coincided with the absence of captain Adam Lowry, injured on his first shift in Utah, Jan. 20.

It wasn’t lost on Lowry how well they’ve done without him.

“Me and (Morgan Barron) were joking one day in the press box we might have to find a way to get in the lineup,” Lowry said. “But it’s been awesome to watch, contributions up and down the lineup. It’s made it a little easier sitting out, knowing the guys are playing as well as they are. To see the strides we’re making, to see some key wins... I don’t want to come back into the lineup and things to change, but I’m really excited to hopefully be back.”

Lowry took full part in Wednesday’s practice and is optimistic he’ll be ready to play in the city where he was born, St. Louis, on Saturday.

Barron remains out, and he likely won’t be the only one.

Head coach Scott Arniel hinted the three Jets players in Thursday’s 4 Nations final in Boston – Josh Morrissey, Kyle Connor and Connor Hellebuyck – might get some time to decompress, rather than fly straight from Boston to St. Louis for Saturday’s game.

“That will be a conversation for Friday,” Arniel said. “We’ll see where this goes after (Thursday) night.”

After their game in St. Louis, the Jets return home to face San Jose on Monday.

Winger Nik Ehlers just wants his 4 Nations teammates to get back healthy and ready for the stretch drive towards the playoffs.

“Because no matter how much better this competition has been than people thought, the important part still comes after,” Ehlers said.

Wednesday’s Jets practice was intense, a sign that players who got a break are ready to shake the rust off, and fast.

“I wouldn’t say I was ready to play tomorrow,” Ehlers said. “But it’s nice to have three, four practice days before the game. But yeah, we’re having a lot of fun. Even though it was a break, we’re still on an eight-game win streak.”

“You got your days that you needed, got some sun,” is how Niederreiter put it. “And now ready to rock and roll again.”

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-captain-adam-lowry-shows-true-colours-going-into-4-nations-final>

### ***'It can't start much crazier': Jets weigh in on Canada-USA 4 Nations showdown***

By Paul Friesen

Adam Lowry didn’t show up for practice on Wednesday with his face painted with the Maple Leaf on one half, Stars and Stripes on the other – but he may as well have.

The Winnipeg Jets captain is in a unique position going into Thursday’s final at the 4 Nations Face-Off.

Not only does he have teammates on both the Canadian and American teams, he’s also a citizen of both countries.

Born in St. Louis, where his dad Dave played for the Blues, Lowry lived in Calgary by the time he was eight. That’s where his father ended his playing career and began his career as a coach.

“Split – I can’t lose,” Lowry said on Wednesday of his rooting position going into the tournament final. “I cannot lose.”

Somebody pointed out he’s actually guaranteed to lose.

“Yeah, that’s a double-edged sword,” the 31-year-old said. “Honestly, I’ll watch it as a fan.”

With Josh Morrissey on Team Canada, Kyle Connor and Connor Hellebuyck playing for the U.S., their teammates feel a pull from both sides of the border going into the highly-anticipated showdown.

Lowry’s true colours, though, showed through eventually.

After all, he won a silver medal wearing the Maple Leaf in 2022.

“Having played for Canada at the World Championship, I slightly lean to cheering for them,” he acknowledged. “But with Helle and KC good friends, I hope they all just have great games. I

hope for a close game, some great entertaining hockey and all three of them come back feeling good, feeling healthy and with the confidence ready for a big second half.

“But really looking forward to that game. It’s going to be another great one.”

Lowry says he watched some of the tournament while on vacation the last 10 days and was surprised, not just at the buzz it’s created off the ice, but on it.

“Overall the tournament’s blown my expectations out of the water,” he said. “Even the Sweden-Finland game, there’s been some real remarkable hockey. You just see how pure, how fast, the game is. Still at the same time physical.”

He’s not alone.

Teammate Nik Ehlers wasn’t expecting this level of intensity, either.

“There’s a lot more speed, grit, playoff-like hockey than most people probably expected,” Ehlers said. “But they’re playing for their country. They’re not just going to play some meaningless (game). Whenever you get to put on your country’s jersey, it’s a proud moment and you can see how proud these guys are of playing.”

Ditto, says Ehlers’ head coach.

“As a fan it’s unbelievable,” Scott Arniel said. “The intensity, the skill level, the games themselves are so exciting. Somebody mentioned the third and fourth lines and the fifth and sixth defencemen aren’t your regular players. These are studs, these are top-end players playing in those roles. It just drives up the competition, it drives up the energy in the game.”

That patriotic fervour only went up with the fight-filled start to Saturday’s Canada-USA tilt.

The scraps caught almost everybody off guard, except for the Tkachuk brothers, Matthew and Brady, who planned them.

