

## **Winnipeg Free Press**

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### ***Short-term pain for long-term gain?***

### ***Jets' draft and development model should get a much-needed infusion of talent***

By: Mike McIntyre and Ken Wiebe

With the Winnipeg Jets ushering in a bit of a youth movement down the stretch, there's bound to be a renewed focus on the "draft and development" model that is supposed to be their bread-and-butter.

No question it has paid dividends, particularly from the earlier stages of the 2.0 era. The first two picks way back in 2011 — Mark Scheifele and Adam Lowry — were home runs who have become foundational pieces for the franchise.

The likes of Connor Hellebuyck, Josh Morrissey and Kyle Connor soon followed and remain to this day, while Jacob Trouba, Andrew Copp, Nikolaj Ehlers, Patrik Laine and Mason Appleton all became key contributors before moving on.

The pipeline has taken a bit of a hit over the past decade, with only a couple of players graduating to full-time NHL status since Laine and (eventually) Logan Stanley did so from the class of 2016.

Dylan Samberg (2nd round, 2017) and Cole Perfetti (1st round, 2020) are the only two who would fit that bill.

Elias Salomonsson (2nd round, 2022) and Brad Lambert (1st round, 2022) have recently been called up from the Manitoba Moose and aspire to get there one day. The jury is still out on several recent picks who are either in the AHL or still playing in junior, college or Europe.

Is this an issue with drafting? Developing? Both? Or just an unfortunate run of bad luck in the annual NHL lottery?

With the rebuilding New York Rangers in town Thursday night, we couldn't help but notice that 20-year-old rookie forward Gabe Perreault scored the game-winning goal (along with an earlier assist) to move him up to a solid 17 points (7G, 10A) in his first 32 NHL games.

Perreault was selected 23rd overall in 2023, which was considered a bit of a fall for the standout with the U.S. National Development Team who went on to play two seasons at Boston College and put up 108 points (35G, 73A) in 73 collegiate games before turning pro last year.

That's notable for Jets fans, since he was still on the board when general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff went to the podium to select Colby Barlow with the 18th pick.

It's still too early to render a verdict on Barlow, but the graduate of the Oshawa Generals who won the OHL scholastic player of the year that season has spent all 46 games of his first pro year with the Manitoba Moose, where he has eight points (3G, 5A).

If you look at the top 19 picks from 2023, three have yet to play in the NHL. Two of them are in the Jets organization, along with Montreal's David Reinbacher (fifth overall, currently with Laval of the AHL).

Joining Barlow is Manitoba Moose teammate Brayden Yager, the 14th overall pick by Pittsburgh who was obtained by the Jets in a trade for 2022 first-rounder Rutger McGroarty (who is up to 28 NHL games on his resume). Yager has 22 points (8G, 14A) in 53 AHL games this year.

It says here the Jets — who will never be a haven for free agent signings — desperately need one, or both, of Barlow and Yager to eventually pan out, especially when you see what the likes of multiple picks around them are already doing in the big leagues.

The Jets certainly hope Salomonsson and Lambert can make up for the loss of McGroarty from the 2022 draft. And last week's trade of Stanley and Luke Schenn to the Buffalo Sabres brought back 2021 first-rounder Isak Rosen (14th-overall), who scored his first goal with the Jets in Thursday's loss to the Rangers.

Winnipeg's own first-rounder from that year, Chaz Lucius, unfortunately had to retire from hockey after being diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, which is a group of inherited disorders that affects connective tissues such as skin, joints and blood vessel walls.

As for 2024 and 2025, there's hope that promising young skaters such as Kieron Walton and Kevin He (who are currently tearing up the OHL) and Swedish defencemen Alfons Freij and Sascha Boumedienne, who recently helped lead their country to World Junior gold, have bright NHL futures.

As for 2026, the Jets find themselves staring at a potential early first-round pick. As of Friday, three teams — the Vancouver Canucks, Calgary Flames and Chicago Blackhawks — have fewer points.

