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<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/arniel-we-still-have-more-to-do>

Arniel: "We still have more to do."

Arniel and Cheveldayoff look to build off impressive 2024-25 season

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG – After a memorable regular season in which the Winnipeg Jets won the Central, the Presidents' Trophy, advanced past the first round of the playoffs for the first time since 2021 and were one goal away from forcing another Game 7 in their Second Round series with Dallas, Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff and head coach Scott Arniel had the same message.

There is still another level to get to.

"Like last year, and those other years, there was big learning. Just learning what playoff hockey actually means. This year, we learned it, we lived it, we grew through it. But our goal now is to win the Stanley Cup. We know we have done a lot of good things," said Arniel.

"But now we know what it takes. We still have more to do. As a staff, as players, these guys are all going home with that mentality and we're going to follow up on this all summer long with this mentality, so that when we get to training camp that's part of our objective."

Cheveldayoff pointed out that just making the postseason is something that shouldn't be taken for granted. The Jets have accomplished that each of the past three seasons and this one finally got over that hump of the opening round in a gruelling series with the St. Louis Blues. They pushed the Stars to six games, Dallas now is taking part of their third consecutive Western Conference Final.

"So, I think in talking to the guys, again, those common themes are just understanding how important each and every detail is from game to game is what you learn, is what you grow," said Cheveldayoff.

"Obviously, there's several teams that are participating right now, that have been there before, and that's what we want to get to. We want to get to that point where you have the battle scars, you have the knowledge that, again, you know what to expect and what it's going to take to go beyond that next level."

Winnipeg had the best power play during the regular season, one of the top offences in hockey and were the best defensive team, period. All of that changed in the playoffs, as the power play finished at 18.6%, goal scoring dried up which is not surprising as the

checking tightens up in the second season. Arniel pointed out it doesn't matter how you win games, you just find ways to do it.

"When it comes to the playoffs, it's a different game. And all it is about is winning your series. It's winning those games," said Arniel.

"And however, that comes about, whether you score four power-play goals or your penalty kill does something or you limit the opposition to limited opportunities to be in your end of the rink, it's only about winning. It's only about winning. That Game 6 for us in Dallas, that was a game to be won."

Game 6 in Dallas. From Mark Scheifele losing his father Brad earlier in the day, deciding to play and scoring the opening goal in the second period. The Stars would end up tying the game in the second and winning on an overtime power play goal from Thomas Harley ending the Jets season.

"But the biggest thing that I had and I knew was that I knew our team, how they were going to handle it. Wasn't like we were walking into something we weren't prepared in the sense of..because we had been a family. Because we had cared for each other," said Arniel.

"It's been growing here the last few years, and I saw it all year long. And I knew how that was going to be handled. Well, I was 99% sure and they did. They went above and beyond, how they handled that Game 6."

Cheveldayoff was impressed with how his group handled that day from start to finish.

"In this particular case, Brad was someone who, Mark was our first draft pick and I've known that family now for over 14 years. You can't talk about being a family. You act like being a family. And I was really proud of how all our players came together," said Cheveldayoff.

"But it's not surprising. As a group this year that's what it's been about. They've held each other accountable behind the scenes more so than people even know. They've been hard on each other, they've pushed each other, they've argued with each other. But that's what you strive for in a team."

The Jets general manager also has to be pleased with how Arniel handled things in his first season behind the bench. After Rick Bowness retired last spring, Arniel did a fantastic job with his second chance as a head coach in the National Hockey League. Arniel picked up from where Bowness left things and pushed the Jets to the best record in the league and was named a finalist for the Jack Adams Trophy.

"I had the fortune of being able to tell the team that Arnie was being nominated and what I said to them was as much as that's an individual coaches recognition, what's a coach's job?" said Cheveldayoff.

"A coach's job is to try and get a group of players to come together and play a certain way and to believe in doing something, to believe in what a coach is preaching and go and execute it."

The Jets now enter the off-season with many questions about what next year's team will look like. Restricted free agents Dylan Samberg, Gabriel Vilardi, Morgan Barron and Rasmus Kupari and unrestricted free agents Haydn Fleury, Brandon Tanev, Mason Appleton, Dominic Toninato and Nikolaj Ehlers. Ehlers had a big year and was a key component on the league's best power play.

"When we get a chance to talk to him (Ehlers), we'll put our best foot forward with him to try to make our case to be a unique Jet for life type player and we'll see where it all goes there. The relationship is great, and he did contribute to the success of this organization on many fronts, and we hope that's something that can continue," said Cheveldayoff.

"If he does choose to go in a different direction than as an organization we'll have to evolve as we have in the past with other things and it will be another opportunity for us to grow in a different area."

NHL.com

<https://www.nhl.com/news/winnipeg-hopes-to-make-nikolaj-ehlers-jet-for-life>

***Winnipeg hopes to re-sign Ehlers to new contract
GM says forward, who can be unrestricted free agent July 1, is 'Jet-for-life-type player'***

By Darrin Bauming

WINNIPEG -- The Winnipeg Jets remain hopeful they can agree to a contract with pending unrestricted free agent forward Nikolaj Ehlers.

Ehlers is coming off a 63-point regular season (24 goals, 39 assists) in 69 games, one point shy of his NHL career-high when he played all 82 games in 2016-17 (25 goals, 39 assists). He missed the first five games of the Stanley Cup Playoffs, but had seven points (five goals, two assists) in the Jets' final eight games before they were eliminated by the Dallas Stars in Game 6 of the Western Conference Second Round.

"Nikolaj has been a player that has grown up in our organization," Winnipeg general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff said Wednesday. "Drafted, developed him, someone that we think the world of. We obviously went into this year eyes wide open that he was a potential unrestricted free agent -- players earn that opportunity."

"When we get a chance to talk to him, we'll put our best foot forward with him to try to make our case to be a unique Jet-for-life-type player and we'll see where it all goes there."

Ehlers, 26, is playing for Denmark at the 2025 IIHF World Championship in Stockholm, Sweden, and Herning, Denmark, leaving to join the national team following Winnipeg's Game 6 loss in Dallas.

"I talked to him the other day when he was going over (to Herning)," Cheveldayoff said. "We haven't had the ability to sit down with him like we had with the other players... We'll finish that process when they're done. I did get a chance (when) Nikolaj Ehlers' agent was in town, we met probably for about two hours (Monday)."

The No. 9 pick in the 2014 NHL Draft, Ehlers has 520 points (225 goals, 295 assists) in 674 regular-season games through 10 NHL seasons.

"I'd echo the statement of everyone in this room, that we'd love to see 'Nikky' back," Winnipeg Jets captain Adam Lowry said. "He's a huge part of our team. He's a game-breaker, he's great in this room. I would say I'm like the rest of you -- we're all waiting, holding our breath, hoping that we can get something done... We'd be extra happy if he decides that Winnipeg is where he wants to spend the next however-many years."