“I certainly didn’t see three fights in the first nine seconds in an international-style tournament,” Lowry said. “The way the crowd responded, just the general hockey fan... drove up the nationalism, the pride, the patriotism, and just the compete.”

“I wasn’t expecting it,” Arniel said. “Although the two Tkachuks being out there together I guess I should have expected it. Love the response. I was just blown away it was happening. It just shows you how much pride is in all those players, putting that jersey on for your country. Whatever it takes.”

Watching from his airplane seat on his way back from Florida, Jets defenceman Neal Pionk was ready to jump out of it.

“It was awesome,” Pionk said. “The plane was taking off and I was glued into the game. My adrenaline was pumping, my blood was flowing. I looked at my wife and said, ‘I’m literally sweating.’ It was great to watch.”

Nobody we talked to seems to expect a repeat of the rowdiness in Thursday’s final – at least not the bare-knuckled part.

The intensity, though, absolutely.

"It can't start much crazier than the last game," Ehlers said. "But hopefully something similar."

"I think it's going to go up one more notch, if that's possible," Arniel added. "They kind of got that out of the way, so to speak. Man, I'm excited to see that game."

Arniel, 62, compared it to the passion of the 1972 Summit Series between Canada and Russia.

"I know it's different," he said. "Just to see the best on best like that, man, there's a lot riding on it. Bragging rights for another year, anyways. It'll be special."

Those bragging rights will bubble into the Jets dressing room.

"The U.S. is going to win, obviously," Pionk, one of a handful of Americans with the Jets, said. "No, it'll be a good game. I don't think it'll be as crazy a start as last time, but it'll be physical still."

"I hope J-Mo (Morrissey) has a hat trick, but I hope Helle pulls it out."

Next year, the NHL gets back into the Olympics.

If this was supposed to be an appetizer, it's been a spicy one.

"They did a great job as a springboard with international hockey and the NHL players heading back to the Olympics," Lowry said. "After this tournament, as fans of hockey we're all excited to see what the Olympics are like next year."

### **Winnipegjets.com**

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/americans-confident-with-hellebuyck-behind-them>

### ***Americans confident with Hellebuyck behind them Boldy: "He's the best goalie in hockey right now and for a reason."***

By Jamie Thomas

BOSTON MA – Winnipeg fans are accustomed to the heroics of Connor Hellebuyck as are his Jet teammates. As expected, the 4 Nations Face-Off tournament has opened some more eyes to the greatness of the two-time Vezina Trophy winner.

Thursday night, Hellebuyck will have the chance to become the first goaltender since Mike Richter to lead the United States to victory at a best-on-best tournament involving NHL players. Richter was spectacular in the final game of the 1996 World Cup of Hockey, as the U.S. beat Canada in the third and deciding game, 5-2 and was named tournament MVP.

Hellebuyck will attempt to do so with his dad Chuck, wife Andrea and his kids in attendance at TD Garden.

"Yeah, it'll be fun. I know this area, I'm very familiar," said Hellebuyck.



"I think it's going to be one of those days where I kind of take it minute by minute and enjoy the process."

In a winner-take-all scenario, the United States players feel very confident about having the 31-year-old behind them even against some of the best in the world like McDavid, MacKinnon and Crosby.

"It's huge. He's the best goalie in hockey right now and for a reason, I think he works so hard. He does all the right things," said Matt Boldy, who has faced Hellebuyck and the Jets three times this season with the Wild.

"It seems like we seem him a handful of times a year and it's always so tough to score on him. So, I'm excited to have him on my team."

Noah Hanafin has played both with and against Hellebuyck over his career.

"I've played in a world championship once with him a long time ago, but I mean, being in this tournament seeing how good he is, I mean, it's incredible. He's so good back there, and even his play with the puck, he gives the defencemen, his whole team so much confidence in front of him," said Hanafin.

"So, we just got to play hard. We have to check well against a really elite team, and I think if we do that, we know he'll hold it down back there."

It wasn't only Hellebuyck that was frustrating Canada in the last meeting on Saturday, it was the entire team forcing the Canadians to dump and chase consistently.

"I think our system has been good. We have the guys that play it hard and play it the right way, a lot of pressure, a lot of good reads, and a lot of guys in positions," said Hellebuyck.

"So, there's not a whole lot of space out there when there's that much speed."

The Canadians had more of a shoot first mentality on Monday when they faced Finland, Connor McDavid and Nathan MacKinnon were a lot more successful than they were against the United States. Even if Canada does find a way to get more pucks to the net, Hellebuyck isn't over thinking things.

"Just stop the puck. Pretty, pretty simple in my world. just get your way in front of the puck. And let everything happen," said Hellebuyck.

"I just go out there and I battle, and I work as hard as I can and give myself the best chance."

