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<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/three-things-jets-comeback-falls-short>

***THREE THINGS: Jets comeback falls short
Jets fall behind 5-1 and lose 5-4 to Stars, Connor scores hat trick***

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG – Mikko Rantanen recorded three points leading the Dallas Stars to a 5-4 win over the Winnipeg Jets at Canada Life Centre putting a damper on the Jets home opener and Jonathan Toews debut. Kyle Connor scored three times and Morgan Barron added the other goal for Winnipeg, Connor Hellebuyck made 32 saves. The Jets went 0-for-4 on the power play, the Stars went 1-for-5. Winnipeg will get right back to work when they host the Los Angeles Kings Saturday afternoon at 12:30 CT.

TOEWS DEBUT

After not playing in a regular season game for over two years, Jets fans welcomed back Jonathan Toews. The 37-year-old had his parents Bryan and Andrée in attendance along with longtime Blackhawks teammate Patrick Sharp. In the second period, Toews had a glorious chance to score his first goal when Nikita Chibrikov hit him coming up the middle of the ice, but Toews fired his shot wide of the goal. In the end, Toews played 18:19, had one shot on goal and liked what he saw from his line with Nikita Chibrikov and Gustav Nyquist.

"There were some situations where the three of us created and had some chances, even on the power play as well," said Toews.

"I was pretty close to making things happen, getting us on the board, so I think there are some positives I'm excited about. [I'll] just keep trying to build on it."

PARADE TO PENALTY BOX CHANGED MOMENTUM

In the second period, the Jets ran into some penalty problems taking three consecutive minors giving Dallas a 5-on-3 power play advantage that carried over into the third period. After Winnipeg had almost killed off Neal Pionk's penalty, Jason Robertson scored on his own rebound to make it 3-1 at 1:01. Just 34 seconds after that, Tyler Seguin converted a beautiful pass from Matt Duchene to give the Stars a three-goal lead. Wyatt Johnston then made it 5-1 as the Jets did not look the team that has been the best defensive squad in the league in back-to-back seasons.

"If we're better with our structure and our details, we're not giving up those looks," said head coach Scott Arniel.

"They scored three goals off entries. That's not us. We don't give up those plays with a guy who's dead center in the middle of the ice, getting chances. We have to work on that."

KC DOING KC THINGS

With the Jets down 1-0 in the first period, it was time for some opening night magic from Kyle Connor. The 96-million-dollar man took a pass from Mark Scheifele and fired a shot behind Jake Oettinger to tie things up. Per NHL Stats, Connor has now scored in eight straight season-opening games dating to 2018-19, already the longest in NHL history. The only players with a streak of six or more contests are Cam Atkinson (6 GP from 2014-15 to 2019-20), Yvan Cournoyer (6 GP from 1973-74 to 1978-79) and Mud Bruneteau (6 GP from 1940-41 to 1945-46).

Connor didn't stop there as he helped build off Morgan Barron's shorthanded goal in the third period, as he would score two goals to complete the hat trick becoming the first player in Jets/Thrashers history to score a hat trick in a season-opening game.

"You give it a good team like that, 5-1 lead, it's tough, but this is a resilient group," said Connor.

"We've shown that a lot throughout the last year and over the past. And yeah, it was a great response. So we can take that out of it for sure."

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<https://www.nhl.com/news/dallas-stars-winnipeg-jets-game-recap-october-9-2025>

Stars hold off Jets despite Connor's hat trick, spoil Toews NHL return Rantanen has 3 points, Gulutzan wins debut in 2nd stint as Dallas coach

By Darrin Bauming

WINNIPEG -- Mikko Rantanen had a goal and two assists, and the Dallas Stars held off the Winnipeg Jets despite Kyle Connor's hat trick for a 5-4 season-opening win at Canada Life Centre on Thursday.

"I think we were really good 5-on-5, defending and offensively playing well," Rantanen said. "But obviously third period, especially the power play, we've got to be more careful. They're looking for breaks like that and we gave them two easy ones. But we learn, we learn from it and we go forward."

Connor's third goal of the game came cut it to 5-4 with 3:03 remaining in the third period for the Jets, who scored three times in the period after trailing 5-1.

"We didn't play a complete 60 tonight," said Connor, who signed an eight-year, \$96 million contract with the Jets on Wednesday. "The bottom line is, we want to get some wins in this league... (I'm) just trying to contribute as much as I can and show a little more leadership this year. And I think over the years, I've definitely grown into that."

