

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/06/09/jets-partner-with-local-groups-aiming-to-see-city-soar>

From Whiteout to down and out

By: Mike McIntyre

Vulnerable people passed out and sleeping on sidewalks, in front of businesses and on park benches. Visible signs of addiction and mental illness at seemingly every turn. Desperate panhandlers teetering on concrete dividers hoping motorists will toss them some change.

These were the scenes obvious to anyone in downtown Winnipeg on Monday afternoon — ones that Winnipeg Jets co-owner and chairman Mark Chipman experienced first-hand as he made his way into a Main Street building for an event much bigger and more important than any hockey game.

“I just don’t know how we can look away from it,” Chipman told the Free Press during a candid, wide-ranging one-on-one chat. “It never ends. Just driving over today ... you can’t drive a block without being reminded of somebody that is really suffering.”

Chipman noted the stark contrast of how the inner-city was bursting with energy and excitement during the seven Jets home playoff dates earlier this spring, with more than 15,000 fans cheering inside Canada Life Centre and thousands more at the outdoor street parties.

But what happens once the buzzer sounds, the game ends and the crowds head home?

“I just find it patently unacceptable,” Chipman said of the challenges facing so many citizens.

The painstaking, often frustrating work to address what he calls a “complex, multi-generational set of issues” continues, with days like Monday providing hope that progress is slowly being made.

Chipman stood front and centre inside Okichidah Pimahtisiwin Kiskinawmatowin (OPK), with Jets defenceman Dylan DeMelo at his side, presenting a cheque for \$234,890 to the United Way which represents 50 per cent of the proceeds from the playoff events held earlier this spring.

The funds will be shared equally among four grassroots organizations working to combat issues of addiction, homelessness and mental illness.

“It’s just incredible,” said Connie Walker, the interim president and CEO of United Way who recently returned to the organization she had previously been with between 2008-2023. “I didn’t realize just how big the cheque was.”

It’s the biggest single playoff contribution since True North and United Way began partnering together in 2019 — and it comes just in the nick of time.

“I’ve been taken aback by the level of need in our community,” said Walker. “Every day, any time of day, I can look out my window and see people struggling. More people than I have ever seen before. It’s not right. I find it heartbreaking.”

Chipman said it was a similar glance outside from his office back in 2014 that led to a personal awakening.

A dishevelled, disoriented man was clearly in some distress. He watched as first responders, paramedics and police showed up to deal with him. Chipman had viewed similar scenes countless times over the years. But this one, he says, stuck with him. He had seen enough.

“I got really curious about what was happening to this soul. Where is this soul going?” Chipman said. “That just took me down a path that I’m still very much on and have spent a lot of time trying to understand and offer solutions to.”

OPK, which works with marginalized, at-risk Indigenous young adults, are one of the four recipients of this year’s funds.

“It’s been a tsunami of need,” said OPK Executive Director Sheryl Blacksmith. “Helping our young people to realize their dreams, to realize their potential, to forgive themselves. Failure is a great teacher. Thank you so much for this amazing gift and how much it’s going to change lives.”

Blacksmith drew plenty of laughs when, looking directly at DeMelo, she admitted to being “a little star-struck...Dylan, I’m your No. 1 fan. I was more nervous about being in your presence than anything else. Just know that you are our heroes.”

DeMelo, an Ontario product who now lives year-round in Winnipeg with his family, embraced her with a hug.

The other recipients this year are N’Dinawemak – Our Relatives’ Place (an Indigenous-led resource offering 24-7 space for individuals experiencing homelessness), the Downtown Community Safety Partnership (which provides 24-7 non-emergency support, outreach and intervention) and Kā Ni Kānichihk – Velma’s House (a shelter for adult women).

“The gravity of the situation is very serious. Having said that, I think in many ways I’ve never been more hopeful,” said Chipman, noting ongoing initiatives at both the provincial and municipal level which he and many other partners are involved with.

“Because I’m sensing a real willingness of all those interested parties to work together. We’re at an intersection here, and we’re going to go one way or the other here. I think we’re really close now. Parts of it are finally coming together.”

Whether it’s on or off the ice, there’s no question the Jets have always had a strong connection with the community, re-enforced by losing the NHL back in 1996 only to get a second chance in 2011. Chipman, who along with business partner David Thomson purchased the Atlanta Thrashers 14 years ago, believes this year’s hockey club only solidified that bond.

True North made a concerted effort to re-connect with old and new fans, due in part to a decrease in its season ticket base and overall attendance. They made significant progress on that front while overseeing a team that won the Presidents’ Trophy, beat the St. Louis Blues in an epic seven-game series and then eventually fell to the Dallas Stars in six games.

“We were really a good team from start-to-finish. Getting past the first round, and the way it was done so dramatically, helped,” said Chipman.

“But when I think about our team, I think about the core of our team. It’s that group of men that really represent us I think people connect with. They’ve watched them grow up. That maturation process revealed itself in some very difficult circumstances.”

None greater than first-ever draft pick Mark Scheifele learning his father, Brad, had passed away just hours before a pivotal Game 6 in Dallas. Scheifele ultimately played in the game, scored the opening goal, then took a late penalty that led to the overtime winner by the Stars.

Jets players and fans immediately rallied around him, and Chipman chartered a plane to take the group to the funeral several days later.

“The way our group rallied around Scheif left an impression on me. I can’t tell you I’m surprised, because I’ve watched these guys grow into men together. But it still left an impression that I’ll never forget,” said Chipman.

“It was just so authentic and genuine and real that I think people connected with it. Schief was everybody’s son.”

On the hockey side, Chipman said the ultimate goal remains delivering a Stanley Cup to Winnipeg. He believes this group is closer than ever to making that happen.

"It's been a work-in-progress. This group didn't all of a sudden just emerge into what they showed themselves to be. They've been becoming this group for many, many years now," said Chipman.

"And what excites me is they're going to continue to be this group for the foreseeable future. I think that's what's really resonating with people."

And, as Monday showed, that can be a real win-win for everyone.

"It's one of the great privileges of being involved in this business of professional hockey," said Chipman.

"That you can associate with organizations like this and try, in some incremental way every year, to make the community a little bit more healthy and stronger. Hopefully we can do this again next year and maybe the cheque is a little bit bigger because we go a little bit deeper."

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/06/09/hart-for-hellebuyck-heard-through-the-grapevine>

***Hart for Hellebuyck heard through the grapevine?
No Jack Adams for Arniel, but Jets netminder's win possibly leaked***

By: Mike McIntyre

This might be the equivalent of scoring on your own net.

It appears the NHL may have sprung a leak and drowned out any drama surrounding two major year-end award winners. A photo currently making the rounds on social media appears to show Winnipeg Jets goaltender Connor Hellebuyck kneeling in front of the Vezina and Hart trophies.

Whoopsie!

It's not clear where the image originated and one should always be wary of manipulation and fakes in this age of artificial intelligence. Neither the league nor the Jets will comment.

But it's an intriguing twist considering the league has done away with a traditional awards ceremony this season, opting for a more grassroots approach to handing out hockey hardware. They have been pre-recording videos recently in which the winners of various honours, including the Selke Trophy, Masterton and Jack Adams, have been surprised on the spot.

There's still a few more big ones to come, including the best goaltender and league MVP, which are set to be unveiled this Thursday at 5 p.m. CT in an hour-long TV special

before Game 4 of the Stanley Cup Final between the Edmonton Oilers and Florida Panthers.

The purported Hellebuyck photo, which appears to have been taken near a lake, includes a large boom microphone hanging above him and an unidentified person capturing the moment on their phone.

There's no question Hellebuyck is a slam-dunk to win the Vezina, which would be his second-straight and third overall. The 32-year-old essentially lapped the goaltending field this past year as he went 47-12-3 in 62 starts with a 2.00 goals-against-average, a .925 save percentage and eight shutouts.

Andrei Vasilevskiy (Tampa Bay Lightning) and Darcy Kuemper (Los Angeles Kings) are the other two finalists, but the only mystery is which one is going to finish second to Hellebuyck.

The much bigger development would be Hellebuyck becoming just the eighth goaltender in NHL history — and the first since Carey Price in 2014-15 — to capture the Hart.

