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<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/blog-connor-happy-to-get-extension-done-before-season>

***BLOG: Connor happy to get extension done before season***

***Connor: "There was never any scenario where I could see myself going somewhere else."***

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG – The only thing that could be bigger news than the Winnipeg Jets season opener coming on Thursday would be the confirmation of Kyle Connor's contract extension.

At 8:45 am CT, the Jets announced that Connor had indeed inked an eight-year extension with an AAV of 12 million dollars.

Now heading into Thursday's game with Dallas, there will not be any type of distraction with regards to the 28-year-old's future in Winnipeg.

"I've had it before where - in my last deal before this one, the extension for seven years - I played throughout the whole year and had no problem. I feel like I do a good job of putting that to the side," said Connor.

"We also realized the urgency of what needed to be done here and I'm super happy that we were able to get it (done) before the season."

The Jets organization has really stood by the fact that they are not just a team, but a family and Connor's family had a tremendous reaction to the news with stick taps on the ice during practice at hockey for all centre.

"Everybody respects each other and it's a family in this room. It was awesome to feel that love and appreciation from the teammates," said Connor.

"These guys in the room couldn't be happier. It just means a lot to be a teammate of those guys."

Head coach Scott Arniel made the announcement preceding the stick taps.

"I said 'We have some very big news; [Nikita Chibrikov] just signed a two-year extension.' That got a good giggle, and I said he took less so we could get Kyle signed," laughed Arniel.

"Then we just congratulated Kyle."

One of Connor's teammates is Mark Scheifele who has been alongside Connor for his entire NHL career. The two stars along with Gabriel Vilardi are one of the best line's in the NHL. Scheifele was asked if there was any concern that Connor might not sign an extension.

"You never know. You never try to get at anyone's business. All you want is that is the best for your friends and your teammates," said Scheifele.

“And I was hoping they were going to get it done. So just tried to stay away as much as I could and hope it got done. And obviously it did.”

Connor was drafted 17th overall in 2015, one of the best drafts in franchise history. Before the 2017-18 season started, he had been sent down to the Manitoba Moose of the American Hockey League. Connor scored three goals in four games and an injury to veteran forward Mathieu Perreault opened the door for him in the NHL and he hasn't looked back.

Connor is 16 goals shy of 300 in his career and is one of the top goal scorers in the league. If he decided to test the free agent market, teams would have been knocking down his door to get him to join them. In the end, Connor said there was no scenario where he could see himself anywhere else.

“This team, these guys here and this organization has been nothing but top notch,” said Connor.

“And like I said earlier, just giving you every chance you can to succeed and all the tools and I wouldn't want to try to win a Stanley Cup with another group of players in an organization. So, once you really start thinking about it, there's no other place.”

#### *ICE CHIPS*

Jonathan Toews had another solid day of practice but Arniel did not commit to the veteran forward playing in the home opener.

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/blog-view-from-the-booth>

#### ***BLOG: View from the Booth***

***The voice of the Jets, Paul Edmonds, takes you around the world of hockey.***

Now that it's throttle up for the Winnipeg Jets into a new season, here are some random notes, quotes and anecdotes involving the team, the National Hockey League and local hockey.... It comes with great relief to all involved that Kyle Connor's contract extension was finalized just prior to Opening Night. Avoiding the lingering questions and uncertainty that can ultimately turn attention away from the on-ice quest of the team to the uncomfortable business topics of money, term and structure can only provide serenity in the Jets dressing room moving ahead.... Still with Connor, now that he's secured in Winnipeg for another eight years, he's likely poised to deliver another high-octane season this year in earnest. After a career-high 97 points last year what's the ceiling this season? Is 100 points a possibility? If so, he would become the first 100-point player in the franchise's history since 2006-07 (Marian Hossa). The last Winnipeg Jets player to score 100 points was Teemu Selanne, who notched 132 in his phenomenal rookie season of 1992-93.

After signing Jonathan Toews, Tanner Pearson and Gus Nyquist this off-season, the Jets not only added some significant depth to their forward core, but a tremendous amount of NHL experience. Between the three players Winnipeg augmented over 2,600 games to their roster. In fact, the Jets are now one of the oldest teams in the NHL according to Elite Prospects, sitting with an average age of 29.33 years old....In addition to the vast game experience Toews and Pearson bring to the team, they also add to the total of Jets' players that have won a Stanley Cup for a cumulative of six. Pearson won his with Los Angeles (2014), while Toews produced three with Chicago (2010, 2013, 2015) and Luke Schenn a pair with Tampa Bay (2020, 2021). That kind of experience isn't necessarily tangible, but it certainly won't hurt a dressing room that is trying to surge toward a higher playoff ascension next spring.

Congratulations to Winnipeg's Jett Woo on helping the Abbotsford Canucks to their first-ever Calder Cup championship last June. Woo, 25, anchored the blueline for Vancouver's AHL team in his fifth year with the organization, after being drafted in 2018 in the second round (37th overall). He chipped in with an assist on the game-winning goal in Abbotsford's clinching game six win over Charlotte and recently signed a one-year extension with the organization. Although he has been called up previously by Vancouver, Woo is still waiting to make his NHL debut....For the record there are two other now local connections to that Canucks AHL title, including former Winkler Flyers' forward and MJHL coach Harry Mahesh, who is now an assistant coach with Abbotsford. The other link is recently signed Manitoba Moose forward Phil Di Giuseppe, an 11-year veteran of professional hockey. For the 31-year-old Di Giuseppe this summer's AHL title was the first hockey championship of his career.

There is little question Nikolaj Ehlers was a notable fan favourite in Winnipeg for the 10 seasons he called the city home. As such, when the Jets host the Carolina Hurricanes in his return to Winnipeg on Nov. 21, it should provide an intriguing date on the calendar. For starters, Ehlers has scored against every NHL team except for the Jets through his career, even recording a goal last year against Utah. And likely more important to his old team is the game should attract a solid crowd, as the 'Canes haven't been a sellout in downtown since 2019.

After finishing with an NHL-best power play last season at 29% effective, the Jets know opposing adjustments are coming. Credit assistant coach Davis Payne for last year's improvement in his first year with the team, but what he has up his sleeve to keep them guessing this season should be worth watching as Winnipeg's man advantage situation improved by 10 goals last season on 22 less chances....Watch for something to be announced in the coming weeks that will officially acknowledge the Jets have reclaimed the historical records and date of the Winnipeg Jets from 1979 to 1996. These are the same annals that transferred south when the team was sold and moved to Arizona as the now defunct Phoenix Coyotes.

