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<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/2026-nhl-draft-chat-with-craig-button>

2026 NHL Draft chat with Craig Button

By Jamie Thomas

With the NHL Draft now less than a month away, the Winnipeg Jets are facing a major decision with the eighth overall pick. Should they stay put and add another top prospect to the system, or use the selection as a trade chip to help a team ready to contend right now? As part of our continuing draft coverage leading up to this summer's event in Buffalo, I caught up with TSN Director of Scouting Craig Button to get his thoughts on what the Jets should do. One of hockey's most respected evaluators, Button believes Winnipeg should seriously consider moving the pick in an effort to strengthen a roster built to win immediately.

A few weeks ago, during the Draft Lottery we found out that the Jets would be picking eighth overall. You said at that time, they should trade the pick as part of a package to bring in a 2C, do you still feel that way?

Button: Absolutely, I think that nothing has changed for the Winnipeg Jets with respect to the type of players and the type of team they have, and most importantly, what they need, and it's not coming from the draft, and I believe that every stone should be turned over, every effort should be made to explore the opportunities, options to get a second line center, every single one now, if you've exhausted them all again. Well, then I guess you got to go and make the eighth pick, but I don't think the Winnipeg's objective should be the eighth pick. And when you have Hellebuyck and you have Morrissey, you have Scheifele and you have Connor and you have Lowry and you have Vilardi, and this really good team that completely fell short this year, and they completely fell short because of because of areas in their lineup that were that were missing, and there's no other way to put it, missing. So now the opportunity exists in a different way, and I don't think that a player you're going to draft in this year's draft is going to help you this year, next year, maybe not even the year after.

Obviously as a draft and develop organization, trying to win the Stanley Cup has forced the Jets to give up a big part of their future by trading draft picks. Does Kevin Cheveldayoff have a choice here other than to give up the future (2026 first round pick) again to go for the Cup?

Button: In an ideal world, you'd like to keep both. Guess what? The ideal world doesn't exist. And there's too many examples of it, whether it be Kevin Cheveldayoff's former team in Chicago, they found themselves in a spot because of their focus with their really good players, whether it be the Vegas Golden Knights, whether it be the Dallas Stars, whether it be the Colorado Avalanche, that's your reality. I love what Nathan McKinnon said post Olympics, and I'm going to imagine he's probably going to say the same thing post Stanley Cup playoffs. You can't fight reality. This is the reality for the Winnipeg Jets. Yeah, right there in front of you, it's right there in terms of going after it. And if you don't go after it, then then you're settling, and you're settling for something. I think that what will always leave you falling short.

Pierre LeBrun reported recently that the San Jose Sharks and Chicago Blackhawks are open to trading their second and fourth overall picks respectively. What would the cost be to move into those spots?

Button: I don't think the second and fourth picks, whoever they are, are ready to come and help the Winnipeg Jets, either. This isn't Macklin Celebrini, Matthew Schaefer coming into the draft. These players have really good potential and in time will be really good players, but Jack Hughes, who was the first overall pick, took him a good year and a half before he was able to find his footing in the league. Forget about becoming a player that was really helping the team, move forward. That was the first overall pick, just because of where he was at that particular moment in time. The cost? Okay, you know why high picks don't get traded? It's because the teams at the high picks ask for exorbitant prices.

Should the Jets end up holding onto their pick, you had them taking Boston University centre Tynan Lawrence. What do you see in him?

Button: Well, I see a really well-balanced second line center, somebody that can give you offense and give you defense, but he's not the only one. There's some really good centres, I love Viggo Bjorck, I have him very high in the draft, but I've seen the draft unfold a number of times where a player that might not be as tall kind of gets a little bit pushed aside, and you think about Cole Perfetti, and I'll use Cole as a perfect example, he went 10th in the draft. He was a really good player coming up, and teams picking ahead of the Jets that year in the draft. 'Well, Cole, like, he's not big, he's not this. Go look at some of the players who got picked before him, guys that weren't that aren't even NHL players. So, could that happen to Viggo Bjorck, right? I think Tynan offers a lot, Alexander Command, Oliver Suvanto. Now, I'm not one to say you should just take a centre there, like if you had somebody that you think is a better player as a winger or as a defenseman, take them, but if it's close and you, you want to start to work within specific areas of your prospect pool that you want to fill, that's when I would say, okay, Tynan Lawrence, or some of those other centers fit.

Let's go back to a few years ago, you had Colby Barlow (who the Jets took 18th overall) as one of you top rated players in that draft. He just finished his first year of pro hockey, how did you see his development path unfolding?

Button: It's not so much what I saw in terms of his development path, it's about understanding that each player's development path can be different. Colby had some issues with his back that I think impacted him. So, the example I will describe here is Gabe Vilardi. Gabe Vilardi was a high draft pick (11th overall, 2017), he had some issues early on in his career with some back issues. You're developing, you're maturing physically, structurally and now you watch Gabe play, and Gabe's a really good player, and because he's healthy, and everything came together maybe a little bit later than he would have liked, forget about what the team is like. I think Colby can be a very similar type of player to Gabe Vilardi. I've watched Colby for too long, his leadership. Yeah, you can look at the numbers and say he struggled, and why isn't he in the NHL right away? Well, every player's path is different, but I still believe, and even watching Colby this year, I still see things in his game that were evident when he was drafted in the first round, that I think make him a good player, and I think you just have to be patient, and that's why I use Gabe Vilardi as an example, I guess what I would call growing pains. I have a common refrain, I call them the three natural laws of maturity, physical, mental, and emotional, and you can't speed them up.

In terms of development, we are seeing more and more prospects playing in both the CHL and the NCAA. Is this a good thing for these prospects?

Button: Well, I think we need a lot more evidence. I think players have to evaluate why they may be taking this path and I'll give you an example here to kind of outline where I'm at. Noah

Hanifin and Zach Werenski are both born in 1997. Werenski could win the Norris Trophy this year. Certainly, we know that he's a superb player. His contracts coming up. You could argue that Werenski is going to be a 12–13-million-dollar player. Okay, Noah Hanifin's, a \$7.25 million player. So, you do the math on the difference there now. Noah had to get to Boston College, had to get to the NHL. Was he able to develop those areas of his game that would allow him to be in the higher tax bracket, shall we say. He didn't. And now you're trying to do it at the highest level. And now Zach Werenski, on the other hand, did. Agents and players better start thinking along those lines. You might think that there's something quicker there for you. I'll be very clear here, I don't understand why a player like Keaton Verhoeff, at 17 years of age, would leave a great coach like James Patrick (from Victoria of the WHL) to go play in the NCAA, I think it was the wrong move for Keaton Verhoeff's development. So now, where does Keaton find himself? Like, is Keaton gonna find himself in the Noah Hanifin bracket, and in a number of years' time? And if I said to a player, 'Hey, just be patient, slow down, like you don't have to get somewhere yesterday.' Noah Hanifin and Zach Werenski, we're talking about a five to six million dollar difference when it gets down to if we want to measure things in wins, losses and dollars.

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/canada-off-to-semifinals-at-worlds-scheifele-adds-two-assists>

***Canada off to semifinals at Worlds, Scheifele adds two assists
Scheifele assisted on game winning goal by Macklin Celebrini in 4-0 win over USA***

By Jamie Thomas

Mark Scheifele assisted on two goals including the game winner by Macklin Celebrini as Canada beat USA 4-0 to advance to the semifinals of the 2026 World Hockey Championships.

Canada will face Finland in the semifinals on Saturday.

It didn't take Canada long to open the scoring as Scheifele found Celebrini at the American blueline, Celebrini walked in and beat Devin Cooley high on the power play at 1:29.

Canada added to that lead halfway through the second period, Scheifele spotted Dylan Holloway open in the neutral zone, Holloway skated into the American zone and had his first shot attempt blocked but followed up and scored on Cooley for a two-goal lead.

Jet Greaves put on a show in the third period with several highlight reel saves including two on Matt Coronato. Canada got two empty net goals from Connor Brown and Sidney Crosby for the 4-0 win.

Scheifele, Gabe Vilardi and Dylan DeMelo will face Jet teammate Ville Heinola and Finland at 1 CT on Saturday. Nino Niederreiter and Switzerland get Norway in the other semifinal, you can watch that at 8:20 CT.

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/scheifele-scores-ot-winner-canada-beats-norway-at-whc>

Scheifele scores OT winner, Canada beats Norway at WHC

By Jamie Thomas

Mark Scheifele scored the winning goal 29 seconds into overtime as Canada knocked off feisty Norway 6-5 to remain unbeaten after four games at the 2026 World Hockey Championships in Switzerland.

Scheifele's game winning tally gave him the hat-trick to go with an assist for his first points of the tournament.

"Yeah, I felt a little bit snake bitten in the games before, but we have such a great team," said Scheifele told the TSN broadcast.

"Just a resilient effort by everyone, it was awesome to get the winner."

Norway jumped out to a 2-0 first period lead on goals by Eskild Bakke Olsen and Johannes Johannesen but Scheifele scored two goals 4:20 apart to even the score before the end of the first period.

In the second period, Canada once again trailed 3-2 before Gabe Vilardi jumped on a Scheifele rebound and tied the game at three on the power play.

The Canadians took their first lead of the contest 31 seconds into the third period thanks to Dylan Cozens who made it 4-3. But Norway stormed back with two goals almost two minutes apart to take the lead again before Ryan O'Reilly tied the game with 1:39 left.

Cue Scheifele's heroics in overtime, as he snuck in behind the Norwegian defence and finished off a pass from Oilers defenceman Evan Bouchard for the winner.

"That wasn't how we drew it up that's for sure," said Scheifele.

"But give credit to Norway, they played a hard game, they got pucks to the net, they worked hard, they played us difficult, but it was nice to get the winner out of that one."

Canada will now face Slovakia tomorrow at 9:20 CT.

