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<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/11/20/not-every-reunion-is-warm-and-fuzzy>

Not every reunion is warm and fuzzy Jets shine light on former teammate protocol with Ehlers rolling into town

By: Mike McIntyre

With a sheepish grin, Neal Pionk confessed earlier this week to a long-held secret about former teammate Nikolaj Ehlers.

"I sat next to him on the plane for five years. I know how to get into his head," revealed the Winnipeg Jets defenceman.

Oh? Do tell.

"Not yet, not yet. I don't want him to figure it out. But he knows. He knows it's coming," Pionk warned.

He'll get his chance Friday night as Ehlers and his Carolina Hurricanes return to town for a regular-season matchup that has likely been circled on plenty of calendars, including those of the players involved.

"It'll be fun. Might have to give him a cross-check or two," Pionk said of Ehlers, who played 719 regular-season and playoff games with the Jets over 10 seasons before departing last summer in free agency.

Thing is, as much as he was joking around, there's plenty of truth to what he says. It would surprise absolutely no one if Pionk — who plays a hard-nose style of game — didn't push the boundaries of the NHL rule book at some point while trying to contain the guy known as "Fly."

Logan Stanley can be added to that list, too. The six-foot-seven Jets blue-liner — no stranger to physicality — said there will be no free passes should he catch Ehlers in the trolley tracks.

"It will be weird seeing him on the other side. Nikky was a fan favourite in the dressing room and good friend. But once the puck drops it will be business," said Stanley.

Which begs the question: How awkward is it to face someone you once went to battle with — someone you spent years beside on charter flights, in hotels, gyms and restaurants across the continent? Is there an unwritten code for situations like this?

A tour around the Jets dressing room quickly reinforced a common theme: It's not in a professional athlete's DNA to put personal relationships ahead of professional pursuits. Or, to put it more bluntly, self ahead of team.

"I think everyone gets it. You can go make up after the game. But in those 60 minutes, everyone knows the job at hand," said Tanner Pearson, who might face more ex-teammates than any other member of the Jets these days.

"I think everyone is grown up enough that when you go into a game, no matter how good of friends you are, you're still trying to come out on the winning side and help your team win. So be it whatever happens on the ice."

Just look at the 4 Nations Face-Off last winter in which players from Canada and the U.S. repeatedly dropped the gloves with each other in their round-robin game. This, despite the tournament happening during the middle of an NHL season with skaters from the same teams — such as Josh Morrissey, Kyle Connor and Connor Hellebuyck — on opposing sides.

"You're going to try to do everything you can to win," said Pearson. "It's kind of our breed, right? You put everything on the line."

Pearson, now 33, broke into the league in 2013 with the Los Angeles Kings, who drafted him 30th overall a year earlier. He spent parts of six seasons in L.A., winning a Stanley Cup as a rookie, before being dealt to Pittsburgh midway through the 2018-19 season.

"I still remember my first time going back there after the trade. That was definitely weird. (In the pre-game warmup) you had pucks flying across centre ice, with guys shooting me in the foot. Everybody was screwing with me," Pearson recalled, singling out Dustin Brown as the main perpetrator.

One of the videos saved on Pearson's phone shows him shoving Tyler Toffoli — a former Kings teammate and one of his best friends — during the heat of battle.

"It's a reminder that I bullied him," said Pearson.

After stops in Vancouver, Montreal, Vegas and now Winnipeg, Pearson has grown accustomed to seeing familiar faces on the other side.

"Probably the longer you're in the league, the more it becomes a (normal) thing," he said. "But it's always fun when you're playing good buddies. That never gets old. You always try to one up each other."

Just last month, Utah Mammoth forward Brandon Tanev took a healthy run at Stanley, and the Jets defenceman didn't look pleased in the moment. They had just been teammates last spring after Tanev arrived from Seattle at the trade deadline.

"It can be weird at some points, but when the puck drops you are playing for your team and the guys in your room," said Stanley.

"Battles like that happen. I actually went and said 'Hi' to him after the game and we laughed about it. In the heat of the moment I even gave him a little whack."

It's a regular sight to see former teammates catching up after games in the bowels of NHL arenas, the sweat on their faces barely dry. Pearson just did that last week in Vancouver with Quinn Hughes, with the pair sharing a laugh about a contested play that had occurred during the game.

"He thought he had me. I told him there was no way he had me," Pearson said of a scoring chance. There was a similar catch-up session earlier in the road trip with Anze Kopitar following a defeat in Los Angeles.

"I think that's what's so special about our league. Pretty much everyone is close and gets along really well," said Pearson. "You can pretty much text anyone at any time and go grab a beer after a game, maybe golf in the summer."

"You're going to try to do everything you can to win... It's kind of our breed, right? You put everything on the line."

Of course, not every reunion is warm and fuzzy. Jets forward Gabe Vilardi still harbours frustration over a collision with former Kings teammate Blake Lizotte two seasons ago that caused an MCL sprain and sidelined him for six weeks.

"I've played with (Lizotte) a lot. He's done a lot of little things like that," Vilardi fumed at the time.

"It's not an awkward fall. It's someone pushing your feet out from the back, my knee gets caught under me and then he tackles me. It's that simple. You make plays like that, it's a stupid play — and it's frustrating to think that guy sits in the box for two minutes and then I have to deal with what I've dealt with for the past month and a half."

Safe to say the two men don't exchange pleasantries after games these days. Like any workplace, not everyone gets along.

Athletes are fiercely competitive, which often brings out extra motivation when facing a former team or teammate.

"You don't want to give them anything. You want to make sure you play hard and hopefully they don't get anything," said veteran winger Nino Niederreiter. "There's no better feeling than scoring a goal against an old team. It's fun."

