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Inside look at Winnipeg Jets

Additions of veteran forwards Toews, Nyquist, Pearson could boost Cup run

By Derek Van Diest

NHL.com is providing in-depth roster, prospect and fantasy analysis for each of its 32 teams from Aug. 1-Sept. 1. Today, the Winnipeg Jets.

The Winnipeg Jets have gotten serious and hope the addition of center Jonathan Toews brings them closer to the Stanley Cup this season.

The 37-year-old Winnipeg native, nicknamed Captain Serious, returns home after not playing in the NHL the past two seasons, signing a one-year contract July 1.

"The first thing is that it's exciting to hear that he feels he's healthy and then to hear that he wants to play, that was an exciting moment there," general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff said July 4. "I can't tell you it was smooth sailing to try to get him back (to Winnipeg) -- there were lots of teams that threw their hats in the ring -- but we were confident that we would be someone that he would want to play for."

Toews missed the entire 2020-21 season with Chronic Immune Response Syndrome and battled the effects of long COVID-19 in 2022-23, last playing with the Chicago Blackhawks on April 13, 2023.

"There was a little while where I didn't want to give too much thought to hockey and tried to get it off my mind," Toews said July 4, "but as I got closer and started thinking I can play again, it was hard to see myself wearing any other jersey."

Winnipeg (56-22-4) won the Presidents' Trophy for having the best record in the NHL last season before losing to the Dallas Stars in six games in the Western Conference Second Round.

The Jets believe adding Toews, who helped the Blackhawks win the Stanley Cup in 2010, 2013 and 2015, can help take aim at their first Cup title.

"With elite athletes they hold themselves to a different standard and they are wired differently both mentally and physically," Cheveldayoff said. "I don't know that it's a gamble; it's certainly an opportunity. In this game here, athletes that do hold themselves to a different level of accountability, they can do great things."

Toews has 883 points (372 goals, 511 assists) in 1,067 regular-season games and 119 points (45 goals, 74 assists) in 137 Stanley Cup Playoff games through 15 NHL

seasons, all with Chicago. He won the Conn Smythe Trophy as playoff MVP in 2010 and was voted one of the NHL's 100 Greatest Players at the League's Centennial celebration in 2017, but he has not played an NHL game in more than two years.

"I'm going to try my best to be honest and realistic with myself on what the challenges are," Toews said. "I think a couple of years ago, I missed the shortened season before I went back to Chicago. In a way, since I hit the ice and [have] really been skating a lot these last couple of months, I didn't feel like that much time had gone by.

"I know it's a long time on paper if you're playing hockey. Lots of things change in the League and teams are different, the game is different and all that, but for myself, it all went by in a blink of an eye."

Toews will help make up for the loss of forward Nikolaj Ehlers, who signed a six-year contract with the Carolina Hurricanes on July 3.

Winnipeg also signed forward Gustav Nyquist to a one-year contract to boost its offense. The 35-year-old had 28 points (11 goals, 17 assists) in 79 games with the Nashville Predators and Minnesota Wild last season and is a five-time 20-goal scorer.

Forward Tanner Pearson (6-foot-1, 207 pounds) is another new addition, signing a one-year contract, and will bring size and strength to the lineup. The 33-year-old had 27 points (12 goals, 15 assists) in 78 games for the Vegas Golden Knights last season and won the Stanley Cup with the Los Angeles Kings in 2014.

"Pearson is a guy that won a Cup and Nyquist is an experienced guy that two years ago had 75 points, so there's some offensive hopefully to replace [Ehlers]," Jets coach Scott Arniel said. "With the other guys, there's size, there's speed, there's heavy character, physical kind of guys. That's kind of where we were looking with that kind of group coming in."

Toews, Nyquist and Pearson join a talented Winnipeg forward group, including Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor, Gabriel Vilardi, Nino Niederreiter, Adam Lowry, Vladislav Namestnikov, Cole Perfetti and Alex Iafallo.