Tampa's Nikita Kucherov (who led the league in points) and Edmonton's Leon Draisaitl (who scored the most goals) are the other two finalists, and Kucherov was just named the Ted Lindsay Award winner as "most outstanding player" as voted on by fellow skaters.

The Hart is decided by members of the Professional Hockey Writers Association, while NHL general managers vote on the Vezina. All ballots had to be turned in before the playoffs, where Hellebuyck struggled at times in going 6-7 with a 3.08 goals-against average and .866 save percentage.

Stay tuned. And, if Hellebuyck does take home the hardware, at least pretend to act surprised.

Speaking of awards

Scott Arniel will have to settle for second-best this time around.

The Jets head coach finished as the runner-up to Washington Capitals bench boss Spencer Carbery for the Jack Adams Award, which was announced this past weekend.

Carbery received 81 of the 103 first-place votes cast by members of the NHL Broadcasters' Association and finished with 464 voting points overall. Arniel got 16 first-place votes and had 249 points, while Marty St. Louis of the Montreal Canadiens was third with 66 points.

A total of 13 different coaches received at least one vote for first, second or third. Funny enough, neither Paul Maurice (Florida) or Kris Knoblauch (Edmonton) were among them, despite their teams meeting in the Stanley Cup for the second straight spring.

Carbery led the Capitals to top spot in the Eastern Conference and second overall in the regular-season standings behind only Arniel's Jets, who went a franchise-best 56-22-4. Both Washington and Winnipeg won their first-round playoff series before getting knocked out in the second round.

Prized prospect staying put?

One of the more intriguing prospects in the Jets' pipeline might be staying put in Russia.

Dmitry Rashevsky, who was selected by Winnipeg in the fifth round of the 2021 draft, was a pending free agent after spending the past five years with Moscow Dynamo of the Kontinental Hockey League (KHL).

Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff said last month the team was in talks with his agent about potentially bringing the 24-year-old to North America for the first time.

However, news surfaced this past weekend that Rashevsky has now signed a three-year offer sheet with rival Avangard Omsk of the KHL, which would seemingly close that door.

However, in a plot twist, reports emerged Monday that Dynamo will exercise its option to match — but then plans to turn around and trade Rashevsky to another team, Metallurg Magnitogorsk. If Rashevsky balks at that, could he potentially pull a power play and take his puck skills across the pond after all?

Rashevsky had 40 points (19G, 21A) in 65 games this past season and scored 24, 19 and 19 goals in the three seasons prior to that. He would be a nice add to the organization's forward depth.

There's often a big risk with drafting Russian skaters, and it's the sole reason Rashevsky slipped as far as he did in his draft year.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/featured/2025/06/08/jets-mailbag-pending-free-agents-and-possible-roster-moves>

Jets mailbag: Pending free agents and possible roster moves Your May Jets questions answered

By: Ken Wiebe and Mike McIntyre

Summertime is coming in hot — and so, too, are your questions about the Winnipeg Jets.

Our monthly mailbag is overflowing with queries about a number of topics. From pending free agents and possible roster moves to the team's second-round playoff exit and what it's going to take to finally reach the top, Free Press hockey writers Ken Wiebe and Mike McIntyre are here with the answers in a super-sized off-season edition.

1. Do you genuinely think the Jets will keep Nikolaj Ehlers and/or get the pieces they desperately need and hopefully have a changed core going into the regular season? Or do you foresee only one of those things happening? RIYANA

2. How much of a turnover in the roster for next season do you expect? VERN

WIEBE: These questions aren't the same, but they're not dissimilar either, so let's tackle them as one.

It's too early to rule out an extension for Ehlers, but it's also true that as of right now, the Jets are the only team with the ability to negotiate with him and his camp. Since Ehlers is so close to being an unrestricted free agent for the first time in his career, it seems unlikely that he wouldn't simply wait for July 1 to see what offers are out there before making a decision of this magnitude, but only Ehlers knows for sure what is most important for him in his next deal.

Various projections have Ehlers moving from an AAV of US\$6 million to something north of US\$8 million and potentially reaching or eclipsing US\$9 million. Working in the Jets' favour is his promotion to the top power-play unit this season and the 10 seasons of sweat equity invested.

However, there will be other teams — and contenders — that will be able to offer first-line minutes to Ehlers that don't appear to be available with the Jets at this time.

As for changing the core significantly, that's simply not going to happen. The core may be augmented and if the Jets lose Ehlers in free agency, they'll need to add a big piece, but the core is going to be the same. That's why Connor Hellebuyck and Mark Scheifele signed massive extensions and it's why Kyle Connor is expected to follow suit. Josh Morrissey has three more years on his contract, Neal Pionk just signed a seven-year extension and Dylan Samberg is set for a long-term pact and significant raise.

Gabe Vilardi is someone the Jets believe in and that will be apparent once his deal gets done and Cole Perfetti just took a big step forward, while Adam Lowry is expected to ink an extension before his contract expires at the end of the 2025-26 season. In short, minimal turnover is expected on the Jets' roster, but some additions would certainly appear to be part of that equation in order for the organization to take another step forward in its playoff pursuits.

3. What does management need to do to make this team as prepared for the Stanley Cup Playoffs as possible? TOM

MCINTYRE: On paper, the Jets appeared to be as prepared as any team this spring given that they finished the regular season on top of the standings. But dig a little deeper and you realize a lack of depth proved costly, especially as the injuries to key players began to pile on.

Not to belabour this issue I've previously written about, but failing to add an impact forward or two at the trade deadline really proved to be costly. The fact the Jets left approximately US\$6 million in cap space untouched really stood out.

So my immediate answer to your question would be, "Don't make that mistake again." I know GM Kevin Cheveldayoff tried various things which didn't work out for one reason or another, but you don't win trophies in the NHL for trying. It's a results-based business, and building off a solid foundation by adding some strong supporting pieces is pivotal.

Your question was specific to management, so I'll leave it there other than to say they no doubt hope some of the painful lessons once again learned by Jets players during these playoffs will pay off down the road.

4. Could Connor Hellebuyck's continuous playoff underperformance be caused by fatigue, and if so should the Jets invest in a higher quality backup and limit Hellebuyck to 50 starts? BOB

WIEBE: First and foremost, Hellebuyck played his best hockey of the playoffs at the end of the second-round series against the Dallas Stars, so that would run counter to your theory. That doesn't mean it should be dismissed entirely. After not being pulled a single time during the regular season, Hellebuyck didn't complete any of the three road games in the opening round against the St. Louis Blues and that was abnormal.

It's worth noting that there were two-day breaks on multiple occasions and for someone who relies on rhythm like Hellebuyck does, that might have been a bigger factor than fatigue when it comes to the higher number of goals allowed than we're used to seeing.

Hellebuyck himself mentioned the weight of the world being lifted off his shoulders by finally advancing past the first round for the first time since 2021, so there could have been some mental fatigue that was part of the equation. By the end of the season, Hellebuyck had made 79 appearances (including 78 starts) when you include the regular season (62 starts, one brief relief appearance), 4 Nations Face-Off (three starts) and Stanley Cup playoffs (13).

If the Jets were to reach their ultimate goal, Hellebuyck would have needed to make somewhere between eight and 14 more starts, so that's another thing to consider. I asked Hellebuyck about his workload after the Jets held exit interviews at the conclusion of the season and he made it clear he wasn't tired and that he got ample rest down the stretch.

Hellebuyck has been north of 60 starts on six occasions, had 56 and 58 two other times and started 45 times during the pandemic-shortened campaign. So, do I think Hellebuyck's workload will be reduced to 50 starts? Absolutely not, nor does it need to be. However, given that it will be his 11th NHL season and he turned 32 last month, moving him somewhere in the range of 56 to 58 starts makes sense — especially during an Olympic year.

And despite all of the chatter about Jake Oettinger of the Dallas Stars during the playoffs, Hellebuyck remains the front-runner to be the starter for Team USA in Italy. As for the backup role, Eric Comrie showed he was more than capable while posting a 2.39 goals-against average and .914, numbers that were rock-solid. Limited run support impacted his 9-10-1 record, but there was nothing to suggest he couldn't handle an additional three-to-five starts next season.