Hellebuyck recently had a chance to meet his idol, Olaf Kolzig. The former Capitals star was at the Jets last road game in Washington, Jets goaltending coach Wade Flaherty set up the meeting.

"I told him, growing up, how I collected his cards and stuff like that. And we just, you know, small talk, and I didn't want to bug him," said Hellebuyck.

"I didn't want to fan boy him too hard, but it was hard not to do."

Hellebuyck was asked if he has chatted with any of his Winnipeg teammates and he mentioned Kyle Connor and that was it. But he thought for a second and mentioned that he has spoken with Jets head coach Scott Arniel about his plans for what is going to happen after the tournament. Winnipeg plays in St. Louis on Saturday, and you would think that Eric Comrie will be facing the Blues to give Hellebuyck a rest, but we will have to wait and see.

Like many American hockey players, the movie *Miracle* is an inspiration and Hellebuyck listed as his favourite movie when he was back playing college hockey. However, he has not had the chance to watch it this week and will likely not get a chance before Thursday's big game.

"It's been pretty crazy, actually, this last two weeks, just managing everything. We got family, we got guests in town, and the travel," said Hellebuyck.

"And then the long days, the late nights, for 8:30 games. Really, it's just been managing your day to day."

### **The Athletic**

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6137245/2025/02/20/winnipeg-jets-nikolaj-ehlers-options-cheveldayoff/?onboarded=true>

### ***Winnipeg's best case for trading Nikolaj Ehlers — and the best case to keep him***

By Murat Ates

When Nikolaj Ehlers was born in Aalborg, Denmark, his father Heinz was in Germany, gearing up for the lowly Augsburg Panthers' playoff run.

Ehlers' mom, Tina, had gone home to Denmark expecting Heinz would join her before too long. Little was expected of the 1996 Panthers, the DEL's 12th-seeded team that finished 26 points behind its first-round opponent, No. 5 Schwenninger.

"But my dad's team kept winning. And my dad kept scoring a lot of points," Ehlers says. "My mom ended up having me and my dad didn't make it back to Denmark until, like, a month later."

It's part of Ehlers family lore now. His dad's team hadn't been expected to make the playoffs, but it beat Schwenninger in Round 1 before losing to top-seeded Kölner Haie in Round 2. The weeks went by, Ehlers' dad honoured his commitment to his team, and young Nikolaj Ehlers grew. When Heinz got home in March, he joyfully picked up Nikolaj's brother Sebastian, the toddler he knew well, and then started to get to know his new son. This process lasted less than a month before Heinz went to Eindhoven in the Netherlands to play for Denmark at the 1996 World Championships.

"By the time he was really home, I was already two months old," Ehlers says. "I'm sure it happens a lot more than we think but for us, I think it just goes into how big of a hockey family that we are."

Now the boy who was born in the middle of a playoff run is 29 years old, a pending free agent and starting what could be the final stretch run of his Winnipeg Jets career. This is his 10th season and his first point-per-game campaign. If he makes it to July 1, Ehlers will become an unrestricted free agent for the first time in his life.

What should the Jets do about that? Is there a chance Ehlers' future continues in Winnipeg?

#### *Cheveldayoff's perspective*

Kevin Cheveldayoff has been asked about Ehlers' future several times, including in this lengthy state of the union The Athletic participated in last month. Cheveldayoff's default answer about Ehlers' future is that he hopes they win the Stanley Cup together.

In January, he spoke of a sense of pride in Ehlers' development.

"When you watch them grow up, they do kind of become like your kids, so to speak," Cheveldayoff said. He was clear, though, that personal feelings of warmth and contract negotiations are not one and the same.

"The business side will be the business side," he said. "Where that goes ... that story's still unfolding."

As it stands, Ehlers' future is still up in the air. Cheveldayoff isn't talking about him in the rarefied "they're big parts of our franchise" tones he used the summer before Connor Hellebuyck and Mark Scheifele signed their seven-year extensions. He's denied shopping Ehlers, but has also acknowledged Ehlers helps the Jets win. It seems clear Ehlers is too big a part of Winnipeg's current success to be traded, but we thought the same thing about Mikko Rantanen not too long ago, too.

#### *Ehlers' contract projection, usage and playoff history*

The 29-year-old is a dynamic top-six forward with first-line talent and a second-line history.

He's played all 10 of his NHL seasons in Winnipeg and has been an elite five-on-five scorer for most of them. Now that he plays consistent minutes on the Jets' top power-play unit, he's on pace for a career-high 75 points in 73 games.

But it's not all roses. Ehlers missed nine games with a lower-body injury in December and has played 65 out of 82 games, on average, for his last five seasons.

Ehlers' playoffs have been disappointing from an offensive perspective. His 14 points in 37 games include big-game moments — particularly during Winnipeg's qualifying-round series against Calgary in 2020 — but fall well short of his regular-season production.