"I think day by day this is becoming more real, and it will as we get closer to the season, too," Toews said. "I'm looking forward to it, it's an exciting time and it's another fresh opportunity."

<https://www.nhl.com/news/winnipeg-jets-top-prospects-for-2025-26-season-32-in-32>

***Top prospects for Winnipeg Jets
Lambert could make NHL impact this season; Salomonsson, Chibrikov likely to develop in AHL***

By Derek Van Diest

NHL.com is providing in-depth roster, prospect and fantasy analysis for each of its 32 teams from Aug. 1-Sept. 1. Today, the top five prospects for the Winnipeg Jets, according to NHL.com.

1. Brad Lambert, F

How acquired: Selected with No. 30 pick in 2022 NHL Draft

2024-25 season: Winnipeg (NHL): 5 GP, 0-1-1; Manitoba (AHL): 61 GP, 7-28-35

Lambert is expected to make the jump to the NHL full time this season after playing the past two seasons in the American Hockey League. The 21-year-old center is a fast, talented offensive player who will continue to work on his defensive game.

"His strength is going to be his speed and his ability to push people back," Jets director of player development Jimmy Roy said. "It's not quite [Nikolaj] Ehlers speed, but it's close and that ability to make plays off the rush and use his speed, I think this past year, he understood how to get more pucks to the net, get inside defensemen."

Lambert (6-foot-1, 173 pounds) got a taste of the NHL last season, and the Jets hope he can help fill the void left by the departure of Ehlers to the Carolina Hurricanes in free agency.

"His biggest thing to make that jump is getting stronger, physically getting stronger, from his legs to his upper body," Roy said. "I think he's done that this summer."

Projected NHL arrival: This season

2. Elias Salomonsson, D

How acquired: Selected in second round (No. 55) in 2022 NHL Draft

2024-25 season: Manitoba (AHL): 53 GP, 5-22-27

Salomonsson (6-0, 172) won a championship with Skelleftea of the Swedish Hockey League in 2024 and had a productive first season with Manitoba of the AHL last season. The 21-year-old is a talented two-way defenseman who Winnipeg would like to see develop into a top-four role.

"The thing that I really like about his game is his ability to get back for pucks and make a good first pass," Roy said. "He's so consistent at that. When he was with [Manitoba] last year, you could see how much more confidence our team had when he was in the lineup, because they knew he was going to be first on pucks. Even when he went into the corner and he was second there, all those 50/50 puck battles, 80 percent of the time he was coming out of the corner with that puck. He also has tremendous skating ability."

Projected NHL arrival: Next season

3. Brayden Yager, F

How acquired: Trade with Pittsburgh Penguins on Aug. 22, 2024

2024-25 season: Moose Jaw (WHL): 21 GP, 11-19-30; Lethbridge (WHL): 33 GP, 14-38-52

Selected by the Pittsburgh Penguins with the No. 14 pick in the 2023 NHL Draft, the 20-year-old center was acquired by Winnipeg for forward Rutger McGroarty in 2024 and will play professional hockey this season after a successful junior career in the Western Hockey League, which included 82 points (25 goals, 57 assists) in 54 games last season.

Yager (5-11, 180) is an offensively skilled player who played for Canada at the IIHF World Junior Championship the past two years.

"His explosiveness and his first five steps and separation speed is tremendous," Roy said. "With a lot of players coming from junior, strength is the big thing, and playing against men and understanding that you're playing 82 games a year and how to maintain that strength throughout the year, that's going to be one of the big things for him. On the positive side, his awareness and his vision and his ability to make plays is elite."

Projected NHL arrival: 2027-28

4. Colby Barlow, F

How acquired: Selected with No. 18 pick in 2023 NHL Draft

2024-25 season: Oshawa (OHL): 62 GP, 32-29-61

The 20-year-old left wing had a strong final season of junior hockey and an outstanding postseason with 33 points (14 goals, 19 assists) in 21 games to help Oshawa reach the Ontario Hockey League Final.

