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<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/morrissey-recaps-emotional-end-to-the-season>

Morrissey recaps emotional end to the season

"All you can do is try and be there for your friend, like he was for me."

By Mitchell Clinton

WINNIPEG – As much as he wanted to be, Winnipeg Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey couldn't be on the ice with his teammates embracing teammate Mark Scheifele at the end of Game 6.

Still, as a longtime friend of Scheifele, Morrissey – who had left the game with a knee injury – knew exactly where he needed to be.

When Scheifele came off the ice - the loss of his father Brad earlier this morning fresh in his mind as Winnipeg's season came to an emotional end in Dallas - the first player he saw before getting in the room was Morrissey.

"I met him in the hallway and we shared a couple of moments. I know that going back to when my dad passed, for me I feel fortunate that I had some time after the season and I feel bad that Mark doesn't have that opportunity," Morrissey said. "I just remember how hard that last game was, knowing that it was kind of the last one he'd be able to watch. I knew the emotion that was going to flood out of Mark when he came off the ice and what he was probably holding back the entire day and game."

The 30-year-old defenceman knows all too well the pain that Scheifele was in.

Morrissey lost his father, Tom, in August of 2021 after a courageous battle with cancer. The two spent countless hours on the ice working on Morrissey's skating, skills that the Norris Trophy contending defenceman still uses to this day.

Scheifele's linemate, Kyle Connor, lost his father Joe that same summer.

"Mark did an outstanding job of just being so focussed on the game and putting everything aside. Who knows what was going through his mind until the game, but this is a big family here," Connor said. "I'm sure throughout the course of the summer, we will have those conversations. They come. I have had those with Josh, and just leaning on each other. It's just letting him know I'm always there for him."

Their bond was similar to that of Scheifele and his father, with the game of hockey a big part of it. Through multiple guest trips in seasons gone by, Morrissey got to see that bond firsthand.

Scheifele was there when Morrissey needed him most. So in small ways, Morrissey returned the favour – checking in on Scheifele throughout that day, walking into American Airlines Center with him, and, ultimately, being there for him when all the emotion came to the forefront.

“Unfortunately we both have lived that experience and it's one that, it was one of the toughest experiences I've ever been through, personally,” Morrissey said. “Throughout the last year and time when Brad was sick, just trying to show Mark that support. And just I think importantly make sure he knows that his friends are there for him, his teammates are there for him, and if he wants to talk about it, you're there.”

At that moment, it didn't matter that Morrissey knew that even if Winnipeg had managed to win Game 6 and force a Game 7, he wouldn't be part of it. He knew the moment he got tangled up with Dallas Stars forward Mikko Rantanen and fell to the ice that his postseason was likely over.

In a way, it was another head-shaking way to end such a promising season. Morrissey made Canada's 4 Nations Face-Off team and played brilliantly, but couldn't play in the final due to an illness that kept him in the team hotel.

Concussion protocol took him out of Game 7 against St. Louis after just 2:09 of ice time. Then came the injury in Dallas.

“It was just frustrating this year that those situations happened. You can feel sorry for yourself or unlucky or whatever you want, but it is what it is,” Morrissey said. “Just got to go back to work and continue to get better and prepare for next season and be ready for those moments when I get a chance to be in them again.”

Last spring, when the Jets were eliminated in five games by the Colorado Avalanche, Morrissey and the Jets resolved to return after a summer spent finding ways to be five to ten percent better.

Together, they earned a Presidents' Trophy after a franchise record setting 116-point season, they ousted the St. Louis Blues in a seven-game thriller, then fell to Dallas in a tightly contested six-game series.

It's progress, but Morrissey knows there is still work to do.

“I think the sentiment is that drive that we had after last season when it didn't go our way, when we felt we needed to make some serious changes, we need to have that same attitude this summer in terms of pushing ourselves, and maybe even harder than we did last year,” he said. “To get to that next level of obviously the ultimate goal of winning the Stanley Cup we've got to continue to push to go to that next level.”

Going back a couple seasons, the word 'family' began being used more and more often to describe the Jets. The players felt it, the coaching staff and management felt it, and those watching the team on a nightly basis could see it.

It's always in the toughest times that families are tested, and it's clear that feeling of family reaches far outside the walls of the dressing room.

"Before the game my mom texted me and I think she shared it with Mary Lou (Scheifele), but Mark and I talked about it, that our dads and KC's dad would be up there having their drink of choice and watching the game," said Morrissey.

"It was a lot of emotion, for sure. And I like I said heart goes out to the family. And miss Brad. One incredible person."

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/hellebuyck-we-re-all-very-motivated-for-a-cup>

Hellebuyck: "We're all very motivated for a Cup."

Hellebuyck looks back at an emotional end to season and lessons learned

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG – Connor Hellebuyck had a heck of a season in 2024-25.

The 32-year-old will win his third Vezina Trophy next month and possibly his first Hart Trophy after putting up 47 wins, a 2.00 goals against average, .925 save percentage and eight shutouts.

He helped the United States get to the championship game at the 4 Nations Face-Off and the Jets past the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs for the first time since 2021.

Hellebuyck also struggled through the first round series against the St. Louis Blues, especially on the road but looked more like himself in Game 7 and then throughout the Dallas series.

"I got to take a step back and look at my game, my regular season game, and see if it needed to change for the playoffs and I learned a lot of things. I learned what makes me tick even more. I reassured some things that I already thought," said Hellebuyck.

"From today to the next playoff game, it's going to be all about building that back up and feeling good about myself and liking where my game is at and getting ready to bring it every single night. That's what playoffs are all about. Ride the waves and every single moment matters."

In the three elimination games that Hellebuyck played in this spring, he went 2-1 with a 1.39 goals against average, .930 save percentage and one shutout. After St. Louis took

a 3-1 lead in Game 7, he shut the door the rest of the way to get the double overtime victory and stopped 18 of 20 in the heartbreaking overtime loss to Dallas in Game 6.

"I think this playoff run, there was a lot of learning curves and a lot of things that we've learned and can take away. I know this group is going to get a lot better from that. Not only did we get tighter as a family, but our game got tighter and we're going to continue to grow that and build that," said Hellebuyck.

"We have pretty much the same group coming back, so we're all very motivated for a Cup. That's our goal. That's all we've got on our mind from now to next year at this time of year. It's all about building the process."

Following the loss to Dallas, Hellebuyck shared a long hug with Mark Scheifele on the ice, Scheifele lost his father Brad earlier in the day. When he was asked about what was said during that embrace, Hellebuyck stayed away from the key details and decided to go with the message.

"You know, we're a family in here and you can really feel it in those moments," said Hellebuyck.

"Everything that we're going through is bringing us closer together and this team couldn't be any tighter. So that's what I'll say."

The consistent question that is asked about Hellebuyck after each season is about his workload. He played 79 games (63 regular season, 3 4 Nations Face-Off and 13 playoff games) in 2024-25. This is the fourth straight season he has played 60 or more regular season contests. But something the Jets have done really well with their star goaltender is getting Hellebuyck rest whenever the opportunity presents itself.

"We have a phenomenal organization around me and (Wade Flaherty) is just phenomenal at managing, knowing how I'm feeling, and how the schedule plays out because it's different every year," said Hellebuyck.

"We had a really good rhythm, and I was able to get my rest when I needed it. I was able to stay in a rhythm all year long. The guys made it so much easier in front of me bringing down the workload in shots and chances and letting me see pucks and rebounds."