There are only two NHL teams this season without a captain. They are the Boston Bruins and San Jose Sharks. For Boston, one wonders if defenceman Charlie McAvoy becomes their next ultimate leader. At just 27 years old, he would appear to be the perfect fit in that he already wears an 'A' and embodies what the Bruins have represented for the last two decades and where they want to get to again after missing the playoffs for the first time in eight seasons last year. Still with McAvoy, did you know his father-in-law is New York Rangers head coach Mike Sullivan? For the Sharks, the search to replace Logan Couture as captain might take significantly more time, especially as the rebuild continues in Silicon Valley. To be clear, Couture is out indefinitely this season after playing just six games in total the last two years.

In this the 15th Anniversary season of the Winnipeg Jets back in the city, congratulations to Doug Neubauer, the Director of Engineering & Ice Operations for True North Sports & Entertainment, and his ice maintenance team at Canada Life Centre. In a recent NHLPA player poll of nearly 600 members, the playing surface at CLC was voted the third-best in the NHL behind the Bell Centre (Montreal) and Rogers Place (Edmonton). It's an esteemed recognition Winnipeg quietly gets annually and Neubauer and his crew are as good as it gets in the industry.

The NHL's extended break for the 2026 Winter Olympics in February will mean the Jets will have 20 days off between games. They'll finish against Montreal on Feb. 4 and resume on Feb.

25 in Vancouver. To make up for the nearly three-week abeyance, Winnipeg will play 16 games in both January and March.

If you're still wondering about the importance of major junior hockey as a pathway to the NHL, then crunch on these numbers. There are 402 Canadian Hockey League alumni named to NHL Opening Night rosters ahead of this season, with 145 of those coming from the Western Hockey League. In fact, all 32 teams have at least one CHL grad, while the Jets in particular boast 15 players who progressed to the NHL via Canadian major junior hockey.

Entering this new campaign the Buffalo Sabres have missed the playoffs for 14 consecutive seasons, a dubious NHL record. There have certainly been some lean years in one of America's most unique hockey markets, where around 10 percent of their season tickets base is Canadians residing just over the Niagara River. What is interesting about last year's Sabres team is they led the NHL in goal posts and crossbars hit. They smashed a whopping 128 combined last season. And if the game of hockey is truly a game of inches, then what would one-third of those posts/crossbars mean if they were converted to actual goals? In other words, what would another 41 goals mean to Buffalo's win/loss record and their overall placement in the Atlantic Division standings. By comparison, the Jets hit 102 posts/crossbars, which placed them 15th in the league.

Finally, if you're wondering about player development philosophy within the Winnipeg Jets organization, then this quote from head coach Scott Arniel sums up the team's strategy on fostering growth of young players like defenceman Elias Salomonsson: "We're trying to make 15-year pros, not one-year pros."

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### **Winnipeg Free Press**

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/10/08/puck-drops-on-15th-season>

#### ***Puck drops on 15th season Key storylines to follow***

By: Mike McIntyre and Ken Wiebe

On your marks. Get set. Go!

The Winnipeg Jets are set to begin the marathon that is the NHL season, looking to ultimately leave all 31 rivals in the dust. And while it would be nice to cross the finish line first once all 82 games are in the books — just as they did a year ago — the real focus is on being the last team standing at the end of the playoffs.

No, it's not quite a "championship or bust" mentality around here, but the bar has been raised considerably for the reigning Presidents' Trophy winners.

"We're not afraid to talk about the Stanley Cup," Jets head coach Scott Arniel said on the opening day of training camp last month — a mantra that would be repeated, almost daily, by players over the past few weeks.

Can they ultimately walk the walk? We're about to start finding out, beginning Thursday against a Dallas Stars opponent that ended their season last spring.

"Everybody is excited to build off of what we did last year," said Jets defenceman Dylan DeMelo.

"We're definitely proud of what we did, with the Presidents' Trophy and setting a lot of records in Jets' history and the craziest Game 7 of all time. But I don't think we're any bit satisfied. We want more. Hopefully, we can get over that hump."

There's no shortage of questions and storylines surrounding this group. Let's dig into the key ones.

The Winnipeg Jets look for another special season after starting 15-1 in 2024-25, capturing the franchise's first Presidents' Trophy and the magic that was the 'Manitoba Miracle'. From left: forwards Cole Perfetti, Kyle Connor and defenceman Neal Pionk celebrate Perfetti's Game 7 equalizing goal against the St. Louis Blues.

### *External doubts*

You'd think a team coming off a sensational 56-22-4 campaign would be among the favourites when it comes to predictions from puck pundits, fans and oddsmakers.

You'd be wrong.

The Jets — not unlike Rodney Dangerfield — seem to be having a hard time getting any respect.

For example, only three people among a panel of 19 Sportsnet writers and broadcasters picked Winnipeg to repeat as Central Division champions. Dallas (7) and Colorado (7) led the way, with Minnesota and St. Louis garnering one vote each. Just two of those 19 have the Jets making it to the Stanley Cup Final — one predicting a win, the other a loss.

South of the border, ESPN projects Winnipeg to finish 12th overall in points, essentially fighting for their playoff lives right down to the end of the campaign. Top centre Mark Scheifele is also listed as one of their prime candidates for "regression."

Vegas isn't exactly bullish on the Jets either, with +2500 odds to win it all — tied for 10th with the Los Angeles Kings and New York Rangers.

"In my years so far being here, I don't think we've ever been picked to be the team," Arniel told the Free Press this week.

"We're real happy with that. We just have to take care of our own business and whatever happens or whatever people say, it is what it is. We've got to go out and do what we need to do. You guys know I've said it enough: we have a big hill ahead of us here, with the Central Division and the Western Conference. We have to take care of that."

Motivation comes in many forms, and the Jets have long used so-called outside noise as extra fuel for their internal fire.

Last season, the Jets caught lightning in a bottle, rattling off eight consecutive victories to open the campaign and followed up a loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs with another seven-game streak to post the best start in NHL history at 15-1.

Banking 30 points barely a month into the schedule laid the foundation for what became a magical season. There were plenty of reasons for that success, but much of it stemmed from vastly improved special teams.

The Jets jumped from the bottom third of the league to owning the NHL's top power play. Sustaining that near-historic level of efficiency won't be easy, but with the offensive firepower spread across both units, it remains a clear strength.

The penalty kill also made major strides, though the goal this year is to move from the league's middle tier into its upper echelon while shorthanded.

Another early-season advantage for Winnipeg has often been its ability to find structure faster than most — especially against teams still integrating new players or systems.

After evolving into one of the league's stingiest defensive clubs over the past three years, the Jets will once again rely heavily on that structure, particularly as they navigate injuries to captain Adam Lowry, forward Cole Perfetti and shutdown defenceman Dylan Samberg right off the hop.

And while it's wise not to put too much weight on early-season strength of schedule, the Jets face only four playoff teams from last season in their first 19 games.