Ehlers' 2025 playoff performance will have a big impact on his offseason contract, whether it's signed in Winnipeg or elsewhere. AFP Analytics projects a six-year, \$7.5 million contract. Using Evolving Hockey's numbers and Ehlers' projected points through the rest of this season, we projected a five-year, \$8.4 million AAV. One league source who does not represent Ehlers ventured a \$8.0 million guess, noting Ehlers' playoff performance will affect perception and his payday alike.

Despite his long track record of five-on-five excellence and newfound power-play success, Ehlers has predominantly been used as a second- and sometimes third-line player in terms of ice time. This is his first full-season run on the Jets' top power play, despite scoring more often than his teammates at five-on-five. If Ehlers does finish the season as a point-per-game player, he'll do it while playing the fewest minutes per game of the 470 players (minimum 20 games played) who have achieved the feat since the NHL instituted a salary cap.

Meanwhile, Ehlers' erratic on-ice movements can make it difficult for linemates to play with him — even when their point totals go up as they do. He doesn't make more giveaways than his teammates do and is a reliable puck transporter. The mistakes he does make last in memory, though, particularly when he's looking for plays that aren't there, and his circuitous routes sometimes leave linemates confused. All of this affects perception, including among Jets brass. Ehlers' next contract will be about his perceived long-term fit as much as his results.

The Jets may prefer to save their money for a more consistent style of player, despite Ehlers' results on the scoreboard.

It also may be that Ehlers wants more than Winnipeg can give him — not in terms of money so much as his spot on the team's depth chart.

Publicly, both parties have kept their words positive. Ehlers is a big part of the team's on-ice success, works with mental health initiative Project 11 off it and has expressed his love for Winnipeg, his teammates and Jets fans multiple times. Privately, communication between the Jets and Ehlers' camp is ongoing.

So, what should the Jets do?

#### *The best case for the Jets to keep Ehlers*

The biggest reason for Winnipeg to keep Nikolaj Ehlers is that he's a great player on a great team. In most cases, that's enough — particularly where cap space and budget exist — but these Jets are uniquely good.

They are legitimate Stanley Cup contenders and have cap space to work with at the deadline. Teams like this add talent, including playoff rentals, whether or not they expect to be able to re-sign them. Last year's Sean Monahan acquisition would be a great example of that; Winnipeg spent a first-round pick on a player they hoped would fit and tried to re-sign.

Ehlers fits. If he's willing to re-sign, it makes him unique. Preconceptions still matter in a league where most NHL players don't want to become Jets until they've experienced Winnipeg firsthand. No, he's not out at the ice fishing shack with Hellebuyck and company every opportunity he gets, but Ehlers has 10 years' worth of connection to the community. From Winnipeg's perspective, those 10 years of real, lived experience are a better recruitment package than any presentation or cold-call pitch.

Whether you like his style or not, Ehlers has won his minutes every single year of his career. The Jets have outscored opponents 29-15 with Ehlers on the ice at five-on-five this season and outscored their opponents 62-33 in the same context last year. This goal differential is dramatic and means more to winning than any stylistic concern; Ehlers sometimes puts teammates offside but he consistently puts them ahead on the scoreboard. One of those is worth more.

The Jets' dominance on the scoreboard happens with Ehlers on the power play, too. He has scored points on an even higher percentage of power play goals than his star-studded list of co-dominators. He's already set a new career high in power-play assists (14) and points (18), showing tremendous chemistry with all four of Scheifele, Kyle Connor, Gabriel Vilardi and Josh Morrissey.

If the Jets led the league like they do and there were a player like Ehlers available on the market right now, there would be a tremendous case to go out and get him. Their second line hums against secondary opposition with him on it, he's equally effective on the top line when called upon, and there's still a chance he signs an extension when all is said and done.

That's not a player you trade.

Unless...

*The best case for Winnipeg to move on*

Winnipeg doesn't give away top players for free. When Jacob Trouba wanted out, the Jets got Neal Pionk and a first-round pick. At the 2022 deadline, when it became clear Andrew Copp would leave via free agency, the Jets got Morgan Barron and the draft picks that became Brad Lambert, Elias Salomonsson and Thomas Milic.

The list goes on. When Patrik Laine and Jack Roslovic wanted out, they got Pierre-Luc Dubois. Then when Dubois wanted out, they picked up Vilardi, Alex Lafallo and Rasmus Kupari. Some secondary players the Jets let walk, like Tyler Myers, Ben Chiarot and Brandon Tanev, but none of those are in Ehlers' echelon.