5. In my view, (this year) the Oilers and Panthers can go into an extra gear that no other team in the league can reach. Evidence: the Panthers smoking the Canes and the Oilers smoking the Stars. How do the Jets find this elusive gear? @Oaktree65472824

MCINTYRE: You're right about the extra gear. Both Edmonton and Florida ultimately finished third in their respective divisions, yet now find themselves facing off for a second straight spring for Lord Stanley.

They know how to win on the biggest stage and didn't sweat the fact they had to start the first three rounds on the road (and, in Florida's case, all four rounds).

That's the intangible every team hopes to have, but few achieve. But it brings me back to the "calluses" Jets head coach Scott Arniel often talks about, and how those can help form the type of resilience you ultimately need to win it all.

Hockey history shows us there are many teams that suffered multiple disappointments before reaching the summit, including the Panthers who won the Presidents' Trophy in 2021-22 only to get bounced in the first round. I'd say they responded to that fairly well, wouldn't you?

Paul Maurice actually brought that up the other day when asked about the Jets, so we'll see if they can follow suit.

6. Would Cole Perfetti ever be considered for 2nd line centre? CATHY

WIEBE: That Perfetti was a candidate for the job going into the 2023-24 season means that you can't rule him out down the road, but the experiment was abandoned early by Rick Bowness and then Arniel has made it clear that he likes what he sees from Perfetti on the wing.

So barring a change on that front, it would appear to be more of a backburner topic for the Jets — though the injury to Lowry, who will miss time after successful hip surgery,

could alter those plans, depending on what happens this summer in regards to trades or free agency.

The biggest development for Perfetti this season was that he was able to stay healthy and appear in all 82 games before suiting up in 13 more during the Stanley Cup playoffs. His game evolved nicely and while his production was on the rise (hitting 50 points for the first time in his career), Perfetti's ability to make an impact even in the games he wasn't on the scoresheet was incredibly important.

He grew into a primary point producer, scoring one of the most important goals of the entire season, scoring with 2.2 seconds left in regulation with the net empty to pave the way for Lowry's heroics in double overtime in Game 7 against the St. Louis Blues.

This isn't to suggest Perfetti couldn't handle the additional defensive responsibilities that come with playing centre, but it seems most likely he will continue to be on the wing at this stage of his career. With 37 goals during the past two seasons, expecting him to eclipse 25 goals is a reasonable expectation, especially if he sees more time on the top power play.

7. What odds would you place on Jonathan Toews signing with the Jets? And if he did, what's the earliest he can sign with them? Also, is it possible Elias Salomonsson can make the Jets team next season? @Oaktree65472824

MCINTYRE: Toews and the Jets seem like a great fit, which Cheveldayoff admitted to when I sat down with him this past January in Salt Lake City for a mid-season chat.

The two men have a history dating back to their time in Chicago, which included winning the Stanley Cup in 2010, so you'd think that might give Winnipeg an inside track. There's also the hometown factor and the glaring need for additional centre depth which you would think would check off some additional boxes for Toews.

I don't expect money to be an issue here — Toews won't be signing for a big bucks given his age and recent history but rather a short-term deal with a low base and perhaps some performance incentives built in. If I had to quantify the likelihood of landing him, I'd put it around 70 per cent.

As for Salomonsson, you could see Arniel's eyes light up as he discussed the young defenceman at year-end exit meetings last month. There was even a comparison to Samberg, which is high praise. I fully expect he will be given every opportunity to show he can win a spot in the top six this fall, which could force the Jets to expose a player like Colin Miller (signed for one more season at US\$1.5 million) to waivers.

8. What would the offer sheet need to look like and what would the compensation be if the Jets offer sheeted Marco Rossi? LEE

WIEBE: The successful offer sheets by the St. Louis Blues in obtaining D-man Philip Broberg and forward Dylan Holloway have some folks aflutter with thoughts of offer sheets running wild as a weapon set to be unleashed by more general managers than we've ever seen before. But a rising salary cap means that many teams would have a better opportunity to match whatever teams make the bold decision to use an offer sheet.

The move worked out exceedingly well for the Blues, with Holloway enjoying a breakout offensive season and Broberg flourishing in a top-4 role. So, it's natural that teams will explore the possibilities.

As it pertains specifically to Minnesota Wild Marco Rossi, it seems more likely the Jets could explore trading for Rossi than attempting an offer sheet. Rossi is coming off a season where he delivered career-highs in goals (24) and points (60). He's appeared in 82 games in each of the past two NHL seasons and had 21 goals and 40 points as a rookie. He's been productive and has ample upside.

The Jets would have done their homework on Rossi leading into the 2020 NHL Draft, where he was chosen ninth overall, one slot before the Jets grabbed Perfetti. Rossi is smaller in stature (five-foot-nine), but has excellent vision and looks like someone that could blossom as a second-line centre.

The Wild are looking to improve its depth at centre beyond Joel Eriksson Ek, so it seems strange that they would consider moving Rossi but his name is definitely out there. The Wild would likely prefer a proven 2C in return, but if they're able to find one in free agency, perhaps they would be interested in a first-round pick or a prospect instead?

PuckPedia lists the Wild with having just north of US\$15 million in cap space available to them, with 11 forwards, seven defencemen and two goalies under contract. Rossi is a pending restricted free agent, as is former Jets blue-liner Declan Chisholm. If the Wild aren't interested in offering Rossi a long-term deal, the prospects of moving him could be enhanced.

Since the Wild were believed to be one of the serious contenders for centre Brock Nelson before he signed a three-year extension with an AAV of US\$7.5 million on Wednesday, it will be interesting to see if that changes how GM Bill Guerin adjusts his off-season priorities.

9. What % would you give to the Jets trading their first-round pick? Is this a deep draft or not?

MCINTYRE: The possibility should absolutely be on the table if it means making the Jets better right now. With the current window of contention wide open, thinking several years into the future should take a back seat to doing everything possible in the present.

Winnipeg currently owns the 28th pick in the first round. Although they would likely get a nice prospect in that spot, this isn't considered a particularly deep draft so whatever player they land is probably years away from having any kind of impact.

In other words, that could have a lot more value to a rebuilding team that is trying to stockpile as many good young players as possible.

Should they consider trading it if the return is valuable? 100 per cent. Will they? I'll put that more around the 50 per cent range.

10. Last year, you mentioned Connor McMichael as a possible 2C target for the Jets, and he blew up with a career year. Who's on the list this summer?

WIEBE: McMichael is someone whose name was circulating around the 2024 NHL draft when word got out that the Jets could be looking to move forward prospect Rutger McGroarty, who was eventually dealt nearly two months later to the Pittsburgh Penguins for Brayden Yager, who will be turning pro this fall after another great WHL season.

It's easy to see why McMichael was someone that was on the Jets' radar, given the season he just completed. Though he was used mostly on the wing and often with former Jets pivot Pierre-Luc Dubois, McMichael, who turned 24 in January, finished with career-bests in goals (26) and points (57) while appearing in 82 games, adding four goals and six points in 10 playoff games this spring.

We'll explore the list more extensively in the days leading up to the NHL draft and free agency, but someone that has my attention is Columbus Blue Jackets forward Cole Sillinger. The son of longtime NHLer Mike Sillinger was chosen 12th overall by the Blue Jackets in the 2021 NHL draft and finds himself behind former Jets' centre Sean Monahan and Adam Fantilli on the depth chart.

Sillinger had 11 goals and 33 points in 66 games last season while averaging just under 17 minutes per game and is someone who might benefit from a change of scenery. Although the 22-year-old was born in Columbus, Ohio, he's got Regina roots and could excel while playing on the Prairies. Sillinger had 16 goals and 31 points as an NHL rookie and has already been in double digits for goals three times.

Could he hit 20 goals with an expanded role? Only time will tell, but Sillinger is six-foot-one and 205 pounds and has recorded 396 hits during the past four seasons, so he would bring some edge to go along with his complementary production.

11. Do you see the Jets re-signing Mason Appleton or Brandon Tanev? Which current Moose player will make the opening lineup? MARK

MCINTYRE: No. And no.