Replicating last year's near-perfect start will be nearly impossible. But this group won't be satisfied simply treading water or sitting at .500 out of the gate, either.

#### *Olympic fire*

Speaking of motivation, there's no shortage of it for the many Winnipeg players who are on the radar for their respective Olympic teams.

While Kyle Connor (USA), Connor Hellebuyck (USA), Josh Morrissey (Canada) and Nino Niederreiter (Switzerland) would appear to be locks for Italy, they'll want to hit the ground running this season to show they're ready to compete for a gold medal next February.

Scheifele (Canada) and defenceman Neal Pionk (USA) were also invited to Olympic orientation camps this summer, signalling they're under consideration for selection.

Final rosters must be submitted by Dec. 31, so sizzling starts for both would not only benefit them personally, but also the Jets as a whole.

#### *Can Toews turn back the clock?*

It will likely take several months to fully gauge the impact Winnipegger Jonathan Toews will have on this group.

What's already clear is that he's fitting in well and showing signs he can contribute more than the elite intangibles he's brought to the NHL for much of the past two decades.

While Toews did "tweak something" in his lower body during his third exhibition game, he's on track to suit up for the season opener and will be counted on as the team's second-line centre.

Exactly what that means in terms of on-ice production remains to be seen. For context, Vladislav Namestnikov was primarily in the role last year and had 11 goals and 38 points in 78 games, finishing eighth in team scoring.

At 37, Toews missed the past two seasons due to health-related issues, but his hockey sense remains sharp. He still knows where to be on the ice, remains a force in the face-off circle and brings the experience of thriving under high-pressure situations.

Toews also excels in the small details that elevate those around him, providing valuable leadership for a team aiming to take the next step in its quest for a championship.

“His personality fits in great,” said Connor.

“He’s on the quieter side but he’s pretty intense when you get into conversations. He’s very open. He wants to share. He’s passionate. He chose Winnipeg, to come here, and it’s not some kind of farewell tour. He wants to win. You can see the fire in him and it’s contagious.”

#### *Life on the farm*

The Manitoba Moose were a mess last year, which isn’t ideal for a “draft and develop” team like Winnipeg.

That should change considerably this season. Not only did the Jets go out and sign proven AHL players such as Walker Duehr, Samuel Fagemo, Phil Di Giuseppe and Kale Clague to bolster organizational depth, but a trio of promising young prospects — Brayden Yager, Colby Barlow and Jacob Julien — are all turning pro after terrific junior careers.

They’ll join the likes of Ville Heinola, Elias Salomonsson, Danny Zhilkin, Jaret Anderson-Dolan, Fabian Wagner and perhaps one or more of Brad Lambert, Parker Ford and Nikita Chibrikov at some point, depending on how injuries play out for the Jets.

That’s the deepest roster the Moose have iced in years — one that could make them a legitimate Calder Cup contender.

Why is this important for the Jets? Not only do you want your next wave of NHL talent playing in a good environment — one that breeds winning habits — but you also want to create internal competition that keeps everyone on their toes.

Consider this: there were 596 former AHL players on NHL opening-night rosters this week, accounting for more than 82 per cent of the entire league. The Jets alone have 22, which is tied with Tampa Bay for tops in the league.

Whether it’s being ready for an NHL opportunity that arises or creating one through stellar play, this is the type of symmetry every organization strives for between its big club and farm team.

#### *What’s the frequency, Helly?*

The workload for Hellebuyck has been a hot topic of debate for nearly a decade. And as the reigning Hart Trophy winner and three-time Vezina Trophy recipient prepares for his 11th NHL season, it’s going to be a storyline worth watching once again.

Hellebuyck has made 60 or more starts six times, including 62 last season when he delivered the best campaign of his career.

There's no question he can handle the load. He's a proven workhorse who continues to push his ceiling higher, even after setting the bar incredibly high from the start.

The debate, as always, is whether scaling back his regular-season starts might help him stay a bit fresher for the Stanley Cup playoffs.

There's no evidence suggesting otherwise, and the Jets probably owe it to themselves to find out — even if Hellebuyck would prefer to start as many games as possible.

“He's still going to come in and ask for 82 games. I know it,” said Arniel. “The big thing is, what happens at the Olympics? Is it seven or eight games if they go to the gold medal (game)? That could add to the picture big-time.”

It's a safe bet Hellebuyck still makes north of 55 starts and could push as high as 59 — though the sweet spot likely sits around 57 or 58.

### *Box office*

When you're the smallest market in the league — in a city that has already lost one NHL franchise — what happens off the ice will always be under a microscope.

The Jets have seen their season-ticket base grow for a second straight year, by roughly 500, up from a franchise-low of 9,500 in 2023-24 — a figure that had commissioner Gary Bettman and team co-owner Mark Chipman sounding the alarm.

There's still a long way to go to reach the pre-pandemic base of 13,000, but efforts continue with more flexible ticketing packages, enhanced perks, improved game-day experiences and ongoing arena upgrades.

Will that lead to a much-needed box office boost?

Winning, of course, helps the cause as well — especially with the salary cap projected to rise significantly in the coming years and a desire to keep spending close to the ceiling.

### *Captain's contract*

Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff joked recently that it wouldn't be long before reporters started asking him about the NHL trade deadline, even though it was still nearly six months away.

His point? There's always another issue to tackle or a potential fire to stamp out.

So, after coming to terms on Wednesday with Connor on an eight-year extension — the richest contract in Jets history — what's next on the to-do list?

That one's easy. Lowry is another pending unrestricted free agent who's made it clear he wants to stick around.

Lowry knew Connor's deal was the top priority, but now that it's done, it wouldn't be surprising if the second draft pick in Jets 2.0 history soon puts pen to paper as well.



With the salary cap on the rise, expect Lowry to earn a raise from the US\$3.25 million he's scheduled to make this season, likely on a three- or four-year term.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/10/08/jets-sign-connor-in-12-m-eight-year-contract-extension>

### ***Jets sign Connor in \$12-M, eight-year contract extension***

By: Ken Wiebe

One of the biggest questions surrounding the Winnipeg Jets has been answered.

After negotiations heated up Tuesday, the Jets and star winger Kyle Connor have agreed to terms on an eight-year extension worth US\$96 million that carries an average annual value of US\$12 million.

It's also the richest deal in Jets history, eclipsing the matching seven-year, US\$59.5 million contracts signed by goalie Connor Hellebuyck and centre Mark Scheifele two years ago by a significant margin.

Connor is the latest homegrown talent to commit his prime years to the Jets, and he will be paid handsomely to do so.

Prior to extending, did any part of Connor wonder what it might be like to explore unrestricted free agency on July 1?