Ehlers is fifth in goals and sixth in assists and points in Winnipeg/Atlanta Thrashers history.

"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," Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck said. "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 and the business side is up to him and his group coming up."

Though Winnipeg has a handful of pending free agents -- including forwards Gabriel Vilardi (restricted), Mason Appleton and Brandon Tanev, as well as defensemen Dylan Samberg (restricted) and Haydn Fleury -- Cheveldayoff knows negotiations with Ehlers will be pivotal to the direction the Jets navigate this offseason.

"The relationship is great, and he did contribute to the success of this organization on many fronts, and we hope that's something that can continue," Cheveldayoff said. "If he does choose to go in a different direction, then as an organization we'll have to evolve as we have in the past with other things and it will be another opportunity for us to grow in a different area."

Family matters: Jets' strong chemistry can keep pushing team forward

By Jacob Stoller

WINNIPEG — It wasn't long ago that there was a negative perception surrounding the Winnipeg Jets' locker room.

The room had one voice and one voice only, and players weren't pulling on the same rope. The team itself was mediocre, cemented firmly in the mushy middle — not bad enough to get a high lottery pick, not good enough to make noise in the playoffs.

Nowadays? They have a gold standard of a locker room. Their culture is their engine.

They're a family.

The way this team rallied around Mark Scheifele in the aftermath of his father's passing was in line with everything we've seen over the last three years. Be it when Neal Pionk lost his close friend, Adam Johnson, to a tragic accident during a hockey game in England or when former coach Rick Bowness had to step away after his wife's health scare, this is a group that's well-versed in supporting one another through hardship.

"You can't talk about being a family. You act like being a family," Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff told reporters at his season-end availability on Wednesday. "And I was really proud of how all our players came together. But it's not surprising. As a group this year, that's what it's been about. They've held each other accountable behind the scenes more so than people even know. They've been hard on each other, they've pushed each other, they've argued with each other. But that's what you strive for in a team."

They're a group of brothers. And assembling that doesn't happen overnight. Contrary to what most armchair GM's believe, Winnipeg can't build a team overnight. No-trade clauses get in the way of any chance of the Jets revamping nearly their entire roster mid-season, like the Colorado Avalanche did this year. They can't trade two core players for a superstar, like the Florida Panthers did when they levelled up for Matthew Tkachuk.

Year after year, there hasn't been a lot of change with this core — even when times were tough. And in the past, it's led to many viewing the Jets' lack of roster turnover negatively. 'Same ol. Same ol.'

But there's something to be said about the importance of continuity when trying to build a winner in the NHL's smallest market.

“You want to develop a core of players that care for each other, that play for each other,” Cheveldayoff said. “I’ve always believed that you do that through drafting them and developing them and growing them and then retaining them.”

This team’s core has all been drafted and developed by the organization. And they’ve each decided to re-sign. They’ve been here through the good and the bad and that’s why there’s such a desire to not just win, but to do it together.

Adam Lowry has become one of the best leaders in the sport.

Josh Morrissey has never shied away from demanding accountability publicly.

Scheifele and Kyle Connor have always elevated their games in the playoffs.

The next generation is blossoming, too — with Dylan Samberg and Cole Perfetti taking massive steps forward this season.

This doesn’t happen overnight. And people around the league take notice.

“We heard from so many different people outside of our organization, (about) the caring and compassion this group has for each other,” Cheveldayoff said. “You can never force a player to want to play somewhere. But I know if I were one of them, I’d want to play in a place where I matter. I matter to the fans, I matter to my teammates and I matter to the thought of trying to win a Stanley Cup. And in the future there may be guys that don’t want to. We’ll move on. We’ll find the guys that do. And we’ll do our best to make this city proud.”

Canadian Press

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/jets-gm-and-coach-are-proud-of-what-players-accomplished-but-want-improvements/>

Jets' GM and coach are proud of what players accomplished, but want improvements

By Canadian Press

When each player met with Winnipeg Jets head coach Scott Arniel and general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff for season-ending talks this week, they were given verbal pats on their backs.

“The first thing we did was that we complimented them,” Arniel said Wednesday as he and Cheveldayoff held their final media availability.

"We told them how proud we were of the year we had, the things we accomplished as a group. Just the fact that we won the Presidents' Trophy, that we were consistent for 82 games, all those things that we did."

The Jets won the trophy with a franchise-record 56 wins and NHL-best 116 points in the regular season, but were eliminated from the playoffs in Game 6 of their second-round series with the Dallas Stars by a 2-1 overtime loss last Saturday.

It was one round better than the previous two seasons, but disappointing for a group that was aiming to hoist the Stanley Cup.

The next steps are something Arniel plans to discuss in-depth with each player during the upcoming two weeks after he gets input from his assistants.

"There's a lot of things for me that happened over the course of this playoffs that are extreme positives," Arniel said. "There's some things again that we're going to have to grill our group on to get better at, so that when we hit this again next year that we're better prepared for it to have the outcome fall in our favour."

Jets captain Adam Lowry is confident players will dig deep to reach another level next season.

"There's a lot of optimism that with another good summer, guys really pushing to get better to work on their game and to find ways to improve, that we can come back next year and put ourselves in a spot to be successful again," he said.

"Put ourselves in a spot to go on another playoff run and hopefully this one ends in late June instead of late May."

Arniel, who's up for the Jack Adams Trophy for the league's top head coach, just finished his first year as Winnipeg's bench boss. He was associate coach the previous two seasons to now-retired Rick Bowness.

"One of the things that came through in our exit meetings in talking to some of the players, there was the accountability that (Arniel) was able to hold the players to," Cheveldayoff said.

"The fairness. That word came out several times in conversations with the players. Hard but fair."

Cheveldayoff said he believes the team can improve again next season.

"We're fortunate we have a real strong core of guys that are going to push, pull and prod," he said. "A lot of different guys that are on the good side of (age) 30, I guess, in the sense that there's still capacity for them to grow."

"That's the group of guys that we're going to challenge to help take us to that next level. And again, it can't be underestimated, we have the best goaltender in the world."

Connor Hellebuyck is likely to win his second consecutive Vezina Trophy as the league's top goalie, and third of his career. He's also a finalist for the Hart Trophy as most valuable player.

He boosted his franchise record with 47 regular-season wins and had the league's best goals-against average (2.00) and most shutouts (eight).

But Hellebuyck struggled at times during the post-season, including being pulled in three road games against the Blues. The Jets never won a road game in their series against St. Louis or Dallas.

Winnipeg has eight pending unrestricted free agents, including winger Nikolaj Ehlers, who's playing for Denmark at the men's world hockey championship.

"When we get a chance to talk to him, we'll put our best foot forward with him to try to make our case to be a unique Jet-for-life type player and we'll see where it all goes there," Cheveldayoff said.

"The relationship is great and he did contribute to the success of this organization on many fronts and we hope that's something that can continue."

Ehlers recorded 24 goals and 63 points in 69 regular-season games. He added five goals and two assists in eight playoff games after returning from injury.