Barlow (6-0, 190) had 40 goals in 50 games with Owen Sound of the OHL in 2023-24 and scored at least 30 goals in each of his four OHL seasons.

"He has such a strong ability to shoot the puck," Roy said. "It's an NHL shot already and now he has to understand how he can get that off quicker and in less time against better goalies and better players. I think that's going to be one of the things he's going to have to work on."

Projected NHL arrival: 2027-28

5. Nikita Chibrikov, F

How acquired: Selected in second round (No. 50) in 2021 NHL Draft

2024-25 season: Winnipeg (NHL): 4 GP, 2-1-3; Manitoba (AHL): 30 GP, 7-11-18

The 22-year-old right wing had his season cut short with a lower-body injury sustained Jan. 20. A talented offensive player, Chibrikov (5-10, 170) is healthy heading into this season and could challenge for an NHL roster spot in training camp.

"He's a highly skilled player," Roy said. "The one thing that's unique about him is the will he has to want to play in the NHL and how badly he wants it. When he turns the puck over, he works his butt off to get it back. He can play in the high-traffic areas as a small, skilled guy. He's not one of those perimeter players that looks to make plays; he gets on the inside, he goes to the net. He's stocky, he's strong on his skates and he plays with some edge too, which is really nice."

Projected NHL arrival: Next season

<https://www.nhl.com/news/winnipeg-jets-three-questions-for-2025-26-season-32-in-32>

3 questions facing Winnipeg Jets Replacing production of Ehlers, Toews' impact among concerns

By Derek Van Diest

NHL.com is providing in-depth roster, prospect and fantasy analysis for each of its 32 teams from Aug. 1-Sept. 1. Today, three important questions facing the Winnipeg Jets.

1. How will the Jets make up for the loss of Nikolaj Ehlers?

The departure of Ehlers as a free agent to the Carolina Hurricanes has opened the door for some of Winnipeg's young offensive forwards to make an impact. Cole Perfetti, 23, had a strong third full NHL season with 50 points (18 goals, 32 assists) in 82 games, and forwards Brad Lambert, 21, and Nikita Chibrikov, 22, each will have an opportunity to make the team out of training camp.

If those players are able to produce, it will help mitigate the loss of Ehlers, who had 520 points (225 goals, 295 assists) in 674 games during his 10 seasons with Winnipeg, including eight seasons with at least 20 goals. Winnipeg was tied for third in the NHL with 275 goals scored and should still have plenty of offensive power, but some new names on the score sheet would be welcomed by the Jets.

2. What impact will Jonathan Toews have?

A three-time Stanley Cup champion with the Chicago Blackhawks and two-time Olympic gold-medal winner with Canada, Toews undoubtably brings a winning pedigree to Winnipeg. The question for the veteran of 1,067 NHL regular-season games and 137 Stanley Cup Playoff games is how much he has left in the tank, particularly after not playing the past two seasons because of illness.

Having Toews around the dressing room will be beneficial to a team desperate to replicate its regular-season success in the playoffs. If he also can help the Jets by being

a strong supporting member to a talented core and chip in offensively, they should be able to take another step forward this season.

3. Can Connor Hellebuyck put together another MVP season and carry it into the playoffs?

Hellebuyck won the Vezina Trophy as the top goalie in the NHL as well as the Hart Trophy as NHL MVP after going 47-12-3 with a 2.00 goals-against average, .925 save percentage and eight shutouts in 63 games (62 starts) in the regular season. But he again was unable to translate that to the postseason, going 6-7 with a 3.08 GAA and .866 save percentage in 13 playoff games.

Winnipeg's success will rely largely on Hellebuyck when it matters. He is 322-185-44 in the regular season in his career but just 24-34 in 58 postseason games. In his 10 NHL seasons, he has won four playoff series and only advanced past the second round once.

<https://www.nhl.com/news/winnipeg-jets-fantasy-projections-for-2025-26-season-32-in-32>

Winnipeg Jets fantasy rankings, projections for 2025-26 Morrissey fringe top-10 defenseman; Perfetti breakout candidate

By Chris Meaney

As part of NHL.com's 32 in 32 series, the fantasy hockey staff ranks the top five Winnipeg Jets players for standard leagues and provides skater points and goalie wins projections for the 2025-26 season.