Saturday, the Jets were one goal away from forcing a Game 7 back in Winnipeg. In the end, they were 10 wins away from the ultimate goal, winning the Stanley Cup. But each setback brings a lesson with it. Hellebuyck remains optimistic about the direction the organization is going and answered the question about what it is going to take to get the team over the top.

"I think it's kind of what we've been doing. We're just continuing to grow our game as a group and figuring out what we want to work on and tweak. We don't want to over tweak

things because we did have a lot of success, but we have to build on that,” said Hellebuyck.

“Just because we had success it doesn’t mean this team is going to sit back and say, ‘let’s just do that.’ No. I know this team and we’re all a bunch of guys that love to learn the game and love to study the game. We’re going to take what we’ve built this year and take it to a whole new level next year.”

NHL.com

<https://www.nhl.com/news/connor-hellebuyck-tweaks-may-have-led-to-playoff-struggles>

Hellebuyck feels adjustments may have led to playoff struggles with Jets Goalie was 0-6 on road, pulled 3 times in 1st round against Blues

By Darrin Bauming

WINNIPEG -- Connor Hellebuyck feels the adjustments he made to his game may have led to a drop in his performance in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

The Winnipeg Jets goaltender struggled at times, particularly on the road; he finished 0-6 with a 5.06 goals-against average and an .809 save percentage. Winnipeg was eliminated by the Dallas Stars in the best-of-7 Western Conference Second Round in six games.

In the first round, the Jets eliminated the St. Louis Blues in Game 7, but Hellebuyck was pulled from three games in the series. He allowed 16 goals on 66 shots in those three games (.758 save percentage).

“I think what I learned the most is you can’t overtweak your game,” Hellebuyck said on Tuesday. “You just can’t abandon your game. Maybe make some tweaks here and there, but nothing huge. Nothing drastic. And you’ve just got to go out there and have fun and realize that bad bounces do happen and sometimes, there is a little bit of a luck factor in hockey. Just trying to control that chaos.”

Hellebuyck, who is a finalist for the Vezina Trophy, awarded to the best goalie in the NHL, and could win it for the third time, said things settled down in his mind before the second round against the Stars. Winnipeg was eliminated with a 2-1 overtime loss at Dallas on Saturday.

Hellebuyck had a 3.85 GAA and .830 save percentage in the first round but improved with a 2.20 GAA and .905 save percentage in the second.

“The first round was a roller coaster and a mental grind,” Hellebuyck said. “Once we got through that, the weight of the world came off my shoulders and I started going back to playing my game. Everything that I was studying in the previous round started to come

together back to my game. ... You might be able to find some tweaks but you don't want to find a ton of tweaks in your game. It's one little thing here and there. You kind of ride with that for a little bit. The second you overgrip it and start overthinking, that's when you lose your edge."

Shutouts in Games 2 and 5 against Dallas helped Hellebuyck's overall numbers in these playoffs (a 6-7 record, a 3.08 GAA and an .866 save percentage), but they were a far cry from his regular-season performance.

"If you start thinking the game and start overthinking the game, then you lose the 'it' factor," Hellebuyck said. "Once I started having fun again ... the level of fun that I'm accustomed to, that's when my game got good and I just started playing. That's what I am going to live and die by."

In the regular season, the 32-year-old was 47-12-3, led the NHL in wins, GAA (2.00) and shutouts (eight), and was second with a .925 save percentage (minimum 25 games played). He also earned his second straight William M. Jennings Trophy, presented annually to the goaltenders who play a minimum of 25 games for the team allowing the fewest goals during the regular season. The Jets allowed 191 goals (including shootout-deciding goals).

"Bad bounces happen and sometimes you just can't control them," Hellebuyck said. "In the playoffs, a lot of chaos happens."

Hellebuyck helped the Jets average a League-low 2.33 goals against this season on the way to winning the Presidents' Trophy for having the best record in the NHL (56-22-4).

"We don't want to overtweak things because we did have a lot of success, but we have to build on that," Hellebuyck said. "Just because we had success it doesn't mean this team is going to sit back and say, 'Let's just do that.' No. I know this team and we're all a bunch of guys that love to learn the game and love to study the game. We're going to take what we've built this year and take it to a whole new level next year."

Had they avoided elimination, Hellebuyck and the Jets likely would have been without their top defenseman. Josh Morrissey revealed Tuesday the injury he sustained to his left knee in Game 6 against the Stars probably would have kept him out for the remainder of the postseason.

Morrissey left the game late in the second period after getting tangled up with Dallas forward Mikko Rantanen along the boards.

"No surgery -- just kind of best case -- but I would've probably been out for the rest of the playoffs, most likely," Morrissey said. "I basically knew right away that I wouldn't be able to [keep playing], that I was injured, and obviously felt something."

Canadian Press

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/jets-will-grow-stronger-after-emotionally-challenging-end-to-season-hellebuyck/>

Jets will grow stronger after emotionally challenging end to season: Hellebuyck

By Canadian Press

Connor Hellebuyck knows how strong bonds can grow when a group deals with adversity.

That's why the Winnipeg Jets star goaltender believes the team will rally after a disappointing — and emotionally challenging — end to its NHL season, and be better for it.

"I think this playoff run, there was a lot of learning curves and a lot of things that we've learned and can take away," Hellebuyck said Tuesday when some players had their final media interviews.

"I know this group is going to get a lot better from that. Not only did we get tighter as a family, but our game got tighter and we're going to continue to grow that and build that."

The Jets won the Presidents' Trophy this year with a franchise-record 56 wins and 116 points in the regular season, but the curse of the award followed them into the playoffs. Since it was awarded in 1985-86, only eight winners have captured the Stanley Cup.

Winnipeg bettered its previous two post-season first-round exits by winning the opening round in a dramatic Game 7 double-overtime victory over the St. Louis Blues.

Next up was the Dallas Stars, who eliminated the Jets 2-1 in a Game 6 that was an emotional wringer for top-centre Mark Scheifele and his teammates.

Scheifele learned the morning of the game that his 68-year-old father, Brad, had unexpectedly died overnight. He decided to play for his dad and even scored the game's first goal, but was in the penalty box when Stars defenceman Thomas Harley netted the winner 1:33 into overtime.

Jets captain Adam Lowry went to the box to console Scheifele, who was then hugged by his teammates. Dallas players also embraced the Kitchener, Ont., product in the handshake line.

Forward Vladislav Namestnikov said the way the team supported Scheifele could be a motivator heading into next season.

"Yeah, 100 per cent," he said. "That was a very sad day, but I thought Mark was a trooper. The team rallied around him."

"It's not the result that we wanted at the end of the day, but I thought it brought the group even closer."

Veteran defenceman Josh Morrissey described Scheifele as his best friend.

"It was tough. Beyond inspiring by Mark," he said. "And everyone knows how proud Brad would have been watching him play."

Morrissey's father died in 2021. He said Scheifele was there for him then, and now he'll do everything to help his friend.

He has talked to Scheifele since he went home to be with his family and prepare for his dad's funeral this week that teammates will attend.

Morrissey had to wait until Scheifele came off the ice to give him a hug because the blue liner was injured late in the second period of that final game against Dallas and didn't return.

His left leg got caught under Stars forward Mikko Rantanen when they collided into the boards. Morrissey said no surgery is required from the ligament injury, but it would have been season-ending had the Jets continued in the playoffs.