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/2026-draft-chat-with-mike-morreale>

2026 NHL Draft chat with Mike Morreale

By Jamie Thomas

With the NHL Draft now just over a month away, the Winnipeg Jets are preparing to make a major decision with the eighth overall pick. As we continue our coverage leading up to this summer's draft in Buffalo, I caught up with Mike Morreale of NHL.com — a longtime draft insider who has spent decades covering the NHL's next generation of stars. Morreale also co-hosts the NHL Draft Class podcast alongside Adam Kimelman, making him one of the most plugged-in voices ahead of draft day.

You and Adam Kimelman released your mock draft immediately after the NHL Draft Lottery, obviously you both have different takes on who is going to go where, can you understand why two scouts would argue about a player and what they see and don't see?

Morreale: Yeah, I've been involved with NHL Central Scouting, as you know, since I've been with the league since 2008. And it was the late E. J. McGuire, when he was director of Central Scouting, he allowed me and Adam to join the final meetings to be in the meeting room with the scouts. I think that's. I know I think it started actually in 2010. Since Adam is deputy managing editor, he's got other tasks to do on the desk and stuff. So, I've been going every year since then. But it's very, very interesting to hear the debate that goes on in particular, like, for instance, like Gavin McKenna this year there was no debate. It was unanimous, number one pick for the North American skaters, Ivar Stenberg, on the international side, Alberts Smits, the defenseman, gave him a little bit of a run for his money. But Stenberg was number one there. So, it's just the debates on skating, on style, on just the impact that these kids might have on an NHL roster. And there are undersized defensemen in this draft this year like Tommy Bleyl of Moncton, Xavier Villeneuve from Blainville. And it's interesting to hear the scouts say, 'yeah, they may be undersized, but are you going to make that mistake again? You know, waiting for Lane Hutson in the second round when you can get him in the first round.' I think we're going to see a lot more undersized defense. This is kind of interesting. There wasn't a defenseman under six-foot drafted last year.

From the beginning of the draft season, who has jumped up your draft board the most? Like who's been a pleasant surprise for you?

Yeah, it would have to be, it would have to be Bleyl, the kid from Moncton. I mean he's broken or set all sorts of records this year at Moncton for what he's done. I mean the thing about him is when he started out the season, no one really knew much about him except the fact that he was maybe a late second round, early third round selection. That's where Central had him at the midterm ranks in January. And then as the season wore on, he just kind of shot up, 81 points. He led all Q skaters in assists this season with 68. He set the Q league records for most points in a single season by a rookie defenseman. The 81 points surpassed Gaston Therrien who had 77 in 77-78. He's just a real pleasant surprise. Produces offense. Despite being 5'11", maybe 160, he goes north, south, and he goes straight forward and he'll blow by you. And he might be the best skater in the draft, to be honest with you, real fluid. He's just like floating on the ice, doesn't break a sweat. He can quarterback a power play, makes a ton of plays, but can also defend well with his feet if you beat him one on one. He has real good recovery speed, good quickness. He takes the good angle. So, his gaps are real, real good. And a fantastic puck mover. I've spoken to a lot of scouts the last two weeks, and this is a guy that's going up the ranks. Some of them even said to me that had didn't have a first-round grade. They were like, 'we were considering maybe we'd be able to get him early second, but they're like, forget it now, like, he's going first round.'

Teams like the San Jose Sharks, Chicago Blackhawks and Calgary Flames have been rebuilding and stocking their prospect cupboards for a while now. With San Jose picking second, Chicago fourth and Calgary sixth, do you think one — or maybe even two — of these teams could trade their first-round picks?

Morreale: I mean, you look at what (Macklin) Celebrini's done, you got Michael Misa, you got Will Smith, William Eklund, I mean, they're stockpiling the forward cupboard. Stenberg to me is the second-best player in this draft. So, if there's a team that's willing to take that chance, like

for instance, the Blackhawks might want a guy like Stenberg, right? So maybe the Blackhawks trade up, maybe San Jose trades down. I, I, I'd be, if San Jose wants to grab that elite level defenseman and there are some great defensemen to be had in this draft and there could be five or six taken in the top 10, top 12 picks. So, if San Jose wanted to move down. But it's so difficult to do that too, right? Because you know, the other team, they'll be looking for some type of asset in addition to the draft pick. So, it's a tough thing to do. As far as the Blackhawks go, I could just see them staying put and grabbed one of the defensemen at number four. If a Chase Reid is there or Carson Carels of Prince George is there, two great D guys. Reid from Sault Ste. Marie is a right shot guy, can move pucks, play minutes. He would help future proof the position and reduce pressure on the young players in Chicago. And then the Flames, as you mentioned, at 6, I had them taken Viggo Bjorck from Djurgardens in Sweden. I think their top priority is to add an offensive presence after forward Matt Coronato led them with 45 points last year, so they didn't have a player over 50 points. And Bjorck, despite being undersized, he goes about 5'9", 177- easily one of the hardest workers in this draft class. And that's one of the things that I've learned over the years when I'm watching prospects and trying to evaluate and writing stuff in my notebook. Like what makes an undersized player like Lane Hutson, a Logan Stankoven, what makes them be able to play the way they play in the NHL? And it's the compete. It's just to compete if you're an undersized player. And I'm just saying that because that's Bjorck here. If you can compete and do it with structure and consistency and a work ethic that just drives the opposing team crazy, you should be in that top mix of players. There are other taller, bigger, stouter centermen in this draft, but I don't think there's one that works as hard as Viggo Bjorck.

Okay, in your mock draft right after the NHL Draft Lottery, you have Daxon Rudolph going to the Jets at eight. What, what do you like about the Prince Albert defenseman?

Morreale: I mean he's got a little bit of everything with the way he's been able to play this year. I think the one thing that really stands out about him is the fact that he makes the game kind of look so easy. He likes to join the rush, just makes things happen, has a real good understanding of the offensive zone, sees the ice well, thinks the game at a high level, can make that great stretch pass, very good, fluid skater, a real heavy shot and he can defend well with his stick. I think the best comparison I got for Daxon is like a Brandon Montour type of player, I think he finished third among Dub defenseman in points this year, 78, finished fourth in power play points, 35. I mean for defenseman, as long as you have the smarts, the IQ and the production on the power play, those are three big things that scouts and GMs want in their defenseman. And this kid's got size too. 6'3", 206, I know he's a right-handed shot, so I think if he's there for the Jets, I think that'd be a great pick for them.

A couple wild-card names for you, winger Ethan Belchetz from Windsor and Oliver Suvanto, a centreman from Finland.

Morreale: Well, I mean Belchetz, he had that injury in March, ended his season. Yeah. So, I mean all the scouts that I've spoken to have said that this is probably one of the more interesting players in this draft. Obviously, he's a power forward, really high ceiling, he can do a lot of damage, really tough to contain, low in the trenches, comfortable with the puck on his stick. And I think he has a lot more hockey sense than he's given credit for and his skating is very good for a player of his size. He's made a lot of improvement in his agility and his footwork. Real polish for a big kid. And he's a real unicorn because of his high-level skill. Real skilled at the puck, good vision and he's a potential top line guy as a power play contributor. So, all things that you'd want in a prospect and 6'5", 228, that's fantastic if you're looking for kind of a hybrid of like a Rick Nash or a Todd Bertuzzi type of player. Suvanto, I like this year playing in Liga. He's one of the more complete, a real mature 17-year-old center. I know that J-P Vuorinen (NHL

Director of European Scouting) told me that not since Alexander Barkov have we seen a 17-year-old play this well and do this well. Now the scoring isn't there. You look at the numbers too, 2-9-11 and 48 games, you think to yourself, 'geez, where is that?' But he's just trusted in a lot of roles for that club and it's a strong team (Tappara), real powerhouse club. So, that's when you look at the numbers, you got to take into consideration maybe he's not getting the best ice time, maybe he's not playing with the top players there as well. So. But he's highly effective in face-offs, battles, defensive coverage. He's a natural two-way player, real reliable, intelligent. I rarely saw him make mistakes, in support of both ends of the ice. And he can create space for teammates because of his size. That's a 6'3", 207-pound frame.

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11869701/analysis-winnipeg-jets-dont-require-change-between-the-pipes/>

ANALYSIS: Winnipeg Jets don't require change between the pipes

By Paul Edmonds CJOB

For all of the heavy lifting expected this off-season to get the Jets back to the Stanley Cup playoffs next year, the one area the team's hockey operations department likely won't dedicate too much time to is goaltending.

Sure, life without Connor Hellebuyck, as mentioned here previously, is closer than ever before, but there's zero chance his address changes without at least a redemption tour starting next September.

As for his backup, Eric Comrie?

He does require a new contract to remain with the team as his current deal expires July 1, but that piece of hockey business should be a formality for Comrie's camp and for those on Carlton Street entrusted to build next year's roster.

A quick look at Comrie's numbers from this past season would indicate a slip in proficiency, but also remember his 25 appearances were more than ever before in his NHL career and a good chunk of those came while assuming the starting job as Hellebuyck recovered from injury.

Over his six years with the Jets, the soon-to-be 31-year-old has been the ultimate soldier. His work ethic rivals few, he's a near-perfect teammate, a good goaltender, and his family loves living here.

In other words, there is no reason for the Jets brass to start a search to find his replacement. It's really Comrie's job to retain, and a two-year extension with a modest raise would undoubtedly consummate another deal, which, if you're counting, would be Comrie's sixth contract with the Jets over his professional career.

The other aspect to Comrie remaining with Winnipeg for at least another year would be to provide some additional time for goaltending prospects Dom DeVincentiis and Thomas Milic to continue their progression in the American Hockey League.

Re-signing Comrie makes a lot of sense for many reasons for the Jets and it's probably exactly what they're thinking, too.