"I think I'd echo the statement of everyone in this room, that we'd love to see Nikky back," Lowry said. "He's a huge part of our team. He's a game-breaker. He's great in this room."

Lowry and top-line winger Kyle Connor are both heading into the final year of their contracts and could be offered extensions.

"That's kind of how I picture myself, as a Winnipeg Jet for life," Lowry said. "I love the city, love playing in front of these fans and I think that's something that hopefully we can take steps towards getting that out of the way this summer."

Cheveldayoff wasn't dismissing that possibility – for both Lowry and Connor.

"I believe they're a big part of our success, and want to keep it that way," he said.

The Jets also have six pending restricted free agents such as defenceman Dylan Samberg and forwards Gabe Vilardi and Morgan Barron.

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6370771/2025/05/21/jets-exit-interviews-scheifele-morrissey-ehlers/>

What we learned from Jets exit interviews, Day 1: Contracts, charters and cracked ribs

By Murat Ates

Josh Morrissey spent part of his Game 6 warmup fighting back tears, in awe of the man he called his best friend.

Morrissey knew more about what Mark Scheifele was going through behind the scenes than most people did. The suddenness of Brad Scheifele's death was a surprise, but Mark Scheifele had shared with Morrissey that his dad had been ill. Brad Scheifele was familiar to Morrissey — someone he'd gotten to know on Jets dad's trips and on golf courses through his friendship with Mark.

"It was just a devastating day," Morrissey said. "Scheif's my best friend, and we've been close for a long time ... And what he 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."

Morrissey has firsthand experience grieving his dad, Tom. He made it clear everybody's situation is different, but: "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."

So Morrissey did his best to be there for Scheifele. He picked up the phone when Scheifele called him first thing Saturday morning and went to Scheifele's hotel room to be with him when Scheifele told him the news. Morrissey remembered Scheifele being there for him during his own grieving process and did his best to channel what he learned when his own dad passed away.

It was striking to hear Morrissey refer to his dad's death as one of the toughest things he's ever been through — and then to hear him express gratitude that it happened.

"I'm grateful in a way that I had the experience, as tough as it was, to be able to support my friend."

Morrissey's framing of the moment was selfless and showed the depth of his desire to be there for Scheifele in his toughest moments. Morrissey and Scheifele are not alone on the Jets; Kyle Connor's dad also passed away in August 2021. It's a bond that Morrissey acknowledged nobody wants to share, but that he's tried to use to be there for Scheifele in recent days.

“Everyone knows how proud Brad would have been watching him play,” Morrissey said. “Even 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. My heart goes out to the family. And I’ll miss Brad. One incredible person.”

Appleton, ‘haunted’ by Game 6 miss, on UFA uncertainty

Roope Hintz, Evgenii Dadonov and Miro Heiskanen all hit the post in Game 6. In the first period, Tyler Seguin put a backhand opportunity wide with Connor Hellebuyck down and out. But Dallas won the series, giving its players the gift of moving on from their mistakes.

Mason Appleton doesn’t get that same gift.

When Appleton cut up the left wing in the third period, the game was tied 1-1 and it was becoming clear the next goal could win it. Connor made a great pass to Adam Lowry, who beat Jake Oettinger with a seam pass across the slot.

It gave Appleton Winnipeg’s best chance to keep its season alive.

“The puck didn’t really settle how I wanted it to so I didn’t really hit it how I needed or wanted to,” Appleton said. “You look back at it, you score the goal and you’re winning the game. So, yeah, obviously it’s kind of haunting.”

Appleton used other words, too. It was “frustrating.” Oettinger’s save was “incredible.” It sounded clear that he’s still processing the pain of a missed opportunity.

“You think about those things for days,” Appleton said. “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.”

Appleton has been a key role player for Winnipeg since the Jets re-acquired him from Seattle in 2022. For the past three seasons, he’s played right wing on Lowry’s line with Nino Niederreiter, contributing to one of the best shutdown lines in the NHL. The role has often come with big minutes — in Game 6, he had the fifth-highest ice time among Jets forwards — which exposes his lack of offensive production relative to other players who play that often. From a human standpoint, it would be a shame if Appleton’s missed opportunity is what he gets remembered for in Winnipeg after all these years. From a storytelling perspective, it’s almost a perfect fit; multiple coaching staffs have promoted Appleton well beyond his offensive ability in the name of defensive play.

He’s an unrestricted free agent now. As a 29-year-old and a new father, Appleton is hoping for term on his next contract. He made it clear that he loves Winnipeg, the Jets organization and his teammates, but he also said contract talks haven’t begun in earnest.

"If we could work it out, I'd be happy to be a Jet," he said. "We haven't really had much communication with them. I guess hopefully in the next little bit here maybe we could get to work and see what both sides want and go from there."

Connor, Tanev talk contracts

Kyle Connor is under contract until the end of next season. He's also eligible for an extension this summer beginning July 1.

Winnipeg will make signing Connor a massive priority. The two-time 40-goal scorer hit 97 points this season while improving his two-way play and then added 17 points in 13 playoff games, including the assist that led to Cole Perfetti's "Manitoba Miracle" in Game 7. He's also an avid lover of the outdoors, spending plenty of time in ice-fishing shacks with Connor Hellebuyck throughout Manitoba's cold winters.

It's difficult to imagine Winnipeg coming by another 97-point player who loves Manitoba as much as Connor does; expect the Jets to be willing to pay Connor's lofty asking price next year. If he signs, Connor is very likely to be the Jets' first player to make north of \$10 million.

He said on Tuesday he's not too worried.

"My philosophy throughout my career is that it will always take care of itself," he said. "I don't stress too much about it or worry about it. When it comes, it comes. I haven't really thought about it much. Time will take care of itself."

Brandon Tanev's contract will cost much, much less, but it's more urgent if the Jets would like to retain him. Tanev, 33, made \$3.5 million last season — too much for a fourth-line player — but is a big fan of the organization that signed him out of college in 2016.

"I enjoy playing here in Winnipeg. I love the city. The team's great," Tanev said when asked about his future. "We'll tackle (contract talks) in the next few weeks here."

It seems likely the Jets will explore contract discussions with Tanev, appreciating his energy level as they do, while keeping their budget in mind — as they did when Tanev signed his \$3.5 million contract with Pittsburgh in 2019.

What did Hellebuyck learn this time? Will it last?

Connor Hellebuyck was the subject of two goaltending deep dives at The Athletic during these playoffs — and neither for good reasons.

Hellebuyck got his game sorted out in time to deliver two shutouts against Dallas and made several highlight-reel saves, but his overall performance was a disappointment. He demonstrated vulnerability and bravado along the way, alternating comments about

having studied goaltending more than anybody with admissions that he needed to be better.