"I reflected on it at the end of the year last year and gave it some thought, but there was never any scenario where I could see myself going somewhere else," said Connor. "This team, these guys here and this organization has been nothing but top notch. And, like I said earlier, just giving you every chance you can to succeed and all the tools and I wouldn't want to try to win a Stanley Cup with another group of players in an organization.

"So once you really start thinking about it, there's no other place."

The belief was that both Connor and the Jets were hoping to get the contract taken care of before the new season begins, which has its obvious benefits for both the player and the hockey club.

Although Connor never outwardly expressed any concern about getting the deal signed or a timeline to do so, this move allows both Connor and the Jets to have clarity on the future moving forward.

That was especially important after fellow winger Nikolaj Ehlers departed as an unrestricted free agent to sign a seven-year pact with the Carolina Hurricanes this past summer.

Having Connor follow him out the door next summer was simply not an option; neither was trying to find a deal similar to the one the Colorado Avalanche made with the Hurricanes when they couldn't reach a contract extension with Mikko Rantanen.

Connor held a lot of leverage in these negotiations, and he got a substantial raise on the US\$7.143 million he will make in the final season of the seven-year, US\$50-million deal he signed in late September of 2019.

It's a massive financial commitment for a Jets team that has continually shown belief in its core, and it's one they absolutely had to make in order to help keep their competitive window as wide open as possible.

The contract includes US\$41 million in signing bonuses and US\$55 million in salary.

Since being chosen by the Jets 17th overall in the 2015 NHL draft, Connor has grown into an elite sniper, producing seven seasons north of 30 goals — including 41 last season and a career-best 47 during the 2021-22 campaign.

On a landmark day for himself, his family and the Jets' franchise, Connor provided some insight on his journey when asked what the player picked out of the USHL would think about the past decade.

"As a kid, I don't think your dreams can get as big as that," Connor said after a chuckle. "It's just about making the NHL, sticking and then the ultimate goal is to win a Stanley Cup with this group. You can never really picture where your career is going to go.

"But it's pretty special and something I don't take for granted, to be able to play for a single organization throughout my whole career. The trust that they have in me and the belief ever since they did draft me in 2015 is awesome. It gives me the confidence to be the player that I am and the person."

Top-line players are incredibly hard to find and the Jets have sewn up Their trio for their prime years — with Scheifele locked in for five more seasons at US\$8.5 million and right-winger Gabe Vilardi about to start a six-year pact that carries an AAV of US\$7.5 million.

The Jets are in win-now mode, and their chances of going on a deep playoff run are exponentially higher with Connor in the fold for an extended period of time.

Connor was seventh in the NHL scoring last season, recording a career-best 97 points, and the list of guys ahead of him include the likes of Connor McDavid, Mitch Marner, David Pastrnak, Leon Draisaitl, Nathan MacKinnon and Nikita Kucherov.

That's pretty impressive company.

Connor's durability nearly matches his consistency and production, and those are qualities organizations like to invest in.

"(He's a) fantastic individual, an elite player, one of the elite goal-scorers in the league and to have him here for a long time... that's great for us," said Jets head coach Scott Arniel.

For those wondering about any player on the Jets roster making nearly US\$4 million more than the reigning Hart Trophy winner and whether there could be any implications, you can simply file this as the new cost of doing business in a rapidly rising salary-cap world.

If Hellebuyck or Scheifele were one year from unrestricted free agency coming off the season they just completed, they would have been in position to cash in closer to the number Connor landed on as well.

Scheifele was asked if Connor would be subject to any grief for becoming the highest-paid player on their roster.

“No, no kidding at all, just happy for him. That’s tremendous and just very, very happy for him,” said Scheifele, who heard about the extension via text from Winnipegger and former Jets forward Adam Brooks. “And happy for myself, too. I get him for the rest of my career so that’s pretty exciting news.”

The recent deal Minnesota Wild winger Kirill Kaprizov signed (an eight-year extension with an AAV of US\$17 million) moved the goal posts to a certain degree, but an argument can also be made that Connor might have left some money on the table by not waiting until next summer to decide on his future.

It’s easy to envision one of the other 31 teams in the NHL being willing to pony up somewhere in the neighbourhood of US\$13 million to US\$15 million per season, but those teams could not offer an eight-year term.

In the end, the Jets retain a critical member of the core group, someone with a skill set that no other player in the system can duplicate.

The player gets a massive payday in a place where he’s more than comfortable raising a young family and will continue to chase the Stanley Cup for a team he’s invested a great deal of sweat equity in.

Any time a team agrees to pay a number of core pieces into their mid-30s, there’s going to be some risk attached.

But when you consider the alternative and what it would mean for the immediate future of the franchise, this has the makings of being a smart move that ages well.

### **Winnipeg Sun**

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/kyle-connors-contract-extension-good-for-the-vibe-in-the-room>

### ***Kyle Connor's contract extension good for 'the vibe in the room'***

By Gordon Anderson

Due to previous experience in contract conversations, Kyle Connor could have waited to sign his new contract, but why bother?

“I think it’s good for everybody, for a team and for the direction of the vibe in the room,” Connor said on Wednesday morning at the Hockey For All Centre. “I was fine either way, going into it (the season). I’ve had it before where — in my last deal before this one, the extension for seven years — I played throughout the whole year and had no problem.”

On Wednesday, the Jets announced the signing of the forward to an eight-year contract extension worth US \$96 million. The deal will kick in next season. He will get paid \$12 million per season going forward.

The deal was also the largest given out in team history.

Connor led the team in goals scored (41) and points last season with 96. He led the Jets during the playoffs with five goals and a dozen helpers in 13 games. Connor has scored 284 goals with the Jets. He has 582 points in 613 regular-season games.

Connor signed his first contract with the Jets in September of 2019.

For team harmony alone, forward Mark Scheifele is also pleased the deal was completed before the start of the regular season. The Jets host the Dallas Stars on Thursday night at Canada Life Centre. Puck drop is scheduled for 7 p.m.

"I think whenever there's a lingering storyline it definitely plays into guys' minds, so I'm happy it's done before the season and just excited to get going," the team's top centre said.

Jets head coach Scott Arniel relayed some of the distractions Nikolaj Ehlers went through last season without a contract. Ehlers eventually signed with the Carolina Hurricanes in early July. The former Jets winger will earn US \$8.5 million this season.

"We went through that last year with Ehlers," Arniel said. "It's just hard for the player. You're thinking about what you have to do to help (the team) win and go out on the ice and be the best player you can, and then you've got that sitting in the back of your mind. As the season goes on, you're thinking about it. For (Connor) that's all off his mind now, he can just go be the best player he can be."

When the deal kicks in next year, Connor will be the highest-paid player on the team. Scheifele and goaltender Connor Hellebuyck will earn \$8.5 million this season and next season. According to PuckPedia, Connor will pocket \$7,142,857 this year.