There is plenty of high-end talent available this summer, including forwards Gavin McKenna, Ivar Stenberg and Caleb Malhotra and defencemen Keaton Verhoeff, Chase Reid, Alberts Smits and Carson Carels, who is from Cypress River.

A little more short-term pain this season could ultimately lead to some much-needed long-term gain for the Jets.

#### *AROUND THE GLASS:*

HEADS UP: How do you stop Nathan MacKinnon?

That's a question teams in the league been wrestling with for years, and the Jets will have their hands full on Saturday afternoon as MacKinnon and his Colorado Avalanche teammates pay a visit to Canada Life Centre.

It's the first of three meetings in the next nine games between the Central Division rivals.

MacKinnon made headlines earlier this week when he plowed into Edmonton Oilers netminder Connor Ingram, drawing a five-minute interference major and a game misconduct. Replays show Oilers defenceman Darnell Nurse making contact with MacKinnon and steering him into Ingram, who was cut on the play and knocked out of the game.

The penalty was later rescinded by the NHL, but debate around the league continues including inside Winnipeg's dressing room.

"I don't know what you can do as it happens pretty fast," said Jets defenceman Dylan DeMelo.

"I think (Nurse) is just trying to get back and stop MacKinnon, MacKinnon is going 100 miles an hour and he is not really in full control of his body but I do not think he is trying to hurt Ingram. It was a tough situation, and I don't think anybody is trying to do anything malicious there.

"It is pretty rare to see a goalie get bloodied like that. It was a scary incident and unfortunate for everybody involved as Colorado lost a pretty darn good player for that game."

**BUFFALO BOYS:** It took a few days to get their work visas in order, but former Jets' Tanner Pearson, Stanley and Schenn were all in the lineup on Thursday night as the Buffalo Sabres fell 2-1 to the Washington Capitals.

Prior to puck drop, Schenn joked with Buffalo media that this is now the fourth different team he's played on with Pearson, with Los Angeles, Vancouver and Winnipeg being the others.

He also noted how he was greeted by one of his new teammates, Josh Doan — who happens to be the son of one of his former teammates, Shane Doan.

"That's how you know you've been around for a while," said Schenn.

Just like they often were on the Jets, Stanley and Schenn were paired together for the Sabres. They got burned on the first goal of the game and both went minus-one. As for Pearson, he didn't draw an assist but was on the ice for Buffalo's lone tally, scored by another trade deadline addition in Sam Carrick.

As noted above, Rosen scored his first goal with the Jets on Thursday, and it was assisted by defenceman Jacob Bryson, who also came over in the trade from the Sabres (along a second and fourth-round draft pick) in exchange for Stanley and Schenn. Buffalo sent a seventh-rounder to Winnipeg for Pearson.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/03/13/jets-seek-to-find-way-through-avalanche>

***Jets seek to find way through Avalanche  
Will need to be at their best to top MacKinnon and Co.***

By: Ken Wiebe

It's the equivalent of going toe to toe with the irresistible force and the immovable object.

As the Winnipeg Jets get set to welcome the league-leading Colorado Avalanche to town, the picture has become clear.

If they're somehow going to turn things around after consecutive losses during an eight-game homestand, they're going to have to find a way to slow down an Avalanche team that has been the cream of the crop this season.

“Obviously, we know how dangerous they are offensively, but they don’t give up a lot and they control a lot of the game with puck possession,” said Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey. “It’s a great test for us. We play them three times in the next three weeks and we have to rise to the occasion. It’s an opportunity for us to step up.

“We know we’re going to need to do something in these three games against them as we continue to push to get back in the mix.”

That difficult push got even tougher after missing out on four points in defeats to the New York Rangers and Anaheim Ducks by a combined score of 10-4.