I really don't see room for either player, with the Jets likely filling their positions with younger and cheaper players. Nikita Chibrikov and Parker Ford are two potential wingers with the Moose who immediately come to mind, with both showing well this year in brief looks with the Jets before they suffered season-ending injuries on the farm.

Obviously Brad Lambert will get a long look in camp, even if he took a big offensive step back in his sophomore AHL season, and Salomonsson should, at the very least, get some NHL games.

12. With second line centre being the perpetual gap in the lineup and limited options for acquiring a new one, why is there not more consideration for moving Gabe Vilardi to 2C? Despite success when required, Blake Wheeler always seemed to resist the idea too. I wonder why obviously skilled players with the aptitude for the centre position avoid (second line) centre? @yyjjetsfan.bluesky.social

WIEBE: There's little doubt the Jets will be investigating the second-line centre position once again this summer, but it's one of several things to monitor within the top-six forward group.

While it's true that Vilardi played some solid minutes at centre as a member of the Los Angeles Kings before he was traded to the Jets, given some of the health challenges he's endured over the past several seasons, playing on the wing is typically a bit easier on his body. That's one of the biggest factors.

Another thing is that Vilardi was part of one of the most productive first lines in the entire NHL before he got hurt last season. If he's moving to centre, he's moving to the second line. Essentially that was the question the Jets had to consider with Wheeler, who was one of the best right-wingers in the NHL at the time. Were they better off with Wheeler at 2C or playing on the top line with Scheifele and Connor?

This is a similar situation. There's little doubt Vilardi could be an effective 2C, but the Jets would also need to replace his offence (27 goals, 61 points in 71 games) on the top line if they made that move. Could the Lowry injury force the Jets to reconsider? It's possible, but these answers will become clearer once the NHL draft and free agency are in the rear-view mirror. The potential addition of Toews as an unrestricted free agent could also factor into the decisions down the middle.

13. How does the way the Jets playoffs ended/went improve the chances of landing legit top 6 forwards or a top 4 D in the couple years going forward. Just the way they were able to beat St Louis in a Miraculous fashion, and the emotional connection to the end of the Jets season. MICHAEL

MCINTYRE: From the way this city rallied around the Jets to the first-class treatment the organization showed its players, you'd have to think potential free agents in other markets at least took notice.

And while I don't expect Winnipeg will ever hang with the likes of Florida and Vegas when it comes to attracting available athletes, I do believe the way this past season played out should at least help the cause.

At the very least, joining the team that won the Presidents' Trophy and has its core mostly locked up, including the best goaltender on the planet, should be enticing to anyone in a "win now" mode. And getting treated like royalty by ownership, management and fans alike has to be appealing when weighing various intangibles.

14. Any buzz/hype in the Jets org about Kieron Walton and Jacob Julien? Their stats look good, but are they AHL lifers? @damaend.bsky.social

MCINTYRE: There's certainly excitement about these two prospects, who literally cast large shadows given their size (Walton is six-foot-six, 216 pounds, while Julien is six-foot-four and 190 pounds).

Let's start with Julien, who is fresh off helping his hometown London Knights win the Memorial Cup. Although his personal stats dipped quite a bit this year — 11 goals and 43 assists during the season compared to 29 tallies and 49 helpers last year — Julien had a monster playoff performance which included 23 points (8G, 15A) in 22 games. He elevated his game on an incredibly deep team while also serving as an alternate captain. He'll turn 21 in September and make the jump to pro this fall. I fully expect that to be with the Manitoba Moose, but his development will be something to watch closely as I truly believe there could be an NHL player here down the road.

The same goes for Walton, who just turned 19 and is expected to head back to the Sudbury Wolves for a fourth season this fall. He took a massive lead this past year, with 92 points in 66 games after putting up 43 in 65 contests a year earlier. The fact he did this on a team that was rather thin up front is even more impressive. Walton had five points (1G, 4A) in four playoff games as his team was swept in the first round, then made his pro debut with the Moose on an amateur tryout and recorded an assist in four AHL games.

Julien (fifth round in 2023) and Walton (sixth round in 2024) both have the potential to be the kind of diamonds in the rough that good organizations often hit on during the draft. Questions about their skating/mobility likely caused them both to fall, so that will be something they'll have to continue to work on. But there's no doubt these two big men have a real nose for the net.

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11212313/rasmus-kupari-europe-winnipeg-jets/amp/>

ANALYSIS: Kupari's departure leaves opening on Jets' 4th line

By Paul Edmonds CJOB

The news of Rasmus Kupari's departure for Switzerland on Tuesday likely didn't send a shock wave through the top of the Winnipeg Jets organization.

It did have some of the executives inside the team's hockey operations department scratching their heads, but their reaction was assuredly far from a "what are we going to do now?" moment.

For his part, we can only assume the 25-year-old Kupari was frustrated with his usage the last two years – particularly this Jets season – where he did show promise of moving up on the team's depth chart, only to get hurt in early March on Long Island and then appear in just one of the team's 33 games from that point on.

When you pull that kind of press box duty, there is little doubt frustration envelops you, and your search for career options elsewhere becomes a priority, especially if you're European.

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Of course, Kupari always appeared to have more upside to his game than what he actually delivered, producing just five goals and nine points in 87 career games with Winnipeg, even though the young Finn had size and was one of the fastest skaters on the team.

His absence next season will leave a right-shot hole on the fourth line — not a large one, to be sure, but a gap that presumably will be filled by any number of candidates, such as Brad Lambert, Nikita Chibrikov, Brayden Yager, Parker Ford or even a free agent acquisition later this summer.

In other words, Kupari's departure is not catastrophic, but it will have the Jets brass likely restructuring their forward lineup to address vacancies in both the top and now bottom six ranks.


For context, if you're a player like Jaret Anderson-Dolan, Morgan Barron or David Gustafsson, the window of opportunity just slid a little more to the left.

After all, the news of Kupari's departure might not have shocked anyone in the Jets' administrative offices, but it will undoubtedly send a wave through those on the team looking to fill the hole that he leaves behind.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11228242/analysis-winnipeg-jets-morgan-barron-extension/>

ANALYSIS: Extending Morgan Barron should rank high on Jets' off-season to-do list

By Kelly Moore Global News

ANALYSIS: Extending Morgan Barron should rank high on Jets' off-season to-do list -  [imageView image in full screen](#)

The focus for Winnipeg Jets fans — and rightfully so — would be on GM Kevin Cheveldayoff negotiating contract extensions for Gabe Vilardi and Dylan Samberg.

But getting Morgan Barron's name on the dotted line will also rank high on Cheveldayoff's priority list.

When we think of the trades the Jets GM has been able to complete over the last few years, two stand out in particular: the return on the Pierre-Luc Dubois transaction with Los Angeles, and the March 2022 Andrew Copp swap with the New York Rangers for Barron — and draft picks that turned into Brad Lambert and Elias Salomonsson.

Barron has sometimes been overlooked because of the fourth-line role he has been assigned for most of his first three full NHL seasons, and modest totals of 29 goals, 29 assists and 58 points in his 238 games as a Jet.

But even though his eight goals and 15 points this past season would appear to be a bit of a step back from year two, my opinion is the six-foot-four, 220-pound Halifax native took strides forward in 2024-25, especially in the post-season.

Barron can play in the middle — and with physicality. He averaged just over 14 hits per 60 minutes, which trailed only Luke Schenn, Adam Lowry and Brandon Tanev among those Jets who played 10 or more games in the playoffs.

The former Cornell captain lost what would have been his first career playoff goal on a secondary deflection by linemate Jaret Anderson-Dolan in the series-opening victory versus St. Louis, and then another on an offside review in Game 6 of that series. But what should not be forgotten is that “shoulder down power drive to the net” we saw from him on multiple occasions.

With Lowry scheduled to miss anywhere from 10 to 25 games to start next season and Rasmus Kupari opting to play in Europe, this should be Barron's chance to keep pushing the needle forward — and perhaps staking a claim to a bigger role than he has played since becoming a full-time NHLer.

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6414807/2025/06/10/nhl-free-agent-stock-watch-playoffs-2025/>

Free agent stock watch: How the NHL playoffs helped or hindered 10 players' outlooks

By Shayna Goldman and Harman Dayal

As much as a player can make an impact in the regular season, the playoffs are where legends are built.