Playing through pain

Jets defenceman Luke Schenn missed the second and third games in the Dallas series and revealed he had cracked a couple of ribs during the third period of Game 2 against the Blues.

"I just went to go hit a guy and felt it right there," he said. "It's not (the same as broken), but I'm not the doctor. But all I know is it doesn't feel great."

Support from far and wide

After news of the death of Scheifele's father broke, a Stars fan took to social media and urged people to show their support by donating to a charity linked to Scheifele. One amount suggested was \$55 to represent his jersey number.

"The fact that people have been showing support regardless of who they cheer for, I think that's what sport is all about," Morrissey said.

Director of corporate communications Krista Sinaisky said in an email that True North Youth Foundation had received 1,065 donations totalling \$72,000 by Tuesday morning. It includes \$5,500 from the Dallas Stars and a matching amount by SkipTheDishes.

"The True North Youth Foundation is honoured to use these funds to meaningfully impact youth in our community in honour of Brad Scheifele and will work with Mark and his family to do so in a way that builds legacy for their family," Sinaisky wrote.

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11189482/analysis-winnipeg-jets-playoff-exit-what-next/>

ANALYSIS: What's next for Jets after playoff exit?

By Paul Edmonds CJOB

What's next? What's the next plausible step for the Winnipeg Jets?

Of course, the rawness of Saturday's playoff exit in Dallas, for many reasons, needs to heal over somewhat, but in the coming weeks and months, this season's performance will be assessed and next year's expectations laid out.

Sure, winning the Stanley Cup is always the main objective — and, frankly, it's the only one, and that's totally understood — but it's also how to get there; how to better improve your team's advancement after making progress in your most recent season but still coming up short. That's what needs to be fleshed out.

In truth, the Jets are not that far away, advancing to the second round of the Stanley Cup playoffs and making it difficult for the Stars to advance to the Western Conference final for a third straight year — proving that steps are important to the process and logically easier to ascend the next time around.

So, to view this season as anything but positive would be incorrect, especially after a Presidents' Trophy, a franchise record for wins and a mantle full of individual hardware that's expected to follow when the league awards are handed out next month.

But as star forward Kyle Connor said Tuesday at his final media availability of the season, ultimately, "we're judged on playoff success." And nothing more!

And while this market seems to be satisfied with the improvement the Jets made in getting past the first round, know this: what has been emanating from Winnipeg's dressing room itself their last two seasons to be better will continue again, likely with a few new faces next year and with even more deposits into the bank vault of experience.

This season, by all accounts, was different for the Jets. It was without question solid, but it wasn't perfect and does leave room for growth and progress.

So, what's next for the Jets? Simply more of the same next year, but only to plausibly add on with another step or two.

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/do-the-jets-need-a-superstar-to-make-a-real-stanley-cup-run/>

Do the Jets need a superstar to make a real Stanley Cup run? (VIDEO)

Sportsnet's Jason Bukala joins Kyper and Bourne to discuss whether the Winnipeg Jets need to acquire a true superstar to make a Stanley Cup run, and the unique challenges they face that could make it difficult.

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6366210/2025/05/20/winnipeg-jets-offseason-priorities/>

The Jets deserve praise, but must keep pushing forward this offseason

By Murat Ates

The Winnipeg Jets won the Presidents' Trophy while setting a franchise record for most points in a season. They did not make it to the Western Conference final. Their offseason begins where those two facts intersect.

There are decisions for the team and players to make this offseason that will have far-reaching impacts. Nikolaj Ehlers' uncertain UFA future is the most urgent, while Dylan Samberg and Gabriel Vilardi's next contracts will help determine Winnipeg's ability to keep the momentum going.

This year's Jets were a special team, worth celebrating — and they have work to do to keep pushing forward. Resting on their laurels, even after the best season in franchise history, would come at next year's peril.

Today, we break down the most important decisions of Winnipeg's offseason. First, though, a quick look at one area to celebrate and another that needs improvement.

Biggest victory: A team culture where there are no passengers

Apologies in advance: This section takes a Toronto Maple Leafs storyline and makes it about Winnipeg.

When Leafs captain Auston Matthews criticized Toronto's Game 7 performance, saying the team had too many passengers for a game that big, I thought about the Jets. Not only did the Jets show up for each other in their biggest games of the playoffs — Game 7 against St. Louis, Game 5 and Game 6 against Dallas — Matthews' words made me consider what Adam Lowry might have said in the same moment.

Lowry would not have called out his teammates without calling himself out first. More likely, he would have called himself out in specific terms, while keeping criticism of anybody else's performance to himself. We saw it when the Jets crashed and burned against Colorado in five games last year — Lowry took personal responsibility for his line giving up three goals to Nathan MacKinnon. His critique of the team's play was couched with the pronoun "we."

They're different franchises with different histories and different paths to their second-round exits. It may not be fair to compare. But Lowry's leadership style was apparent during his postgame press conference in Dallas. He was emotional, but mature. When he spoke, he put his teammates above himself.

"We're a family," Lowry said, fighting back tears. "You want to give (Mark Scheifele) the strength. You want to get that kill so bad. We just couldn't do it."

Matthews is one of the best players in the world. This is not meant to criticize him from thousands of kilometres away. But his comments are a reminder that Winnipeg's leadership is in exactly the right place, the result of a process begun by Rick Bowness and continued by Scott Arniel.

Biggest problem: Great team defence with one glaring weakness

Rewind the calendar by a year. Focus only on the Jets' critics, and it's clear: There's no way a season like this one should have been possible. No division title, no Presidents' Trophy, no William Jennings Trophy, no finalists for the Vezina Trophy, Hart Trophy or Jack Adams Award. If you had only believed the angriest Jets critics, the team was broken and needed to be rebuilt.

There was one thing they were right about, though. Winnipeg's special teams had glaring issues. The power play and penalty kill combined to cost a 110-point team the 2024 division title, leading to a first-round matchup with Colorado, where the 62.5 percent penalty kill helped sink the series.

This season, assistant coach Dean Chynoweth improved the penalty kill (slightly) while assistant coach Davis Payne's power play became the team's biggest improvement. Sometimes it's wise to listen to squeaky wheels.

It's time to listen to the critics about one more thing. The Jets gave up a ton of goals through traffic these playoffs (again) and, based on roster construction, it's unclear how Winnipeg is meant to win the battle for the middle of the ice. Whether you blame Connor Hellebuyck for the goals against, the Jets defenders or both, the playbook to beat Winnipeg in the playoffs depends on beating the Jets in traffic and taking away Hellebuyck's sightlines. Put enough goals past him, and he can get rattled.

Hellebuyck recovered from a miserable series against St. Louis to allow 13 goals in six games against Dallas, which will build confidence heading into future playoffs. Still, the Jets have long-term commitments to three very smart but undersized top-four

defencemen in Josh Morrissey, Pionk and Dylan DeMelo. Bigger third-pairing defencemen like Logan Stanley, Luke Schenn and Colin Miller come with limitations. It's hard to see an immediate path to a solution.

They're not moving the franchise goaltender. They're locked in on their top four defencemen, with a Samberg extension one of their top offseason priorities. Somehow, some way, the Jets are going to need to improve on this front — and probably faster than highly touted prospect Elias Salomonsson can make happen.