Jonathan Toews had a shot on goal and a takeaway in 18:19 of ice time in his debut for his hometown team in Winnipeg, his first NHL game since April 13, 2023, after health issues prevented him from playing the past two seasons.

"I think it is just really exciting before the game," Toews said. "But then once you get your legs out under you, you just go out there and play. But as the game went on you just try not to think about it too much and just enjoy it. You enjoy it when you play your best, and I just tried to find a way to do that."

Toews played for the Chicago Blackhawks from 2008-23, winning the Stanley Cup three times as their captain (2010, 2013, 2015).

"Just, you know, close, but a lot of room for improvement," Toews said of his own game. "A lot of little things I can do better. Definitely trying to start the play with the puck off the face-offs; didn't really get that going for my line out there. But other than that there were some situations where the three of us created and had some chances, even on the power play as well. I was pretty close to making things happen, getting us on the board, so I think there are some positives I'm excited about. [I'll] just keep trying to build on it."

Jason Robertson and Nils Lundkvist each had a goal and an assist, and Thomas Harley and Roope Hintz each had two assists for the Stars. Jake Oettinger made 21 saves.

Glen Gulutzan won his debut in his second stint as Dallas coach after being hired on July 1. He previously coached the Stars from 2011-2013.

"Nothing mimics the first round of playoffs more, in my opinion, than the first five (or) six games of the season," Gulutzan said. "Everybody's juiced up. There's a lot of energy in the buildings. Everybody's healthy, for the most part, and there's a lot of energy. And the games can get a little crazy, and that's what happened tonight."

Morgan Barron scored, and Mark Scheifele had three assists for the Jets, who were also playing their season opener. Connor Hellebuyck made 32 saves.

"Certainly you have to give Dallas credit, but for 50 minutes we were not a very good hockey team," Winnipeg coach Scott Arniel said. "Our structure and detail in all three areas wasn't very good. They're too good of a hockey team to make those kind of mistakes."

Rantanen made it 1-0 Dallas at 3:15 of the first period when the rebound from Hintz's shot from in close went off Hellebuyck's mask and to Rantanen alone in front.

"He was in everything," Gulutzan said of Rantanen. "Took penalties. He was in all fabrics of the game, you know, and you like that. You want guys with a full stat line, and he competes hard. That's what I love about him -- he competes and he's got some fire -- and that's what it takes."

Connor tied it 1-1 at 6:19, collecting Scheifele's cross-slot pass and shooting it under Oettinger's glove.

"It doesn't take much for him to find holes to get that shot off," Arniel said. "The first one, it looked like he was running out of room but he gets it back on his stick and puts it (inside) the bar. He's just a goal-scorer. That's what he does. When he gets time, he gets space, he gets 1-on-1 with the goalie, 90 percent of the time it's in the net."

Lundkvist put the Stars back ahead 2-1 at 15:24, scoring with a snap shot from the high slot.

Dallas made it 4-1 with two goals in a span of 34 seconds in the third. Robertson scored on the power play at 1:01 before Tyler Seguin's goal at 1:35.

"[Rantanen's] playing with some bite out there," Robertson said. "I think everyone was just jacked up to get started, but when he gets going he starts feeling it, gets physical. It just adds another element to his game."

Wyatt Johnston then pushed it to 5-1 at 3:23.

"We gave that top line a couple too many looks," Connor said. "They hurt us a bit there. And we just got to be smart when guys like that are on the ice, but the end of the day, like I said earlier, I think the response is the biggest thing that we show in this group, and we got to take that and move on."

Winnipeg later responded with two short-handed goals in a span of 1:16.

Barron stole the puck in the Jets' end while killing a 5-on-3 Stars power play and skated the length of the ice to score on the breakaway and cut it to 5-2 at 9:53. Connor then scored his second goal of the game on a partial break off his own rebound to make it 5-3 at 11:09.

"The short-handed goal sparked us," Arniel said. "Kind of put a little more urgency into us and we won a few more battles -- little bit more of the things we needed to do during the first 50 minutes."