Although the Jets only gave up 17 shots on goal to the Rangers on Thursday, defensive-zone coverage lapses led to four of the six goals (with one coming shorthanded and the other into an empty net).

Given the high-octane offence the Avalanche bring to the table, led by Hart Trophy candidate Nathan MacKinnon and Norris Trophy candidate Cale Makar, minimizing mistakes is a must if you’re trying to contain this group.

MacKinnon has 44 goals and 108 points in 63 games this season and only Connor McDavid of the Edmonton Oilers has more (110) in the race for the Art Ross Trophy.

“He’s always been so explosive and so dynamic,” said Morrissey, who has known MacKinnon since they were playing minor hockey. “But what really stands out, spending more time with him the last few years, is his commitment to the game and how professional he is. On and off the ice. He’s always trying to search and find ways to get better, work on his game, work off the ice with his nutrition, fitness, all of those things.

“Playing with him you see that drive and intensity and his all-around game. It’s why he’s one of the best in the world.”

This is the second of four meetings between the Central Division rivals, with the Avalanche defeating the Jets 3-2 in Denver in December.

A deep Avalanche roster has since added forwards Nazem Kadri and Nicolas Roy and defenceman Nick Blankenburg in trades prior to last Friday’s deadline.

After a couple of stumbles this week, the Jets are hoping to channel the effort they put forth against the Tampa Bay Lightning earlier in the homestand, when they earned a 4-1 victory over a team that was then leading the Eastern Conference.

“(The Avalanche) have had a fantastic season,” said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. “It is going to take (an effort) like the Tampa Bay game where we had everybody dialled in and we did a really good job with our five-man units against everybody that jumped over the boards.

“We have to be on point, doing that against a Colorado team that has made some additions and has some of the elite players in the league on their team.”

Although the Avalanche will be without captain Gabe Landeskog, their forward depth is impressive, with Martin Necas taking another important step (30 goals, 79 points, second in

team scoring) and Brock Nelson, who was a target of the Jets at the trade deadline in 2025, anchoring the second line (30 goals, 55 points, fourth in team scoring).

The defence corps is solid and the goaltending tandem of MacKenzie Blackwood (2.42 goals-against average, .908 save percentage) and Scott Wedgewood (2.16 goals-against average, .918 save percentage) are in the conversation as the best duo in the NHL.

That's why Arniel basically said he's going to need the best from every one of his players to find the win column.

One of the positive developments for the Jets during the past quarter of the season has been the emergence of defenceman Elias Salomonsson as an NHL regular.

Injuries to Neal Pionk, Colin Miller and Morrissey opened the door for expanded minutes and responsibilities, and Salomonsson has proven to be capable of handling them.

Salomonsson had 20:11 of ice time on Thursday, which gave him north of 20 minutes in five of the past 10 games, and was given the chance to run the second power-play unit.

"He has all that stuff in his repertoire," said Arniel. "Some of it, earlier in the year, wasn't all there because he was trying to figure out the NHL game. Now, he is going through it and trying, maybe he will try a couple of things in the offensive zone or some things defending, feeling more comfortable about his gap, going back for pucks, making that first pass.

"He is getting more and more comfortable in his skates as he recognizes now this is what the NHL is all about, this is what elite players do on a nightly basis, this is what top six forwards do and this is what bottom six forwards do. He is getting to know players and the opposition and I think that has helped."

Salomonsson has chipped in assists in consecutive games to give him a goal and three points in 21 NHL games, as he settles in on a pairing with Dylan Samberg.

"I'm trying to add layers to my game," said Salomonsson. "The most important thing is to play well defensively, and then we can build from that.

"It's a good opportunity for me. I think I have offence in my game, too. Trying to bring that shot mentality to that power play. Don't pass around it too much if a lane is open. Try to get the shot through."

Morrissey has been impressed as Salomonsson's flourished in an expanded role.