The Jets have to think about long-term, sustainable success — going all-in on this season's Cup run while ignoring the future isn't an option. If there's a chance they lose Ehlers for nothing, they must pursue trades that help them now and in the future or risk giving away a point-per-game player for free. If you thought Ehlers was a UFA risk — and if you could get a quality top-nine forward with term in a package for Ehlers now — it would be awfully tempting to think of ways to help next year's team, no matter what role he fills right now.

What if there's a Jets version of Colorado trading Rantanen — a pending UFA — for Martin Necas, who has one year left on his contract?

I'm sure this is the sort of thing that keeps GMs up at night, though Cheveldayoff has also shown he can make difficult decisions. Back in 2022, Winnipeg was four points out of a wild card spot and had two games in hand on Vegas when Cheveldayoff traded Copp to New York. That was difficult for Cheveldayoff to do, even knowing he wasn't going to be able to sign Copp in the offseason.

It's not realistic for every conditional draft pick to work out in Winnipeg's favour (nor every draft pick; the Jets did well to choose Lambert, Salomonsson, and Milic as they did). But Cheveldayoff gave future versions of his team a leg up by making the difficult decision on Copp in 2022.

This type of "get something for a pending UFA" approach gains weight if you doubt Ehlers' playoff acumen. It gets heavier still if you consider that Ehlers has averaged 65 games played per season over his 20s; it's tough to bet on the Ehlers at 29 to 34 Winnipeg would get out of a five-year contract being more healthy than the younger version that preceded him.

And what happens when his speed and agility begin to falter? Ehlers has been incredible value as a \$6.0 million first-line-caliber forward. Ehlers is uniquely dependent on his explosiveness. I think he'd be well worth a \$8.0 million AAV in the short run but would see a great deal of risk in signing him to 35 years old or beyond.

*What if?*

I tend to view Ehlers as an ideal player to keep, even as a rental. He's a known entity in Winnipeg: a fit on the top power play and second line, plus a viable top-line option when Scott Arniel needs a different look. The established chemistry and fit is worth more to me than the first-round pick plus prospect package I'm imagining as the most likely return.

Obviously, that opinion comes with an "it depends on what Winnipeg could get" caveat. It's just hard to see Winnipeg winning an Ehlers trade such that they compete for this year's Cup without him on the roster.

Any trade talk is about the summer, then — and that means trading Ehlers' rights prior to July 1, likely for a mid-round pick — or, more boldly: working together on a sign-and-trade. The Jets could theoretically extend Ehlers for as many as eight years in an effort to get a more meaningful return. None of it is ideal and it would still involve a good player's departure; I still hold that Cheveldayoff is too fastidious a GM to lose Ehlers for nothing when all is said and done.

I think the Jets would be best off to extend Ehlers, ideally for a four- or five-year term. My guess is there are teams who would offer him much more than that on July 1.

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6146467/2025/02/20/4-nations-final-team-usa-team-canada/>

### ***Five reasons Team Canada will definitely beat Team USA (and vice versa)***

By Sean McIndoe

It's Canada vs. the United States Thursday night, and it's fair to say everyone is a little bit dialed up.

On one hand, that's great — hockey rules when it's played with real stakes, and it's been a long time since a game has felt this important. But more crucially, this makes life tough for me, a hockey writer who just wants to turn in a simple preview without getting yelled at. Do I know who's going to win? Yes, of course I do, but I also know that half of you aren't going to like the answer.

So here's the deal: I have five reasons Team Canada is definitely winning, and five more why Team USA is the obvious pick. You decide which ones you want to read. The only rule is that you're not allowed to read both because doing that is illegal and your continued scrolling of this article signifies your acceptance of the terms and conditions.

Agreed? Cool, let's do this.

(Note to editors: Don't forget to go back and delete half of these later.)

*Team USA is winning because: They have Connor Hellebuyck*  
It's the goaltending. It was always going to be the goaltending.

Really, I could just end this whole piece right here. Connor Hellebuyck was already the best in the world coming into the season, he's running away with this year's Vezina, he's been all but unbeatable so far in the tournament (including against Canada), and he'll be rested heading into Thursday night.

Meanwhile, Canada has Jordan Binnington, who's made a habit out of giving up one weak goal each game. I mean, what are we even doing here?

In previous generations, giving Team USA the world's best goalie and Team Canada a guy who's barely average would have been considered evening the odds. But in a tournament where the rest of the rosters are as close as they've ever been, a massive disparity like this at the most important position is almost unfair. Team USA only has to skate Team Canada to something resembling a draw, and they probably win by multiple goals just based on the goaltending.

Yes, Hellebuyck is just one guy. But he's the one guy who's going to be standing in the way of every Team Canada scoring attempt. That's if the Canadians even get all that many, considering how safe they'll have to play it when they know every mistake can wind up in their net.

This is the nightmare scenario Canadians have been fearing for years, and now it's here. And it makes picking a winner in this game easy.