Last year at this time, Hellebuyck made waves by saying it was time to revamp the way he plays goal. He'd put too much weight on his own shoulders instead of committing to team play, he said after getting shelled by Colorado — but he'd tossed out that approach by training camp of this season. When he got shelled again by St. Louis, the criticism piled up as Hellebuyck looked genuinely rattled by the results. It's easy to imagine fan outrage boiling over had Hellebuyck not won Game 7 or pieced himself back together in time for Round 2.

Hellebuyck said his biggest takeaway from these playoffs is that it's possible to overcorrect his game as a response to goals against.

"That's exactly what was going on in the first round," he said. "Just me and the way I've gotten to the level I've gotten to is because I've always had an answer. I've always tried to fix a problem and I've always looked at the smallest little details and found an answer. When bad things happen when you're doing things right, it makes you stand back and really question, 'Maybe those tweaks weren't right.' But I think what I learned the most is you can't over-tweak your game. That's the biggest learning curve this year. You might be able to find some tweaks but you don't want to go find a ton of tweaks in your game — it's one little thing here and there."

To use a made-in-Manitoba analogy, it sounded like Hellebuyck knew he'd hit an icy patch of highway but made it worse for himself by oversteering in his attempt to recover. He's a problem-solver by nature; when the goals were piling up through traffic and screens, Hellebuyck got in his own way. Had he done enough to adapt his game? Had he done too much? Hellebuyck had fallen out of his flow state and started to doubt himself.

"The second you over-grip it and start overthinking, that's when you lose your edge," he said. "That applies to every sport. If you start thinking the game and start overthinking the game, then you lose the 'it' factor — that's what I'll call it. Because when you're just out there playing, you're just reading the game and you're a small, tiny step ahead because you're just playing — you're in a zone where you're not overthinking what's going to happen here, here and here. You're just like, 'OK, that's going to happen now and I'm expecting that.'"

A charter to Kitchener

The Jets have arranged a charter flight from Winnipeg to Kitchener, Onta., on Thursday so players and staff can attend Brad Scheifele's funeral. It's the type of gesture that True North consistently gets right.

They did the same for their Minnesotan players with respect to Adam Johnson's funeral in 2023, while also helping Luke Schenn take time away from the team to see his wife and kids after the trade deadline this season. Multiple players have told The Athletic

publicly and privately that these gestures help them feel valued as people, not just as players, and it's easy to imagine it having an impact on player retention down the line.

The Jets have succeeded in extending veterans like Neal Pionk, Alex Iafallo, Vladislav Namestnikov, Dylan DeMelo and Nino Niederreiter in recent seasons — not to mention Scheifele and Hellebuyck in 2023. They each have their own reasons and their own personal situations. It would be inaccurate to say Winnipeg re-signs players solely because it treats them well during crisis moments, but the Jets have shown up for their players when it's been needed. The players appreciate that.

Schenn's cracked ribs and a look at next year's defence

Luke Schenn was the first player to reveal an undisclosed injury at exit interviews, sharing that he cracked his ribs delivering a body check in Game 2 against St. Louis. The injury was painful enough for Schenn to cede his roster spot in Game 2 and Game 3 against Dallas and it stayed with him through the rest of the playoffs.

"It's not an excuse. It's just, you're trying to battle through that while not being hesitant," Schenn said. "But the training staff did an incredible job and (I) just sort of tried to push through and help the team any way I could."

The Jets lost Schenn's minutes by a 12-3 margin at five-on-five. He also put the Jets shorthanded six times in 11 games, tying him with Logan Stanley for the sixth-most minor penalties in the playoffs to date. Schenn was unlucky to be outscored quite that badly given Winnipeg had 48 percent of shot attempts with him on the ice, but his performance was not superior to that of third-pairing alternative Colin Miller.

Schenn did share a funny story from the handshake line against St. Louis. When he ran into his brother Brayden, the two Schenns exchanged injury information.

"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 (either) of us."

Winnipeg has seven NHL defencemen under contract next season: Morrissey, DeMelo, Pionk, Stanley, Schenn, Miller and Ville Heinola, along with Manitoba Moose standout Elias Salomonsson. (Second-pairing stalwart Dylan Samberg is a pending RFA.) Schenn probably has more to give than he showed in the playoffs, but I'm not convinced he's one of Winnipeg's six best options next season.

Haydn Fleury, who is not under contract next season, said he'd "love to" stay in Winnipeg.

"I really enjoyed my time here," he said. "My wife and kids really enjoy it. And being able to play in a city where hockey matters, for me, is huge."

What they're saying about Ehlers

Winnipeg's players were all asked about Nikolaj Ehlers' impending free agency. They sung his praises while acknowledging that the business side of the game is what it is.

"He's one of our best players and he carries the play so much when he's on the ice," Connor said. "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 too. He's got a big voice."

"I try not to think about those things too much, but certainly love playing with him and hope he can be back," said Morrissey.

"I love Nik and I hope he stays, but that's the business side of it and it's out of my control," Namesnikov said.

"He's such a big part of this family and the heart and soul of a lot of things we do here," said Hellebuyck. "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 and the business side is up to him and his group coming up."

Ehlers is missing exit interviews to play at the IIHF World Hockey Championship. He scored for Denmark on Tuesday, helping the Danes qualify for the quarterfinals.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/jets-have-collective-drive-to-reach-the-next-level-following-season-of-highs~3137800>

Jets have collective drive to reach the next level following season of highs (VIDEO)

There's no doubt that the Jets gave their fans, and each other, plenty of moments to cheer for this season and remember for years to come, but ultimately, the team fell short in their expectations and final goal. TSN's John Lu has more on the collective drive to build on what they've achieved next season.

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/will-jets-success-and-players-re-signing-help-winnipeg-land-other-ufas~3137847>

Will Jets' success and players re-signing help Winnipeg land other UFAs? (VIDEO)

The Jets just won their first Presidents' Trophy in franchise history but fell short in the playoffs again. How important is re-signing Nik Ehlers? Will Winnipeg's success this year help them land other unrestricted free agents? TSN Hockey analyst Martin Biron joins Domino's That's Hockey host Gino Reda to discuss.

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/gm-cheveldayoff-to-pitch-jet-for-life-deal-to-ehlers>

GM Cheveldayoff to pitch 'Jet-for-life' deal to Ehlers

By Paul Friesen

Teammates all want him back, while Winnipeg Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff calls him a player “we think the world of.”

The GM will get a chance to put his money where his mouth is when it comes to forward Nik Ehlers, a pending unrestricted free agent.

Ehlers is suiting up for Denmark at the world championship, but Cheveldayoff says he met with his agent for some two hours recently.

“Nikolaj has been a player that has grown up in our organization,” the GM said on Wednesday. “Drafted, developed him, someone that we think the world of. When we get a chance to talk to him, we’ll put our best foot forward with him to try to make our case to be a unique Jet-for-life type player, and we’ll see where it all goes from there.

“If he does choose to go in a different direction than as an organization we’ll have to evolve ... grow in a different area.”