After all, backup goaltending wasn't a problem for Winnipeg in 2025-26, which means all of the heavy lifting to improve the team should be applied elsewhere this off-season.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11862568/analysis-nikolaj-ehlers-winnipeg-jets/>

ANALYSIS: Loss of Nikolaj Ehlers continues to haunt Winnipeg Jets

By Kelly Moore CJOB

ANALYSIS: Loss of Nikolaj Ehlers continues to haunt Winnipeg Jets - imageView image in full screen

All season long, the departure of Nikolaj Ehlers and the effect it had on the Winnipeg Jets was a major talking point in this market.

Ehlers' impact for the Carolina Hurricanes in the playoffs has not quieted that conversation to any degree.

It was quite the performance by the guy they call Fly for Carolina on Saturday night.

He scored a highlight-reel goal in the second period when he raced to a loose puck in the neutral zone and out-maneuvred Lane Hutson and Cole Caufield on a rush into the slot before beating Jakub Dobes five-hole to snap a 1-all tie.

And then the breakneck speed that thrilled Jets fans for a decade was on full display for the overtime game winner when Ehlers took a pass in open ice in full flight and snapped a shot past Dobes, blocker side.

Depending on what happens the rest of the way, that goal may be circled as one of those critical moments for the Hurricanes, who won for only the second time in their last 11 conference final appearances.

And at the same time, it's almost like pouring even more salt into an open wound for Jets fans — reopening that can of worms about the unexplained reasons why Ehlers felt he needed to move on from the franchise that drafted him to get a fresh start.

The most popular observation is that he was deployed unfairly, held back, so to speak, by coaches Paul Maurice, Rick Bowness and Scott Arniel. And yet here Ehlers is, thriving as we speak — playing on Carolina's third line.

On one hand, Winnipeg hockey fans could and should be happy for the "Dashing Dane." But the way this past season unfolded for the Jets, that would be a painful proposition.

It's almost like, for these past five weeks since general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff and Arniel spoke at their exit interviews, the organization has attempted to take on an "out of sight, out of mind" approach to perhaps lower the temperature in the room.

But when Ehlers does what he did on Saturday night, the heat will remain on full blast.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11859755/scheifele-hat-trick-canada-edges-norway-worlds/>

Scheifele completes hat trick in overtime as Canada edges Norway 6-5 at worlds

By Staff The Canadian Press

Mark Scheifele scored his third goal of the game in overtime, and Canada narrowly avoided an upset with a 6-5 win over Norway on Thursday at the world hockey championship.

Scheifele scored the winner off a slick three-way passing play from Evan Bouchard and Macklin Celebrini.

“It felt good (to score),” said Scheifele, who had yet to register a point heading into Thursday’s game. “I felt a little snake-bitten in the last few games, but we have such a great team. It was such a resilient effort by everyone, and it was awesome to get the winner.

“Today’s win certainly was not how we drew things up, but give credit to Norway because they played a hard game and got pucks to our net.”

Norway took a 5-4 lead midway through the third period on goals just under two minutes apart from Noah Steen and Tinus Luc Koblar.

The Canadians pulled goaltender Cam Talbot for an extra attacker with two minutes 15 seconds remaining, and the move paid off when Ryan O’Reilly scored to send the game to overtime.

Scheifele also had an assist for a four-point game. Scheifele’s Winnipeg Jets teammate Gabriel Vilardi added a goal and an assist for Canada, while Dylan Cozens also scored.

Bouchard had three assists.

Talbot allowed five goals on 19 shots.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11856645/analysis-cole-perfetti-next-contract-winnipeg-jets/>

ANALYSIS: Cole Perfetti’s next contract a conundrum for Winnipeg Jets

By Paul Edmonds CJOB

Among the extensive list of decisions the Winnipeg Jets front office will need to make this off-season, the one involving Cole Perfetti could be the most fascinating.

Set to become a restricted free agent for the second time in his career on July 1, Perfetti’s next contract — and where it lands in terms of both money and length — will be challenging to predict.

Of course, there are several avenues this process could take — anything from a second straight two-year bridge deal to a long-term agreement that will keep the 24-year-old in Winnipeg into his 30s.

Now, based on his past performance sheet, there is nothing to suggest the Jets will reach out and offer anything close to a five-year deal or more, which will then force the former first-round draft pick to again bet on himself with something in the neighbourhood of a one- or two-year agreement that then gets him to unrestricted free agency.

That new contract will assuredly include a raise on the \$3.2 million he made each of the last two seasons, but the complexity of determining a satisfactory market value for both parties is where this gets complicated. After all, Perfetti is a difficult player to evaluate.

Following a career-high 50 points last season and posting nearly 20 goals in each of the last two years, an ankle injury this year stunted him offensively and those numbers dropped considerably. In other words, what is his true value? And has he reached his ceiling, or is his production still trending toward a real breakout year in what would be his fifth full-time NHL season coming up in September?

And for the record, it's not like the Ontario product hasn't been given an opportunity, as his top-six forward position with power-play time cannot be overlooked. But is there still more there? Is he a 25- or 30-goal scorer at some point?

TheAHL.com

<https://theahl.com/news/bauer-personifies-moose-jets-commitment-to-community>

Bauer personifies Moose, Jets commitment to community

By Patrick Williams, TheAHL.com Features Writer

Anyone watching the Manitoba Moose quickly can see what Tyrel Bauer brings on the ice.

The Alberta-born defenseman is a throwback. Steady defensively and quick to defend his teammates, the 6-foot-4, 216-pound Bauer has become a fan favorite at Canada Life Centre, racking up 401 penalty minutes in 214 games.

In junior hockey, he was a captain by his third season in the Western Hockey League. And he has emerged as a leader with the Moose as well.

Off the ice, though, he's a softie. That's why the AHL, along with representatives from IOA and American Specialty, selected him the winner of the Yanick Dupré Memorial Award for this season. The award, given to a player for "outstanding contributions to his local community and charitable organizations," honors Yanick Dupré, a Hershey Bears forward who passed away at only 24 years old in 1997 after a battle with leukemia.

Bauer has immersed himself in Winnipeg life through his four seasons in the city. He has twice been selected as Manitoba's team winner of the IOA/American Specialty AHL Man of the Year award, and has joined Jimmy Oligny (2022-23) and Jimmy Roy (2002-03) as Dupré Award winners from the Moose.

"This is a really, really special award for a lot of reasons," Bauer said. "When I got the call, I did some research on Yanick and what he meant to the community and his story. I'm very honored to be recognized and try to carry it out in his name."

To start, the 24-year-old Bauer has collaborated with the Kinship and Foster Family Network of Manitoba on a program that brings foster families to Moose home games. There, they meet with Bauer and also take home gift bags from the team.

Then there is Project 11, a major deal in and around the Jets organization and Winnipeg. It's part of the late Rick Rypien's legacy, and several long-time members of the organization had strong relationships with Rypien going back to his days with the original incarnation of the Moose in the city. Part of the True North Youth Foundation, Project 11 stresses education on mental health. Bauer dove into that initiative as well, coaching an under-11 boys team at the Winnipeg Jets Hockey Academy, plus serving as a speaker at TNYF's annual gala.

Geography means that the Moose have one of the AHL's most demanding road schedules, and time can be difficult to find during the 72-game regular season. But Bauer also fit in a classroom visit with St. Amant, a non-profit that helps people in the province handling developmental disabilities, autism, and acquired brain injury. His community itinerary also holiday gift drives, classroom, autograph sessions, and playing at the Moose Backyard Rink Contest.

It's a heavy workload beyond an already-demanding schedule, but Bauer takes it on happily.

Oligny was captain of the Moose during Bauer's rookie season and made a strong impression.

"As much as I learned on the ice, I learned from him off," Bauer recalled of his former defense pairing partner. "A really good man...at building relationships, bringing young guys in, and welcoming me and making me feel like a part of the team.

"And then seeing him at these community events and how he interacted with people, how he interacted with kids or adults or fans in just such a genuine way really taught me a lot, enough that I wanted to when Jimmy did leave, I took over his foster family program. I asked him, I said, 'Hey, what are you planning to do with this? Could I take it over in your name?' And he was all on board. You could see the excitement just to see the program keep going because of what it meant to the community."

Bauer also recognizes a very cut-and-dried fact: nothing in the hockey business works without the fans and communities that support the support at every level. Whether that is grassroots work out on the ice with kids or a Jets game at Canada Life Centre, fans make this sport go.

"As a hockey player," Bauer said, "we are in a really unique position to give back to the community. I mean, our job is to play hockey, but we wouldn't have that if it wasn't for the fans in the community cheering us on and supporting us. So, to be able to give back to them and just show our genuine appreciation for what they do for us is special."

AHL players like Bauer are young, healthy, pursuing a life's dream, and have a bright future. But as Dupré's passing in 1997 drove home, life can turn difficult quickly – whether it's because of illness, addiction, financial stress, or other pain. For all of his early success and just being one call-up away from the NHL, Bauer has remained quite cognizant of those realities outside of the rink.

"Everybody is going through something else, something in their life," Bauer said. "They have their own challenges unique to them. People just want to feel connected. They want to feel heard. They want to feel seen, and that's a universal experience for everybody. Being able to interact and have fun and just have some laughs or a smile can really go a long way."

Like Oligny, Bauer now is one of those veteran voices inside the Moose dressing room. He will continue to spread that message he heard when he first came to the Moose.

“It’s really about bringing the community together, and I’m just really grateful to have that opportunity. We all have a lot of pride to play in Winnipeg.”

Daily Faceoff

<https://www.dailyfaceoff.com/news/winnipeg-jets-connor-hellebuyck-trade-rumors-contender>

Can the Jets move on from Hellebuyck and still be a contender?

By Hunter Crowther

The Winnipeg Jets followed their Presidents’ Trophy-winning 2024-25 campaign with a disappointing 2025-26 season, going 35-35-12 with 82 points, finishing seventh in the Central Division and 26th in the league.