*Team Canada is winning because: The Americans have Playoff Connor Hellebuyck*  
Sure, Hellebuyck was great during the 2023-24 regular season. And he's been great so far during the 2024-25 regular season. Anyone remember what happened in between?

Oh right, he completely collapsed in the 2024 playoffs. Just like he did in the 2023 playoffs. And in 2020. And in 2021, once he got past Mike Smith and had to face Carey Price. On the bright side, at least he didn't collapse in 2022. (The Jets did not make the playoffs that year.)

So what's the deal? It's hard to say. It could absolutely be a case of small sample sizes messing with our perception, although the sample size isn't all that small anymore. Maybe fatigue is a factor, in which case you may want to check which NHL goalie led the entire league in saves coming into this tournament. Or maybe the moments just get too big for him. And if he can't handle the first round of the postseason, how's he going to look in a game that all his teammates seem to be calling the biggest of their lives?

Meanwhile, two goalies in this entire tournament have won Stanley Cups. That would be Binnington and his backup, Adin Hill. No, Binnington hasn't looked great this week, and it's safe to assume Jon Cooper will have him on a short leash. But the last time Binnington played in a game this big was when he stopped 32 of 33 shots in Game 7 of the 2019 Stanley Cup Final. The last time Hellebuyck won a game this big was, well, he hasn't.

Hey, refresh my memory, which building was that 2019 Game 7 played in? Huh, interesting.

*Team USA is winning because: They've got home ice*  
Thanks for that reminder that the game is in Boston. That's going to be a major factor.

We haven't had a chance to really hear from the Boston crowd yet, since the only Team USA game the city has hosted was entirely meaningless. But it's fair to say those fans will be a factor, especially after how Canadian fans treated the Americans on Saturday.

But this is about more than just crowd noise. Team USA isn't just the home team in the eyes of the fans, but also the rulebook, meaning the Americans get last change. That gives Mike Sullivan control of the matchups, however he chooses to use it.

Canada had their shot at the Americans on their own home ice, in front of one of the loudest crowds in recent memory, and still came up short. Why would the result be any different when now it's Team USA with the home-ice advantage?

*Team Canada is winning because: Some of Team USA's best players have gone cold*  
Auston Matthews hasn't scored a goal yet. Neither has Jack Hughes. Both have just a single assist, which came on the same goal – the team's fourth of a 6-1 win. Kyle Connor's lone point, another assist, came in that game too. J.T. Miller hasn't done anything besides punch himself in the face. Nobody on the blue line other than Zach Werenski is producing much of anything, including former Norris winner Adam Fox. Even the Tkachuk brothers and Jack Eichel, who were unstoppable in the opener, have gone cold.

Put differently, the Americans had one big period where they ran up the score against the tournament's last-place team, and other than that they've been relying on goaltending and low-scoring hockey.

Meanwhile, Connor McDavid and Nathan MacKinnon have looked dangerous throughout the tournament, and Sidney Crosby has more points than either of them. If a championship showdown is about your best players being your best, then Team USA might want to let some so-called stars know that the tournament has started.

*Team USA is winning because: Their best players have gone cold and it hasn't mattered*  
Oh, a few of the biggest names are slumping? Fascinating. And how many meaningful games has that cost this team? Oh right, zero.

Team USA didn't need its biggest stars to roll past the Finns, or to beat Canada. They treated the Sweden game like a night off because they'd earned one. This is the deepest American team ever, and that means that not everyone has to be at their best every night for them to win the whole thing.

Put it this way: If Matthews, Hughes, Fox and all the rest stay cold, so be it – Team USA will just have to rely on the best goalie in the world to play well enough to earn a low-scoring win over Canada, which is a formula they've already followed once. And if even a few of those guys suddenly rediscover their games? Against Binnington? In terms of big-game humiliations for Team Canada, this could be the 1981 final all over again.

*Team Canada is winning because: Sidney Crosby won't let them lose*  
He's the tournament's leading scorer, and one of its biggest stories. With little left to play for in Pittsburgh these days, Crosby sure looks like a guy who's been laser-focused on this tournament for a long time, and is ready to leave everything on the ice.

And maybe more importantly, he's been here before. He scored arguably the biggest goal in international history in 2010. He's already won three best-on-best tournaments. It's big news when his team loses a game. And his teammates know that.

Meanwhile, Team USA has turned over the entire roster since the last major tournament. That's an impressive sign of how much new talent they've been able to develop, but they don't have a Crosby – a certified star who's been through this before and leads by example. In what will probably be a very tight game where nerves are high, that could absolutely matter.