Ehlers’ pure speed would be hard to replace, and he seems as well-liked as anyone in the Jets dressing room.

“I’d echo the statement of everyone in this room, that we’d love to see Nikky back,” captain Adam Lowry said. “He’s a huge part of our team. He’s a game-breaker.”

Eight times in 10 seasons, Ehlers has scored at least 20 goals, even with injuries that have limited him to as little as 45 games.

He began to change the narrative on his playoff performance this year, going from four goals in his first 40 post-season games to five in his last five.

At 29, he’s in his prime. He earned \$6 million this season.

His linemate, friend and card-playing partner on the team plane is keeping his fingers crossed he’ll still be cashing Jets cheques.

“He would do anything for this team,” Cole Perfetti said. “I’m just hoping ... we all want him back. He’s a heck of a player, heck of a person. He does know everyone here wants him around because he’s a joy to life and an excellent player.”

Less likely to leave, but still needing new deals, are restricted free agents Gabe Vilardi and Dylan Samberg, the former part of the Jets top line, the latter coming off his first season as a top-four defencemen.

"I'm hoping that it goes smoothly," Vilardi, 25, said. "But it's not really my thing. That's what my agent's for, and they'll get it done. I'm not too worried about that."

Vilardi is coming off a 27-goal season that saw him get hurt late and play nine playoff games, scoring just once. His last deal paid him \$3.4 million.

Samberg got into 60 games and went plus-34, the best mark on the team. He'll be looking at a big raise from the \$1.4 million he earned in the last year of his two-year deal.

"I was able to get in that top-four role, and that was huge for my confidence," the 26-year-old said. "I was able to sprinkle a little bit more offence, still looking to work on that one. But I felt like I had a tougher role this year, playing against a lot of teams' top lines. It was a good challenge, and I really enjoyed it and hopefully I continue to do that."

"The exciting thing for us is that we have some of those players that are on this side of the 30-plus years," Cheveldayoff said. "Those are some of the guys that have capacity to grow. We'll work on that. We'll find a way to find common ground."

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/scratching-the-surface-but-plenty-of-itch-left-in-jets>

Scratching the surface, but plenty of itch left in Jets

By Paul Friesen

One by one, Winnipeg Jets players took their places in front of the cameras and microphones the last two days and fielded questions like practice pucks, connecting on some better than others.

The one they consistently put home, and with a little extra oomph, had to do with being satisfied with their season.

Turns out they aren't.

They'd much rather have been suiting up for Game 1 of the conference final against Edmonton on Wednesday than talking about what might have been.

"We felt like we had a team that should and could still be playing," captain Adam Lowry said. "We were right there with a really good, deep Stars team."

It was a one-shot difference in their overtime loss in Game 6 in Dallas, a shot that would have forced a Game 7 at home.

That's a far cry from the first-round exits of the last two years.

"This year is the first year where we lost and the past few days have been really hard," forward Gabe Vilardi said. "I thought we had as good a chance as anybody to win the Cup. It definitely does feel like a letdown."

"There could be more anger," is how Kyle Connor put it a day earlier. "Because we were that much closer and we didn't win."

The previous two, meek playoff exits, made it so obvious the Jets were lacking, they left a different feeling. More of a deep soul-searching.

"We just got steamrolled by Colorado, and it wasn't as tight," Vilardi added. "This year, every game, different bounces and we could be playing tonight. Looking at those first four games, we could be up 3-1 instead of being down 3-1. So those are the things I've been thinking about the past few days, at least."

Defenceman Dylan DeMelo agreed it's night and day. Both feelings are bad, but in a very different way.

Last year his words at the exit interviews included this: "Question everything."

"Last year was a huge disappointment on how things unfolded," he said on Wednesday. "We felt we all dropped the ball."

This time, they carried it together, through a hard-fought and historic seven-game series in Round 1, raising hopes that a Presidents' Trophy-winning regular season was a harbinger of things to come.

DeMelo called the whole trip a blast.

"Something amazing to be a part of," he said. "This group of guys you want to compete with, you want to work with. The games we've had, the comeback win in Game 7, the whiteout, everything about it. The most fun I've had probably my whole career. You want to ride that wave, you want to keep it going and win the Cup."

Going into the playoffs they hoped they had the team to do it.

After Round 1, they believed.

Then one goal, and it was over.

"It's still pretty fresh," DeMelo said. "The appetite is always there to improve. I feel like as soon as you settle, you're done for."

DeMelo planned to watch the conference finals closely to see what he can pick up, why those four teams have made repeat trips deep into the post-season.

"We don't have many guys who have won or gone to the Stanley Cup final," he said. "So we're trying to figure this out together. We maybe don't have all the answers, but we're sure as heck going to try to find them."

So, too, will his head coach.

"We all wish that we were playing instead of having to watch it," Scott Arniel said. "These four teams have great experience at this time of year. How did they get it? We want to be one of these groups."

If the Jets learned how not to play in the playoffs last year, they learned how to this time.

"We learned it, we lived it, we grew through it," Arniel said. "But our goal now is to win the Stanley Cup. We know we have done a lot of good things. But now we know what it takes."

"We scratched the surface this year."

There's still plenty of itch left, though.

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/friesen-predictable-lack-of-punch-sunk-jets-gm-cheveldayoff>

FRIESEN: Predictable lack of punch sunk Jets, GM Cheveldayoff

By Paul Friesen

Mason Appleton talked about the big one that got away in Game 6 against Dallas.

'Hard but fair': Evaluating Arniel's first full season behind Jets' bench

Article content

Adam Lowry pointed to his inability to get a single point in six road games.

Even head coach Scott Arniel acknowledged there were playoff decisions from the bench he'd like to have back.

But what about from the big chair?

Now that the dust has settled on the Winnipeg Jets season, the performance of GM Kevin Cheveldayoff at the trade deadline looms as large as any single factor in what everybody acknowledges was another early playoff exit.

The Jets needed another top-six forward, but didn't get one.

The result: In eight of 13 playoff games, they scored just one or two goals. Their record in those games: 1-7.

"When it gets to the trade deadline, it's like a box of chocolates," Cheveldayoff said on Wednesday. "You don't know necessarily what's out there."

Using that analogy, instead of going for the chocolates with the rich nougat filling at the deadline, Cheveldayoff chose the jam: Brandon Tanev and Luke Schenn.

Those two combined for a few dozen hits, but just one point in a combined 24 playoff games.

Meanwhile, Winnipeg's No. 1 power play went dry, as did scoring from the bottom half of the lineup.

"The goals in the playoffs aren't about the numbers of goals, it's about the timeliness of the goals," Cheveldayoff said. "You have to learn a lot of things about yourself in the playoffs."

Actually, we knew going in this team needed help up front. The playoffs only reinforced it.

"If there were opportunities where we felt that we could add players that were going to help us win, we were obviously fully prepared to do that," the GM said. "But you have to create your own moments."

There's no doubt the Jets did some of that, most memorably in Game 7 of the first round.