Biggest offseason priorities: Contracts

Winnipeg would ideally clone Samberg — perhaps making a right-handed version — but will have to settle for signing the 26-year-old defenceman as a restricted free agent. Samberg's contract will be at or near the top of Winnipeg's offseason priorities, and I fully expect the Jets to sign him to a long-term deal.

Vilardi's power-play production cooled off at the end of the season and during the playoffs, but he still posted 61 points in 71 games heading into this summer's negotiations. Vilardi, Samberg and Winnipeg's other restricted free agents — Morgan Barron and Rasmus Kupari — all have arbitration rights, and it wouldn't be surprising to see one or more of them file, even if they don't make it to a hearing. It would make them ineligible for offer sheets, ensuring a Jets contract for next season, then create a bit of deadline pressure once the hearing dates are announced.

Ehlers' future is the biggest question mark. There's a sense he's inclined to explore the UFA market after 10 years in Winnipeg. Could the Jets' playoff run, his success during that run and a year's worth of top power play time renew Ehlers' optimism about an extension? Or did playing fewer minutes than Mason Appleton in Game 6 renew angst about ice time and usage? Ehlers played the ninth-most five-on-five minutes per game among Jets forwards in the regular season, and again in the playoffs.

Ehlers deflected questions about his future during the regular season while declaring his love for Winnipeg, his teammates and Jets fans. Now, with his intention to make it to the World Championships in time to play for Denmark on Tuesday, it seems he won't speak at exit interviews, either.

Beyond Ehlers, Samberg and Vilardi, one expects straightforward negotiations with RFAs Barron and Kupari. Winnipeg's other unrestricted free agents include Appleton, Brandon Tanev, Dominic Toninato, Haydn Fleury, Axel Jonsson-Fjallby, Dylan Coghlan and Chris Driedger.

Ehlers' absence leaves a gaping hole in Winnipeg's projected lineup, with a ripple effect that puts Lowry's shutdown line at risk. This Jets lineup would have ample cap space, regardless of how much is allocated to Vilardi and Samberg, and could probably afford Ehlers' next deal if they believe there's a fit. One also expects Winnipeg to be at the front of the line if the 37-year-old Jonathan Toews' comeback goes well, but we'll save UFA discussion for another piece.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/what-changes-can-jets-make-to-improve-next-year~3137017>

What changes can Jets make to improve next year? (VIDEO)

The Jets made it one round further than their previous two playoff appearances but still fell short of their ultimate goal. What changes can they make to take another step next year? Martin Biron joins Domino's That's Hockey to discuss.

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/05/20/everything-that-were-going-through-is-bringing-us-closer-together>

***'Everything that we're going through is bringing us closer together'
Tight-knit Jets reflect on unified locker room in support of Scheifele***

By: Mike McIntyre

The pain was evident as Josh Morrissey limped into the Winnipeg Jets dressing room on Tuesday to clean out his locker and meet the media for one final time this year.

It wasn't from the serious knee injury the team's top defenceman suffered Saturday night in Dallas, which knocked him out of what would ultimately be a season-ending overtime loss to the Stars.

"No surgery. Kind of best-case," Morrissey said. "But I would have probably been out for the rest of the playoffs."

Nor was it from reflecting on how a concussion chased him from a thrilling, season-saving overtime victory against the St. Louis Blues in Game 7 of their previous series. Or how illness kept him from suiting up for Team Canada in the 4 Nations Face-Off final back in February — a game that would also end with an overtime triumph and a gold medal.

"You can feel sorry for yourself or (call it) unlucky or whatever you want, but it is what it is," Morrissey said on missing out on so many pivotal moments.

No, the reason for his hurt had everything to do with his best friend, Mark Scheifele, and the series of events that transpired as the NHL's No. 1 regular-season team saw its dream of a Stanley Cup come to a screeching, heartbreaking halt.

"Just a devastating day," Morrissey said quietly.

Scheifele's father, Brad, died early Saturday morning. Morrissey called him an "incredible man," someone he'd spent plenty of time with over the years due to his closeness with the entire family. At hockey rinks, golf courses and dinner tables, among other places.

Although he'd been battling an illness and "we knew behind the scenes obviously a little bit of what was going on, nobody really saw that coming," said Morrissey.

"Unfortunately, I've been through it with my dad (Tom, who died of cancer in 2021)," he said. "Just a flood of emotion. And what (Scheifele) was able to do mentally to play that game and play as well as he did, and obviously score that goal, it's inspiring to me as his best friend."

Scheifele gave the Jets a 1-0 lead against the Stars, setting the stage for a potential storybook finish. But not only did Dallas tie the game, Scheifele took a tripping penalty with 14 seconds left in the third period which led to the power-play winner in overtime.

Morrissey wasn't able to rush to the penalty box to console Scheifele — the way that captain Adam Lowry did — since he was already out of the game with his own injury that occurred in the second period following an awkward collision with Stars forward Mikko Rantanen.

But he was there for him in the hallway as a devastated Scheifele made his way to the room inside a raucous American Airlines Center — the same way he had walked into the rink that afternoon by his teammate's side.

"I knew the emotion that was going to flood out of Mark when he came off the ice and what he was probably holding back the entire day and game. All you can do is try and be there for your friend, like he was for me," said Morrissey.

Prior to puck drop, his mother shared a message she had sent to Scheifele's mother, Mary Lou, in which she mentioned how Tom Morrissey and Brad Scheifele, along with Kyle Connor's late father, Joe, "would be up there having their drink of choice and watching the game."

"This is a big family here. Everybody felt that loss," Connor said Tuesday.

"Everybody is different with how they grieve and deal with that stuff. I just kind of let him be by himself a little bit throughout the game. I'm sure throughout the course of the summer, we will have those conversations. They come. I have had those with Josh."

Scheifele's grief was being shared throughout the Jets room by teammates old and new. Defenceman Luke Schenn jokingly called Brad Scheifele his "billet grandfather," noting that he had spent several weeks living in Scheifele's home after being acquired at the trade deadline from the Pittsburgh Penguins.

“His dad was here and stayed at the house when we were together, and I got to know him and he’s just the most genuine, nicest guy you could ever meet,” said Schenn.

“Going into that game, the whole morning skate, there was tears because obviously people knew them. Tears for Scheif, silence, it was not your typical game day where you’re going into an elimination game where everyone’s pretty upbeat and great energy. It was kind of the opposite, which is expected when something like that happens to a teammate and family.”

Schenn described how Scheifele, an alternate captain with the club, was trying to rally the Jets during intermissions as he spoke with them in the dressing room.

“It was incredible the strength he showed and how much he cares about the guys in this room,” he said.

“We all wanted to do it so bad for him and his family and, unfortunately, it just didn’t work that way. But, incredible what he was able to play through and score that goal too, I mean, we all had just the biggest smiles on our faces on the bench. And you knew what was happening because, obviously, his dad was looking down on him.”

Jets goaltender Connor Hellebuyck spoke of the extra-long embrace he had with Scheifele on the ice following the game. The two men have a strong bond, including signing simultaneous seven-year contract extensions prior to the 2023-24 season.

“You know, we’re a family in here and you can really feel it in those moments,” he said. “Everything that we’re going through is bringing us closer together and this team couldn’t be any tighter. So that’s what I’ll say.”

Players were spending Tuesday and Wednesday having exit meetings with head coach Scott Arniel and general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff and would typically now be going their separate ways for the summer.