One name who struggled in the regular season was Connor Hellebuyck, who went 23-23-11 with an .895 save percentage, well below the all-time performance he was able to produce during his Hart Trophy-winning campaign the year before. While the 33-year-old is signed through the 2030-31 campaign, some are wondering if a change of scenery would serve the three-time Vezina Trophy winner a world of good.

The Sheet host Jeff Marek pondered on his show Tuesday a potential trade that would send Hellebuyck to the Buffalo Sabres in exchange for defenseman Owen Power, plus other assets. While the idea may rub some Jets fans the wrong way, the team may have to face the reality that it’s time to make a decision with their No. 1 netminder.

On Wednesday’s episode of Daily Faceoff LIVE, Tyler Yaremchuk and former NHL goaltender Carter Hutton discuss the Jets’ upcoming offseason and whether now is the time to move on their franchise goalie.

Tyler Yaremchuk: I think there’s probably been some amount of conversation about Hellebuyck maybe wanting a fresh start. Again, when there’s smoke, there’s fire. An interesting part for the Jets is, can you trade Hellebuyck and still build a contending roster without the best goalie in the world?

Carter Hutton: I don’t know if you can. I know Jeff Marek brought up a potential trade with the Sabres, and it depends what you get back. But they have an aging corps and Kyle Connor’s \$12-million per year contract kicks in next year, and he’s going to be turning 30. Mark Scheifele is 33, Adam Lowry is 33, and all of a sudden, you eliminate that X-factor to try and make a run in a star-studded Central Division.

If I’m a free agent, and I’m looking to go somewhere, and now you take Connor Hellebuyck out of the equation ... why the heck would you want to go there?

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/05/19/bauer-making-an-impact-on-and-off-the-ice>

Bauer making an impact on and off the ice Moose defenceman named AHL's Yanick Dupré Memorial Award recipient

By: Mike McIntyre

You don't have to tell the Manitoba Moose how much of an impact Tyrel Bauer has on and off the ice — the club experiences it on a regular basis.

But now the rest of the hockey world knows it after Bauer was named the winner of the Yanick Dupré Memorial Award for the 2025-26 season.

This prestigious honour has been presented annually since 1998 to an AHL player for his contributions to his local community and charities. It is selected by the AHL and representatives from two partner organizations from among 32 individual team Man of the Year honorees.

Bauer, 24, just wrapped up his fourth pro season of hockey with the Moose after being selected by the Jets in the sixth round of the 2020 draft. The Alberta native is one of the toughest customers in the league, racking up 401 penalty minutes so far in his career while also chipping in five goals and 16 assists over 214 AHL games.

The former captain of the Seattle Thunderbirds is a fearless shot blocker, will drop the gloves on a dime to protect his teammates and is a natural leader. He appeared on the cusp of his first NHL call-up late this past season, only to suffer an injury.

Don't be surprised to see him get some time with the Jets starting in the fall.

When he's not lacing up the skates, Bauer is keeping busy with numerous community initiatives. He works with the Kinship and Foster Family Network of Manitoba which allows several foster families over the course of the season to attend Moose games, receive gift bags from the team and meet Bauer after the game.

Bauer also served as a volunteer coach for a U-11 boys' team at the Winnipeg Jets Hockey Academy this past year and made appearances at events for Project 11 — the True North Youth Foundation's initiative in honour of former Jets and Moose player Rick Rypien — to help educate youth on the importance of mental health.

Bauer also visited residents at St. Amant, a non-profit organization which supports more than 5,000 Manitobans with developmental disabilities, autism and acquired brain injuries, and participated in several team events including holiday gift drives, school reading appearances and autograph sessions.

The AHL's annual Man of the Year award is named after Dupré, who died in 1997 at the age of 24 following a 16-month battle with leukemia. Dupré, an NHL draft pick of the Philadelphia Flyers in 1991, played four seasons in the AHL with the Hershey Bears and was an AHL All-Star in 1995.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/05/19/jets-defence-cant-rest>

Jets defence can't rest

Salomonsson's surgery calls for club to make blue-line changes in off-season

By: Ken Wiebe

It won't be a major overhaul for the Winnipeg Jets blue line, but there's certainly an opportunity to make some improvements to the back end this summer for general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff and company.

Roster construction is top of mind as the Jets and 28 other teams continue to watch what's happening in the Stanley Cup race.

While the NHL is a copycat league, the teams that have advanced to the Western and Eastern Conference finals — the Colorado Avalanche, Vegas Golden Knights, Carolina Hurricanes and Montreal Canadiens — don't exactly fit under the one-size-fits-all template.

After taking a look at the second-line centre position, it's time to identify another area that should welcome some additional talent, whether that's via trade or free agency.

A high-end defenceman might ultimately be available if the Jets use the eighth overall pick in the 2026 NHL Draft, but it's unlikely that player can jump immediately into the NHL lineup this fall.

From watching the Manitoba Moose during the club's seven games in the Calder Cup playoffs, Jets management would have learned that Isaak Phillips continues to look like a capable depth option — whether that's competing for a job on the third pairing or somewhere in the seventh to eighth slot in the organization.

A lot of that slotting will depend on what happens during the next few months, but Phillips logged big minutes and had significant responsibility against the Milwaukee Admirals and Grand Rapids Griffins.

The other Moose blue-liner that boosted his stock was Tyrel Bauer, who is no longer exclusively known for his willingness to drop the gloves.

Coupled with the shoulder surgery to Elias Salomonsson — who has emerged as someone who is ready to take on a bigger role in the NHL once he returns to full health — the door may be slightly more ajar for both Bauer and Phillips in training camp.

At the bare minimum, they're at the front of the line for an early-season recall.

But that's not to suggest the internal options are going to be given a clear path to win the job.

The Jets have six blue-liners under contract that ended the season with the Jets: Josh Morrissey, Dylan DeMelo, Dylan Samberg, Neal Pionk, Haydn Fleury and Salomonsson — whose timeline for recovery means he won't likely be ready for opening night.

Morrissey, Samberg and DeMelo all have two seasons left before they have the ability to become unrestricted free agents in the summer of 2028.

Fleury, who was limited to 38 games last season due to injury, has one season left on his contract while Pionk's six-year pact expires in the summer of 2029.

The Jets have some promising prospects including 2025 first-rounder Sascha Boumedienne and Alfons Freij, who helped Sweden capture a gold medal at the world junior hockey championship in January.

But Boumedienne has transferred to Ohio State for his junior season in the AHL, while Freij appeared in five games with the Moose this spring after finishing up in Sweden and he's going to require some seasoning in the minors before he's ready to compete for NHL duty.

Edison Engle, chosen by the Jets in the sixth round of the 2025 NHL Draft, is coming off a solid Ontario Hockey League season with the Brantford Bulldogs and is heading to Western Michigan this fall, so he's at least a year or two away from turning pro.

Which brings us to six blue-liners who could appeal to the Jets this off-season:

Colton Parayko

St. Louis Blues

Contract status: Signed through 2029-30, AAV of US\$6.5 million

Age: 33

2025-26 stats: 77 GP, 4 G, 14 A, 18 P, 23 PIM

The skinny: A Stanley Cup champion in 2019 who has partnered with Morrissey at the 4 Nations Face-Off and at the 2026 Olympics, Parayko would add size and experience to the right side. He would also bring cost certainty for the next four seasons, which aligns with many members of the Jets' core group. His ranginess also makes him an effective penalty killer and his booming shot from the point could appeal to the second power-play unit. Parayko used his full-movement clause to turn down a potential deal to the Buffalo Sabres, but might a move to Winnipeg have more appeal to someone who is from Edmonton? The cost of acquisition (should Parayko be interested in joining the Jets) would be the key here. But adding someone like Parayko could make it more appealing for Morrissey and Samberg to extend as early as early as next summer. From where we sit, moving the 8th overall pick in 2026 shouldn't be on the table, but the Jets have other options that should make it appealing for the Blues to consider.

Michael Kesselring

Buffalo Sabres

Contract status: Pending RFA

Age: 26

2025-26 stats: 34 GP, 0 G, 2 A, 2 P, 50 PIM

The skinny: There's no doubt it was a disappointing campaign for the mobile D-man, as an ankle injury limited his ability to make much of a contribution. Being limited to one playoff game isn't necessarily an indicator of how head coach Lindy Ruff or the organization feels about the long-term forecast for Kesselring, but it's also important to remember Jarmo Kekalainen wasn't the GM who traded for him either. It's possible he could be available via trade, especially since he needs a new contract. A lot of teams will view him as a bounce-back candidate as he's just a year removed from posting seven goals and 29 points in 82 games with Utah and stands six-foot-five.

Antti Tuomisto

Detroit Red Wings (Grand Rapids Griffins)

Contract status: Group 6 pending UFA

Age: 25

2025-26 stats: 68 GP, 8 G, 21 A, 29 P, 34 PIM

The skinny: A second round pick (35th overall) of the Red Wings in 2019, this Finnish D-man logged heavy minutes on the top pairing against the Moose during the Calder Cup playoffs. He moves well for someone in a six-foot-five, 218-pound frame, makes a strong first pass and plays a sturdy game. Since the Red Wings have a crowded right side, including prospects Axel Sandin-Pellikka and Anton Johansson, Tuomisto is likely looking for a place with opportunity and the Jets might be able to provide that.

Brenden Dillon

New Jersey Devils

Contract status: Signed through 2026-27, AAV of US\$4 million

Age: 35 (turns 36 in November)

2025-26 stats: 82 GP, 3 G, 12 A, 15 P, 89 PIM

The skinny: He's someone who never really wanted to leave the Jets organization and someone who could check some important boxes with a potential reunion. Not only was he an important part of the culture change that occurred, Dillon still plays a physical game and is willing to stand up for his teammates when the situation arises. He averaged 18 minutes per game last season and still moves well for someone with 1,056 NHL games on his resumé to go along with 84 more during the post-season. Dillon is also someone who could help the Jets penalty kill.