"He's a big guy that moves really well and has good instincts," said Morrissey. "He plays with some bite defensively. Like any younger guy, when you can put a number of games together in a row in the NHL and kind of feel like you have a little bit of a leash where you're not going to make one mistake and be taken out of the lineup.

"He's been consistent. The schedule is not easy when you're a young guy. Anyone can have one good game, but to play well consistently, with travel and not a lot of rest, that's sort of the tough part of the NHL and he's handled it really, really well. Instincts, skating, the way he moves the puck, I also like that he likes to shoot the puck, too. With all of those things, he looks great and he's only going to get better."

## **The Athletic**

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7111859/2026/03/14/on-winnipeg-jets-drafting-history-development-and-misses-mailbag/>

### ***On Winnipeg Jets drafting history, development, and misses: Mailbag***

By Murat Ates

Winnipeg's playoff hopes fade by the day, so it's no surprise this mailbag was filled with critical questions.

Why have the Jets stopped unearthing late-round gems at the draft? What are other teams doing better than Winnipeg with respect to player development? Doesn't hindsight suggest the Jets should be managing their talent differently, and putting more players in positions to succeed?

Your questions had more nuance than that, but they were full of fire all the same. Let's dig into them below.

*What are your thoughts on the current scouting director and staff. They haven't unearthed a later round player in many years. — Tony L.*

Mark Hillier was promoted to Director of Amateur Scouting in September 2015, shortly after one of the best drafts in Jets history. Winnipeg capitalized on the surprising availability of Kyle Connor at No. 17, then struck again on an NHL player by taking Jack Rosolovic at No. 25. In most years, two NHL players is a win in and of itself, but Connor's star power (did you see that goal against New York?) propels the value proposition higher. But the Jets weren't done, adding Jansen Harkins in the second round and Mason Appleton in the sixth round.

That's four NHL players of varying quality — and two near misses in Erik Foley, whose career was derailed only by injury, and Sami Niku, who got into 67 NHL games as a seventh-round pick. Under Marcel Comeau, it felt like the Jets could scarcely miss on draft day. It got to the point where decisions they made were publicly defensible simply because they were the ones who'd made them; their track record was so good.

Then 2016 hit. Winnipeg took the slam dunk pick on Patrik Laine and landed a divisive but now veteran NHL player in Logan Stanley later in the first round. They landed two top-four defencemen in 2017, with Dylan Samberg and Johnathan Kovacevic taken in rounds two and three, but it takes five more drafts before they can claim success outside of the first round — and they have only Cole Perfetti (No. 10, 2020) to show from the first round.

This means the Jets are drafting poorly, right?

Let's take a quick look at the 29 draft picks Winnipeg made in the six drafts between 2016 and 2021. Obviously, having a top-10 pick — like the Jets are on track to get this year — is worth a lot more than a late first-round pick. But what are the odds a player at each draft slot turns into an NHL player down the road? Analytical studies have given us those odds.

This study by Stephen Burtch is from 2015 and therefore getting old. I think it's reasonable to think scouting staffs should be getting better if there is any meaningful change at all. But Burtch did a kind thing, showing his work and sharing his formulas.

Based on Winnipeg's 29 draft picks from 2016 to 2021, starting with Laine at No. 2 in 2016 and ending with Dmitry Rashevsky at No. 146 in 2021, the Jets "should" have:

- Eight players who have played at least 100 NHL games
- Six players who have played at least 200 NHL games

Here are the seven players they've selected who have played at least 100 NHL games. The five who have played at least 200 games are shown in green:

So every time you see someone complain that the Jets have been awful at drafting, you can tell them they've been slightly below average. And every time you see someone argue that the Jets haven't had enough quality draft picks to justify all of the complaining, you can say they've still had enough picks to provoke gentle worry. You might even suggest that Chaz Lucius would have fixed everything if only he had stayed healthy, but that seems like a reach.