Players who thrive in the intensity and pressure of the Stanley Cup Playoffs often can write their ticket after, and those who wilt under the spotlight face questions until they prove otherwise.

Sometimes a player's stock doesn't change based on the playoffs. Corey Perry's next contract probably won't be influenced by what he is doing in Edmonton; realistically, most general managers interested in signing him will seek a low-risk, inexpensive contract with bonuses at this point in his career. Mikael Granlund's glow-up in San Jose and regular-season play in Dallas probably hold more weight than his playoffs, too.

But with free agency taking place just a couple of weeks after the postseason, recency bias can creep into player evaluations. It will likely fuel interest in Sam Bennett and raise more red flags for Mitch Marner.

So with the playoffs winding down and the offseason approaching, here's a look at 10 pending unrestricted free agents who may have seen their stock change this postseason.

Nikolaj Ehlers, Winnipeg Jets

Stock up 

There have been two prevailing narratives throughout Ehlers' career: he is underutilized in the regular season and doesn't make enough of an impact in the playoffs.

At his best, Ehlers is one of the Jets' top offensive threats between his play-driving and creativity in transition despite his usage. At his worst, he struggles in a playoff environment, which knocked him down to 5A in this year's Player Tiers, with team executives raising red flags about his postseason play.

That finally changed this year, as Ehlers raised his game when the pressure was the highest. Just take his gutsy cross-ice pass in the dying moments of Game 7 that helped keep the Jets' season alive. Or his two multi-goal games against the Stars to help the Jets make a Round 2 push.

After missing the first five games with injury, Ehlers ended the postseason with five goals and seven points in eight games, after only netting four goals and 14 points in his previous 37 playoff games.

There was always going to be interest in Ehlers this summer, as one of the few first-line-caliber forwards set to hit free agency. But his postseason improvement, after another strong regular season, should pump up his value even more.

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6409327/2025/06/09/jets-mailbag-centre-rossi-rashevsky/>

Jets mailbag, Part 2: Landing a second-line centre, Dmitri Rashevsky's potential and more

By Murat Ates

Today we're finding Winnipeg its second-line centre.

We're also projecting timelines for its top prospects, from Elias Salomonsson, Brad Lambert and Nikita Chibrikov through Brayden Yager, Colby Barlow and beyond. Then we're taking our first steps toward rewriting the CBA and exploring trade possibilities, UFA signings, and even an offer sheet or two — and we will do all of it based on your questions for our latest mailbag.

Thanks, as always, everyone — it's been a great start to the offseason.

Note: Submitted questions have been edited for clarity and length.

How can the Jets address their recurring need for a second-line centre? — Travis R.

There are four ways, as I see them.

The first is to take a different approach, forgive Gabriel Vilardi and Cole Perfetti their lack of footspeed, and attempt to use them in the role. Coach Scott Arniel prefers faster centres who can offer low support in the defensive zone and help lead transition attacks. Perfetti and Vilardi have the hockey sense to do so, but Arniel hasn't typically been satisfied with their skating.

The second is to approach the unrestricted free agent market, where the most realistic acquisition is one of the NHL's all-time great players, but he hasn't played since April 13, 2023. Jonathan Toews, 37, was not an elite centre for Chicago in either of his last two seasons, but he is someone with whom Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff maintains a relationship. Winnipeg is interested and likely willing to bet on Toews' return to good health, mitigating continued age-related decline. (If the Jets do manage to sign Toews, it

may be safer to think of him as a bottom-six centre until his return to form — if there is one — proves otherwise.)

The UFA market also includes Sam Bennett, John Tavares, Matt Duchene, Ryan Donato and Pius Suter — who all strike me as various shades of unlikely to sign in Winnipeg. If I'm right, the idea of Toews gains appeal — not because I view him as a sure thing but because throwing a dart at his middle-six capability offers some odds of helping Winnipeg. This stands in stark contrast to signing someone like Bennett: a zero percent shot at signing him equates to zero help, regardless of his current effectiveness as a player. (The zero percent number is my belief, not sourced information.)

The third approach is the restricted free agent market, which provides younger players but requires Winnipeg to commit assets to a trade or an offer sheet.

Let's start by using Marco Rossi as an example. Michael Russo and Joe Smith have reported that the Wild are not interested in signing the 23-year-old centre to a deal in the \$7 million range and are thus exploring the idea of a trade. The appeal of acquiring such a player is clear: Rossi is already a 60-point centre, he turns 24 this September and he's not UFA-eligible until 2029. If he helps, he helps through the heart of Winnipeg's current window. A trade for such a player could cost a first-round pick and a top prospect — or more, depending on the market.

What about offer sheets?

If you're unfamiliar with the process, an offer sheet is a way for teams to acquire RFAs from rival clubs. Winnipeg could theoretically sign Rossi to a contract, which Minnesota would then have the option of matching. If the Wild matched the Jets' contract offer, then Minnesota would keep Rossi without any cost to the Jets. If they declined to match that offer, Rossi would join Winnipeg and the Jets would send Minnesota draft picks. The number of picks would depend on the price of the contract:

\$11,700,193 and up
Four first-round picks
\$9,360,154 to \$11,700,192
Two first-round picks, one second-round pick, one third-round pick
\$7,020,114 to \$9,360,153
One first-round pick, one second-round pick, one third-round pick
\$4,680,077 to \$7,020,113
One first-round pick, one third-round pick
\$2,340,038 to \$4,680,076
One second-round pick
\$1,544,425 to \$2,340,037
One third-round pick
\$1,544,424 and below
No compensation

Some of the offer sheet tiers are shown in red because Winnipeg doesn't have its second-round pick in either of the next two drafts and thus can't make an offer sheet in that range.

Let's consider two examples. First, imagine that Winnipeg signed Rossi to a five-year, \$35 million contract with a \$7.0 million average annual value. That would only cost the Jets a first-round pick and a third-round pick, which carries tremendous appeal. If the Wild believe in Rossi at all, though, they'd likely be willing to match that offer sheet and look for a better trade at a later time.

A second example would target a player in that same compensation range who would be harder to match for his current club. Maybe they don't have enough cap space — or maybe, unlike our Rossi example, the Jets' offer is rich relative to the player.

Let's say Winnipeg approaches Morgan Geekie with that same five-year, \$35 million contract offer. Let's say Geekie loves the idea of living in Winnipeg, just under a three-hour drive down the Yellowhead Highway from his hometown of Strathclair, MB. And let's say the Boston Bruins look at Geekie's 33-goal breakout season, gamble on his 22 percent shooting percentage being unsustainable and let him go. It's not quite realistic, in that Boston has a ton of cap space, but \$7 million AAV is further outside a reasonable contract projection for Geekie than it was for Rossi.

There are challenges in this approach. Offer sheets get discussed more than they get executed because it's tough to find the perfect mix of a player willing to be poached, a rival club unable or unwilling to hold onto him, and a team willing to run the risk of retribution somewhere down the line. There's thought in some circles that teams will be more likely to go this route, given the St. Louis Blues' successful acquisition of Dylan Holloway and Phillip Broberg from Edmonton last summer, but the Oilers were more cap-strapped than any of the clubs I've listed above. Maybe it's less about an offer sheet, then, and more about acquiring one of these RFA targets by trade.

As a final and very different thought: If we're talking about offer sheets at all, what about 23-year-old power forward Will Cuyllé, who scored 20 goals and 25 assists for the New York Rangers last season? Cuyllé can play either wing and has the ability and intensity to drag teammates into the fight.

How big of an addition would Dmitri Rashevsky be for the Jets if they convince him to come overseas? — Brad B.

According to a report from Sport Express, Rashevsky has signed a three-year offer sheet with Avangard Omsk, with Dynamo Moscow now given the opportunity to match. Either way, it looks more like he'll play the next three years in Russia than come to North America. But let's run the analysis anyway.

Rashevsky is a 24-year-old prospect whose elite stickhandling leads to highlight-reel offence in the KHL. He's scored 62 goals and 59 assists in his last 199 KHL games for

Dynamo and stunned a lot of observers — myself included — when he scored 19 goals in 48 games right after the Jets drafted him as an overager in 2021.