Mario Ferraro

San Jose Sharks

Contract status: Pending UFA

Age: 27 (turns 28 in September)

2025-26 stats: 82 GP, 7 G, 16 A, 23 P, 35 PIM

The skinny: Known most as a stay at home blue-liner who plays a physical game, the second round pick (49th overall) of the Sharks in 2017 is someone who was believed to be on the Jets' radar before they acquired Luke Schenn at the deadline in 2025. Ferraro isn't a big point producer (he's eclipsed 20 points only twice in his seven NHL seasons) but he averaged just over 21 minutes per game and never finished with fewer than 120 hits, so he fits what the Jets are trying to do in terms of being harder to play against. Plus he can help the penalty kill.

Brett Kulak

Colorado Avalanche

Contract status: Pending UFA

Age: 32

2025-26 stats: 83 GP, 1 G, 11 A, 12 P, 38 PIM (with Oilers, Penguins and Avalanche)

The skinny: After making a solid contribution to the Edmonton Oilers during consecutive runs to the Stanley Cup finals, this versatile blue-liner has done an excellent job since he was acquired from the Pittsburgh Penguins for Sam Girard and a 2028 second-rounder. Kulak might not be flashy, but his play seems to elevate as the stakes rise and his ability to play either the left or right side makes him even more valuable. His series-clinching goal in OT against the Minnesota Wild should only boost his stock as he prepares to hit the open market.

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/possible-trade-destinations-for-maple-leafs-defenceman-morgan-rielly/>

Possible trade destinations for Maple Leafs defenceman Morgan Rielly

By Ryan Dixon

Morgan Rielly has spent May trying to help Canada have a positive experience at the world championship. And when the blue-liner returns from his international sojourn, there's some sense the months ahead might see him on the way to a new club team.

Change is all around the Toronto Maple Leafs, and with a new GM (John Chayka) in place and a coaching vacancy that will (presumably) be filled soon, one thing that remains constant is speculation that Rielly — the longest-tenured Leaf — has played his last game in blue and white.

You don't have to scroll down too far on Nick Kypreos' first off-season trade board to find Rielly's name. The Sportsnet insider believes the new Leafs regime is still open to dealing Rielly and that the 32-year-old — despite full no-move protection — wouldn't stand in the way of the right move.

From Kyper:

"The way it's been told to me is that Toronto is looking into things, Rielly is aware of it, and that he will be presented with a few options if they arise. Rielly still has no-movement protection for the next two years, but the belief is that wouldn't be a major hurdle to overcome."

Rielly has four years left on a contract that accounts for an AAV of \$7.5 million. In all likelihood, a team trading for him would assume full responsibility for those dollars — it's hard to imagine the Leafs retaining salary — with the understanding that you probably don't have to give up the sun and the moon to get him.

Acquiring Rielly would be a bet that a guy with good mobility and a ton of playoff experience in a high-pressure market could thrive with a fresh start that allows him to relinquish years' worth of baggage.

Don't forget, for all the ups and downs the regular season has brought him in Toronto, Rielly has typically risen to the occasion once the playoffs begin. Since the 2022 post-season, only five defencemen with at least 25 playoff games played in that time have a better points-per-game mark than Rielly's 0.74. That handful is Evan Bouchard (1.09), Cale Makar (1.07), Adam Fox (0.91), Victor Hedman (0.84) and Devon Toews (0.79).

That's pretty serious company to keep, and when you consider the fact Rielly is still in his early 30s, it's easy to see why a club might want to be the second squad Rielly skates for in his long NHL career.

Of course, we don't know exactly what the fifth-overall pick would favour in terms of a new landing spot. Presumably, he'd like to join a team that's either an established contender or

clearly on the rise. What we do know is Rielly's negotiated protection ensures he's signing off on any new home.

With that in mind, let's play matchmaker and see which teams might be a fit.

Winnipeg Jets

The Jets always have to go about team-building a little different due to the fact the club is not a top free-agent destination, nor is it the type of place every established NHLer is going to waive a no-trade for.

But what about a kid from Western Canada who played major junior hockey in Moose Jaw?

Despite a down season, the Jets remain all-in on winning with an over-30 core. The team's top need is a second-line centre, but no sense waiting around to see what happens there.

If you look at Winnipeg's defence, there's a job just waiting for Rielly as an over-qualified third-pair guy on the left side. With a top four of Josh Morrissey, Dylan DeMelo (Rielly's Canadian partner at the worlds), Dylan Samberg and Neal Pionk locked in, Rielly could jump on the third pair with right-shooting Elias Salomonsson and help bring along the talented 21-year-old (who won't actually be ready for training camp thanks to off-season shoulder surgery).

What a top-to-bottom blueline that could be for the Jets.

Canadian Press

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/hurricanes-nikolaj-ehlers-comfortable-in-carolina-after-decade-with-jets/>

Hurricanes' Nikolaj Ehlers 'comfortable' in Carolina after decade with Jets

By Canadian Press

Nikolaj Ehlers was in need of direction.

Not on the ice or in his career — just the basic life stuff.

After playing 10 seasons with the Winnipeg Jets, signing with the Carolina Hurricanes last summer was a massive change.

Ehlers knew countryman and goaltender Frederik Andersen from their time with the Danish national team. Other than that, everything was new.

"The ride to the rink, where the grocery store is, the guys, the organization, the playing style, all of that is different," said the 30-year-old winger, whose club is taking on the Montreal Canadiens in the NHL's Eastern Conference final. "The guys made it easier for me in the room, and all the outside stuff that comes over time, but I feel great here now.

"I feel comfortable."

That showed on the ice in the regular season following a slow start.

Ehlers, who signed a six-year, \$51-million contract in free agency July 3, was held off the scoresheet in his first five games and didn't find the back of the net until early November before setting career-highs in goals (26), assists (45) and points (71).

Then something clicked on a line centred by Carolina captain Jordan Staal and accented by grinding forward Jordan Martinook, as Ehlers finished second on the team in scoring behind Sebastian Aho.

"He's a great player," Hurricanes head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "Threw him with (Staal) just to kind of get him in a different look. I didn't know if it really was gonna translate to anything ... took off and had a great year.

"He's got a real good flair. He's that one player for us that's really speedy and (has) just a little different dynamic."

Carolina plays a unique, aggressive style that includes pressuring opponents all over the ice.

Martinook was impressed with how Ehlers, who had two goals and two assists in nine playoff contests this spring heading into Saturday's Game 2 at Lenovo Center against the Canadiens, adapted following a decade in Winnipeg.

"Been unbelievable," Martinook said. "Seamlessly fit into our group, and then on the ice it's just fun to watch him. His skating, his skill, it's cool to be out there with him.

"He's brought an element that we were missing."

Staal said a fine-tuned hockey sense allows Ehlers to be an effective 200-foot player for a roster that swept the Ottawa Senators and Philadelphia Flyers before facing Montreal for the right to play in the Stanley Cup final.

"Plays smart without the puck as well as with the puck," he said. "Able to create something out of nothing with his offensive abilities. But I think without the puck, he understands the game and understands where you want to play."

The defensive side was something Brind'Amour hadn't counted on when Carolina landed Ehlers.

"His two-way game has been something we didn't anticipate," he said. "But his dynamic offensive play certainly stood out."

Martinook said that while Ehlers doesn't have the biggest frame at six feet and 190 pounds, the No. 9 pick at the 2014 draft can be sneaky physical thanks to his quickness.

"He can see red a little bit," Martinook said. "Not the biggest guy, but he's powerful and can get to places where other guys can't as fast."

Getting to work is also now much less of a challenge.

"I don't need to use the GPS to get to the rink anymore," Ehlers said with a grin. "It's been a great year."

The Athletic

https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7309748/2026/05/27/winnipeg-jets-prospects-nhl-ready/?unlocked_article_code=1.IIA.fcq8.tdHjwZ7FD9dl&smid=ta-android-share

Which Jets prospects are NHL-ready? Winnipeg's projected U23 roles for 2026-27

By Murat Ates

Kevin Cheveldayoff has often told media that there's opportunity for young players with the Winnipeg Jets. He has a habit of signing veteran depth players, who his coaches often give ice time at young players' expense.

It's as though Cheveldayoff dares his top prospects to surpass replacement level veterans, only for his coaches to decide those veterans are better "win now" options. It may also be that the prospects simply haven't been ready, but that narrative began to shift at the end of last season, when playing time opened up for Brad Lambert, Elias Salomonsson, Isak Rosen, Brayden Yager, and Nikita Chibrikov.

Which of these players can help next season's Jets? Who's ready for a bigger role? And when Cheveldayoff's offseason work is done, which Jets aged 23 or younger will end up earning NHL jobs?

Here are best- and worst-case scenarios, my projections, and a look at one potential 2026-27 Jets roster.

Brad Lambert, RW/C, 22

Best reasonable case: Lambert puts his speed on display early and often. He cuts wide and into the middle with equal aplomb, making defenders guess more often than when he was primarily a perimeter player and beating them as a result. He channels his speed into forechecking and backchecks with such vigor such that he earns Scott Arniel's trust. He plays a second line, second power play unit role, and scores close to 50 points.

Worst reasonable case: Lambert struggles to create space for himself despite his outlandish speed. Whether he's unable to sell outside routes before surprising with inside movement or it's more about strength in battle situations, Lambert fails to score enough to earn a top-six job or defend well enough to play on Winnipeg's third line.

Projection: Lambert sticks in the NHL for the full season, finishing around ninth or 10th in even-strength minutes while getting second-unit power play time. He is an inconsistent scorer, finishing 82 games with 30-40 points.

Elias Salomonsson, RD, 21

Best reasonable case: Salomonsson recovers from shoulder surgery ahead of schedule. He opens the season on the Jets' third pair, playing with a more effective partner than incumbent Haydn Fleury. The Jets commit to Salomonsson as an NHL player, despite his waivers exemption (and any early-season rust). He gets stronger, despite or perhaps as a response to his injury, and becomes a top-four option who impacts the game in all three zones. Fans are incensed that he's not used as Josh Morrissey's partner on the top pair.