Team USA is winning because: You can't beat Jaccob Slavin, you can only hope he doesn't contain you

But he will. Jaccob Slavin has been one of those fun stories that pops up in these tournaments where everyone realizes just how good a player is while his team's own fan base yells "WE TOLD YOU" into the void. No, he probably won't add offense, but they've got plenty of that. What Slavin and Brock Faber have done is basically shut down anyone they're up against.

Hey, did we mention that Team USA has home ice and last change? Hope you enjoyed the Connor McDavid show while it lasted because you're not going to notice him much.

*Team Canada is winning because: They're healthier (we think)*

This feels a little bit like the NHL playoffs, where the mantra that "everyone is probably playing hurt" rings true. Mix in a bad flu that's been going around, and health is an issue for both teams, including in ways we won't find out about until after the game. But it's still safe to say that Canada is the healthier team heading in.

Team USA will be missing Charlie McAvoy, and we're still not sure if Quinn Hughes can replace him (or how good he'll be if he does). Brady Tkachuk missed practice Wednesday. Auston Matthews and Matthew Tkachuk missed Monday's game. All three of those forwards will play, but are they 100 percent? If not, how close are they?

On the Canadian side, while they did lose Shea Theodore early on, the biggest health news of the last few days is that Cale Makar seems to be back to his old self. Chalk it up to bad luck for the Americans if you'd like, but the health scale has tipped to one side as this tournament has worn on.

*Team USA is winning because: This is the moment they've been building toward for years*

This is real life, not some feel-good movie, and you never know how things will play out. But come on. If you've been a sports fan long enough, you can see exactly where this is all heading because the script has been in progress for years.

Yes, Canada has owned the best-on-best hockey world for nearly the past three decades. It wasn't supposed to be that way, after the Americans' stunning World Cup win in 1996 seemed to signal the dawn of a new era, but here we are. Full credit to the Canadians for winning five of the last six best-on-best tournaments.

But while all those wins have been piling up, the Americans have been growing the game, and building a deep talent pool. The 2016 World Cup may have been a disaster, but not a single player from that 0-3 roster is back. That unprecedented turnover speaks to the depth of young talent the nation has produced, and we've known for a while that this current generation of American stars could all peak at the same time to create a monster. That's exactly what we're seeing.

After embarrassment in Nagano in 1998 and again at the World Cup in 2016, and plenty of ups and downs in between, the Americans now get a winner-take-all showdown with their rivals. And they get it not on some faraway rink in the middle of the night, but on home ice in prime time in front of what's likely to be one of the biggest hockey audiences in recent memory. The script has been perfect. All they need to do now is finish the story.

Sometimes the sports gods telegraph the ending, and that's OK. Especially when it's the right one.

*Team Canada is winning because: It's always Team USA's moment until it isn't*

If this is a movie, it's one we've seen before. Heck, 1998 was supposed to be Team USA's chance to win Olympic gold and cement their place on top of the hockey mountain, and instead they left Nagano in disgrace. But they've also had two cracks at Team Canada in a winner-take-all best-on-best final, including one in 2002 that came on home ice, just like this game. Those two games gave us Jah-yoe Sakic and a Golden Goal and a whole bunch of American excuses about how close they were.

And sure, they are close. They have been for decades. Close doesn't cut it when everything's on the line.

American fans can treat this game like it's playing out on a movie set if they want to, and that's fine. As a wise man once said, this tournament is about the flags, not the cameras. And it's going to be a Canadian flag left standing at the end, just like always.

### **Sportsnet.ca**

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/scouts-analysis-four-players-with-the-most-to-prove-in-4-nations-face-off-final/>

### ***Scout's Analysis: Four players with the most to prove in 4 Nations Face-Off final***

By Jason Bukala

Watching a player perform under the brightest lights is often the truest test of his ability.

When monitoring how players are progressing during the draft and development phase, teams keep close tabs on how each prospect reacts in high-leverage games.

Does he wilt under pressure? Does he take his game to another level and impact the outcome in a positive way for his team? If he's a goaltender, is he able to provide timely saves and not allow a soft goal that leads to his group chasing the game?

Almost every NHL player has been thrust into potentially uncomfortable in-game situations before they arrive in the best league in the world. They have learned what it takes to win major junior, college, European pro and minor pro championships somewhere along the way.

The 4 Nations Face-Off championship game between Canada and the U.S. has several players, on both sides, champing at the bit to prove they have what it takes to win a tournament like this.

Here's a list of players who may have the most to prove:

#### ***Connor Hellebuyck***

Hellebuyck is the reigning Vezina Trophy winner and, unless his game falls off a cliff, looks poised to win the award a second straight year and for the third time in his career.

Hellebuyck has been historically strong in the regular season for the Winnipeg Jets, but his playoff results have been substandard. The 31-year-old has a career 2.58 goals-against average and .917 save percentage between games one and 82. His stats this season are off-the-charts great (2.06/.925).