I don't think the Jets are going to be successful in bringing him to North America this season, but it's still a fun question to explore because the range of possibilities seems to be enormous.

The data-informed approach would be to take a look at every player who moved between the KHL and NHL in recent seasons, check out how their scoring rates changed and build an estimate for Rashevsky. Thankfully, this study of NHL equivalencies (NHLe) is commonplace, with one recent study estimating Rashevsky's KHL offence would translate to approximately 50 points per 82 NHL games.

If Rashevsky pulled off a 50-point NHL season, it would tie him with Perfetti for sixth among Jets skaters. That's a touch ambitious. There have been a lot of players to move between the NHL and KHL (and back) in recent history. When I look at the scoring of NHL castaways like Josh Leivo, Ryan Spooner and Jordan Weal (Rashevsky's teammate in Moscow), one gets the sense of overinflated offensive totals.

Take Leivo, who I remember best as a Maple Leaf but whose NHL work included 16 points in 51 games for the 2022-23 St. Louis Blues. He's 32 years old now and just scored 80 points in 62 games for the Chernyshev Division-winning Salavat Yulaev in Ufa. Spooner, who I remember best as a Boston Bruin and who scored at a point per game in the AHL at his peak, is 33 years old and has scored at a rate of 0.80 points per game through his last three KHL seasons, while Weal — who was also a roughly point-per-game AHL scorer — has scored 0.88 points per game in the KHL in that same time frame.

It's the sort of stuff that should bring our expectations for Rashevsky crashing down to earth.

But then you take a look in the other direction. Kirill Marchenko was a star for Columbus this season, scoring 31 goals and 74 points in the NHL at 24. Rewind to his last KHL season — the 21-year-old Marchenko scored fewer points per game than Rashevsky did that year — and it's easy to understand why Winnipeg wants Rashevsky to sign as soon as possible.

It feels like the Jets have a glut of youth ready to arrive within a year or two of each other. Parker Ford, Nikita Chibrikov, Brad Lambert, Dmitri Rashevsky, Elias Salomonsson, Colby Barlow and Brayden Yager. What do their arrival schedules look like? — Ryan F.

This is a great question. There could be an opportunity available as early as this season.

If UFA forwards Nikolaj Ehlers, Mason Appleton and Brandon Tanev sign elsewhere, then the current Jets roster has room for three additional forwards — four if you assume Adam Lowry starts the season on the injured reserve. Even if two of those players are veterans, there's room for Lambert and Chibrikov to start the season with Winnipeg if they earn it at camp.

Ford turns 25 this summer, so I'm not thinking of him as a prospect in the same light, but he does make sense as a depth forward on Winnipeg's current roster. He's a small player with a ton of competitive fire — a spark plug in a way Winnipeg could use. (That said, Ford hasn't been an elite scorer at any level. His career arc implies more of an NHL/AHL tweener than a middle-six impact player. He could "make" the Jets a whole bunch of times in between AHL stints over the course of his next contract.)

I'm projecting Yager and Barlow to start their pro careers in the AHL this season, while Salomonsson could be anything from a viable third-pairing defenceman if the Jets clear room ahead of him to a 2025-26 Manitoba Moose who has to bide his time for parts of two AHL seasons as Dylan Samberg did before him. Salomonsson is younger than Samberg was and likely a step ahead in terms of his eventual ceiling, but this may not earn him an early arrival.

We'll deep-dive this later in the summer.

Do you think the league would ever consider getting rid of modified no movement clauses? — Trevor G.

No. The NHL and NHLPA appear to be on track to negotiate their next CBA smoothly and without massive changes.

But I couldn't help but poke around a little bit. The number of no-trade clauses is unique to the NHL, and so too is the proportion of them likely to include the Jets.

I was shocked to read that the NBA only has two no-trade clauses: LeBron James and ... Bradley Beal. The NFL has eight, all of them star quarterbacks. The MLB automatically grants "10-and-5" trade-vetoing rights to players who achieve 10 years in the league, along with five consecutive years with the same club. I was told by an MLB writer that the number of players with 10-and-5 rights (or independently negotiated no-trade clauses) is "relatively small."

According to PuckPedia, the NHL has 80 players with full NMCs and another 164 players with at least some amount of no-trade protection. Remember that 49 percent of polled NHL players report that Winnipeg would be the first team on their no-trade clause; add them to the 80 NMCs and you get at least 160 players — 21.7 percent of the league — likely to have a "no thank you" to Winnipeg built into their contracts.

Winnipeg built a Presidents' Trophy team with Eric Comrie and Colin Miller as their marquee UFA signings and one-fifth of the NHL — or more — listing it in their NTC.

Take a moment to applaud that fact and another one to rage against the machine. The Jets are flying against the wind both ways, even compared to other Canadian teams.

What prospect in the upcoming draft excites you the most for the Jets (and why is it Blake Fiddler?) — Adam B.

It's draft season! Great question. I consulted an array of scouts in making the Jets' pick in our next mock draft, which will be published on Wednesday.

Fiddler is an intriguing prospect — read Scott Wheeler's feature story for more — but you'll have to stay tuned for proper draft content on my end. In the meantime, check out Wheeler's rankings here and Corey Pronman's rankings here.

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6411938/2025/06/09/nhl-playoffs-2025-series-ranking/>

The road to the Stanley Cup Final: Ranking the 14 playoff series that got us here

By Sean McIndoe

We're two games into a Stanley Cup Final that already seems like it could be headed for classic status. But before we get too far ahead of ourselves, let's look back at the 14 other matchups that brought us here, with our annual ranking of every series that led to the final.

All in all, it's been a mixed bag of a postseason. We avoided having even one sweep, which is impressive. We also had half the series end in five games, which generally isn't impressive. It's a top-heavy list, but having gone through it all, I'm not sure we can complain about what the hockey gods served up. Let's start at the bottom and work our way up.

3. Dallas over Winnipeg Jets in 6 (Round 2)

Expectations: A heavyweight battle between two Cup-worthy teams.

What we got: Pretty much that.

Overtimes: One, in Game 6, with Thomas Harley ending the Jets' season.

Mandatory controversy: There were two biggies, both favoring Dallas, with Mason Marchment somehow getting away with swatting an official and Alexander Petrovic's game-winning goal in Game 3 being allowed to stand despite looking like this.

Defining moment: It's hard to choose in a series that was packed with them. We could go with Rantanen's domination in the opener, or a pair of Connor Hellebuyck home shutouts between continued road struggles, or Mikael Granlund's hat trick in Game 4. But I think the moment we'll remember most from the series actually came in a losing cause: Mark Scheifele's return to the lineup after his father died, and the goal he scored to give the Jets a lead they couldn't hold.

Bottom line: This series didn't miss much, aside from a Game 7.

1. Jets over St. Louis Blues in 7 (Round 1)

Expectations: The Blues were a reasonably fun story with some long-shot upset potential, and they'd give the Presidents' Trophy winners just enough of a fight to make the series worth watching before quietly making their exit.

What we got: A combination of a Jets meltdown and Blues defiance that came as close as you can possibly come to an upset before ... well, you know.

Overtimes: Just one, but it was double-overtime in Game 7.

Mandatory controversy: We had the coaches feuding over Scheifele's injury, a pregame scolding from the league and even a malfunctioning airplane.

Defining moment: For most of the series, it looked like it would be the image of Hellebuyck fishing a puck out of his net. But that storyline disappeared — well, it took a few days off — thanks to one of the greatest Game 7 comebacks we've ever seen.

How good does a game have to be for the double-OT series winner to be only the third-most-memorable goal? I still can't believe this all happened.

Bottom line: I could see having the Stars and Avs in the top spot on your list. Both series were all-timers, and you could argue the two Game 7s were the best games we've ever had on back-to-back nights. I'm going with the series that produced a game that's in the running for the most dramatic ever, but I don't think there's a wrong answer. Thank you, 2025 Central Division: You were the true MVP of the postseason.

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6398915/2025/06/03/nikolaj-ehlers-free-agent-destinations/>

Which NHL teams should be interested in Nikolaj Ehlers in free agency?

By Shayna Goldman and Murat Ates

Nikolaj Ehlers is closing in on unrestricted free agency after 10 seasons with the Winnipeg Jets.