Worst reasonable case: Salomonsson misses camp and gets assigned to Manitoba, where he's slow to get going and fails to assert himself as Winnipeg's early call-up option. By midseason, Winnipeg is committed to its wild card push and won't try Salomonsson ahead of veterans like Colin Miller or Jacob Bryson, who it signed in the offseason to compensate for Salomonsson's absence. He stagnates.

Projection: Salomonsson starts slowly — maybe even in the AHL, pending health — but earns his NHL job all over again. By season's end, he's the Jets' clear No. 5, sometimes outplaying Dylan DeMelo and Neal Pionk.

Isak Rosén, RW/LW, 23

Best reasonable case: Rosén's first full NHL season provides secondary scoring and tenacity that helps win games when that scoring goes cold. He plays with the same confidence he's demonstrated in the AHL, waterbugging his way into scoring areas and finding dangerous opportunities to shoot. Rosén's season proves that the point-per-game AHL scorer can play a top-six role in the NHL, too.

Worst reasonable case: Rosén's lack of strength or straight-line speed makes it hard for him to find soft ice. Despite good lateral movement, fast hands, and a good shot, Rosén can't drive play on his own and plays too far down the lineup to produce offence. The "AAAA" designation — too good for the AHL, not good enough for the NHL — that critics hurled at Rosén in Buffalo finds its way to Winnipeg.

Projection: Rosén plays a bottom-six role and receives second-unit power play time. His numbers don't pop. Some of Rosén's goals are pretty and fans maintain hope in his top-six upside.

Nikita Chibrikov, RW/LW, 23

Best reasonable case: Chibrikov stays healthy. He earns an NHL job, such that the Jets don't have to risk waivers, and then keeps his work boots on. He makes himself an absolute pain to play against and adds offence from the bottom six. He's a dogged forechecker, getting pucks out and keeping pucks in, and looks like he could become a complementary possession player like Mathieu Perreault, with a better shot.

Worst reasonable case: Chibrikov is unable to turn his work rate into NHL results. He's not fast or physically effective enough to win a job on Adam Lowry's line and doesn't score enough for a top-six job, so he stagnates on Winnipeg's fourth line (or worse, the press box).

Projection: Chibrikov is less likely than Lambert or Rosén to surprise on the Jets' secondary scoring line, despite starting last season on the second line. Depth minutes, the press box, a waivers claim, and passage through waivers are all possibilities.

Danny Zhilkin, C, 22

Best reasonable case: Danny Zhilkin turns his short NHL audition into an impressive Jets camp — better than his already-impressive work in 2024 and 2025. His tireless motor, and growing ability to beat NHL players in battles correspond with a newfound Jets prioritization of youth. He steals a fourth-line centre job from a veteran to start the season and keeps it while playing a key role on Winnipeg's PK.

Worst reasonable case: Winnipeg places Zhilkin on waivers with the (reasonable) expectation that he clears. He's claimed (by a team you hate) and goes on to star in a Michael Eyssimont cover band, angering opponents and mucking it up in a depth role for somebody else.

Projection: Winnipeg retains Vladislav Namestnikov for its fourth-line centre job. Zhilkin clears waivers and continues to develop with the Moose.

Brayden Yager, C, 21

Best reasonable case: Brayden Yager accomplishes everything projected for Zhilkin a moment ago, but with more scoring. His tenacity on the fourth line earns him second unit power play time, where he produces a little bit of offence. By season's end, Yager plays right wing on Lowry's line and fans wonder if the Jets have found their next captain. His numbers don't pop but Yager's defensive commitment makes him look like a potential shutdown centre.

Worst reasonable case: Winnipeg assigns Yager to Manitoba, where he's unable to build on last season's 30 points in 68 AHL games. Manitoba continues to dole out icetime in an oddly democratic fashion, limiting Yager's offensive opportunities such that his projection drops from "middle six centre" to "probable NHL player."

Projection: Yager is assigned to the Moose and excels, putting together a quietly great AHL season, competing for the team lead in points. He earns a short Jets call-up and plays well in a depth capacity.

Garrett Brown, RD, 22

Best reasonable case: Garrett Brown continues his late-blooming, upwardly mobile trajectory as a prospect, winning an NHL job in his first attempt. The 6-foot-4 right-shot defenceman steps into the spot left vacant by Salomonsson's injury and surprises us with great mobility, efficient puck retrievals, and crisp breakout passes. Winnipeg protects its third pair from elite opposition such that Brown is able to win his minutes right out of the gate.

Worst reasonable case: Brown struggles to adapt to professional hockey, not only in the NHL but at the AHL level, too. The two-time NCAA champion finds himself fighting for ice on a crowded Moose blue line, which is led by a demoted Salomonsson and Tyrel Bauer. Brown's development stagnates in the absence of icetime such that his trajectory as a prospect is (prematurely) deemed to have stalled.

Projection: Brown plays a top four role for Manitoba. Growing pains exist but he's ready for the role. He does not receive NHL consideration until he's played a full year in the AHL, following the footsteps of fellow three-year college defenceman Dylan Samberg.

Dom DiVincentiis, G, 22

Best reasonable case: Dom DiVincentiis turns his dominant AHL playoffs into a backup role for Winnipeg — and posts solid numbers despite the quantum leap.

Worst reasonable case: DiVincentiis returns to Manitoba, where Thomas Milic has taken his game to another level. Manitoba's timeshare turns into a hierarchical arrangement with DiVincentiis as the clear No. 2.

Projection: DiVincentiis battles with (and supports) Milic as the two young netminders rule Manitoba's net.

Thomas Milic, G, 23

Best reasonable case: Same as above: For whatever reason, the Jets leave their No. 2 job open. Milic, who had the superior regular-season save percentage (.905) and received more starts (41) than DiVincentiis, is first in line. He excels.

Worst reasonable case: Milic returns to the Moose to find that DiVincentiis has taken his game to another level. Milic becomes the No. 2.

Projection: The timeshare continues.

Winnipeg's projected end-of-season 2026-27 roster

Not every player's best-case scenario can come true. Some exist in direct conflict, as in the case of Milic and DiVincentiis, Salomonsson and Brown, and Lambert and Rosén. Keeping that in mind, here's my projected Jets' end-of-season roster:

We've reunited Kyle Connor, Mark Scheifele, and Gabriel Vilardi, while re-establishing one version of Lowry's shutdown line for Arniel. This makes room for Lambert to join the top six. Salomonsson wins his job back on defence, playing with an as-of-yet unsigned UFA, and Eric Comrie returns in goal. The No. 8 pick, which we'll say Winnipeg makes, is not projected to make the team. This is informed by recent Jets history, but if the offseason provides a surprise forward upgrade, it will bump Barron or Lambert down the lineup.

What's your take on the 2026-27 Jets? Let us know in the comments.

https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7301044/2026/05/25/winnipeg-jets-perfect-offseason-2026-draft-trades/?unlocked_article_code=1.IFA.OOd8.xns2ZqNWJ3c4&smid=ta-android-share

A perfect Winnipeg Jets offseason starts with a reality check and good scouting

By Murat Ates

Nikolaj Ehlers' two-goal performance, including the overtime winner, for the Carolina Hurricanes in Game 2 of the Eastern Conference final, inspires the re-litigation of his Winnipeg Jets tenure.

"What fools the Jets were to let him walk," some say.

"He was never a playoff player," say others.

By firing up the take machines about Winnipeg's past, we miss out on an important discussion about the future. Whether or not Ehlers' chaotic scoring style, neutral-zone zig-zags and offensive-zone loops culminated in your preferred brand of hockey, he is a useful tool in an argument Winnipeg needs to make with itself right now.

If the Jets are meant to have any success at all — if they're meant to make the playoffs and then win enough to establish themselves as legitimate contenders — they're going to need to get contributions from players at every position in their lineup. Ehlers' success, chaos and all, should remind us it is insufficient to look at some groups of players as "players who win" and others as "players who don't." Build a good enough team and you can win with anybody who helps — whatever their style of play, whatever their minutes, from Ehlers in Carolina, to Nate Schmidt and Paul Maurice in Florida, to Cole Perfetti and Kyle Connor in Winnipeg right now.

The Jets weren't eliminated in the second round last year because Ehlers or Connor or Mark Scheifele weren't this ineffable thing called a "winner." They weren't eliminated because they lacked some ethereal quality offered by the spirits of Luke Schenn, Tanner Pearson and Jonathan Toews. They lost because they didn't have enough great players to assure otherwise — and because hockey is a chaotic sport where one great team can beat another in six games if it gets off to a hot start and Mikko Rantanen scores a hat trick in Game 1.

The biggest problem wasn't Ehlers, Connor or Scheifele. It was that Winnipeg didn't have two more players as good as those guys were.

Coaching, deployment and systems all matter, too, but the biggest requirement for a team to win games is for it to have more good players than its opponent does. If Dylan Coghlan can go 1,615 days between NHL goals, including a season with the Jets and Moose, but then become Vegas' Game 1 hero against Colorado, the lesson has more to do with Vegas' roster quality buying him the opportunity to play in Round 3 at all than it is about Coghlan's intrinsic quality as a playoff magician.

There are clutch players in this world. They're worth celebrating. I think we try so hard to find them and then categorize them into neat, simple boxes that our emotions tend to write oversimplified (and often false!) narratives in our search.

Winnipeg's goal, in an ideal offseason, would be to favour a rational approach. It would be to add quality wherever the Jets can find it, while acknowledging the Jets are in tough on the UFA and trade markets. And it would be to accept incremental improvement, because a roster with multiple holes isn't going to be fixed by a single spectacular, nigh-mythical acquisition. Give Jack Eichel to the 2025 Jets and they're Stanley Cup favourites, but add him to the Jets' roster as it stands today and Winnipeg would still need to strive for improvement.