1. Connor Hellebuyck, G

NHL.com win projection: 39

Hellebuyck, who was voted the Vezina Trophy winner as the NHL's top goalie for the second consecutive season and third time in his career, set League career highs and led the League (minimum 35 games played) in wins (47), goals-against average (2.00), save percentage (.925) and shutouts (eight) in 63 games (62 starts) last season. The 32-year-old became the fourth goalie in the expansion era (since 1967-68) and first since Carey Price in 2014-15 to win the Hart Trophy, voted as NHL MVP. Since 2022-23, Hellebuyck leads the NHL in games played among goalies (187), wins (121), GAA (2.29) and shutouts (17), and is tied for first in save percentage (.922) with Linus Ullmark (minimum 35 games). Hellebuyck is projected for a League-high 39 wins this season, and the top-ranked fantasy goalie in NHL.com's rankings is a fringe top-10 overall player.

2. Kyle Connor, F

NHL.com point projection: 90

Connor set NHL career highs in points (97) and assists (56) in 82 games last season. The 28-year-old also was tied for seventh in the League in goals (41) and has had at least 40 goals in two of his past four seasons. Connor, who led the Jets in points, goals, assists, even-strength points (67; tied for seventh in NHL), power-play points (28) and

shots on goal (267; eighth in NHL) last season, has scored at least 30 goals in seven of his past eight seasons and is averaging 237.8 shots on goal per season during that span. Since 2021-22, Connor ranks 13th in the NHL in goals (153 in 308 games), third in game-winning goals (35) and ninth in shots on goal (1,078). Connor is a fringe top-10 overall fantasy player and ranks second at left wing behind Brady Tkachuk of the Ottawa Senators.

3. Mark Scheifele, F

NHL.com point projection: 81

Scheifele had an NHL career-high 87 points (39 goals, 48 assists), 11 game-winning goals and 25 power-play points in 82 games last season. The four-time 30 goal-scorer has scored at least 25 goals in eight of his past 10 seasons, had at least 40 assists in six of his past seven seasons, and had double-digit power-play goals with at least 20 power-play points in four of his past seven seasons. The 32-year-old is a fringe top-20 forward and top-10 center in NHL.com's rankings.

4. Gabriel Vilardi, F

NHL.com point projection: 67

The 26-year-old set NHL career highs in goals (27), assists (34), points (61), power-play goals, (12; led team), power-play points (25), shots on goal (130), games played (71) and ice time per game (18:08) last season, his second with Winnipeg. Vilardi has had at least 20 goals and an 18.0 percent shooting percentage in each of his past three seasons. He's ranked just outside the top 50 among forwards and should be considered around pick No. 70 overall.

5. Josh Morrissey, D

NHL.com point projection: 60

Morrissey's 62 points (14 goals, 48 assists) in 80 games last season ranked eighth among NHL defensemen. Morrissey, who led the Jets in ice time per game (24:23) last season, has had at least 60 points in each of his past three seasons and at least double-digit goals, 170-plus shots on goal and 100-plus blocks in four straight seasons. Since 2021-22, Morrissey is tied for seventh at his position in goals (52 in 318 games) and ranks eighth among defensemen in points (244) and power-play points (84). The 30-year-old is a fringe top-10 defenseman in NHL.com's rankings.

Other WPG players on preseason fantasy draft lists:

Breakout candidate: Cole Perfetti, F (point projection: 60)

Bounce-back candidate: Jonathan Toews, F (point projection: 45)

Draft bargain: Neal Pionk, D (point projection: 40)

Deep sleeper: Gustav Nyquist, F (point projection: 40)

Blocks and hits specialists: Luke Schenn, D

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/winnipeg-jets-need-power-play-to-produce-by-committee-1.2354129>

Jets need power play to produce by committee

By Travis Yost

As the 2025-26 season looms, a burning question hangs over the Winnipeg Jets: Can the team sustain its new-found power-play dominance, or was last season's success a mirage?