NOTES: Connor extended his NHL-record streak of scoring a goal in season-opening games to eight (2018-19 to 2025-26). The only players with a streak of six or more contests are Cam Atkinson (six games from 2014-15 to 2019-20), Yvan Cournoyer (six; 1973-74 to 1978-79) and Mud Bruneteau (six; 1940-41 to 1945-46). ... Oettinger (4-0-0) became the first goaltender in Stars/North Stars history to win four season-opening games, passing Marty Turco (3-1-3), Cesare Maniago (3-4-0), Kari Lehtonen (3-2-1) and Ed Belfour (3-0-2). ... Scheifele (10 goals, seven assists; 17 points) passed Blake Wheeler (seven goals, seven assists; 14 points) for the most points in season-opening games in Jets/Thrashers history.

<https://www.nhl.com/news/jonathan-toews-enjoys-emotional-winnipeg-jets-debut-despite-loss>

Toews enjoys emotional Jets debut despite loss to Stars

By Tracey Myers

WINNIPEG -- Jonathan Toews heard the thunderous ovation as he emerged from the tunnel.

The Winnipeg Jets center last heard an on-ice reception like that on April 13, 2023, while with the Chicago Blackhawks. That night, the fans at United Center were saying goodbye to their captain, who wasn't going to be re-signed by the only NHL team he knew.

On Thursday, the fans in Winnipeg were welcoming Toews back to the game he loves.

"Just a lot of energy, a lot of excitement," Toews said about the reception he received before the Jets' 5-4 season-opening loss to the Dallas Stars at Canada Life Centre. "Just trying to contain myself a little bit there."

It would have been understandable if Toews had gotten caught up in the moment. It's been a long two-plus years of battling health issues, trying to get back to normal again and trying to resume the NHL career he thought may have ended in 2023.

Instead, he focused on the game. The Winnipeg native, who was center on the second line with left wing Gustav Nyquist and right wing Nikita Chibrikov, logged 18:19 of ice time with one shot on goal and one takeaway. He was also 7-for-15 on face-offs.

"I think it's just really exciting before the game," Toews said. "Once you get your legs under you, you just go out there and play. As the game went along, I just tried not to think about it too much. Just enjoyed it. You enjoy it when you play our best and I'm just trying to find a way to do that."

Sure, there was a little rust. There was bound to be for the 37-year-old after not playing for so long. But there were certainly signs of the vintage Toews, the guy who helped the Blackhawks win the Stanley Cup in 2010, 2013 and 2015. He was good in board battles and looked comfortable on the second line and the Jets' second power-play unit.

"We've got to realize he's going to be growing every game. He showed spurts of it," Jets forward Kyle Connor said. "He's such a cerebral player. He had a great chance in the second (period) coming down there and, obviously, he's the type of player that he's kicking himself. He thinks he can bury on all those and you see it, though -- he's growing and not only on the ice, but in the locker room, he's a constant presence for us.

"He's great, and he's helping along. Obviously, he's with some new linemates, Chibrikov over there, and you can just see he's talking to him constantly and helping guys along. So, you know

that experience goes a long way. And I liked what I saw from him tonight. Made a lot of good plays, and he was just smart around the puck.”

Despite the loss, it was a special day, especially for Toews’ family. His parents, dad Bryan and mom Andree Gilbert, were at the morning skate and at the game.

“I mean, this is where he grew up and playing with all his buddies and the family’s here,” Bryan Toews said. “It means the world to us as a family that he’s here. We know he’s not only coming to his home city but a great organization, great ownership and great team. Jonathan can’t say enough about his teammates and how strong they are as a group, and he’s so happy to be part of that.”

Toews’ return was big news in the League, and his opponents were also happy to see his return.

“I hate that he’s in the Central (Division), but I love that he’s back,” Stars forward Matt Duchene said to laughs. “I texted him in the spring, kind of seeing what he was thinking. Maybe [he’d] end up wearing green, white and black at some point, but no, it’s great to see him back. He’s had such an amazing career and it’s too bad what he’s gone through, but this looks like a great situation for him.”

Toews said prior to the game that he was ready for the comeback talk to end and the games to begin. Now they have. It’s going to take a little time for him to get adjusted to the Jets, to the systems, to playing after such a long time away. Considering his work ethic, he’ll likely catch up fast.

“Lot of room for improvement, lot of little things I can do better,” he said. “I’m definitely trying to start the play with the puck off the face-offs and didn’t really get that going for my line out there. Other than that there were some situations where the three of us created and had some chances. Even on the power play as well.