But there’s one last team event still on the schedule — Brad Scheifele’s funeral in Ontario, which they are all flying to on Thursday to be with Scheifele, who is already back home with his family.

“Being together as a team for this long, you can lean on your teammates and everybody in the room. That’s where you really dig in there,” said Connor.

Morrissey said he was heartened to see that people have donated more than \$60,000 to the True North Youth Foundation in Brad Scheifele’s honour as a “\$55 for 55” campaign took off on social media over the weekend with many Dallas fans chipping in.

“A very nice gesture,” he said.

“Sports brings so many people together. It’s unifying, and for it to happen like it did and for Mark to be able to go out there and play, it’s got to be inspiring for so many people. The internal strength that he had to be able to play that game is incredible. And the fact that people have been showing support regardless of who they cheer for, I think that’s what sport is all about.”

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/2025/05/20/i-love-being-a-winnipeg-jet>

‘I love being a Winnipeg Jet’

Unrestricted free agents Appleton, Fleury express interest in sticking with the team

By: Ken Wiebe

Mason Appleton not only wore his heart on his sleeve, he stated his intentions just above the brim of his cap.

As he stood in front of reporters on Tuesday, the Winnipeg Jets right-winger was sporting a lid with WPG on it.

For someone who is set to become an unrestricted free agent on July 1, it wasn’t an accident Appleton chose to show his support to a community he’s grown to be a big part of, spending nearly seven-and-a-half of his eight NHL seasons in the Jets’ organization.

“Obviously each side has to talk and stuff has to get figured out. I love being a Winnipeg Jet. It’s all I’ve really known. I was in Seattle for a short while. I love it here and I love this organization. If we could work it out, I’d be happy to be a Jet,” said Appleton, who was asked a follow-up about what was on his checklist for his next contract.

“I’m 29. I’d like some term, some stability on that. But, at the same time, sometimes that changes the numbers on that. I guess I kind of got an idea in my head. We haven’t really had much communication with them. Hopefully, in the next little bit here maybe we could get to work and see what both sides want and go from there.”

With some unknowns surrounding his future, Appleton admits that saying goodbye is a bit different this time around.

“Yeah, it is. I’ve never been in a spot like this, as a potential UFA,” said Appleton, originally chosen by the Jets in the sixth round of the 2015 NHL draft. “When you’ve got a term left on your deal, a loss stings and the season ends and you end up where you dwell and you get over it and then, ‘It’s OK, we’ve got next year.’

“That’s not the reality for me right now. You don’t know what next year brings or where that will be. But, like I said, I love being a Winnipeg Jet.”

Appleton is one of eight pending UFAs in the organization, which includes Nikolaj Ehlers, Brandon Tanev, Dominic Toninato and Axel Jonsson-Fjallby, defencemen Haydn Fleury and Dylan Coghlan and goalie Chris Driedger.

Ehlers is the highest profile player on the list and even as he was suiting up for Denmark at the 2025 IIHF men's world championship, his future was one of the topics discussed.

After being added to the top power-play unit this year, Ehlers saw an uptick in his production, registering 24 goals and 63 points in 69 games before adding five goals and seven points in eight playoff contests.

"He's an awesome guy to be around and it's been such a pleasure watching him grow his game — not only on the ice but off the ice as well — and watching him become the guy he is," said Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck.

"He's such a big part of this family and the heart and soul of a lot of things we do here. Not only does he bring it on the ice, but just around the rink he's a pleasure to be around.

"You know he's going to have your back no matter what you're going through. He's a big part of the group."

Tanev was reminiscing about his first tour of duty with the organization and thankful for a second crack at a playoff run in 2025.

"Obviously, I had my start here and to come back for a second go around, it's awesome," said Tanev.

"It was an opportunity to come to a good group, a great city with good people in it and to live out your dream playing in the NHL. I think no matter where you are, your goal is to play in the NHL and to win a Stanley Cup.

"So I've always been grateful for my time here in Winnipeg, and it's been awesome and the fans and everyone have made it that way."

Defenceman Fleury signed a two-way deal to play a depth role, but ended up suiting up in some of the Jets' most important games of the season, including a Game 7 victory over the St. Louis Blues in the opening round.

There were ups-and-downs to endure, as injuries opened the door for Fleury to see some second pairing minutes with Neal Pionk during the first half of the season, but a lower-body issue he sustained on Dec. 23 against the Toronto Maple Leafs impeded his momentum to the point he was a healthy scratch down the stretch and for the beginning of the playoffs.

But Fleury appeared in 39 games during the regular season and then got into eight of the 13 postseason contests, enhancing his value, whether he sticks around or hits the open market.

"I'd love to stay. I really enjoyed my time here," said Fleury.

"My wife and my kids really enjoy it. And being able to play in a city where hockey matters for me is huge. And just to be able to show my kids how much a sport can do for a community is something that I'm really proud that I got to show my son this year."

The Jets already have eight blue-liners under contract for next season, while Elias Salomonsson will be trying to work his way into the equation as well.

THE CHANCE: Appleton had the best chance to give the Jets the lead in Game 6 on Saturday, but Dallas Stars goalie Jake Oettinger made a sprawling glove save to prevent his backdoor shot from going in with roughly eight-and-a-half minutes to go in regulation time.

Appleton brought up the chance unprompted and got emotional when talking about the glorious opportunity to provide the go-ahead goal.

"The puck didn't really settle how I wanted it to, so I didn't really hit it how I needed or wanted to," said Appleton. "You look back at it, (if) you score the goal, you're winning the game. So, yeah, obviously it's kind of haunting in a sense. Frustrating.

"But at the same time you see goalies make incredible saves. I didn't get what I wanted on it, but at the end of the day it's a game of inches."

As haunting as the missed chance was, Appleton said it was one of many moments that could have gone either way in the tight series with the Stars.

"You think about those things for days," said Appleton.

"It's athletes competing. It's not pen and paper where you're just figuring out stuff and it's yes or no answers. That's not how the game of hockey works. There's what ifs in everyday life, but there's a million in hockey with two teams competing at that pace for 60 minutes. What if they didn't hit the post there close to the end and it just went in? Like a million what ifs on both sides, but man, yeah, it's a sport and it is what it is."

Appleton finished the playoffs with seven assists in 13 games, which left him tied for third on the team with Ehlers and defenceman Pionk.

Only Mark Scheifele (12 points) and Kyle Connor (five goals, 17 points) produced more than Appleton offensively during the first two rounds.

Appleton had 10 goals and 22 points in 71 games during the regular season, a slight dip from the career-high 14 goals and 34 points he had in 82 games in 2023-24.

INJURY UPDATE: During the playoffs, Jets defenceman Luke Schenn dropped a hint that he wasn't necessarily a healthy scratch when he was replaced by Colin Miller early in the second-round series with the Stars.

On Thursday, he revealed that he had been playing with a pair of cracked ribs, the result of a hit he delivered in the third period of Game 2 against the St. Louis Blues.

"I just went to go hit a guy and felt it right there," said Luke.

"I had that for the remainder of the playoffs, so yeah, it's obviously, it's tough. I mean, that was a hard-fought, physical series and then you're trying to continue to play with that. So, no, it's not an excuse, it's just, you're trying to battle through that while not being hesitant, that was the grind. But the training staff did an incredible job and just sort of, yeah, tried to push through and help the team any way I could."

Are cracked ribs the same as broken ribs?