[https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/kyle-connor-lands-richest-contract-in-winnipeg-jets-history?utm\\_source=winnipeg-jets](https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/kyle-connor-lands-richest-contract-in-winnipeg-jets-history?utm_source=winnipeg-jets)

### ***Kyle Connor lands richest contract in Winnipeg Jets history***

By Paul Friesen

Kyle Connor isn't going anywhere.

The Winnipeg Jets' star forward, who'd been on course to become a free agent next summer, has inked an eight-year contract extension worth an average \$12 million per season, the most lucrative contract the franchise has ever handed out.

The deal is reportedly loaded with bonuses, and not just an initial signing bonus. It also includes a full no-move clause, meaning the Jets can't put Connor on the trade market without his approval for the length of the contract.

The 28-year-old set a career high with 97 points last season, including 41 goals and a career-best 56 assists, finishing among the NHL's top-10 scorers, while being named a first-team all-star.

In 13 playoff games he led the team with 17 points, including five goals.

He is earning just over \$7 million on his current contract, which runs through this season.

Since the Jets drafted him in the first round, 17th overall, in 2015, the Michigan native has recorded seven seasons of at least 30 goals.

His average salary comes in at just half a million dollars lower than Connor McDavid's, after the Edmonton Oilers star recently signed a two-year extension.

Connor is the third high-profile Jets player to commit to the organization for the maximum eight-year period, joining centre Mark Scheifele and goalie Connor Hellebuyck, who signed deals of that length on the eve of the season two years ago. Those contracts are worth an average \$8.5 million per season.

The Jets open this season at home against Dallas, the team that knocked them out of the second round of a playoffs last spring, on Thursday.

[https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/the-jets-open-their-nhl-season-against-the-dallas-stars-on-thursday?utm\\_source=winnipeg-jets](https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/the-jets-open-their-nhl-season-against-the-dallas-stars-on-thursday?utm_source=winnipeg-jets)

### ***The Jets open their NHL season against the Dallas Stars on Thursday***

By Gordon Anderson

After weeks of mind-numbing practices and games that counted for nothing, the Jets will finally get a taste of the real thing.

"I'm really excited to just get playing hockey again, playing meaningful games," Jets forward Mark Scheifele said on Wednesday. "And it starts off with a big one against Dallas."

The Jets begin the 2025-26 NHL regular season on Thursday when the Dallas Stars come to town for a 7 p.m. puck drop at Canada Life Centre.

"It's always great to play that team that knocked you out — anytime, whether it's the first game of the year or towards the end, down the stretch, or in the playoffs, we're going to be seeing these guys and we're going to have to go through them," Jets forward Kyle Connor said. "We know what kind of team they are, so we're going to be excited for that one and it's a great way to start the year."

The Stars eliminated the Jets in six games in the second round of the Western Conference playoffs last May.

Connor received the lion's share of the media attention on Wednesday, as the club announced his eight-year contract extension worth US \$96 million. The contract takes effect next season, paying him \$12 million per year.

The newly signed forward says the Stars are a strong early-season litmus test for the Jets.

"We feel we have a lot of unfinished business, as a group," Connor said. "We took a great step last year, obviously the Presidents' Trophy, but we realize that it's all about that next step in the playoffs, getting to that next round and winning and having that consistent presence in the playoffs and going as deep as we can."

Training camp began on Sept. 18 at the Hockey For All Centre. The club played six exhibition games, and won two of them.

The head coach is happy where the club is at as he stares down the extended runway that is a hockey season.

'I felt that training like training camp was good, everybody built their game towards (Thursday),' Arniel said. "We have checked all the boxes on all the stuff on all the stuff we wanted to present to the players and now it is (just go out there and play the game)."

Arniel says the race for the Central Division begins on opening night. A good start is imperative.

"You want to set the tone off right, not only your opening game, but you want to make sure in our division that we can get out in front of these guys, and we want to get off on a good note," Arniel said.

Last season, the Jets had the division lead well in hand after winning eight consecutive games right out of the gate. The club's first loss was to the Maple Leafs on Oct. 28. In total, they won 15 of their first 16 games.

The team will ice a short-handed lineup with captain Adam Lowry on the sidelines with a hip injury. Cole Perfetti is also out with a high ankle sprain, and Dylan Samberg is on the shelf with a broken wrist. All three players are either weeks or months away from returning.

Jonathan Toews is nursing a lower-body injury, but he did practice on Wednesday.

"Toews had a good day (on Wednesday)" Arniel said of the club's 37-year-old projected second-line centre. "We will make that decision on Thursday."

**Sportsnet.ca**

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/10/07/everybodys-ready-to-go>

***With Kyle Connor extension, 'top-notch' Jets lock up yet another core piece***

By Ryan Dixon

WINNIPEG — Initially, it was impossible to know exactly what was said to trigger a rousing round of stick taps at the start of Winnipeg Jets practice. Still, it was easy to assume the subject matter had something to do with the news left winger Kyle Connor had just put pen to paper on a massive contract extension with the club.

Once the equipment had been peeled off, Jets coach Scott Arniel confirmed he kicked off practice by congratulating Connor, with just a little bit of cheekiness thrown into the celebration.

"I said, 'We have some very big news; [rookie Nikita Chibrikov] just signed a two-year extension,'" Arniel relayed with a smile. "That got a good giggle, and I said he took less so we could get Kyle signed."

With respect to Chibrikov and the deal he made a couple days ago, not much can lighten the mood around a squad like a star player doubling down on his commitment to the only franchise he's ever competed for.

"Yeah, it's awesome," Connor said of the eight-year, \$96-million contract extension the Jets announced he signed on Wednesday morning. "Both sides were working hard to get this done before the season and I couldn't be more thrilled and excited to be part of this organization for the next eight, nine years, including this year."

Of course, the feeling is mutual. Arniel said he was thrilled to get the Tuesday-night call from Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff informing him that the two sides had hammered something out.

"Just in my short time here with [Connor], from him getting married, having a child, to having the last two years, especially, the breakout years he had and the recognition he's starting to get around the league that maybe he wasn't getting [before], people know who he is now and they know how good of a talent he is and how important he is for us," Arniel said.

The coach noted it was especially great to learn this big bit of business had been knocked out before the Jets start their regular season Thursday night at home versus the Dallas Stars. Last year, Nikolaj Ehler's pending free agency was a season-long subplot before he ultimately signed with the Carolina Hurricanes. Despite best intentions, Arniel acknowledged it's tough for a player to be laser-focussed while twisting in the wind.

"We went through that last year with [Ehlers]," he said. "It's just hard for the player. You're thinking about what you have to do to help [the team] win and go out on the ice and be the best player you can be, and then you've got that sitting in the back of your mind and certainly as the season goes on, you're thinking about it. For [Connor], that's all off his mind now, he can just go be the best player he can be."