But when they needed another, facing elimination against the Stars, they came up with one goal for the third time in these playoffs.

A lack of finish led to their end.

Arniel, sitting next to Cheveldayoff at Wednesday's final media Q & A, wasn't about to point the finger at his boss's performance on the trade market. Not after sitting next to him at the deadline and seeing what he was up against.

“The biggest thing that jumped out at me was how many teams were still in the hunt this year,” the coach said. “Every time a name came up, there were six teams that were interested or seven teams that were interested. Even more than that, at times.

“That was like, wow, this is a big pond that we’re in right now.”

A pond with plenty of big fish that didn’t make it into Cheveldayoff’s boat.

Like the GM, Arniel was hoping the ones he already had would be enough to turn the tide.

“When it comes to this time of year, it isn’t just your top guys that have to score goals. Everybody,” Arniel said. “You just look at the top-four teams that are still playing. It’s depth, throughout. And it is an area that we have to grow.”

That depth needed bolstering in March for a payoff in May.

And when the last two lines didn’t manufacture a single goal over the last three games, the Jets were sunk.

The last game, where two goals would have been enough, was the perfect example.

Unlike previous seasons, though, it felt like this Jets team gave all it had.

They bounced back from road loss after road loss to set up that memorable seventh game against the Blues.

Game 1 of the Dallas series is the big one Arniel wants back.

“Coming off the high of Game 7, I knew there was going to be that moment where Dallas and their experience and Pete DeBoer was going to push Game 1 at us,” he said. “He was coming, and they did. That was a moment lost for us. That’s one that got away.”

Still, they clawed back to win Game 2 in impressive fashion, then went on the road and dropped a couple more.

They had another bounce-back in them, at home in Game 5.

They emptied their tanks one last time on Saturday in Game 6, coming up just short but leaving one undeniable conclusion.

Cheveldayoff had made the Jets a more rugged group, and it probably helped get them through that punishing first round.

But trade acquisitions had made the Stars just a little better.

The big one got away.

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/05/21/lengthy-summer-to-do-list-for-cheveldayoff>

Lengthy summer to-do list for Cheveldayoff Stanley Cup continues to elude Jets general manager after 14 seasons at the helm

By: Mike McIntyre

Kevin Cheveldayoff once again finds himself staring down a lengthy summer to-do list. However, the Winnipeg Jets general manager believes he's getting closer than ever to checking off the elusive item that is constantly at the very top: Build a Stanley Cup champion.

"I truly believe we've got a bunch of winners in that room," Cheveldayoff said Wednesday as he met the media to wrap up his 14th year at the helm.

The Jets won more than anyone during the regular season, with a 56-22-4 record that had them on top of the NHL standings. But they came up 10 wins short of the ultimate goal in the playoffs.

"It was a historic year in many ways for the franchise. Getting the Presidents' Trophy is certainly something we're proud of," said Cheveldayoff. "But, obviously, there's still some work to be done."

It wasn't lost on Cheveldayoff that he was sitting inside Canada Life Centre putting a bow on the 2024-25 campaign on the same day the Jets would have been hosting Game 1 of the Western Conference Final against the Edmonton Oilers had things worked out a little differently. Instead, the Dallas Stars have that opportunity while the Florida Panthers and Carolina Hurricanes battle it out for Eastern Conference supremacy.

"There's several teams that are participating right now that have been there before, and that's what we want to get to. We want to get to that point where you have the battle scars, you have the knowledge that you know what to expect and what it's going to take to go beyond that next level," said Cheveldayoff.

To that extent, he and head coach Scott Arniel spent this week meeting individually with every player for 15-20 minute sessions in which they discussed the recent past, the present and the future. The theme of "unfinished business" was a constant theme.

"We may not have all the answers for you here yet, because there's still lots of dissection that will go on with us here. But to a man, everybody certainly was looking for more and it's incumbent upon us to try to take those next steps," said Cheveldayoff.

"Hopefully the experience we went through will help those players in future times."

The Jets raised plenty of eyebrows when they only added depth forward Brandon Tanev and depth defenceman Luke Schenn at the trade deadline, leaving approximately US\$6 million in available salary cap space on the table. Does Cheveldayoff regret not being more aggressive, especially since injuries began to pile up during the playoffs and Winnipeg's depth was severely tested and offence dried up?

"This group earned the right to be together. If there were opportunities where we felt that we could add players that were going to help us win, we were obviously fully prepared to do that," he said.

Cheveldayoff tried to take some bigger swings but ultimately struck out due to a variety of factors including being outbid on a player, the target not wishing to waive a no-trade clause to come to Winnipeg or the other team ultimately pulling him off the market.

"We kind of had a multi-layered plan going into the deadline as to how we wanted to attack it and wanted to give ourselves the greatest flexibility that we could. But if the players aren't there to be a fit in your lineup, you don't just go grab a player to shoehorn something in," he said. "You don't just spend (cap space) for the sake of spending it."

Cheveldayoff could be busy writing cheques over the next few months as he tries to keep as much of this roster intact while also adding some new elements he hopes can get them over the top. Forward Nikolaj Ehlers leads a list of pending unrestricted free agents which also includes Tanev, Mason Appleton and defenceman Haydn Fleury.

"Nikolaj has been a player who's grown up in our organization. Drafted, developed him. Someone we think the world of," said Cheveldayoff.

"We will be putting our best foot forward with him to try to make our case to be one of those guys who can be a unique Jet-for-life type player. We'll see where it all goes."

Cheveldayoff recently had a two-hour meeting with Ehlers' agent and plans further talks once Ehlers is finished playing for Denmark at the World Championships.

"The relationship is great. He did contribute to the success of this organization on many fronts and we hope that's something that can continue. If he does go in a different direction than obviously as an organization we'll have to evolve as we have in the past with other things," he said.

Cheveldayoff also has a trio of important restricted free agents in need of new details including defenceman Dylan Samberg and forwards Gabe Vilardi and Morgan Barron.

"I think the exciting thing for us is that we have some of those kind of players that are on this side of the 30-plus years. Those are some of the guys that have capacity to grow, so those are some of the guys that we challenge the most," said Cheveldayoff.

"The contracts and that, that's going to take care of itself. We'll work on that. We'll find a way to find common ground."

There's also the upcoming NHL draft — the Jets own the 28th-overall pick — to be followed by July 1 free agency, summer development camp and perhaps working on contract extensions for captain Adam Lowry and top sniper Kyle Connor, who will both be heading into the final year of their deals next fall.

"I'm very open to both of those guys in their conversations that I believe they're a big part of our success, and want to keep it that way," said Cheveldayoff.

He spoke repeatedly about the character of the Jets and how they rallied last weekend around Mark Scheifele following the death of his father. The majority of the team were taking a charter to Thursday's funeral service in Ontario before they disperse for the off-season.

"I think when times are at their lowest, that's when people really show themselves," said Cheveldayoff, who lost his own father when he was 17.