So there are two stories here:

- The Jets were amazing in this regard under Comeau and are slightly below average under Hillier

Winnipeg gave away its late-round success stories (Kovacevic, Chisholm) for free instead of keeping them with the team

It seems to me that the modern-day Jets are perfectly average drafters but below average at development. Saying so for sure would require a deeper dive.

*Why do the Jets, a team that admits it struggles to attract people in free agency and is on every trade list, seem so uninvested in player development and its AHL team? Also, why do you think the Jets refuse to put young players in opportunities to succeed? ... People often point to Seth Jarvis as a draft miss but there's a 0% chance that Jarvis would have been given the same TOI and opportunity here that he got in Carolina. — Michael D.*

Your question covers a lot of ground, Michael, so let me start by defining some terms.

I accept your premise that Winnipeg struggles to attract free agents. I accept the sentiment of your comment about no-trade clauses, too. I did a deep dive into no-trade clauses last season and found that nearly one-third of the NHL had some form of no-trade protection — an absurd number, in my opinion.

When you reference investment in player development and the Moose, you're talking about two different things. Winnipeg's investment in player development might be seen as the salaries it pays to former Moose players, Jimmy Roy and Mike Keane, whose jobs fall directly under the player development umbrella. I had the opportunity to speak to Roy and Keane at length at the 2022 draft in Montreal; I left with the impression that their roles were more about communication and establishing human-to-human links with prospects than hands-on, day-to-day improvement. It's an area I need to learn more about.

I think the Jets woke up last summer with respect to the Moose — that their signings of Walker Duehr, Samuel Fagemo, Mason Shaw, Parker Ford, Kale Clague, and Phil Di Giuseppe, among others, were about realizing they'd understaffed their AHL team. To me, that's a realization that Colby Barlow, Brayden Yager, Jacob Julien, and the next generation of impactful Moose youth needed a better quality team than Brad Lambert or Nikita Chibrikov got.

Those AHL veteran investments probably cost more than the Jets' development staff do, given the higher-end AHL salaries paid (\$375,000 for Fagemo, \$400,000 for Duehr, \$475,000 for Clague, etc.) They may have more impact, too, given their ability to insulate Winnipeg's youth as they adapt to the pro game — and given how Manitoba has soared from 31st of 32 AHL teams last season to playoff contention this time around.

You're right, though — Winnipeg can't afford to have a cellar-dwelling AHL team, especially if a fundamental tenet of its development strategy involves extensive development in the minors before NHL jobs become available.

You're spectacularly right about Seth Jarvis, who played more minutes on a line with Hurricanes No. 1 centre Sebastian Aho in his first three seasons than Cole Perfetti played in the NHL ... period.

Perfetti's most common centre during his first three seasons in the league — which are the same three seasons as Jarvis spent playing with Aho — was Vladislav Namestnikov. Even now, with Kyle Connor and Mark Scheifele an automatic two-thirds of Winnipeg's top line, Scott Arniel has alternated Gabriel Vilardi and Alex Lafallo as their running mate. Perfetti sees Scheifele on the power play and that's mostly it.

That's an enormous difference in developmental approach.

*What, in your opinion, Murat, were the woulda/shoulda/coulda/ moves the Jets didn't make in the last 5-10 years, using 20/20 hindsight. — John B.*

This question would be a fun article.

Using 20/20 hindsight, I think Winnipeg would have been better off if it had managed to close some form of a Nikolaj Ehlers for Martin Necas trade than letting Ehlers reach free agency. Despite his love for Winnipeg, I think Ehlers' departure was known as likely for a long time.

I don't know that Winnipeg got close to landing Mark Stone in 2019, when it ultimately acquired Kevin Hayes — I think Stone was keen to sign an extension in Vegas — but that would have been a franchise-altering move had the Jets pulled it off. Less speculatively, waiving Kovacevic was an unforced error. They drafted and developed a late bloomer and then let him go, keeping players with lower ceilings than he had at the time. Kyle Capobianco was never going to be part of the solution.