He's done plenty of that, especially against the Minnesota Wild, where he spent parts of six years. Niederreiter also gets a little extra spark facing former clubs Carolina, Nashville and the New York Islanders.

"It can be a very emotional time when you play an old teammate. They're friends, and many are almost part of your family," said Niederreiter, who had Hurricanes star forward Sebastian Aho over for dinner on Thursday night.

They'll quickly go from breaking bread together to battling against each other less than 24 hours later.

"At the end of the day, it doesn't matter who's on the opposite side. You have to play your game, and you have to play hard," said Niederreiter.

"You put the friendship aside, and then you see each other after the game and talk about certain moments that happened during the game, talk about how the new life is going."

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<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/the-jets-need-more-offence-from-the-defence-hurricanes-in-town-friday-night>

The Jets need more offence from the defence, Hurricanes in town Friday night

By Gordon Anderson

Plainly speaking, the Jets need more of a scoring threat from the back end.

On Tuesday in a 5-2 victory over the Columbus Blue Jackets, the Jets got that, with goals from defencemen Logan Stanley, Neal Pionk and Josh Morrissey.

“(Goals from your defencemen) make you multi-dimensional,” Jets assistant coach Davis Payne said. “When you look around the league, it’s a really important part of rush play, it’s a really important part of offensive-zone play, to create numbers with a five-man attack and it’s something we want to build on.”

Heading into league action on Thursday, the Jets are in a five-way tie for 10th in the NHL with goals scored by defenceman with nine. They are tied for ninth with the Buffalo Sabres for total defenceman points at 45.

Morrissey leads the way with four goals, while Stanley has three, and Pionk and Dylan DeMelo each have one.

The Jets play host to the Carolina Hurricanes on Friday at Canada Life Centre. Sean Walker leads the Hurricanes defensive core with four goals in 20 games.

Incidentally, the Hurricanes are tied for sixth with 11 goals coming from the back end, and are fourth overall with 50 total points. The Blue Jackets lead the league in goals from the d-core with 15, Zach Werenski scoring his sixth for Columbus on Tuesday.

Luke Schenn has two assists in 15 games. Colin Miller, Haydn Fleury, and Dylan Samberg have zero points. Samberg has seen action in only three games, working his way back from a broken wrist, Miller has played in five games and Fleury has seen action in 15. Fleury is currently on injured reserve.

According to head coach Scott Arniel, depth scoring includes his back end, not just the men up front.

“When your defence can add offence from that back end, it makes you that much more dangerous,” Arniel said. “If you can have guys coming from the back end, being dangerous and getting their shots to the net or attacking the net, as Morrissey did on his. Those are big and it puts pressure on the opposition.”

Morrissey created a three-on-two by jumping into the rush and heading for the back post with Miles Wood in pursuit. Mark Scheifele’s saucer pass was right on the mark for the redirect into the net at 1:12 of the second period.

"I knew it was a three-on-two-ish rush," Scheifele said. "I was just waiting for the lanes to open, and I saw Josh go towards the back door. I just saw the positioning of the d-man and tried to make a good pass and put it on his tape and a great finish by him."

The Jets have won five of seven games when a defenceman scores a goal. Pionk and Stanley have one game-winning goal apiece in 19 games.

Morrissey accounts for nearly 44 per cent of the total goals from the back end, and 47 per cent in the points category. The Calgary native has 17 assists. The remainder of the defence has a total of 19 helpers.

Payne says it is imperative that Winnipeg receives more points from its defenders. It can't be all Morrissey, all the time.

"Teams in this league they track so darn hard and they play with numbers in their own zone so tight that if you're not equalizing your opportunity with that five-man attack or using your defencemen or using movement or having them become part of the options, it's really tough to create offence," Payne said. "It's critical in today's game."

Pionk's winner against Columbus was a power-play goal at 15:30 of the second period. The Minnesota native has five points this season.

"The forwards can't do it themselves," Pionk said. "They can't be a three-man unit. It's got to be a five-man unit. So, not only is that defensively, but also offensively, too. We have to help them out. We have got to create motion and create some space for them."

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/cheveldayoff-excited-to-make-team-captain-lowry-a-jet-for-life/>

Cheveldayoff excited to make team Captain Lowry 'a Jet for life' (VIDEO)

Kevin Cheveldayoff joins Kyper and Bourne to discuss Adam Lowry's five-year extension, how the deal came to be, why the team Captain was a priority for the Jets, and explains the timing of this news.

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/cheveldayoff-stamps-his-support-for-scheifeles-olympic-roster-hopes/>

Cheveldayoff stamps his support for Scheifele's Olympic roster hopes (VIDEO)

Kevin Cheveldayoff joins Kyper and Bourne to talk about why Mark Scheifele should make Canada's Olympic roster, how he's been key to Winnipeg's recent success, and what aspects of his game the lifetime Jet has taken to the next level.

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/report-jets-give-brad-lambert-permission-to-seek-trade/>

Report: Jets give Brad Lambert permission to seek trade

By Sportsnet Staff

Brad Lambert may be out of Winnipeg soon.

The Winnipeg Jets have given Lambert's representation permission to seek a trade partner, per NHL insider Frank Seravalli.

Lambert, 21, has scored one goal in four appearances with the Jets this season. He was Winnipeg's first-round pick in 2022, drafted 30th overall.

The Finnish-Canadian forward has spent most of his professional career with the Jets' AHL affiliate Manitoba Moose. He has suited up in only 10 NHL games over three seasons.

He last played for the Jets on Nov. 4 against the Los Angeles Kings, where he saw just 6:58 of ice time.

In 127 career AHL games, Lambert has 28 goals and 90 points. He was named an AHL all star in 2024.