"It's not, but I'm not the doctor," said Schenn. "But all I know is it doesn't feel great."

Luke wasn't the only Schenn brother playing through pain.

Nor was he the only member of the Schenn family keeping a secret.

"(Brayden) did not know about that," said Luke.

"Funny enough, he had an injury that was almost very similar to mine, and I didn't know about his either, and he comes up after Game 7 and he goes, 'Yeah, I'm pretty banged up,' and I go, 'Point,' and he shows me the spot, and I'm like, 'That's literally where I'm sore, too.' And my dad knew, and he didn't tell both of us either."

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/05/20/building-on-historic-season-a-motivating-next-step>

***Building on historic season a motivating next step
Going home early stings, but Jets took incredible step forward***

By: Ken Wiebe

Connor Hellebuyck had a few things to tend to before his obligatory final meeting of the season with the media.

As the Winnipeg Jets All-World goalie was grabbing one of his goal sticks off the rack, one couldn't help but notice the image of the Stanley Cup, painted on the doors that led to the home bench at Canada Life Centre, looming in the background behind him.

With another longer-than-hoped-for off-season having arrived for these Jets, the pursuit of that elusive silver chalice very much remains top of mind.

After surviving an exhilarating seven-game series with the St. Louis Blues to advance to the second round for the first time since 2021, the Jets were eliminated in overtime of Game 6 by the Dallas Stars.

The emotional toll of what transpired leading up to the game after the death of Mark Scheifele's father, Brad, coupled with the effort put forth by the Jets entire team, was admirable.

Had one additional bounce gone the Jets way, they could have easily forced a Game 7 on home ice.

But when exit interviews are held, the reality of the situation sets in.

And the reality for this edition of the Jets is that they took an incredible step forward, but they also finished the campaign 10 wins shy of the ultimate goal.

A year ago, after the Jets were bounced in five games (which included four consecutive losses) to the Colorado Avalanche in Round 1, the message was simple.

Players, coaches and members of the management team spoke about the need to get five to 10 per cent better.

The words weren't hollow and the premise led the Jets all the way to the best regular season in franchise history, a first Central Division title and a Presidents' Trophy banner.

There wasn't necessarily one theme emerging from the eight players who spoke on Tuesday, but some longtime members of the core — and some newcomers — steadfastly believe the Jets remain on the right trajectory.

"The cruel part about our game is a lot of people are trying to answer that question right now, right?" Hellebuyck asked rhetorically, when the subject of those 10 additional wins was broached.

"There is only one team that gets to say we've figured it out. What's it going to take? I think it's kind of what we've been doing. We're just continuing to grow our game as a group and figuring out what we want to work on and tweak. We don't want to over tweak things because we did have a lot of success.

“But we have to build on that. Just because we had success it doesn’t mean this team is going to sit back and say ‘let’s just do that.’ No. I know this team and we’re all a bunch of guys that love to learn the game and love to study the game. We’re going to take what we’ve built this year and take it to a whole new level next year.”

As thin as the margin for error is, a whole new level is precisely what will be required from this group — which will require further roster upgrades to a roster that already featured plenty of depth but could still use more.

“We’ve shown, (with) this group, the body of work we have done in the regular season the past couple years. And obviously taking a step in the playoffs this year, gaining that knowledge, gaining that experience,” said Jets left-winger Kyle Connor, who is eligible to sign a contract extension on July 1.

“Great regular season. But the season is always judged by the playoffs and what you do. We won a round, but at the end of the day, it was a failure. We didn’t win a Cup and that’s our job as players here and the organization. With how good of a group we feel we had, it’s going to come back next year even more focused.”

Connor wasn’t trying to be a downer, though he’s been around long enough to know that the clock is ticking for this core group.

Sustained success isn’t a guarantee, even when many of the important pieces are in place.

Keeping the entire band together is a challenge and bringing in the right complementary pieces is something every team in the league is trying to do.

“Every year is different. It’s got a way of ending on its own and its own script that has been written,” said Connor. “You could say there could be more anger that we’ve gotten that much closer and we didn’t win, so there are two ways of looking at it.”

As the only player on the roster that’s been to the top of the mountain and has his name engraved on the Stanley Cup, Jets defenceman Luke Schenn knows what it takes for a group to level up.

He also knows that you don’t get to hit fast forward when it comes to the process of team building and strengthening the foundation.

“Well, I mean, it doesn’t get any easier. You’ve got to start from day one again, too, and it’s a journey,” said Schenn. “You look how competitive this league is and teams are going to obviously try to get a lot better in the off-season and make changes and make moves. Every guy has to go back in the summertime and try to get better themselves, too.”

"If you rely on your past, that's not exactly a setup for success in the future. So, you've just got to continue to go back and try to get better and grind."

Although he's only been around the Jets for a couple of months, Schenn knows what a winning team and organization is supposed to look like.

He's seen what belief can do and by exorcising some long-lasting playoff demons this spring, the Jets have a better idea of the path they need to go down next.

"There's a lot to be proud of," said Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey. "This year, the disappointment is still there, but we pushed, obviously, a great Dallas team to six and overtime, and I think all of us felt if we'd managed a way to get that to Game 7 that there's no way we weren't going to win that game at home."

"At least that was our mindset. For us, we had a great season. The things we talked about improving, we did improve on. We worked extremely hard last summer to do that, and through this entire year. We won an incredible Game 7 and obviously moved forward."

Morrissey was quick to acknowledge that the hard work is just beginning.

The road to going from one meagre playoff win in each of the past two springs to six in 2025 took a lot of sacrifice and effort, all of which was well worth it.

But getting the job done requires even more.

"The sentiment is that drive that we had after last season when it didn't go our way, when we felt we needed to make some serious changes, we need to have that same attitude this summer in terms of pushing ourselves, and maybe even harder than we did last year," said Morrissey.

"We saw the results of our hard work this season and how we got rewarded and improved. But to get to that next level of, obviously, the ultimate goal of winning the Stanley Cup, we've got to continue to push to go to that next level."

That feeling of being oh-so-close but yet-so-far is a driving force, yet separating your team from the rest of the pack is easier said than done.

"You learn more from losing than you do winning," said Jets defenceman Haydn Fleury. "There's a lot to learn, but there's also so much good that we showed in that series, and I think just the steps that we took as a group throughout the year is just a testament to what they're building here."

Arriving in next-year-country is the bus stop no team wants to arrive at, but 31 of the 32 clubs eventually do.

It's also a great motivator.

"It's not the end result that we wanted. But we have all the keys in this room to have success and I think we'll be back stronger next year," said Jets forward Vladislav Namestnikov. "It's unfinished. I think the guys here understand what we can achieve. It leaves that sour taste and hunger to come back and do it again next year."

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipegsun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/morrisseys-triple-whammy-d-man-wouldve-been-done-even-if-jets-had-won>

Morrissey's triple-whammy: D-man would've been done even if Jets had won

By Paul Friesen

Had the Winnipeg Jets forced a seventh game with Dallas and advanced to the third round of the playoffs, they would have done so without the services of Josh Morrissey.

Luke Schenn jokes about keeping injuries from brother Brayden in Round 1

Article content

The Jets' top defenceman on Tuesday revealed the knee ligament he strained in Game 6 against the Stars was serious, although not the worst-case scenario.

"No surgery," Morrissey said as the Jets held their exit interviews. "But I would've probably been out for the rest of the playoffs."