"As a group this year that's what it's been about. They've held each other accountable behind the scenes more so than people even know. They've been hard on each other, they've pushed each other, they've argued with each other. I don't know that we're going to win the Presidents' Trophy again next year. But I feel very comfortable sitting here saying that group of players wants it. They want to push. They want to be pushed."

For many of those reasons, he hopes the narrative is starting to shift when it comes to Winnipeg's perception around the NHL, specifically with players who might balk at coming here in trades or free agency.

"The players want to win. We have a goaltender that's the best in the world. Players want to play in a fan base that cares. We've got some of the most passionate fans in the league," said Cheveldayoff.

"You can never force a player to want to play somewhere. But I know if I were one of them I'd want to play in a place where I matter. I matter to the fans, I matter to my teammates and I matter to the thought of trying to win a Stanley Cup. And in the future there may be guys that don't want to. We'll move on. We'll find the guys that do. And we'll do our best to make this city proud."

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

***'Put ourselves in a spot to be successful again'
Jets captain optimistic team will find ways to improve next season***

By: Mike McIntyre

Adam Lowry isn't planning on going anywhere.

The Winnipeg Jets captain will be entering the final year of his contract next season but isn't worried about what that means for his future. Nor is the organization, it should be noted.

"That's kind of how I picture myself. As a Winnipeg Jet for life," the 32-year-old said Wednesday.

"I love the city, love playing in front of these fans and I think that's something that hopefully we can take steps towards getting that out of the way this summer. There's obviously a few more important pieces that will probably get done before. But I don't see that being an issue. As long as they want to bring me back, I'm more than happy to come back."

Lowry, who scored a career-high 16 goals during the regular season and then added four more in the playoffs, would be eligible to sign an extension as of July 1. It sounds like general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff is already starting to draw up the paperwork.

"I think the world of Lows. He is Winnipeg. He is what it embodies," said Cheveldayoff.

Lowry, the second draft pick of the 2.0 Jets after Mark Scheifele, will make US\$3.25 million for 2025-26. While the wound of a second-round playoff exit is still fresh, he believes even brighter days are on the horizon.

"There's a lot of optimism that with another good summer, guys really pushing to get better to work on their game and to find ways to improve, that we can come back next year and put ourselves in a spot to be successful again," said Lowry.

"Put ourselves in a spot to go on another playoff run and hopefully this one ends in late June instead of late May."

Nikolaj Ehlers will ultimately make the decision that is best for him. But the pending unrestricted free agent forward is likely going to have several Winnipeg teammates in his ears over the coming weeks trying to convince him to re-sign with the Jets.

“Being Nikky’s friend, playing with him for so long, all you want to do is support him. Unrestricted free agency, it’s something that you have to wait for, and he’s earned that right,” said Lowry.

“I think I’d echo the statement of everyone in this room, that we’d love to see Nikky back. He’s a huge part of our team. He’s a game-breaker, he’s great in this room. I would say I’m like the rest of you. We’re all waiting, holding our breath, hoping that we can get something done.”

Cole Perfetti, a frequent linemate of Ehlers, hopes he hasn’t seen the last of his wingman.

“Obviously, we all want him back. It’s out of our control. He’s a heck of a player, heck of a person,” he said.

Perfetti checked off plenty of boxes this year including staying healthy for all 82 regular-season games, suiting up for 13 post-season contests and establishing new career offensive highs.

He also scored the goal now referred to as the “Manitoba Miracle” in Game 7 of the first-round series against the St. Louis Blues — something he never gets tired of being reminded about even by complete strangers.

“Talking to neighbours and some people at the grocery store, people that were at the game saying it was the greatest moment of their life. To be able to hear that and be a part of that, it’s special,” said Perfetti.

“You see how much this team means to this community and to this city. Winnipeg bleeds hockey and bleeds the Jets. We’re so lucky that we have fans like that, that are so passionate and so supportive of us. I’ve never heard a building that loud. It was the craziest thing. I wish I would have remembered it a little better. I kind of blacked out during that whole thing.”

Long-term or short-term? Gabe Vilardi says he hasn’t put much thought yet into what his next contract will look like.

The 25-year-old, who set new career highs this year for games played, goals, assists and points, said he won’t sweat the details as he spends the summer bouncing between his girlfriend’s home in California and his in Ontario.

“I’m hoping that it goes smoothly, but it’s not really my thing. That’s what my agent’s for, and they’ll get it done — I’m not too worried about that,” he said.

Vilardi, who missed the last 11 games of the regular season and the first five games of the playoffs with an upper-body injury, said not winning the Stanley Cup this year feels like a “letdown.”

“The past few days have been really hard. Just looking back, I thought we had as good a chance as anybody to win the Cup,” he said.

“Last year we just kind of got steamrolled by Colorado and it wasn’t really as tight. I think this year, every game, I’m not sure what the eye test says, I’m not sure what the analytics say that you guys obviously see, but being out there I felt like different bounces and we could (still be) playing.”

The Jets are hoping patience may finally pay off when it comes to prospect Dmitry Rashevsky.

The 24-year-old Russian forward, picked in the fifth round of the 2021 draft, is at the end of his contract with Moscow Dynamo of the KHL.

Cheveldayoff and assistant general manager Larry Simmons recently had a Zoom call with him and his agent in an attempt to bring him to North America.

“He’s got some decisions to make. Obviously, we think he’d be a perfect fit in our organization here but, again, there’s lots of different factors that go into their decisions. We’re still hopeful,” said Cheveldayoff.

Rashevsky has put up 156 points (81G and 75A) over the past four seasons.

Elias Salomonsson is knocking at the door of NHL work.

Both Cheveldayoff and head coach Scott Arniel had plenty of praise for the 20-year-old Swedish defenceman, who is coming off his first pro season with the Manitoba Moose and had 27 points (5G, 22A) in 53 AHL games.

“He had an exceptional year and not surprisingly. We’ve been talking about him for several years in different settings like this, we feel like we have a really good one there,” said Cheveldayoff.

Arniel went so far as to compare him to Dylan Samberg — a sentiment he admits he’s shared with Salomonsson during a recent meeting.

“We’re excited. If he has a really good summer, he’s someone that could force us to make some big decisions,” said Cheveldayoff.

“You’re fortunate as an organization when you have the ability to let the players show you that they’re ready as opposed to you having to put them in a situation and hope that they’re ready. We talk about with players, ‘We want you here for a long time. Not just a quick minute. We want you to be a longtime pro.’”

Jets co-owner Mark Chipman has chartered a plane that is taking multiple members of the Jets to Kitchener on Thursday so they can attend the funeral of Mark Scheifele’s father, Brad, who passed away last Saturday hours before the team faced the Dallas Stars.

“For Chipper to charter a plane to bring most of the guys and staff out, it means a lot to us as players. It certainly will be an emotional time,” said Lowry.

“To be there to support our friend, our teammate and his whole family, it means a lot to us. Brad was one of a kind, an unbelievable person, and we’re really glad we can all be there to support the whole family.”