I'll dive deeper into your idea someday. For now, I will choose "every single non-competitive season wherein a veteran pending UFA with no chance of helping a future version of the Jets gets minutes over a player with years left in the system."

*What do you think it would take for Cheveldayoff to be fired? — Courage.white*

Kevin Cheveldayoff would have to step down from his position before Mark Chipman would fire him.

Consider Chipman's words to Elliott Friedman in this 32 Thoughts piece:

"We've never even come to the last year of one of his contracts and we won't ... I'm at an age where I feel certain he will outlast me in this organization."

*There were some who suggested the Jets were playing Nyquist to "showcase" him and trade him. Was it realistic for the Jets to expect more than a sixth-round draft pick for him? Why did they sacrifice the development of Danny Zhilkin? — Winnipegjets1972*

The concept of "showcasing" a player is discussed more than it's done. In Gustav Nyquist's case, I would say that it's difficult to showcase a player with a single goal on his resume for the season. They're playing him because they signed him and believe in his ability to help them win hockey games.

Danny Zhilkin is a highly specific pull on your part. The Jets tend to make decisions based on roles and I would think of Brad Lambert as closer to Nyquist in that the ideal form of the player is as a secondary scorer. Zhilkin is having an excellent year for Manitoba and has already set career highs in AHL games played, goals, assists, and points, but his projected role with Winnipeg is something more akin to a bottom-six centre.

The Jets may give him a longer look once they're mathematically eliminated from the playoffs, but Zhilkin has one more year on his ELC. I think playing to his first, fully healthy, and truly impactful year in the AHL is a win for his development.

*When you do stories that get into the human side of the players you cover, it gives your readers an interesting peek behind the curtain. But does getting to know players on the level required for these type of stories risk tainting your objectivity in evaluating them as hockey players? — Aavocup A.*

I saved this question for the end because I love the topic. I don't think most people understand their biases. I spend time trying to understand mine.

Here are a few ways in which I might be biased:

- I spend time talking to Jets players. There are many studies that show affinity builds between people based on repetition of contact alone, irrespective of other factors
- I think a fundamental truth about the human experience is that the more we understand each other, the more we like each other — especially in person, and especially in conversations that feel like there's some stakes to them. Get through an awkward moment with someone safely, showing mutual understanding and nuance, and you grow more fond of them.
- I believe I can understand opinions and perspectives that I don't share. I've also found that asking people about their decisions sometimes reveals reasons for them which make sense that I hadn't previously considered.
- In cases where true empathy is required, the understanding and affinity grow to another level entirely. When Josh Morrissey and I talked about grief for this story about his dad's passing, it

was an exchange. That builds connection. When Gabriel Vilardi opened up about his mental health journey, I shared an experience with him in that regard that I don't typically share. And when Logan Stanley opened up about being a dad, it was one of the most human, engaging, and fun conversations I've had with an NHL player.

I think honest analysis roots itself in statements of fact about what's happening on the ice or on the stat sheet. Stanley's shooting percentage was unsustainable whether or not I think he's a remarkably engaging dad. His defensive zone struggles are demonstrable whether or not his story about cracking eggs with his daughter cracked me up.

I also think it helps not to lionize people when they're doing well. Everyone is three-dimensional and flawed, with strengths and weaknesses better understood with real human-to-human connection. I don't want to pretend we're having heart-to-heart conversations every day in this line of work but I think honest reviews during the great times helps establish objectivity during the tougher times, too.

Maybe I should have given you the shortest, truest answer: Criticism, both positive and negative, is easier for me when it feels fair and true. The worst NHL player is one of the best athletes in the world and I admire that. I try to focus on critiquing specific actions — highlight reel goals, egregious giveaways — as opposed to making all-encompassing statements about what they mean. And I'm just a person, doing my best, so I may not always get it 100 percent right.