Winnipeg cruised to the Presidents' Trophy in the 2024-25 regular season with 116 points, finishing with a staggering +86 goal differential. To achieve such impressive regular season results, you need to dominate on both ends of the ice and the Jets did just that. They finished fifth in league scoring and, with the best goaltender on the planet in Connor Hellebuyck manning their crease, conceded a league-low 191 goals.

Unfortunately for the Jets organization, another strong regular season ended with another disappointing playoff exit, with the team dispatched by the Dallas Stars in the second round.

Since that loss, there have been several notable personnel changes. The most significant would be the loss of winger Nikolaj Ehlers, a near point-per-game player who signed a lucrative contract with the Carolina Hurricanes. Winnipeg is going to try and replace some of that production through committee, bringing in Gustav Nyquist, Tanner Pearson, and the ultimate wild card in 37-year-old Jonathan Toews.

The loss of Ehlers may sting on paper, but I think Winnipeg is still deep enough to overcome his departure. What may be harder to overcome is a potentially meaningful regression in power-play performance, something surely on the mind of assistant coach and power play guru Davis Payne.

The Jets power play was unstoppable in 2024-25, averaging 11.1 goals per 60 minutes, which, for context, has only been trumped by the 2022-23 Edmonton Oilers and the 2023-24 Tampa Bay Lightning.

But it's a notable outlier performance:

There are many contextual reasons for why teams could see a meaningful shift in performance from one season to the next (and in both directions). In most cases, it concerns a significant change in on-ice personnel. But that wasn't the case for Winnipeg. Just looking year over year, Winnipeg dressed many of the same faces, and yet rate scoring nearly doubled.

Every returning forward saw a sizable jump in year-over-year scoring on the power play –Ehlers was six goals better (having been shut out the year prior), Mark Scheifele was five goals better, Kyle Connor and Alex Iafallo four goals better, and Gabe Vilardi three goals better (his 12 power-play markers were top 20 league wide and on par with Ottawa's Brady Tkachuk and Detroit's Patrick Kane).

With such little change in deployment (though I think Vilardi's development into a lethal scoring weapon is notable), I turned my attention to structural changes ushered in by Payne.

During the season, Payne talked about his philosophy on the power play with a specific emphasis on attacking through the neutral zone and spacing in the offensive third. When you watch their first unit on video, you see this manifest over and over – playing with control and attacking between the circles feverishly, illustrated beautifully by the shot profiles over at HockeyViz.

Just look at the year-over-year change:

The hope here is Winnipeg's power play can stave off major performance regression because their surge in productivity coincided with a coaching change and meaningful shift in tactics. Real goal scoring may have nearly doubled, but expected goal rates jumped considerably too, and it did so with just about the same complement of skaters year over year. Losing a player the calibre of Ehlers stings, but this is a group that has already shown it can produce by committee.

Winnipeg is good enough everywhere else to weather a power play regression if it comes. But if this group is capable of repeating last year's explosive run on the man advantage, they have a shot to finish near the top of the NHL standings once more. And perhaps this time, parlay a new-found strength into something more meaningful when postseason hockey begins.

Data via Natural Stat Trick, NHL.com, Evolving Hockey, HockeyViz

The Fourth Period

<https://www.thefourthperiod.com/pagnotta/eyes-on-mcdavid-kaprizov-others-as-september-arrives>

EYES ON MCDAVID, KAPRIZOV & OTHERS AS SEPTEMBER ARRIVES

TORONTO, ON — With Labour Day now in the rearview mirror, players, coaches and staff across the NHL are flocking to their respective cities in preparation for training camps that begin in a couple of weeks.

As the Florida Panthers look to defend their back-to-back titles, just about every other NHL club will try to dethrone them as Stanley Cup Champions come June 2026.