"To hear [from Cheveldayoff] it was completed and completed before the season, so it's not kind of a distraction, it's awesome. [Connor is a] fantastic individual, an elite player, one of the elite goal-scorers in the league and to have him here for a long time, that's great for us."

That was a view shared by Mark Scheifele, who knows a thing or two about what Connor just went through. It was two years ago that Scheifele, along with Connor Hellebuyck, inked twin seven-year, \$59.5-million contract extensions to forgo free agency right on the eve of the 2023-24 campaign. Given both players' performance since then — Scheifele is a point-per-game centre playing beside Connor on the top line and Hellebuyck is the reigning league MVP, for goodness' sake — those cap hits are extremely team friendly, especially with the salary ceiling projected to make appreciable gains in coming years.

Scheifele said there was no tension around Connor re-setting the bar in the Jets dressing room with the richest contract in franchise history, outstripping the deals he and Hellebuyck inked a relatively short time ago.

“Just happy for him,” Scheifele said. “That’s tremendous and just very, very happy for him and happy for myself, too. I get him for the rest of my career, so that’s pretty exciting news.”

Even from a league-wide perspective, you can certainly argue the Jets did well to get Connor signed for a \$12-million hit. The number is right in line with what Mikko Rantanen and Mitch Marner signed for in 2025, and those elite wingers are playing for teams with no state tax in Texas (Rantanen) and Nevada (Marner). Now consider that Kirill Kaprizov — who, like Connor, was taken in the 2015 draft — just inked an eight-year extension that carries a \$17 AAV. Since Kaprizov entered the league at 23 years old in 2020-21, he’s posted 1.21 points-per-game mark. While that’s superior to Connor’s 1.05 mark during the same span, it’s still jarring to think Kaprizov — who’s only one year younger than the 28-year-old Connor — accounts for \$5 million more per year on the Wild’s ledger than Connor does in Winnipeg.

Any way you slice it, everyone from Jets fans to members of the organization to, of course, No. 81 himself must be happy with how things played out. And while Ehlers did choose to depart as a UFA, Cheveldayoff and his staff have done great work since the end of last season to lock up core pieces like defenceman Neal Pionk, Connor’s linemate Gabe Vilardi and, now, Connor himself on long-term pacts. Throw the deals Scheifele and Hellebuyck signed a couple years ago in the mix and that stereotype nobody wants to play in Winnipeg evaporates fast.

“We’ve said before it’s hard to get guys, free agents, to come here,” Arniel said. “But once we get [players] here and get a grasp on them, get a hold on them, we dig in on them, they recognize how special it is to play here.”

For his part, Connor contemplated what life outside Winnipeg might be like, but the idea of leaving — even if it meant he could sell his services to the highest bidder — never took.

“I reflected on it at the end of [last season] and gave it some thought, but there was never any scenario where I could see myself going somewhere else,” he said. “This team, these guys here and this organization has been nothing but top-notch. And like I said earlier, just giving you every chance you can to succeed and all the tools [you need]. I wouldn’t want to try to win a Stanley Cup with another group of players in [a different] organization. So once you really start thinking about it, there’s no other place.”

Now he won’t have to think about it ever again.

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/why-connor-decided-to-ink-eight-year-extension-with-jets/>

### ***Why Connor decided to ink eight-year extension with Jets (VIDEO)***

Sean Reynolds catches up with Winnipeg Jets' Kyle Connor after signing an eight-year extension with the organization to discuss what the deciding factors were for him and his close connections with his teammates and the city of Winnipeg.

**TSN.ca**

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/2025/10/08/the-talking-point-whats-the-impact-of-kyle-connors-extension-on-the-jets/>

### ***The Talking Point: What's the impact of Kyle Connor's extension on the Jets? (VIDEO)***



The Jets locked up Kyle Connor to the richest deal in franchise history on Wednesday, signing the star forward to an eight-year, \$96 million contract extension. What's the impact of Connor's extension on Winnipeg? TSN Hockey analyst Martin Biron breaks it down in The Talking Point.

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/2025/10/08/connor-jets-willingness-to-win-scheifele-and-hellebuyck-commitment-helped-decision-to-sign/>

***Connor: Jets' willingness to win, Scheifele, Hellebuyck commitment helped decision to sign (VIDEO)***

Fresh off signing his eight-year extension with the Jets, Kyle Connor sat down with TSN Hockey Insider Darren Dreger to chat about his decision to commit to Winnipeg long-term, his relationship with Mark Scheifele and Connor Hellebuyck, getting to know Jonathan Toews, what he thinks about setting a specific target for goals this season and more.

### **NHL Network**

<https://illegalcurve.com/nhl-network-nhl-tonight-crew-breaks-down-the-8-year-contract-extension-for-kyle-connor/>

***NHL Tonight crew breaks down the 8-year contract extension for Kyle Connor (VIDEO)***

The NHL Tonight crew breaks down the 8 year contract extension between Kyle Connor and the Winnipeg Jets

### **Global Winnipeg**

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11469448/winnipeg-jets-kyle-connor-contract-extension/>

***'I couldn't see myself anywhere else': Kyle Connor, Jets agree to 8-year, \$96M contract***

By Sam Thompson & Russ Hobson Global News

Kyle Connor is staying in Winnipeg long-term.

The Jets' star winger, who turns 29 this December, agreed to the biggest contract in franchise history, signing an eight-year, \$96-million deal on Wednesday.

Connor, who was drafted 17th overall by the Jets in 2015, has recorded 582 points in 613 games — all with the Jets. He led Winnipeg in goals and points last season, while also setting a new career -high with 56 assists.

Getting a deal done prior to the 2025-26 season, Connor told 680 CJOB's The Jim Toth Show, was always the goal.

"Obviously both parties wanted to get something done before the season to show a strong signal... to the team, the franchise, the city, and just put it behind us and get the business taken care of," he said.

"I'm trying to win the Stanley Cup and be the best team (we) can."

The Michigan native won the Lady Byng Trophy in 2022 and has represented the United States internationally, including at the 4 Nations Face-Off in February.

Connor said re-signing in Winnipeg was always his first choice as he weighed his options during the off-season.

“At the end of the year, you sit down and you have those options, you go over them with your family. The more I thought of it, I couldn’t see myself anywhere else, striving to win a Stanley Cup with this group,” he said.

“It was really important to me to stay there. I don’t take for granted the opportunity that has been given to me by this organization and being able to wear a Jets (logo) for my entire career.”

At \$12 million per season, Connor becomes the Jets’ highest paid player, surpassing Mark Scheifele and Connor Hellebuyck who are both at \$8.5 million per season. Connor could have potentially signed for a higher amount on the open market next summer as an unrestricted free agent, but the new deal can make him a lifetime Jet.