How do the Jets win this offseason and improve the roster they have today?

Win at the 2026 draft

There will be great prospects available to the Jets at No. 8, if they make the pick. There are compelling trade scenarios for that pick, too, with precedent including great work by the Montreal Canadiens to acquire Noah Dobson and by Carolina to acquire K'Andre Miller at last year's draft. There is even the possibility of trading up to No. 2, given San Jose GM Mike Grier's willingness to listen to offers.

I think Winnipeg doesn't have the trade chips to win that bidding war, but there are other ways to "win" the draft. The Jets have the following picks:

No. 8

No. 71

No. 116 (Edmonton's pick, acquired in a package from Buffalo for Logan Stanley and Luke Schenn)

No. 135

No. 167

No. 199

No. 220 (Buffalo's pick, acquired for Tanner Pearson)

The best asset, by far, is the first-round pick, so Winnipeg has to make an excellent decision about how to use it.

The simplest approach is to make the pick. I'm slowly buying into Viggo Björck hype, but also believe any of the top defencemen purported to be available — Alberts Smits, Keaton Verhoeff or Daxon Rudolph — would be a substantial upgrade to the Jets' prospect pool. Scheifele was taken No. 7 and Ehlers and Jacob Trouba each arrived at No. 9; there was a time Winnipeg hit consistent winners from exactly this range.

The most obvious route to gain value is to shop No. 8 for multiple other first-round picks. This would require Winnipeg to identify top players at, say, No. 15 and 31, and for the team that owns those picks — St. Louis, in this case — to buy into moving up. The Jets could then move the 31st pick for multiple second-round picks to increase their draft capital. Trading down for multiple picks is not a win-now move, but a team whose scouting and analytics departments worked in concert might find value here.

There is also the possibility of moving the No. 8 pick for a roster player — ideally a second-line centre like Marco Rossi or prospective versions of the same in past No. 5 picks Barrett Hayton or Kent Johnson. In our “win now” fantasy, they pick up the 23-year-old Johnson, who immediately sorts out any issues from a disappointing 2025-26 and surpasses his 57-point career high.

Our ideal “win long-term” play is to trade the No. 8 to St. Louis for Nos. 15 and 31. Winnipeg then selects top Kamloops Blazers scorer JP Hurlbert at No. 15, before trading the No. 31 pick to the Calgary Flames for picks No. 35 and No. 65. (This latter trade is rooted in real precedent; it mirrors a Hurricanes move with Chicago at the 2025 draft.) Hurlbert becomes a massive, Connor kind of hit, as unlikely as that may be in real life, because the Jets scouts have hit a home run as in their best days.

This second scenario looks like a futures play, but it has immediate value. Armed with Hurlbert and three more picks inside the top 75, Winnipeg can work toward getting help for its NHL roster.

Acquire at least one under-the-radar player who hits

Kevin Cheveldayoff acquired Buffalo's second-round pick in 2027 as part of the Stanley and Schenn trade and quickly alluded to the possibility that it gets moved. Is it possible to turn a second-round pick into a helpful NHL player on draft day?

There are precedents. The Philadelphia Flyers sent Ryan Poehling, a second and a fourth to the Anaheim Ducks for Trevor Zegras last summer. The Washington Capitals picked up Andrew Mangiapane — a player I thought would do better for them — at the 2024 draft for a second. Colorado got Ross Colton, who went on to score 40 points in 80 games and is now a third-line forward, for a second at the 2023 draft. Zegras is the most impressive of the three, but Winnipeg's roster leaves plenty of room for less-heralded upgrades.

Even the most optimistic outlook for this youth-leaning roster could use prime-aged help — particularly in the middle six:

Kyle Connor
Mark Scheifele
Gabriel Vilardi
Cole Perfetti
Morgan Barron
Brad Lambert

Nino Niederreiter
Adam Lowry
Isak Rosen
Cole Koepke
Vladislav Namestnikov
Alex Lafallo
Nikita Chibrikov
Josh Morrissey
Neal Pionk
Dylan Samberg
Dylan DeMelo
Haydn Fleury
Elias Salomonsson
Connor Hellebuyck

Previous second-line centre target articles have discussed the following players:

Connor McMichael, WSH
Mavrik Bourque, DAL
Peyton Krebs, BUF
Cole Sillinger, CBJ
Jesper Kotkaniemi, CAR

The ideal acquisition is a player just outside the top six on his team who isn't getting power-play time, but is capable of producing more if given more opportunity. Kotkaniemi is a couple of rungs below that — he's been a healthy scratch for the entirety of Carolina's playoff run — but the acquisition cost for a \$4.825 million AAV bottom-six forward should be cheap. Kotkaniemi continues to defend well, but his 28-point pace over his past three seasons leaves a lot to be desired.

Speaking of "should," Mavrik Bourque should be an easy decision for Dallas to keep, but there's a world in which cap constraints created by Jason Robertson's next contract make him a trade target. Connor McMichael is not a famous Capitals forward, but the 25-year-old RFA played a top-six role during what might have been Alex Ovechkin's last NHL season and scored 46 points in 78 games while doing it. Washington is probably not parting with him for a second-round pick.

Peyton Krebs continues to be interesting. The former Winnipeg Ice star averaged 13:02 per game at five-on-five during the regular season — third among regulars for Buffalo up front — without getting power-play time. The Sabres have Zach Benson to prioritize as an RFA; that plus Alex Tuch's UFA contract could eat up the entirety of their projected cap space. Krebs is not a dazzling offensive talent at the NHL level but provided stable secondary scoring for Buffalo with those heavy five-on-five minutes, scoring 39 points last season. He may hit the sweet spot of useful, affordable and available to the Jets.

Whether it's one of these names or a surprise acquisition, Winnipeg's perfect offseason would include adding a cheap, middle-six forward who surprises us all with how well he fits in.

Improvement from within

Call it Adam Lowry's return to form, turning a third line that was a drain on production this year back into a strength. Call it Perfetti transforming from secondary scorer to a play-driver in his own right, emerging as a 60-70 point player with the most consistent 82 games of his career.

Maybe it's Brad Lambert or Isak Rosén, whose 19 points in 83 games in the NHL (combined) don't inspire thoughts of top-six stardom yet.

Next year's Jets need to be able to brag about multiple breakthrough seasons in the same way so many 2025-26 Jets produced some of the worst point totals of their career. Elias Salomonsson seems like the obvious one to pick, but his shoulder surgery could affect his availability to start the season.

Weaponizing cap space this summer — and at the trade deadline

If you've perused The Athletic's 2026 free agency big board, you've noticed what we've all noticed: It's not the most inspiring group. Darren Raddysh, Rasmus Andersson and Alex Tuch are really good but they're not likely to be Winnipeg Jets. The \$104 million salary cap and relative lack of top-end talent available suggests a series of overpayments, too.

But cap space is one of Winnipeg's strengths heading into next season. The Jets have approximately \$20 million with which to sign Perfetti, Rosén, a backup goaltender and a seventh defenceman. If one were to earmark \$10 million for those players, the Jets would have \$10 million with which to go shopping this summer — if they plan to be a cap team.

One counterintuitive way of using that space would be to spend it inefficiently, attempting to win a free agent's services via a short-term overpayment. By this, I mean a big overpayment. Like, \$8 million AAV to Mason Marchment on a two-year deal.

Marchment, 30, is a shift-disturbing forward who's also scored at a 56-point pace over his past three seasons. He's huge, he's a pain to play against, and there's no one else like him on the roster. Evolving Hockey projects him to earn \$6.3 million AAV on a four-year contract, but we're getting him two-thirds of that money in half the time. Likely? No. Conceivable? Yes. As with every proposed solution in this piece, it's a gamble — not on a single grand-slam player who can fix everything that ails Winnipeg, but on one who might provide more value to a winning team than the existing roster can offer.

There isn't a single home-run swing on the following roster, but we've added two players from today's discussion — and have only spent cash and draft capital to make it so.

Kyle Connor

Mark Scheifele

Gabriel Vilardi

Mason Marchment

Kent Johnson

Cole Perfetti

Alex Iafallo

Adam Lowry

Brad Lambert

Cole Koepke

Morgan Barron

Isak Rosen

Nino Niederreiter

Vladislav Namestnikov

Nikita Chibrikov

Josh Morrissey

Neal Pionk

Dylan Samberg

Dylan DeMelo
Haydn Fleury
Elias Salomonsson
Garrett Brown
Connor Hellebuyck

The more realistic alternative? Challenge Winnipeg's veterans to flip the script on last season and earn the trade-deadline spending spree of their lives.

If Connor Hellebuyck wants the Jets to compete, he needs to post a .920 save percentage heading into the trade deadline. If Connor and Scheifele want help up front, they need to play the kind of defence that leads to them outscoring their opponents without Josh Morrissey on the ice, which they didn't do last season. The same goes to Lowry, whose offence disappeared, and prime-aged players with room to grow like Vilardi, Perfetti and Dylan Samberg.

If Winnipeg survives the Central Division, approaching the trade deadline with a playoff spot and an abundance of cap space after protecting it all season, then its players will have earned the "win-now" kind of investment that quite frankly doesn't make sense from here. A perfect offseason would require that realization by Jets brass combined with uniquely productive middle-of-the-roster additions. It would also require more creativity from Jets coaching than we saw in 2025-26.

Winnipeg has had that kind of success before in its very best days, whether at the draft or via unheralded veteran additions. It's not impossible. But the Jets need to get all of these things right just to give themselves the opportunity to do it at the trade deadline.

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Projecting Cole Perfetti's next contract with the Winnipeg Jets

By Murat Ates

Cole Perfetti has experienced miraculous playoff highs and ankle-twisting lows since his last contract negotiation.