## **Winnipeg Sun**

[https://www.winnipegsun.com/sports/winnipeg\\_jets/the-ties-that-bind-winnipeg-s-toews-loses-mentor-friend-in-former-jets-captain-troy/article\\_573dfaa5-0f37-4e88-bbea-fa2a398e4357.html?taid=69b538b514087e0001c8f271&utm\\_campaign=trueanthem&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=twitter](https://www.winnipegsun.com/sports/winnipeg_jets/the-ties-that-bind-winnipeg-s-toews-loses-mentor-friend-in-former-jets-captain-troy/article_573dfaa5-0f37-4e88-bbea-fa2a398e4357.html?taid=69b538b514087e0001c8f271&utm_campaign=trueanthem&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter)

### ***The ties that bind: Winnipeg's Toews loses mentor, friend, in former Jets captain Troy Murray***

By Paul Friesen

It hasn't been an easy year for Jonathan Toews, and last weekend the Winnipeg native and Jets centre took another hit, one that provides some perspective for any goal-scoring drought or losing streak.

The death of former NHLer Troy Murray touched many people, but for Toews it marked the loss of a friend and mentor.

"I gravitated to him early in my career," Toews said before the Jets took on the New York Rangers on Thursday. "Definitely formed a bond and real friendship with him over the years. It was really hard to see. He was going to fight. He was going to give it everything he had to beat the cancer that he had."

Like Toews, Murray was a Chicago legend, a former Blackhawks captain who became a team broadcaster after his playing career.

He died of cancer on Saturday, battling the disease for more than four years. He was 63.

“He loved being around the rink and loved calling the games,” Toews said. “And just loved being around the boys, too. We all loved him and had a lot of respect for him. It’s tough to see what he had to go through. Hope he’s in a better place.”

The similarities between Murray’s career and that of Toews’ are remarkable.

Both chose the University of North Dakota, where they led powerful Fighting Sioux squads, Murray’s winning a national championship in 1982, Toews coming close two-and-a-half decades later.

They both led Canada to World Junior titles, Murray as a captain with current Jets boss Scott Arniel as a teammate, Toews as an assistant.

In the NHL draft, both went to Chicago, Murray in the third round in 1980, Toews in the first round, third overall, 26 years later.

Both wore No. 19 and became the Blackhawks captain as exceptional, two-way centres.

While contributing a boatload of offence, both won the Selke Trophy as the NHL’s best defensive forward, Murray in 1985-86, Toews 27 seasons later.

And if all that wasn’t enough, both Murray and Toews went from the Blackhawks to Winnipeg, Murray even wearing the ‘C’ for the Jets from ‘91 to ‘93.

That took even Toews by surprise.

“Was he captain in Winnipeg, too? Wow,” the 37-year-old said. “He was the real deal. It’s cool. I guess I’m trying to follow in his footsteps.”

While Toews led the ‘Hawks to three Stanley Cups, Murray settled for one with Colorado in the last year of his career.

Stories about Murray’s character and personality have been plentiful this week.

Toews was lucky to hear some first-hand after a game of golf followed by dinner at a mutual friend’s home years ago.

One that stands out: Murray taking a puck in the mouth in a game during the 1990-91 season, knocking out some teeth and sending part of his dental plate down his throat.

“He’s bleeding all over the ice, and they had to take him straight to the hospital and had to stick a tube down his throat,” is how Toews recalled the story. “It was pretty gory. They didn’t have any anesthetic so they couldn’t knock him out. Oh, my god – this guy’s from a different time. Everyone says hockey players are tough now, but it was definitely a different time.”

After his cancer diagnosis and initial treatment, Murray returned to his broadcasting job in Chicago. But he wasn’t around this season, as his health deteriorated.

Toews had to rely on updates from mutual friends.

“He wasn’t able to get back to many text messages and phone calls for the last year,” Toews said. “So I hadn’t seen him or heard from him for quite a while. I just tried to respect his space on that, too.”