With a lot of hype in a number of markets, plenty of focus will also be on some of the game's top stars now in the final year of their respective contracts.

Connor McDavid, Kirill Kaprizov, Jack Eichel, Kyle Connor, Adrian Kempe, Martin Necas, Artemi Panarin, Alex Tuch, Filip Gustavsson and Alex Ovechkin lead the list of stars needing new deals, and they'll be stealing much of the headlines once camps get underway.

With the salary cap going up to at least \$104 million next season and at least \$13.5 million after that, the League's in a good spot and the players are waiting to cash in. Many of them are also waiting on McDavid to set the market.

Last week at the Hockey Canada Orientation Camp, McDavid reiterated he has "every intention to win in Edmonton," and added "I'm going to take my time" to evaluate his position before committing to a new contract.

"All options are on the table. We're going through it," he said. "I don't have a preference either way (on timing). I want to the (Oilers) to be as focused and dialed in and ready to roll from Day 1 as much as possible, and we don't need any distractions."

McDavid didn't rule out a max-term contract, but the belief is he may end up in the three-to-five-year range once the dust settles on an expected extension. Naturally, the longer it takes to come to terms on a new deal, the greater the spotlight on the topic becomes. I have every indication that McDavid will re-up with Edmonton on some type of extension, but when it up to him.

And as McDavid's camp begin their negotiations with the Oilers, players like Eichel and Kaprizov may choose to wait until that situation is settled before finalizing their deals.

The Minnesota Wild are prepared to pitch Kaprizov a significant contract and those conversations are expected as early as this week. Word out there suggests an eight-year deal worth in between \$120 million and \$130 million, which would put his AAV north of \$15 million and potentially around or over \$16 million.

With Mitch Marner locked into an eight-year deal in Vegas at an AAV of \$12 million, the Golden Knights know the floor for Eichel. Just how much more, though, is the question.

Eichel tallied 94 points last season, the first time he has cracked 90+ points in his career. Yes, Vegas benefits from being in an income tax free state, and that will lessen the cap blow, but the Knights will need to step up with a significant offer. Between his offensive capabilities and his two-way style at the pivot, Eichel's next deal may sit around \$13 million in that market.

Talks between the Winnipeg Jets and Connor's camp are also expected to pick up as early as this week, and his next deal will start with a \$1 followed by at least seven zeroes, while over there summer there seemed to be a financial gap between Kempe and the Los Angeles Kings – and I'm not sure that has closed much, so far.

Kempe is looking for a deal in the \$10 million AAV range over eight years, while the Kings started talks under the \$9 million mark. With Anze Kopitar likely playing in his last NHL season, the Kings want to compete this season and getting Kempe locked into a new deal is important.

Circling back to McDavid, it would surprise no one if his deal hovered around the \$17 million AAV mark on a mid-term deal, but does a shorter term result in an even higher AAV? Those discussions start soon.

HERE AND THERE

- Chatting with Flames captain Mikael Backlund in Milan 10 days ago, it is clear he is confident he will be sticking around Calgary after his current contract expires. There's work to be done, but an extension, at some point, seems expected.
- Also on the Flames, I'm told contract talks with restricted free agent youngster Connor Zary are "getting closer" on a three-year deal, but there is still work to be done.
- The Dallas Stars and Jason Robertson's camp are expected to pick up contract talks now that the calendar has flipped to September. He's eligible to become an RFA next July.
- In Toronto, after going the summer without negotiating, sources tell me the Maple Leafs have now started contract extension discussions with goaltender Anthony Stolarz.
- Also on the Leafs, forwards David Kampf and Calle Jarnkrok remain available for trade.
- As our pal Anthony Di Marco reported, the New York Islanders have added Ian Laperriere to their scouting department.
- There are several teams, including the Philadelphia Flyers, interested in goaltender Carter Hart, but they continue to wait on the NHL's decision to determine when he is eligible to play.
- Expect to hear Mario Ferraro's name out there again this season, likely in the second half, as teams will look to add to their blueline for their playoff runs.