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/05/21/arniels-second-chance-a-season-of-firsts>

***Arniel’s second chance a season of firsts
Jets bench boss the right choice despite team’s early playoff exit***

By: Ken Wiebe

All the effort Scott Arniel put into rebranding himself was time well spent.

Although his second chance as an NHL head coach didn’t lead directly to the promised land, Arniel showed over the course of the season that he was the right choice to replace Rick Bowness as the bench boss of the Winnipeg Jets.

Certainly his familiarity with the organization was a benefit, dating back to his time as the captain and eventually head coach of the Manitoba Moose, but this hire was about an opportunity that Arniel worked extremely hard for.

When that chance came, the Winnipeg resident wasn’t about to let it slip through his fingertips.

Whether it was a historic 15-1 start, an 11-game winning streak down the stretch, posting the best record in franchise history (56-22-4) or capturing the first Central Division title and Presidents’ Trophy in franchise history, Arniel pushed a lot of the right buttons this season.

His passion and intensity were evident, but so was his calming presence.

“Arnie had a great demeanour on the bench, he never wavered. He never got too high or too low. He always kept the ship steady,” said Jets defenceman Dylan DeMelo. “Great messages throughout the year. He was more focused on the process than the results and worried about our game because he knew we were building towards Game 83 and the playoffs. There was great leadership back there for us that really set the tone for our leadership group and that sprinkled throughout our whole organization.”

That leadership resulted in six playoff wins — which was four more than the previous two springs combined — but ultimately was 10 wins shy of the ultimate goal of winning the Stanley Cup.

So while Arniel was quick to express his gratitude to his players for all of their hard work along the way, he admits he will be asking them for more when they check back in for training camp in September.

“A whirlwind, honestly. It seems like yesterday I was sitting here talking to you guys about how thankful I was about getting a second chance,” said Arniel. “For me, it’s a dream come true to be back doing it. For me, this is the start of something that I’m hoping ends with us one day holding that Stanley Cup.”

Since being hired for the job on May 24 of 2024, Arniel has not shied away from that goal and the Jets took some important steps towards accomplishing it over the course of the 101 games they played, including the exhibition season.

“Obviously to come in, us having the success we did early, means that we had a good camp and we were prepared and ready to start the season,” said Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey. “And then throughout the year, obviously to win the Presidents’ Trophy and have the year we did, a ton of that falls on him. The relationship a lot of guys had, especially the defencemen, but all the returning players from the last few years with him, really helped.

“We wanted to be pushed, we talked about that in exit meetings, we talked about that in the media. And he pushed us and found which buttons to press, but also what areas in our game could we tangibly improve, and I thought he did a great job isolating those areas.”

Arniel’s ability to build on the foundation put in place during Bowness’s tenure — when Arniel was an associate coach — was essential, as was putting his own stamp on the structure and how he deployed the personnel.

“I thought he did an unbelievable job. He should win the Jack Adams, to be honest,” said Jets captain Adam Lowry. “He does such a good job of communicating his expectations, communicating with players, so you know where you stand with him. He’s hard on us at times but he’s extremely fair.

“He does a really good job of pushing to get the most out of us. As he gets more experience, he’s only going to grow in that role and his confidence in himself and the way he views the game.”

Arniel is up for NHL coach of the year with Spencer Carbery of the Washington Capitals and Marty St. Louis of the Montreal Canadiens.

As proud as he is to be included on the list of finalists, Arniel spent plenty of time since the Jets were eliminated to sort through some of the things he’d wished he had done differently.

“I have a whole bunch,” said Arniel. “There’s moments, there’s things that happened. For me there’s areas that you’ll look at, whether it’s lineup or matchups or little things. We put ourselves in a position to get home here for Game 7 (against the Dallas Stars), after not winning Game 1, and it didn’t happen.

“That sort of grabs at you. That’s a part that really bothers me a bit about that we didn’t get that chance to come home for Game 7. Because I really liked our chances.”

Prior to taking questions from the podium after his team eliminated the Jets in the sixth game of the second-round series, Stars head coach Pete DeBoer offered the ultimate compliment to Arniel and his entire staff.

“I can’t imagine there’s a better-coached team in the league than what that coaching staff did with that group,” said DeBoer, noting he thought Arniel should get the nod as the Jack Adams Trophy winner. “I’m a little biased because we work in the West, but, (the Jets) won the Presidents’ Trophy. They give you nothing, they play hard, they play as a team, great leadership.”

It’s been well documented that things didn’t go as planned for Arniel in his first stint as an NHL head coach with the Columbus Blue Jackets from 2010 to 2012.

For all of the talk about lessons learned over the course of the past season for the Jets, Arniel applied plenty of those to how he approached this task.

There’s a lot to be proud of and a whole lot left to tackle — and Arniel knows that’s exactly what he’s signed up for.

“That’s why we’re here and it’s what this group wants,” said Arniel. “And we’ve got to do all the right things to get there. But for me, maybe a month from now, we’ll sit back and kind of look at certainly the great things that happened but, at the end of the day, we didn’t win. We’re not playing Edmonton (in the Western Conference final). And that’s the one thing that is still sort of gnawing at me a little bit. But, you know, real proud of our hockey team, real proud of, certainly, all the things that went on over the course of the year.

“Yeah, it’s been quite a year for me.”

The exit meetings held during the past two days were the start of an off-season project that will include a full homework project for the Jets’ players and members of the coaching staff.

The 15-minute sessions were the appetizer to what will likely be one-hour chats that encompass individual and team plans for the upcoming campaign.

Since this group made it clear that they want to be pushed like an elite team, that’s going to be the new normal for a Jets club that yearns for additional post-season success.

“One of the things that came through in our exit meetings in talking to some of the players, there was the accountability that he was able to hold the players to,” said Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff. “We talked about it going in and extensively in the interview process. Communication is such a key thing when it comes to coaching. Going back to when we made the decision to ultimately hire Arnie, it was that familiarity and that knowing that he was right for this group here to help push them. He knew where the strengths and the weaknesses of the players were. And again, he’s continued to grow.

“Probably the most important thing that I’ve seen was the human side of Arnie. When you want to develop that family atmosphere, you have to be able to bark at the guy but then be able to say ‘good morning’ and have a cup of coffee with him the next day. That’s an important trait today, and I think the guys respect that.”

Respect is a necessity in the pursuit of hockey’s Holy Grail.

“We haven’t achieved what we’re all trying to achieve. And that’s to win a Stanley Cup,” said Arnie. “And if you’re not in this game to do that, not really sure why you’re playing. Like last year, and those other years, there was big learning. Just learning what playoff hockey actually means. This year, we learned it, we lived it, we grew through it. But our goal now is to win the Stanley Cup.

“We know we have done a lot of good things. But now, we know what it takes. We still have more to do. We scratched the surface this year, so now it’s about what happens moving forward.”