Morrissey's leg was caught under a falling Stars forward Mikko Rantanen in the second period in Dallas on Saturday.

He left the ice immediately and didn't return, just the latest on a series of three lousy breaks in three of the defining moments of his season.

The first was an illness that kept him out of Team Canada's showdown with the U.S. in the final game of the 4 Nations tournament.

Next, an early hit that took him out of Game 7 against St. Louis in Round 1, causing him to miss his team's historic comeback and double-overtime win, plus Game 1 of the second round.

"Concussion protocol," Morrissey said.

Then came Saturday.

"I basically knew right away," he said. "It was just frustrating this year that those situations happened. You can feel sorry for yourself or unlucky or whatever you want, but it is what it is. Just got to go back to work and continue to get better... and be ready for those moments when I get a chance to be in them again."

Morrissey played 80 of 82 games during the season, as the Jets won the Presidents' Trophy as the NHL's top team.

The way they went down fighting left a completely different taste in Morrissey's mouth compared to their early, meek exit a year ago.

"There's a lot to be proud of," Morrissey said. "There was a lot to be proud of last year, but the ending was extremely disappointing. This year the disappointment is still there, but we pushed a great Dallas team to six and overtime, and all of us felt if we'd managed a way to get that to Game 7 that there's no way we weren't going to win that game at home."

Morrissey pointed to how hard the Jets worked last summer and how they embraced being pushed by first-year head coach Scott Arniel, both paying off in that seven-game series against the Blues and in giving Dallas all it could handle.

"We need to have that same attitude this summer, in terms of pushing ourselves," he said. "And maybe even harder than we did last year. We saw the results of our hard work this season and how we got rewarded and improved. But to get to that next level of the ultimate goal of winning the Stanley Cup, we've got to continue to push to go to that next level."

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/cracked-ribs-broken-heart-mark-schenns-first-two-months-with-jets>

Cracked ribs, broken heart mark Schenn's first two months with Jets

By Paul Friesen

Just when it seems there couldn't be another chapter in the story of the Schenn brothers first-ever playoff meeting, older brother Luke reveals one.

The Winnipeg Jets defenceman says he suffered a couple of cracked ribs in Game 2 of the first round against St. Louis.

Schenn kept playing through it, though, and kept the news from his brother Brayden, the Blues captain, not wanting to put a target on his rib cage.

That's just the beginning.

"Funny enough, he had an injury that was very similar to mine, and I didn't know about his, either," Schenn told reporters in Winnipeg on Tuesday. "And he comes up to me

after Game 7 and goes, 'I'm pretty banged up.' And I go, 'Point,' and he shows me the spot. And I'm like, 'That's literally where I'm sore, too.'

"And my dad knew, and he didn't tell both of us."

Luke Schenn's injury helps explain why he was scratched for Games 2 and 3 against Dallas. He returned for the last three, trying to play his usual physical style, despite the pain.

"It's not an excuse," he said. "You're trying to battle through that while not being hesitant. That was the grind."

Joining the Jets at the trade deadline, Schenn says his two-plus months in Winnipeg exceeded his expectations.

It began with him living with teammate Mark Scheifele for a month and a half, sometimes with Scheifele's dad, who'd be visiting from Ontario.

It ended with Brad Scheifele's death rocking the team before Game 6 in Dallas.

"He's just the most genuine, nicest guy you could ever meet," Schenn said. "I couldn't believe what a nice man he was. His mom's incredible, too... they felt like family. Going into that game, the whole morning skate, there were tears... tears for Scheif, silence – it was not your typical game day where you're going into an elimination game, where everyone's pretty upbeat and great energy."

"It was the opposite."

Schenn doesn't think it affected the Jets' play. He just credits Dallas for coming out strong and the Jets for hanging in and pushing it to overtime.

As a two-time Stanley Cup winner, Schenn says there's no secret to reaching the next level.

"It doesn't get any easier," he said. "You've got to start from Day 1 again. And it's a journey. Every guy has to go back in the summertime and try to get better... if you rely on your past, that's not exactly a setup for success in the future. In saying that, there is valuable experience that you can go back and rely on."

Schenn is signed for another year. He guesses his new team exorcised some demons by reaching the second round, after two previous first-round exits.

"Probably a big mental hurdle for the guys to push through... knowing you can take the next step."

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/i-love-it-here-uncertainty-swirls-around-jets-pending-free-agents>

'I love it here': Uncertainty swirls around Jets' pending free agents

By Paul Friesen

There was no sign of Nik Ehlers as the Winnipeg Jets began their exit meetings on Tuesday. He was already off to join Team Denmark at the world championship.

Whether or not he ever pulls on a Jets sweater again is another story. He's easily the Jets' most high-profile, pending unrestricted free agent.

"I've played with Nikky for nine years now," defenceman Josh Morrissey said. "He's a fantastic player, fantastic teammate, fantastic guy. I try not to think about those things too much, but certainly love playing with him and hope he can be back."

Ehlers' speed and skill produced an eighth 20-goal season.

Those qualities would also produce a high bid on the NHL's open market, which begins on July 1 – particularly after Ehlers more than doubled his career playoff total with five in two rounds.

"He's huge," Kyle Connor said. "One of our best players, and he carries the play so much when he's on the ice. He's a big part of our power play this year, too. He's a huge piece for us and big in our locker room. He's got a big voice."

A big shot, too, one Connor Hellebuyck sees in practice all the time.

The Jets goalie hopes to see it again in training camp.

"The business side of the game is unfortunate sometimes, but it's something that has to take care of itself," Hellebuyck said. "He's an awesome guy to be around and it's been such a pleasure watching him grow his game, not only on the ice but off the ice as well, watching him become the guy he is."

"He's such a big part of this family and the heart and soul of a lot of things we do here."

Linemate Vlad Namestnikov says he and Ehlers had a nice, long talk at the team's windup dinner, but he received no appetizer on the 29-year-old's future plans.

"I would love him to stay," Namestnikov said. "But it's not up to me. Being unrestricted is hard, but it's part of the business and everyone goes through it."

Winnipeg's other pending UFA's include forwards Mason Appleton and Brandon Tanev, as well as defenceman Haydn Fleury.

"We haven't really had much communication with them," Appleton said of contract talks with the Jets. "Hopefully in the next little bit here maybe we could get to work and see what both sides want and go from there."

It's the first time the 29-year-old Appleton has been in this position, and it's not a particularly comfortable one.

"How do you pack your house even, things like that," he said. "It is different. When you've got term left on your deal, a loss stings and the season ends... and you get over it and then it's, 'Okay, we've got next year.' That's not the reality for me right now. You don't know what next year brings or where that will be."

Appleton says watching Vlad Namestnikov, Alex Iafallo and Neal Pionk ink extensions during the year didn't leave him feeling left out.

"The Jets haven't in the past generally signed a lot of guys throughout the course of the season, but everyone is growing, they're trying to do things a little different and be better as well," he said. "Those are close friends, too, that got those deals, so super happy for them."

A Jets draft pick in 2015, Appleton would be happy to see another contract offer from Winnipeg on his table soon.

"I love being a Winnipeg Jet. It's all I've really known. I was in Seattle for a short while. I love it here and I love this organization. If we could work it out, I'd be happy to be a Jet."

Tanev, 33, is in the same boat, wondering if he'll get an offer from the team that gave him his start in the NHL as an undrafted free agent.