“(I’m) very excited for our group, for the city, for him especially,” said Scheifele. “Amazing news to come into the rink this morning.

“Whenever there is a lingering storyline, it definitely plays into guys’ minds, so I’m happy it’s done before the season.

“I’m happy for myself too. I get him for the rest of my career, so that’s pretty exciting news.”

Connor’s head coach is also thrilled to have one of his top snipers locked down long-term.

“It’s awesome,” said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. “I’ve been able to coach him for the last few years. Fantastic individual, an elite player, one of the elite goal scorers in the league and to have him here for a long time, that’s great for us.”

The Jets kick off the new season at home against the Dallas Stars on Thursday night.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11469363/analysis-winnipeg-jets-15th-season-begins-edmonds/>

### ***ANALYSIS: Puck drops Thursday on Jets’ 15th season in Winnipeg***

By Paul Edmonds CJOB

The puck will drop on a new hockey season Thursday night in Winnipeg – the 15th for the Jets back in the city.

For fans of the team, it’s been a quick ride to say the least, but a memorable journey with, undoubtedly, so much more to come.

Along the way, there have been great plays, great players, playoff highs, playoff lows, empty buildings and consecutive sellouts. For many of us, winter in Winnipeg has been so much more enjoyable with them than it was without.

So, as the Jets host the Dallas Stars on Thursday, what we should expect is what the team also forecasts for itself: a highly competitive season with a playoff spot secured for late April.

What we shouldn't expect, however, is another Presidents' Trophy, a second straight franchise-record 56-win season or 116 points and multiple trophies – including the Hart – for their goaltender again.

That is not to say those objectives cannot be reached for a second straight year, it's just that the reality is this season will be different, just like each one of the previous 14 have been since the team returned.

Now, before there's any accusation that we're selling the prospects for this season short before it even begins, it should be noted that a consecutive Central Division title is certainly attainable for a team that is deeper, more experienced and hungrier than ever.

It's a group that has figured out that the 82 regular-season games are only an audition to earn an invitation to a 16-team tournament that determines a Stanley Cup champion.

For sure, this will be an exciting season for the Jets. Different, as mentioned, but lively in its own way for everyone, especially the fans.

And so, as the puck drops on a new campaign Thursday night in Winnipeg, the 15-year ride in the city continues at high speed and a memorable journey in the NHL rolls along with, undoubtedly, so much more to come.

### **CBC Manitoba**

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/jonathan-toews-jets-season-opener-9.6932495>

#### ***Toews's return to Winnipeg meaningful for both Jets centre and the community he grew up in***

By Graham Sceviour-Fraehlich · CBC News

Jonathan Toews's first game as a member of the Winnipeg Jets, slated for Thursday night, promises to be a meaningful homecoming for both the star centre and countless Manitoba hockey fans.

"Having the chance to be here at home in front of my friends, my family and the city of Winnipeg and playing for the Jets, it's a dream," the Winnipeg-born Toews said in French — which he grew up speaking in a bilingual household — after a training camp session last month.

Toews, who captained the Chicago Blackhawks to Stanley Cups in 2010, 2013 and 2015, says he feels the community he grew up in has left its mark on his makeup as a hockey player.

"We're very humble. We're hard-working. For me, those are two qualities that I think I exhibit every day," he said in French.

"My ability to work, to score goals, to attain my objectives [are things that] I've learned from my parents, but also my coaches and my teachers, all my friends."

Several Jets supporters who came to a recent team training camp session said having Toews play for the team is a dream come true for them as well.

"It's very special for Winnipeg," Jets fan Vinny Gillespie told Radio-Canada at the event, speaking in French.

Gillespie, a university student, says he's bought tickets for Toews's first game, and intends to grab a No. 19 Toews jersey for the occasion.

Fan Jessica Bradley said she's "always been a Jonathan Toews fan, even before the Jets came back [to Winnipeg in 2011]."

"So to see him on home ice wearing home team colours is amazing," said Bradley.

Toews "could've gone to any team in the league," added Melissa Matthew. "But he came to Winnipeg, so that's huge."

#### *Former coach, teacher praise work ethic*

Toews, now 37, will soon see his first regular-season action since the 2022-23 season. His absence was caused by chronic inflammation as well as immune system troubles possibly caused by long COVID.

Despite his long absence, Toews said he wants to play a role similar to the one he had as the leader of the Blackhawks.

"My role is still to score, to contribute offensively and also to play well on defence," he said in French, adding he wants to continue to be a force in the faceoff circle and on the penalty kill.

These skills have won Toews a collection of hardware that include a Conn Smythe Trophy as playoff MVP in 2010, the Frank J. Selke Trophy in 2013 as the best defensive forward and the Mark Messier Leadership Award in 2015.

Thom Gross, who was Toews's coach and trainer during his days as a minor hockey player, said he's not surprised to see his former pupil working to return to the sport's top level, saying the player's work ethic was apparent from a young age.

"The work ethic, but also the understanding that that's what was going to be required to be successful," he said, adding that Toews's level of devotion to the game stands out even among the hardest-working of players he coached.

#### *Jonathan Toews's healing journey: From long COVID back to the NHL*

The hockey player's work ethic extends to his commitment to maintaining his French. Despite having played 15 seasons with Chicago, Toews says the French language remains a central part of his identity that also connects him to his home province.

"We learn when we're young to take pride in that," Toews, whose mother hails from Quebec, said in French.

"It's not always easy to preserve our language, preserve our culture, so I work on it as much as I can, even if I don't often get the chance to speak it."

Dolorès Beaumont, his former teacher and vice-principal at the Winnipeg schools École Christine-Lespérance and École Lavallée, is still in contact with his family. She agrees that it's his level of effort that distinguishes him.

"Jonathan was a Grade 7 student, but not like the others," she said in French, saying he stood apart from his classmates.

*'Incredibly blessed'*

The fruits of that effort are visible at Dakota Community Centre, where the two-rink hockey facility Toews grew up playing at now bears his name.

The president and chief executive officer of the centre, Michele Augert, said she appreciates Toews, who made a \$1-million donation to the centre in 2016.

"We are incredibly blessed to have Jonathan as part of this community centre and a very championed supporter of this community centre," she said at the centre, standing in front of a display case showing off Toews-related memorabilia, including a new Jets jersey.

"We're incredibly proud that he calls this place home, and we're proud to be part of his family."

Tyler Riel, the centre's director of hockey and ice programs, played hockey with Toews as a child. He said the sight of the Winnipegger in Jets blue could help make the sport even more popular locally.

"Especially here at the community centre, I know there's going to be a lot of people and a lot of kids that are going to be looking up to him and gravitating towards hockey because of him signing here," he said.

It is uncertain whether Toews will be suiting up when the Jets will start their season Thursday at Canada Life Centre against the Dallas Stars, after he sustained an injury in the pre-season.