“I was pretty close to making things happen, getting us on the board as well. There are some positives that I’m excited about. Just keep trying to build on them.”

https://www.nhl.com/news/jonathan-toews-ready-to-resume-nhl-career-with-winnipeg-jets?utm_source=xdotcom&utm_medium=nhl_social&utm_campaign=media

Toews set to resume NHL career, provide ‘contagious’ work ethic for Jets

By Tracey Myers

CHICAGO -- Jonathan Toews made an immediate impact on Patrick Sharp.

“Right away, there was this presence around him in the room,” Sharp said of the former Chicago Blackhawks captain and his former teammate. “He knew what he wanted to accomplish, he

knew how much work he needed to put in and was willing to do and he was as motivated and as headstrong as anyone I've ever played with. So, that's kind of how I remember him, and not a lot has changed over the years.

"When he puts his mind to something, who am I to tell him it's not going to work?"

That presence, focus and leadership became a staple for the Blackhawks under Toews, their captain from July 18, 2008, to April 13, 2023. Those attributes will be there when Toews and the Winnipeg Jets open their season against the Dallas Stars at Canada Life Centre in Winnipeg on Thursday (8 p.m. ET; TSN3, Victory+).

The 37-year-old, who signed a one-year, \$2 million contract with the Jets on July 1, is back in the NHL after a two-year hiatus because of health issues. Toews was injured during a preseason game against the Minnesota Wild on Sept. 30, but will make his regular-season debut with Winnipeg on Thursday.

"There's a lot of challenges that come your way throughout the year," Toews said after the morning skate Thursday. "Just fatigue and trying to recover and trying to deal with minor injuries that pile up here and there. It's the same for everybody and I'm just happy and grateful to be back to the point where I know I'm confident I can go contribute to this team and put these last few years behind me and just go enjoy this life once again."

Winnipeg won the Presidents' Trophy last season as the best team in the regular season (56-22-4, 116 points) but is still looking for its first Stanley Cup championship. The Jets have qualified for the Stanley Cup Playoffs in seven of the past eight seasons but haven't advanced farther than the Western Conference Final in 2017-18.

Enter Toews, a likely Hockey Hall of Famer who grew up in Winnipeg and helped Chicago win the Stanley Cup in 2010, 2013 and 2015. He won the Conn Smythe Trophy, awarded to the most valuable player of the playoffs, in 2010. He also won the Selke Trophy, given annually to the League's best defensive forward, in 2013.

He had 883 points (372 goals, 511 assists) in 1,067 regular-season games and 119 points (45 goals, 74 assists) in 137 playoff games with the Blackhawks.

"It's a huge deal and it means a lot to the guys in the room," Jets captain Adam Lowry said. "We feel like we're a good team and we're really pushing."

"To have him consider us as one of those contenders and one of those teams he believes in -- a smaller market and generally a market most people don't consider coming to -- I think it's a testament to his belief in our group, and it was nice to see when it was finalized. Now that we have him, we're super excited to welcome him into the fold."

It remains to be seen how Toews will adjust to his new surroundings on ice, but former teammates are certain he'll be a factor in the Jets' locker room.

"He's always made others in the room feel welcome and comfortable," former Blackhawks forward Andrew Shaw said. "He's also that leader that shows ... he doesn't tell you how to do things, he goes out there and does it. He doesn't just do it once, he does it every day.

"He's always doing the little things right. When you get a team to buy into that, you have a leader leading that way who's already got three Cups under his belt, a couple of gold medals (with Canada). It's hard not to push yourself and do the little things right; it's contagious when you see guys like him doing it."

Indeed, there's a reason Toews earned the nickname "Captain Serious."

"Everybody got behind Jonathan," former Blackhawks defenseman Brian Campbell said. "He was the leader and with his work ethic, it was almost like, 'Who can work harder? Who can outwork each other?' That's what I felt it was.

"Sometimes I don't think I had that in other organizations, but when I came here that's how it was. It was like he led it, and I don't think anybody worked harder than him and he just kept pushing that way."

Toews has been through a lot the past two years. Playing for Winnipeg is the beginning of a new chapter for him, but he'll bring the same qualities that made him a great leader in Chicago.

"Anytime you can bring someone in with that type of experience in the playoffs, in big games and big moments, whether that's the Stanley Cup Final or winning the Stanley Cup or the Olympics, he has proven time and time again in big moments that he shows up and he delivers," retired NHL forward Andrew Ladd said.

"There's a certain calmness and belief in himself in those moments that very few have, so that tends to rub off on everyone else on the team."