"Everyone's been so great to me," he said. "It's one of those places where you come to the rink every day, you're smiling, and when you put that jersey on it's exciting to go on that ice. The building, the atmosphere, during the regular season and the playoffs was unbeatable. It's a special place to play."

He gets no argument from Fleury, who came to Winnipeg after splitting seven seasons with Carolina, Anaheim, Seattle and Tampa Bay.

"I'd love to stay," the 28-year-old defenceman said. "Being able to play in a city where hockey matters for me is huge. It's my first time playing in Canada, and it's special. The pressure that gets put on us as players is a special opportunity."

Less likely to leave as restricted free agents are forwards Gabe Vilardi and Morgan Barron, plus defenceman Dylan Samberg.

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/not-your-typical-game-day-jets-relive-emotional-final-day-in-dallas>

'Didn't even seem real': Jets relive emotional final day in Dallas

By Paul Friesen

It's a day they'll never forget, seeing a teammate get tragic news to start it, being eliminated from the playoffs to end it.

Three days after they played their final game, Winnipeg Jets players on Tuesday took some time to revisit the emotional grinder they, and especially Mark Scheifele, went through in Dallas.

Scheifele was back home with family in Kitchener, Ont., grieving the loss of his father, Brad.

But his presence was still very much in the dressing room where teammates talked to the media one last time.

Josh Morrissey will remember the morning phone call that shook him from his sleep and thrust him into the real world.

The Winnipeg Jets defenceman will remember going straight to Scheifele's room to see what his teammate needed after learning of the death of his father.

"We knew behind the scenes a little bit what was going on," Morrissey said. "But nobody really saw that coming. Your heart goes out for your friend. Unfortunately I've been through it with my dad, and every situation's a little bit different. But just a flood of emotion."

For the rest of that day in Dallas, that's what Morrissey did: check in with his long-time friend to see if he was okay.

What else can you do, or even say?

The most important thing: "Just having somebody there."

"Sometimes you don't necessarily hear the words the person's saying when you're in that state," Morrissey said. "Until you lose your dad, especially when you're close with him like Mark was and like I was, you don't really know how to handle it. Just being there for him is all you can do. That means the most."

Scheifele had done the same for Morrissey when he lost his dad to cancer nearly four years ago.

Only Scheifele didn't get the chance for a long goodbye, as Morrissey had that summer. He had a game to play. An elimination game.

He'd decided right away he was going to play. It's what his dad would have wanted.

Kyle Connor would understand that, too. He lost his father four years ago.

"Who knows what was going through his mind until the game," Connor said. "But this is a big family here. Everybody in that room here felt that loss."

Scheifele stayed at the hotel while his teammates went to the morning skate, their thoughts with him, their emotions spilling onto the ice.

"There were tears," defenceman Luke Schenn said. "Tears for Scheif. Silence. It was not your typical game day."

Before the game, Morrissey received a text message from his mom that he just had to share with Scheifele.

"That our dads and KC's dad would be up there," is how Morrissey recalled it. "Having their drink of choice and watching the game."

Seeing Scheifele in the warmup choked up his teammates yet again.

"We do some little things together," Morrissey said of their pre-game routine. "And it felt like I was fighting back tears. It was tough."

Scheifele showed up for the game like his dad was in the first row behind the bench, cheering him on.

"It almost didn't even seem real, in a sense," Mason Appleton said.

"I couldn't believe how much strength Scheif had," Schenn added. "He was talkative. He was at intermission giving it to us a little bit, in a positive way, to keep going or get on them."

Teammates took No. 55's cue and played a vastly better second period than their first.

And when Scheifele scored the game's opening goal, it was like the heavens opened and light poured down on the bench.

"We all had the biggest smiles on our faces," is how Schenn put it. "And you knew what was happening, because his dad was looking down on him."

Dallas would tie it up, and what happened late in the third period and in overtime is all the proof anybody needs about how cruel and unfair sports can be.

But there were reminders of how good and how unifying it can be, too.

Like the Dallas fan who started an influx of donations to the Jets True North Youth Foundation, one of Scheifele's charities of choice.

The original donation, \$55, sparked tens of thousands of dollars more.

"I haven't asked him if he's aware of it," Morrissey said. "For it to happen like it did and for Mark to be able to go out there and play... it's got to be inspiring for so many people. Highest stakes, elimination game – the internal strength that he had to be able to play that game is incredible.

"And the fact that people have been showing support regardless of who they cheer for, that's what sport is all about."

Suffering a knee injury during the game, Morrissey wasn't able to embrace his teammate when he finally stepped out of the penalty box on Saturday.

But that didn't lessen the impact of their meeting in the hallway after the teams shook hands and left the ice.

"I knew the emotion that was going to flood out of Mark when he came off the ice," Morrissey said. "And what he was probably holding back the entire day and game."

Again, all he could do was be there.

Somewhere along the way, the defenceman told Scheifele how proud his dad would be of him, how proud they all were. And how his teammates were standing beside him.

He also talked to Scheifele about how hard it was going to be when he got home and saw the rest of his family.

He knew, because he's lived it.

"I'm grateful, in a way, that I had the experience, as tough as it was, to be able to support my friend," Morrissey said. "Somebody texted me, 'We're part of the same club,' which is not one you want to be a part of."

It's not.

But thankfully someone is there to help when you join it.

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/its-haunting-jets-appleton-still-playing-the-what-if-game>

'It's haunting': Jets' Appleton still playing the what-if game

By Paul Friesen

It's the yawn that'll keep Mason Appleton awake at night.

The yawning cage, that is.

The Winnipeg Jets winger had an open net against Dallas just past the midway mark of the third period in Game 6, the teams knotted at 1-1.

Appleton didn't get all of it, and the puck hit sprawling Stars goalie Jake Oettinger. The rest is history.

"An insane chance," Appleton said. "The puck didn't really settle how I wanted it to, so I didn't really hit it how I needed or wanted to. You look back at it, you score the goal and you're winning the game. It's haunting, in a sense.

"You think about those things for days."

They are the what-ifs. And in the fast-moving, sometimes chaotic game of hockey, there are many every time you lace them up.

"It's athletes competing. It's not pen and paper where you're just figuring out stuff and it's yes or no answers," is how Appleton put it. "What if they didn't hit the post there close to the end and it just went in? Like a million what-ifs on both sides."

Appleton finished the playoffs with no goals and seven assists in 13 games, after a 10-goal, 22-point regular season.

The 29-year-old pending unrestricted free agent also took away some pride in seeing his team get further than it did the last two years, when it went down with barely a whimper in the first round.

"Tons of pride," he said. "You lose in five last year... you have a real sour taste that we chased all summer. Then we come back and put a great product on the ice for 82 games. We won a lot of hockey games, won the Presidents' Trophy and then found ourselves in an absolute dog fight against St. Louis. Came out alive.

"And I don't really feel like this Dallas series was a 4-2 series. We were a what-if away from Game 7 coming back to our building, where we've been dominant. A lot to be proud of."

As for his uncertain future, Appleton says it helps to have a child at home to take his mind off his job.

“You have a one-year-old and they’re trying not to bonk their head on stuff,” he said. “You’re trying to help them with that, so just a lot of chasing them around. It definitely keeps your mind off the game. He doesn’t know anything about hockey. He doesn’t know what I do. It’s actually cool that way.

“Hey, just go be a dad, love your kid and your wife and it distracts you and helps you out.”