**NHL.com**

<https://www.nhl.com/news/kyle-connor-signs-eight-year-contract-with-winnipeg-jets>

***Connor signs 8-year, \$96 million contract with Jets  
Forward 7th in NHL last season with 97 points; deal begins in 2026-27***

By NHL.com

Kyle Connor signed an eight-year, \$96 million contract with the Winnipeg Jets on Wednesday. The contract begins next season and has an average annual value of \$12 million.

"It's awesome," Connor said. "Both sides were working hard to get this done before the season, and I couldn't be more thrilled and excited to be part of this organization for the next eight, nine years, including this year. And I think the culture and identity of this city and this organization fits well in my values and that's something that was a big priority for me."

Winnipeg plays its season opener at home against the Dallas Stars on Thursday (8 p.m. ET; TSN3, Victory+).

"To hear it was completed and completed before the season, so it's not kind of a distraction, it's awesome," Jets coach Scott Arniel said. "I've been able to coach [Connor] for the past few years, [he's a] fantastic individual, an elite player, one of the elite goal-scorers in the League, and to have him here for a long time, that's great for us."

Connor is in the final season of a seven-year, \$49.98 million contract (\$7.14 million AAV) he signed Sept. 28, 2019, and could have become an unrestricted free agent after this season.

Testing the market, however, never felt like an option for the 28-year-old forward.

"I reflected on it at the end of the year last year and gave it some thought, but there was never any scenario where I could see myself going somewhere else," he said. "This team, these guys here and this organization has been nothing but top notch. ... I wouldn't want to try to win a Stanley Cup with another group of players in an organization. So once you really start thinking about it, there's no other place."

Connor was seventh in the NHL last season with 97 points and tied for seventh with 41 goals. He led the Jets during the Stanley Cup Playoffs with 17 points (five goals, 12 assists) in 13 games.

It was his second 40-goal season (47; 2021-22) and his fourth consecutive 30-goal season. Since becoming a full-time NHL player in 2017-18, Connor has scored at least 25 goals in each of his eight seasons, and his 282 goals during that span are eighth in the League.

Selected by Winnipeg in the first round (No. 17) of the 2015 NHL Draft, Connor has 582 points (284 goals, 298 assists) in 613 regular-season games and 49 points (20 goals, 29 assists) in 58 playoff games.

"Looking at the window and the pieces that this organization has built over the years and just the willingness to win at all costs, you can see it top down, starting with [executive chairman] Mark Chipman and [him] giving us players, ever since I came into this organization, a chance to succeed and all the tools that you need. And it's continued throughout the career, and it's getting better. So from an organization standpoint, I love to see it, and I couldn't be more excited."

<https://www.nhl.com/news/trophy-tracker-winnipeg-jets-connor-hellebuyck-preseason-choice-to-win-3rd-straight-vezina>

***Trophy Tracker: Hellebuyck preseason choice to win 3rd straight Vezina with Jets Oettinger, Shesterkin also among favorites for top goalie by NHL.com panel***

By Adam Kimelman

To mark the beginning of the 2025-26 regular season, NHL.com is running its first installment of the Trophy Tracker series. Today, we look at the race for the Vezina Trophy, given annually to the top goalie in the NHL as selected NHL general managers.

Connor Hellebuyck has a chance to do something that's happened once in 44 seasons.

The Winnipeg Jets goalie, who won the Vezina Trophy voted as the best at his position in the NHL the past two seasons, is the favorite to win it again this season, according to NHL.com. Hellebuyck received seven first-place votes and 61 voting points from a 15-person panel.

Andrei Vasilevskiy of the Tampa Bay Lightning was second with 43 points (two first-place votes), followed by Jake Oettinger of the Dallas Stars with 42 (two), Igor Shesterkin of the New York Rangers with 25 (three) and Sergei Bobrovsky of the Florida Panthers with 16 (one).

Dominik Hasek (1997-99) is the only other goalie to win the Vezina three straight seasons since NHL general managers began voting on the award in 1981-82.

Hellebuyck certainly has the talent and pedigree to match Hasek. Last season he won 47 games, tied with Hockey Hall of Famers Bernie Parent (1973-74) and Roberto Luongo (2006-07) for the third-best single-season total in NHL history. His eight shutouts led the NHL, as did his 2.00 goals-against average (minimum 25 games). He was second with a .925 save percentage, just behind Anthony Stolarz of the Toronto Maple Leafs (.926), who played 34 games compared to Hellebuyck's 63.

Hellebuyck also had a .935 even-strength save percentage that ranked second (Stolarz, .936) while facing 1,403 even-strength shots, fourth most in the NHL. He had a .900 or better save percentage in a League-best 71.0 percent of his starts (44 of 62). He became the fourth goalie in the NHL Expansion Era (since 1967-68) to win the Vezina and the Hart Trophy as NHL most valuable player in the same season, joining Carey Price (2015), Jose Theodore (2002) and Hasek (1997, 1998).

Hellebuyck, though, doesn't believe any of that carries into this season.

"For me I'm kind of going into it as just another season," he said. "We're continuing to build, but I don't want to bring expectations into it. I think expectations kill. I've seen it enough. We're a good team but sometimes you don't win when you expect to win, and you win when you don't expect to win. Really just trying to keep all expectations off the table and go in with a fresh slate. We're going to build our game the way we ended last year, put our best foot forward and let everything fall into place."

At 32 years old, Hellebuyck still is in the prime of his career. He has a team in front of him that should be a Stanley Cup contender, and there's also the extra motivation that comes from having a chance to play for Team USA at the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026.

For now, Hellebuyck isn't concerned with what could happen or might happen down the road.

"I was thinking, 'How can we take that to another level? How can we continue to build?'" he said. "Just because you had success doesn't mean you're going to have success every single day, so how can we continue to build that? That's what I love about the game and playing the game, is there's always more to learn. There's always adapting with the game and how the game is changing. So, for me, it was what's the next step."

Voting totals (points awarded on a 5-4-3-2-1 basis):

Connor Hellebuyck, Jets, 61 points (7 first-place votes); Andrei Vasilevskiy, Lightning, 43 (2); Jake Oettinger, Stars, 42 (2); Igor Shesterkin, Rangers, 25 (3); Sergei Bobrovsky, Panthers, 16 (1); Jacob Markstrom, New Jersey Devils, 15; Dustin Wolf, Calgary Flames, 5; Mackenzie Blackwood, Colorado Avalanche, 5; Sam Montembeault, Montreal Canadiens, 3; Ilya Sorokin, New York Islanders, 2; Darcy Kuemper, Los Angeles Kings, 2; Adin Hill, Vegas Golden Knights, 1; Jordan Binnington, St. Louis Blues, 1