But over the past two playoffs, his record is 2-8 with a 4.34 GAA and .875 save percentage.

Hellebuyck allowed a soft goal from long range to start the tournament against Finland, but he's been nearly perfect since, stopping 45 of the next 46 shots he faced. He's won both of his starts and sports a ridiculous .957 save percentage.

It's safe to say Hellebuyck is highly motivated to prove he can win on the biggest stage. Now, there's pressure on him to provide top-tier goaltending in a must-win game. A victory over Canada would give him a feeling of accomplishment, and confidence, that he can take back to Winnipeg as it prepares for a potentially long playoff run this spring.

### *Auston Matthews*

Matthews has been dealing with nagging injuries for much of the season and missed 15 games as a result. Even if he plays every game the rest of the way, his 67 regular-season appearances would represent the third-lowest mark of his career. The injury woes have definitely impacted his offensive output — specifically goal-scoring. Matthews must score 15 times in the team's remaining 27 games to surpass his career-low of 34 goals from the 2017-18 season. He was held out of Team USA's final round-robin game against Sweden due to some soreness.

But the Team USA captain is surrounded by some uber-competitive teammates who will be expecting him to fight through whatever's ailing him and contribute in whatever way he can to assist the team in victory. Matthews has played four Game 7s in his career with the Maple Leafs and come away with zero victories. His teammate, Jack Eichel, said the game against Canada is going to be the biggest game of his career, despite the fact he has won a Stanley Cup with the Vegas Golden Knights. Statements like Eichel's confirm how important this game is to the Americans.

Matthews was chosen to be the captain and lead the group to victory. It will be interesting to see how he responds and what he takes away from the experience. If he's not scoring goals, his off-the-puck effort and defensive detail (what I describe as his "B" game) must be on time.

### *Mitch Marner*

It's impossible for me to not include Marner in the same category as Matthews. Marner isn't Canada's captain — and to be fair, he did score a massive overtime goal against Sweden in the first game of the tournament — but he needs to show he can handle the pressure of this game and have a positive impact. He's only registered three shots on net over the first three games and hasn't made plays in traffic or gotten to the inside offensively.

Marner started the tournament skating alongside Connor McDavid on the top line, but the two players didn't gel and Marner now finds himself on the third line with Anthony Cirelli and Brandon Hagel. However, there's no shame in skating with the two Tampa Bay forwards — if anything, it speaks to Marner's skillset. He has the ability, and commitment, to take care of his zone defensively and kill penalties when he isn't producing offence.

Yet Marner has not enjoyed playoff success in a Maple Leafs uniform. The pending unrestricted free agent already makes \$900,000 more than Finland captain and Stanley Cup champion Aleksander Barkov. He gets paid \$1.4 million more than Stanley Cup champion Brayden Point of the Tampa Bay Lightning. And those comparisons are only going to bubble up more and more when he signs his next contract.

At the 4 Nations, Marner's ice time has trended down. He logged the second-fewest minutes (12:46) of any skater for Canada in its elimination game against Finland. If he's going to be paid like one of the top-10 players in the NHL this off-season, he has an opportunity Thursday to put his best skate forward and prove why onlookers should believe in his game in a hostile/high-leverage environment.

#### *Jordan Binnington*

Binnington was between the pipes for the St Louis Blues when they defeated the Boston Bruins in Game 7 of the 2019 Stanley Cup Final ... at the same arena where he'll look to lead Canada past the U.S. on Thursday. He's familiar with the hostile environment and has the experience to fall back on. Canada has the second-best goaltender on the ice against the Americans, but Binnington at least holds the experience advantage over Hellebuyck.

It's impossible to imagine Binnington wasn't aware of the fact that most of the hockey industry identified Canada's goaltending as the weakest of four teams at the tournament outset.

Binnington is a feisty competitor who hasn't allowed the emotional side of his game to get the better of him in his first three starts despite some uneven moments. If he provides the steady goaltending required to win a tournament like the 4 Nations, in Boston no less, he will have earned the right to stare into the cameras post-game and scold all of those who doubted his role on this team.

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/usa-might-have-goalie-edge-but-can-hellebuyck-win-the-big-game/>

#### ***USA might have goalie edge, but can Hellebuyck win the big game? (VIDEO)***

Circa Sports' Mike Palm joins VSIN By The Books to run through a couple of important factors that can help handicap this massive game between Canada and the U.S., in the 4 Nations Face-Off final in Boston.

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/assessing-each-canadian-teams-chances-to-break-32-year-cup-drought/>

#### ***Assessing each Canadian team's chances to break 32-year Cup drought (VIDEO)***

As NHL gets set to return from the 4 Nations Face-off break, Jesse Fuchs takes a look at the 7 Canadian team's chances of making the Stanley Cup playoffs.