The goal he scored in Game 7 against St. Louis set a new record as the latest Game 7 tying goal in NHL history. Then Nikolaj Ehlers' departure opened up a job on the Jets' top power play, allowing Perfetti to feast on a unit that led the NHL in efficiency one year ago. If anyone was going to have a breakout season, it was him, fresh off 50 points and starting the season with newfound playoff confidence.

Then a high ankle sprain took him out of the lineup. He scored just five points in his first 24 games to start the season and didn't look like the same clever, incisive player that had produced in a secondary scoring role the previous year. As his ankle healed and his confidence in it grew, Perfetti's scoring returned: he produced at a 50 points per 82 games rate from Jan. 1 through the end of the season. Add it all up, though, with the games missed due to injury, and Perfetti scored just 32 points in 68 games.

Now the two-year, \$3.25 million AAV bridge deal Perfetti signed in 2024 has come to an end — not with a massive breakout season but with a late return to form. He's 24 years old, continues to show poise with the puck, good hands, and great vision, but his poor counting stats from last season will hurt him.

Perfetti has more leverage this summer than he did two years ago. He's a restricted free agent with arbitration rights and his first crack at UFA status could come as soon as 2027. If he wanted to play hardball, he'd simply file for arbitration and then wait for the hearing. It would guarantee him a one-year contract, putting the Jets under pressure next summer, with him just one year away from UFA status. This is similar to the strategies employed by former Jets like Andrew Copp and Jacob Trouba, which each resulted in trades.

I don't think it's going to come to that. I project that the Jets will get Perfetti signed to a long-term contract, and it might age as a bargain, given Perfetti's injury-impacted year and the series of cap increases projected in the years to come. But what will it cost the Jets?

Today, we look at Perfetti's contract through four different lenses, starting with a Jets comparable, adding a list of the NHL's most recent RFAs, and then looking at two analytical models to project his most likely contract.

Gabriel Vilardi: An in-house comparable?

Two factors stopped the Jets from signing Perfetti to a long-term deal back in 2024. The first was that Perfetti's \$3.25 million AAV bridge deal kept his cap hit low, giving Winnipeg an opportunity to add contracts at the 2025 trade deadline. They took a serious run at Brock Nelson that would not have been possible had Perfetti been signed to a larger cap hit on a long term deal; the strategy is sound, even if the result was a failure.

The second reason was that Winnipeg was not yet sold on Perfetti's ceiling. He'd scored 75 points in 140 games at the time — similar to the 78 points in 152 games Gabriel Vilardi had scored prior to his \$3.4 million AAV bridge deal the previous summer — but Perfetti shared an injury history with Vilardi, too. Neither player had played a complete 82-game season prior to signing their bridge deals. In both cases, Winnipeg chose to wait and see.

In Vilardi's case, it cost them but worked out well, creating a \$7.5 million AAV contract the Jets are happy to pay. He followed up his 2023 bridge deal with poor health and good results, playing with Kyle Connor and Mark Scheifele on the first line and the top power play unit. He scored 97 points in 118 games in that role, then cashed in on the six year, \$7.5 million AAV contract that started in 2025-26.

Perfetti has scored 82 points in 150 games since signing his bridge deal. He played mostly with Ehlers and Vladislav Namestnikov in 2024-25, then a mixture of Vilardi, Adam Lowry, Jonathan Toews, and Namestnikov in 2025-26, which contributed to his decline in scoring. He also received some first-unit power play time, but didn't immediately become a mainstay on PP1 the way Vilardi did before him. You may also be aware that Winnipeg's power play scored 21 fewer goals this season than it did in 2024-25.

Does Vilardi's trajectory make things simple, then? Could it be as easy as taking Perfetti's points per game and giving him two-thirds of Vilardi's cap hit percentage? Perfetti is two years younger than Vilardi was when he signed his deal, but otherwise their draft pedigree and contract trajectories have been similar.

If so, then Perfetti is heading for a six-year, \$5.44 million AAV extension.

Alexis Lafrenière, Matt Coronato, and historical precedents

One other way to approach Perfetti's contract projections is to look at all of last summer's restricted free agents, pick out the ones who signed long-term contracts, and compare them to Perfetti's performance to date.

Here's a list of players drafted between 2019 and 2021 who signed long-term RFA contracts in 2025. I've also included each player's points per game in 2024-25 and in their career before signing their contracts.

Wyatt Johnston
5 x \$8.40 M
0.87
0.72
Matthew Knies
6 x \$7.75 M
0.74
0.58
JJ Peterka
5 x \$7.70 M
0.88
0.63
Alexis Lafreniere
7 x \$7.45 M
0.55
0.41
Dylan Guenther
8 x \$7.14 M
0.86
0.74
Mason McTavish
6 x \$7.00 M
0.68
0.74
Matt Coronato
7 x \$6.50 M
0.61
0.50
Cole Perfetti
TBD
0.47
0.54

A few items jump out. The first is that most of the top young RFAs who signed long-term deals last summer have produced more points than Perfetti has to date. He lags well behind top earner Wyatt Johnston, whose \$8.4 million AAV is not comparable for our purposes here. The second is that Dylan Guenther is underpaid relative to his peers and Utah did well to sign him so early in his career.

The third is that Perfetti's high ankle sprain could cost him a lot of money.

It's reductive to point solely to injury, knowing the trouble Winnipeg had with its secondary scoring this season — Toews, Lowry, and Namesnikov weren't a murderer's row of linemates for Perfetti to work with. It's also true that six out of seven players on the chart got more top unit power play time than he did. But the NHL is a league where players get paid for points and time on ice. Perfetti's injury and its impact on his season cost him points in his platform year and it will cost him money.

"If Perfetti scored five points in 24 games to start his season, he scored 27 points in 44 games to finish it," goes the counterargument. "That's the exact same, 50 points per 82 games scoring rate he put up in 2024-25, but this time he did it without Ehlers."

It's an important argument for fans and media: It reminds us that Perfetti did produce once he got healthy and should be thought of as a viable secondary scoring option despite his low point total. It's not an argument to give him JJ Peterka money. Take Perfetti's January through April scoring rate of 0.61 points per game to Kevin Cheveldayoff and he'll argue that Perfetti needs to stay healthy before getting that kind of AAV.

Perfetti's closest comparables among last summer's RFAs are Alexis Lafrenière and Matt Coronato. I suspect New York paid Lafrenière at least partly for his pedigree, but Coronato's seven year, \$6.50 million AAV contract is a sensible comparable. We'll add seven years at \$7.08 million AAV, via Coronato's contract adjusted for the \$104 million cap, to six years at \$5.44 million AAV, via Vilardi.

But what if we could look at all comparable contracts, predicting Perfetti's cap hit based on a sample size bigger than the seven RFA long-term deals from last summer? The models at Evolving Hockey and AFP Analytics can sort through hundreds of contracts instead.

Evolving Hockey and AFP Analytics

Evolving Hockey's contract projection model is really two models working in unison — one that predicts the length of a contract and one that predicts its value. If you want to pick it apart, read their glossary here. Here's what it projects for Perfetti's contract this summer:

Cole Perfetti

1

\$4.03 M

8%

2

\$4.49 M

15%

3

\$5.41 M

26%

4

\$5.76 M

24%

5

\$6.04 M

13%

6

\$6.46 M

7%
7
\$6.96 M
3%
8
\$7.64 M
5%

If Evolving Hockey's projections come true, Perfetti could be looking at a three or a four year contract worth \$5.4 million AAV or \$5.8 million AAV. Note that the cap hits increase as the contract gets longer, with the biggest jump between two and three years. That passes the common sense test, with Perfetti two years away from UFA eligibility. A player's UFA years cost more.

AFP Analytics presents two options for Perfetti's next deal — a long term (five year) contract and a one year deal. Sensibly, it avoids two years, which would walk Perfetti straight to free agency:

Cole Perfetti
1
\$4.30 M
5
\$6.40 M

There is little difference between the two models' view of Perfetti's one-year AAV, but AFP Analytics projects a higher AAV on a five-year deal.

We are now left with four projections:

- The Vilardi comp, using one and only one Jets teammate to project six years at \$5.44 million AAV
- The 2025 RFA list, choosing Coronato based on comparable point-per-game game rates to project seven years at \$7.01 million AAV
- Evolving Hockey, which projects a three or a four year contract between \$5.4 million and \$5.8 million AAV
- AFP Analytics, which projects a five year contract at \$6.4 million AAV

So what will Perfetti make? Let's call it a four-to-six-year deal at \$5.5 million to \$6.5 million AAV.

What it all really means

Back to real life for a minute. Cole Perfetti is a 24-year-old player coming off an injury-impacted season that deflated his point totals. Some players in that situation would push for a one year contract, betting they could crush their previous scoring rates and earn more money as a result.

When I asked Perfetti about his contract, he said that a long-term deal would be "a real honour" for him. He said it would be a sign that the team believed in him and I believed him when he said it. I don't think this is a situation that turns into a vitriolic arbitration case or an early exit, as in the Copp and Trouba examples. Even if he took a mercenary approach, he's 24; a six year contract extension would make him an unrestricted free agent in 2032, at 30 years old. He could earn close to \$40 million before then and cash in further at that time.

When I think from Winnipeg's perspective, Perfetti's step back in point production may be a fortunate bounce. If he signs a six-year deal at \$6.5 million AAV, then stays healthy and starts scoring 60 points per season, the contract will be a bargain. Even a \$6.5 million Perfetti would constitute a slightly smaller percentage of next season's \$104 million cap than Bryan Little's \$4.7 million AAV did in 2017-18. The flat cap era is over; it's increasing by roughly 10 percent per year.

In the end, budgets are about priorities. If Jets management is cynical about Perfetti's health or his ceiling, it might try to take more of a "wait and see" approach on a one- or a three-year deal. But I don't expect that kind of cynicism. The Jets have ample cap space, the UFA market is unforgiving, and Perfetti is Winnipeg's top RFA. The Jets are well-positioned to pay him through his 20s and to do well on a long-term contract if they choose.