Ehlers, 29, has scored 520 points in 674 regular-season games. He's averaged 15:48 per game over the course of his last three seasons, prompting frequent discussion about his playing time — most of it online, some between Ehlers and multiple head coaches. Speaking with The Athletic during the season, Ehlers was adamant about his love for his teammates, his love for Jets fans, and his uncertainty about what his future would hold.

As the offseason progresses, the likelihood increases that Ehlers will explore his UFA opportunity on July 1. Despite conversations between Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff and Ehlers' agent, André Rufener — and despite Cheveldayoff's characterization of Winnipeg's contract offer as a "Jet for life" type of deal — Ehlers' most likely path involves exploring what free agency has to offer.

This isn't to say that the Jets hold no appeal or that Ehlers' departure is a certainty. Winnipeg is one of several teams who could use a top-six forward who can produce on a top power-play unit. Ehlers leads all Jets in five-on-five points per minute over the past three seasons and factored in on a higher percentage of Winnipeg's power play goals with him on the ice than anyone else on the No. 1 unit. Ehlers is fast and so creative in conjuring moments that break defenders out of their structure. He's a force in transition who can create offense without relying on extended offensive zone time and would be an asset on many NHL teams — Winnipeg included.

There are also moments of chaos that leave linemates flatfooted, putting them offside or making them wait as Ehlers turns a straight line zone entry into a bit of freewheeling jazz in the offensive zone. He's also not a strong D-zone player, while Mark Scheifele and Adam Lowry's lines got the most difficult matchups in Winnipeg. But every Jets skater was more productive with Ehlers on their line than without him this season — a trend that's been true for most of Ehlers' career.

"He's one of our best players and he carries the play so much when he's on the ice," said Kyle Connor at Jets exit interviews. "He's a huge piece for us and big in our locker room, too."

Ehlers missed exit interviews with Winnipeg media to play for Denmark at the men's World Championship. His teammates shared Connor's sentiments, praising Ehlers' quality as a person and as a player while acknowledging the uncertainty of his future.

One certainty of his future: a nice raise in the offseason. But just how much?

Evolving-Hockey projects a seven-year deal worth \$8.9 million a year outside of Winnipeg. That is slightly above his \$8.1 million market value, according to Dom Luszczyszyn's market value.

While star players usually don't get signed for what they're worth, the tier below sometimes do. Since there isn't a ton of high-end talent in the 2025 free agent market (and in a growing cap world, teams have more spending power), Ehlers' deal could inflate above his market value and closer to the \$9 million mark.

So, where will Ehlers play next season?

Here are 11 teams that could — or should — be interested.

Carolina Hurricanes

Puck possession team, meet puck possession all-star. The Hurricanes are known as a forward thinking, analytics-inclined team and Ehlers is an analytics darling. He's so effective in transition that most models grade him out as a strong defensive player, while generating — and finishing — scoring chances from the most dangerous areas of the ice. Meanwhile, the Hurricanes arrive at the offseason with an eye-popping \$28 million in cap space, along with a roster that's nearly complete. They're ideally positioned to compete for — and win — top UFA targets like Ehlers (and perhaps even Mitch Marner, even after Marner nixed a mid-season Mikko Rantanen trade.)

The tantalizing thing about Ehlers as a Hurricane is that he's a close stylistic match for Martin Necas: a dynamic rush threat who generates a ton of zone entries and then turns those entries into real goals for himself and for his teammates. Ehlers' power play offense surged with his promotion to the Jets' top unit this season: 7.55 points per 60 minutes, compared to Necas' 7.35 points per 60 in Carolina.

With so much cap space, such obvious forechecking strengths, such obvious finishing weaknesses, and another Eastern Conference finals exit, this should be a franchise-defining offseason in Carolina. Ehlers does not match the Hurricanes' forechecking strengths but excels in every offensive area they lack — and helps turn expected goals into the ones that count.

Vegas Golden Knights

The Golden Knights have invested a ton in their blue line and center depth, sometimes at the expense of their wingers. What was once a strength in Vegas has faded over the last couple of seasons, and free agency is the prime time to address it since the team doesn't have many prospects or draft picks to spend in a trade scenario.

Aside from Pavel Dorofeyev, the Golden Knights don't have a ton of pure offensive threats like Ehlers on the wing. And that proved costly against the Oilers, as the team only mustered seven five-on-five goals across five games in Round 2.

What Vegas does have is a lot of two-way talent, from Jack Eichel and William Karlsson down the middle to Mark Stone on the wing. With two lines capable of playing matchup minutes, the team should be able to shelter him to more offensive usage. Or maybe one of those centers can help add some balance to a line with Ehlers.

The big question is cost, since the Golden Knights don't have a ton of cap space to work with right now. That's something management has a ton of experience navigating; there are always subtractions to make to push the salary bounds when needed.

New Jersey Devils

Ehlers wouldn't need to be the answer in New Jersey — the Devils already have Jack Hughes, Jesper Bratt and Nico Hischier up front, with Dawson Mercer and Ehlers' former junior teammate Timo Meier playing important roles. Still, New Jersey has room for one more game-breaker in its top six and lamented its lack of offense during the

playoffs. Ehlers is dangerous in transition, creative on the power play and an underrated puck retrieval weapon to help extend offensive zone shifts.

The obvious fly in the ointment is cap space: Luke Hughes' next contract will take up too much of the Devils' \$12 million of projected cap room for New Jersey to accommodate Ehlers without follow-up moves. Ondrej Palat, at \$6 million, represents a potential safety valve on that front. He does have a no-move clause with a 10-team no-trade clause as of July 1 and it's worth noting that the Devils' 2022 bet on Palat may show a preference to supplement their stars with Cup-winning veterans.

Even with that substantial caveat, the Devils' moment has arrived. Jakob Markstrom has stabilized their goaltending. The Hughes brothers are expected to be healthy to start next season. And Ehlers, whose 2.1 points per 60 minutes last season put him on par with Jack Hughes, would get to play with a more dynamic center than Vladislav Namestnikov, increasing his potential for offensive output whether he plays with Hughes or Hirsch in the top six.

Toronto Maple Leafs

If Mitch Marner walks as a free agent, Toronto should join the market for Ehlers.

As much as Toronto has adopted a more playoff-style game with tight defense and an aggressive forecheck, this team still needs a high-octane offense with more contributors. That would still be true even if Marner, a winger capable of putting up 100 points, were to extend.

As much as the focus is always on what the Core Four do, the fact is that the team got outscored 12-6 this postseason with Marner, Auston Matthews, William Nylander and John Tavares on the bench. So if Marner leaves, that offensive need is even more pressing.

Ehlers isn't a one-for-one replacement for Marner. He doesn't play matchup minutes or kill penalties. But he's a high-end puck mover who can generate rush scoring and create dangerous chances. And with his salary on the books in place of Marner's, the Leafs would have more space to add depth scoring (or any extra penalty killers) needed around their core.

While Ehlers doesn't have the longest history of excelling in the playoffs, his difference-making performance this spring in Winnipeg showed those demons are behind him. Just look at his cross-ice pass that helped set up Cole Perfetti's Game 7 game-tying goal in Round 1.

Los Angeles Kings

Ehlers doesn't fit the mold of the Kings' structure or forward group, so this pick may feel out of left field. But after four (!) consecutive Round 1 eliminations, it's time for L.A. to go against the grain. Maybe that finally happens with Ken Holland taking over as general manager for Rob Blake.

The Kings don't necessarily need to completely overhaul their roster or playing style, but it's clear this team needs some change to better compete with the best in the West. It's thought that defense wins championships, but it's clear in recent years that a team also needs an elite offense. So this team should be looking to add more scoring pop to their defensive playing style. Adding more puck-moving forwards who can boost the team's rush-based attack could be the key.

Adrian Kempe, Quinton Byfield and Alex Laferriere all contribute shots in transition, but only Kevin Fiala stands out with some of the best in the league.

With Ehlers in the fold, the top six would have more dimension. L.A.'s two-way centers would help offset any defensive concerns with Ehlers' game, allowing him to play to his strengths.