Toews was in Winnipeg when he received the news of Murray’s death last Saturday. Knowing what he’d been going through, there’s a sense of relief for him and his family to go along with the sense of loss.

“There’s moments where it hits you,” Toews said. “It’s real. I haven’t been able to see him or say goodbye. There’s definitely moments where you can really get in touch with how special he was as a person and how rare that is in your life to have someone to look up to and mentor you.”

That two kids two provinces apart, one from St. Albert, Alta., and another from Winnipeg, followed such similar paths isn’t something you’ll see often, either.

“You realize what it means to play for the Hawks, to play for the Jets,” Toews said. “When guys like that have walked that path, it definitely gives it some gravity. You think about how you’re going about your business every day, too.”

[https://www.winnipegssun.com/sports/trial-by-fire-jets-d-man-salomonsson-cool-under-duress/article\\_1f621c9e-610c-43d3-b067-3d86ec457865.html](https://www.winnipegssun.com/sports/trial-by-fire-jets-d-man-salomonsson-cool-under-duress/article_1f621c9e-610c-43d3-b067-3d86ec457865.html)

### ***‘Trial by fire’: Jets’ d-man Salomonsson cool under duress***

By Gordon Anderson

Jets rookie blue liner Elias Salomonsson continues to play important minutes, more by necessity than preference at this point.

“We are banged up and he has taken on probably a larger role than maybe what you want to do to a young defenceman,” head coach Scott Arniel said on Friday morning. “He is right in the heat of the season, having to play top four minutes. We are using him on the penalty kill and on the powerplay. It is a big role, and he is doing his best and doing a really good job with it.”

When the Jets returned from the Olympic break, the situation on the back end was dire with Neal Pionk and Josh Morrissey both sidelined with undisclosed injuries. And now that Logan Stanley and Luke Schenn are no longer with the team, someone not named Morrissey or Dylan DeMelo has to play those secondary pairing minutes alongside Dylan Samberg.

“It is just the circumstances of where we are at,” Arniel said. “You can see that he has the ability and the skill set. He is going to be a good defenceman but it is under trial by fire. It really is a tough time he is having to be put in the situation.”

Five games into this season-long eight game homestand, the right-shot d-man’s minutes have ranged from 18:28 and 21:43 per night.

Not ideal, according to Arniel.

“You’d rather be sitting in a playoff spot and going through a scenario where you could control (his ice time) a little better,” the coach said. “He is going to grow, and he is going to learn, and he is going to be even better for the experience. It is not the ideal way of going about it with

defencemen as you don't want them to get overwhelmed by the moment, but he has handled it well. He has been good for us."

Naturally, the 21-year-old doesn't see any issue with his time on ice or his multiple roles. He has played 1:01 of powerplay time and 2:09 of PK time since the homestand began on March 3 against the Chicago Blackhawks.

"I think it's fun," Salomonsson said. "The level of compete is going up the last stretch of games with everyone fighting for a spot in the playoffs."

Arniel says the rookie is slowly introducing his offensive upside now that he is getting used to the calibre and the speed of the league and feeling better about his game in the defensive zone.

"He has all that stuff in his repertoire," Arniel said. "Some of it, earlier in the year, wasn't all there because he was trying to figure out the pro game, the NHL game. Now, he is going through it and trying, maybe he will try a couple of things in the offensive zone or some things defending, feeling more comfortable about his gap, going back for pucks, making that first pass."

Morrissey has noticed, too.

"He's playing with a ton of confidence," Morrissey said. "He is a big guy who moves well and has good instincts. He plays with some bite defensively. Like any younger guy, when you can put a number of games together in a row in the NHL and kind of feel like you have a little bit of a leash where you're not going to make one mistake and be taken out of the lineup, that's the same for every young guy. I also like that he likes to shoot the puck too. With all of those things, he looks great and he's only going to get better."