Washington Capitals

The Capitals' biggest challenge as an organization will be their transition to life after Alexander Ovechkin, whose contract ends after this season. They're in a surprisingly good place to do so, with their core mostly intact and a little over \$10 million in cap space this summer — and Ehlers could be a perfect place to spend that money.

Washington's game is predicated on hard, heavy forechecking. The Capitals are loaded with big bodies and puck-hounding forechecking threats. They recover their dump-ins, protect the puck well in traffic and generate a lot of offense off of extended zone time. They don't particularly excel on generating offense off the rush, which is where Ehlers excels. At 29 years old, Ehlers is a zone-entry machine and a threat to create scoring chances for himself and his teammates off those entries. His high-speed, structure-breaking offensive game that could help Washington supplement its heavy forecheck with an elite transition threat.

It may be that the Capitals use their cap space in an effort to re-sign UFA Andrew Mangiapane, who they limited to a third-line role in the name of building roster balance. Mangiapane fits the Capitals' puck-hounding, forecheck-heavy stylistic game more closely than Ehlers does. But by being a different, more chaotic type of threat, Ehlers could insulate Washington from those long nights in Raleigh where zone time gets hard to come by and the offense fades away.

New York Rangers

The Rangers would have to clear cap space, potentially in the form of moving Chris Kreider's \$6.5 million, for an Ehlers-sized swing to make sense this summer. They're starting the offseason with just \$8.4 million in projected cap space, while needing to sign K'Andre Miller, Matt Rempe and Will Cuyille, among others. If they do clear enough space to sign Ehlers, he could be a perfect fit.

The Rangers' forward group is deep and diverse, but new coach Mike Sullivan inherits a roster with a lot of question marks after a disappointing season. Will Mika Zibanejad

play center or move to right wing, as he did to end the season? If he keeps playing down the middle, who could offer New York the same kind of quality on the right side, given all of its commitments on the left?

Ehlers solves a lot of those problems. He's a left-shooting winger who has played portions of his NHL career on the right side, including a dominant stretch with Mark Scheifele and Mathieu Perreault way back in 2019. New York could use him as a Kreider replacement if they do trade their longtime veteran, or play him on the right side if they'd prefer to keep Zibanejad at center. No matter how they deploy him, Ehlers would be a boon to a power play that managed to drastically underperform the sum of its parts in 2024-25.

Vancouver Canucks

If the Canucks are going to prove this past season was a fluke, it has to be a busy summer in Vancouver to upgrade this roster. This isn't a contender-worthy team. It wasn't even a playoff-caliber group in 2024-25.

The league's top contenders provide a loose blueprint of what to strive for. Between the Panthers, Oilers, Stars and Hurricanes, the average forward corps of the 2025 conference finalists has a plus-35.7 Net Rating. Vancouver, for comparison, is down at plus-0.10.

While there will be a big focus on the middle of the ice this summer, with Vancouver likely in the market for a 2C, the wings can't be neglected, either — especially if Brock Boeser walks as a free agent. Even if Boeser extends, this team still needs a boost because as it stands, Conor Garland is the most valuable winger on this team ... and that doesn't scream contender. That's why Ehlers should be on the Canucks' radar. He would have a positive impact on a five-on-five offense that ranked in the bottom 10 this year and knock the rest of the winger depth into more fitting roles. And his creativity would help give the power play a spark after wilting this season.

New York Islanders

With Mathieu Darche leading the way as general manager, it's a new era of Islanders hockey. But what direction will he take this summer?

The Islanders could opt for a retool and focus on reclamation projects and up-and-coming talent this summer. That would allow management to take a more patient approach to free agency this summer and instead prep for a loaded 2026 class.

But with Mathew Barzal, Noah Dobson and Ilya Sorokin all in the right age range to compete, they could look to make a quicker turnaround. That's where someone like Ehlers could come into the picture. His offensive ability is exactly what this team is missing; there isn't much top-six talent on Long Island outside of Barzal and Bo Horvat. As much as Patrick Roy helped the team tighten up defensively when he first took over, the offense has remained a weak point on Long Island.

By adding help on the wings, it would allow Barzal to shift back to the middle — and stop the team from having to overspend on a new 2C in what looks like a pretty thin center market this summer.

Montreal Canadiens

The Canadiens' top line of Nick Suzuki, Cole Caufield and Juraj Slafkovsky was a driving force behind the team's push for the postseason. At five-on-five, this trio outscored opponents 50-29 in the regular season. But without this line on the ice, the Canadiens were outscored 117-79. So Montreal should be in the market for more support behind those three roster staples at the top of the lineup.

A full season of Ivan Demidov on the second line could go a long way, but Montreal may still want more reliable scoring on the wings. As much as the Canadiens are projecting a more conservative free-agency approach, this is where someone like Ehlers could make sense. His presence (along with Demidov's) would shift players who slotted into second-line roles into more fitting third-line positions.

The tricky part of rebuilding is knowing when to start adding players in that 'right now' age range. A team shouldn't build their roster through free agency, but can use it to accent an up-and-coming core if there's a measured approach between taking big swings and spending irresponsibly. That's the line management would have to walk with Ehlers, if the team feels it's ready to phase out of a rebuild and into a playoff team.

Chicago Blackhawks

Look at the Stanley Cup Final for a quick lesson in the UFA value of a budding superstar. The Oilers weren't a top UFA destination ... then they drafted Connor McDavid and the world opened up to them. Zach Hyman, Evander Kane, Viktor Arvidsson, Jeff Skinner, Adam Henrique and others joined Edmonton in search of a Cup title alongside the NHL's preeminent superstar.

Chicago isn't quite ready to follow suit but has a lot of money to spend and a first-line, top-unit job alongside Connor Bedard on offer to this summer's free agents. Meanwhile, Ehlers is likely thinking long-term for his next contract — term that would buy Chicago time to continue its build. If the 29-year-old Ehlers is willing to move from the Cup-contending Jets to the 31st-place Blackhawks — and wait — then Chicago should be able to put together a compelling package of ice time, opportunity and money. For Chicago, the signing would be a clear indication to its market that the Blackhawks are on their way back — and motivation for fans to return the United Center to 100 percent capacity. Ehlers' speed brings fans to their feet and he's an easy sell in the community.

It's just hard to think he'd wait 10 years to earn UFA status and sign with a team so far from immediate contention.

The Hockey News

<https://thehockeynews.com/nhl/winnipeg-jets/latest-news/jets-defensive-prospect-puts-up-positive-results-in-first-professional-season-tougher-challenges-await-next-season>

Jets Defensive Prospect Puts Up Positive Results In First Professional Season; Tougher Challenges Await Next Season

By Julian Gaudio

Winnipeg Jets defensive prospect Alfons Freij completed his first season of professional hockey, putting up positive results.

The 19-year-old scored two goals and added eight points in 29 games for IF Björklöven in HockeyAllsvenskan, Sweden's second-tier league. HockeyAllsvenskan has proved to be a great league for developing young prospects.

Freij will make his SHL debut next season, playing with Timrå IK, a team featuring several NHL-affiliated prospects and former NHLer Magnus Pääjärvi.

The Jets selected Freij with the 37th overall pick in the 2024 NHL Draft. The second-round pick was the first selection made by the Jets, and the Jets were given plenty of praise for the selection. Listed at 6'1, 196 lbs, Freij is a wonderful skater with strong offensive instincts. He's known for his playmaking ability, and he's beginning to round out his defensive game.

His excellent skating is highlighted by both the speed he generates, but also his edge work. He can distribute his weight onto either foot, which makes him a handful for forwards to cover when engaging on the forecheck or trying to defend him at their blue line. His skating and frame should allow him to continue to develop defensively while maintaining his outstanding transition ability.

Freij was left off of Sweden's World Junior team this season but will likely play a large role at this year's event. With Axel Sandin-Pellikka, Tom Willander, Theo Lindstein, and Rasmus Bergqvist all aging out of the tournament, roster spots are open for the taking, and Freij looks prepared to take over.

Although he is still 2-3 years away from fighting for a roster spot on the Jets, Freij is trending in the right direction. Another season or two playing in the SHL will be great for his development before he transitions to North American professional hockey with the Manitoba Moose in the AHL, following a similar path to Elias Salomonsson, who looks poised to crack the Jets roster sometime soon.