Canadian Press

<https://www.chrisd.ca/2025/10/10/winnipeg-jets-dallas-stars-season-home-opener-loss/>

As Toews Debuts with Jets, Connor Shines in Season-Opening Loss to Stars

By Judy Owen, The Canadian Press

The spotlight was on Jonathan Toews when the Winnipeg Jets stepped on the ice for their season opener against the Dallas Stars on Thursday.

It ended shining brightly on Kyle Connor, Winnipeg's newly minted highest-paid player.

Connor delivered a hat trick in Winnipeg's comeback attempt, but the Stars skated off with a 5-4 victory that featured a goal and two assists from Mikko Rantanen.

"Yeah, for sure," Connor said when asked if his performance was satisfying after he signed an eight-year, \$US96-million contract extension on Wednesday.

"The bottom line is, we want to get some wins in this league. And it's a lot more fun when you win this now, but just trying to contribute as much as I can and show a little more leadership this year."

The Winnipeg-born Toews received a loud, long cheer from the sold-out crowd at Canada Life Centre when he was introduced before puck drop.

The new Jets centre, who was playing his first NHL game since April 13, 2023, with the Chicago Blackhawks, logged 18:19 of ice time in his 1,068th career regular-season game. He had one shot on goal.

The three-time Stanley Cup champion and former Chicago captain missed the past two seasons for health reasons related to Chronic Inflammatory Response Syndrome and long COVID-19.

"Just a lot of energy. A lot of excitement. I'm just trying to contain myself there," Toews said of the crowd's welcome.

The 37-year-old said he felt "close" to being in game form. He played on the second line with wingers Gustav Nyquist and Nikita Chibrikov.

"But a lot of room for improvement, a lot of little things I can do better," Toews said. "Definitely trying to start the play with the puck off the faceoffs. Didn't really get that going for my line out there. But other than that there were some situations where the three of us created and had some chances, even on the power play as well.

"I was pretty close to making things happen, getting us on the board, so I think there are some positives I'm excited about. (I'll) just keep trying to build on it."

Jets head coach Scott Arniel said Toews was a lot like his teammates – it took a while for everyone to get going.

"I thought I saw changes in his game in that second period," Arniel said. "He started to have the puck a little bit more, had some looks, that line started to do some things.

"At the end of the day, that's a tough one because our whole group wasn't good. And for him, certainly would've liked for it to be a better first game."

The Dallas Stars also appreciated Toews' effort to return to NHL action.

"It's great to see him back," Rantanen said. "I think it's good for the league to have a player like him back in the lineup and back in the NHL, so happy for him.

"It was kind of long journey back and I thought he looked good out there, so just great for the league to have a face like that back on the ice."

Dallas head coach Glen Gulutzan, making his debut behind the bench in his second stint with the franchise, also tipped his hat to Toews.

"I felt good for him, you know," Gulutzan said. "I've watched him and, you know, still a big body, strong on pucks. And you can see his, just some of his 'headsiness' around.

"And for a guy who hasn't played for a while, boy, he's a great player. He still looks good, and you watch him a little bit because he was one of the big guys in the game."

Winnipeg was down 2-1 after the third period and there was no scoring in the middle frame that featured five Jets penalties, with one off-setting. Dallas started a two-man advantage for 1:42 late in the frame.

After Winnipeg's first power play expired, Robertson scored off a feed from Rantanen at 1:01 of the third. Thirty-four seconds later, Seguin made it 4-1 at even strength and Johnston scored at 3:23.

As the crowd quieted down, the Jets brought it to life with a pair of short-handed goals by Barron at 9:53 and Connor's second of the night at 11:09. The Jets winger tallied his third with 3:03 remaining.

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/10/09/jets-comeback-comes-up-short>

Jets' comeback comes up short

By: Mike McIntyre

It had everything you could want heading into a season-opener: The hometown hockey hero making his highly anticipated debut. Two new banners being raised to the rafters. Four shiny team trophies on display in the concourse. A raucous sold-out crowd and two opponents with a rich recent history.

Unfortunately for the Winnipeg Jets, the Dallas Stars spoiled their day yet again.

Last spring it came in Game 6 of their emotional second-round playoff series in the form of a heartbreaking 2-1 overtime loss down in Texas. Now, 145 days later, it was in Game 1 of the 2025-26 campaign — a wild 5-4 setback.

This was always going to be a tough first challenge for the Jets. They were facing a loaded Stars team widely regarded as one of the pre-season favourites to win the Stanley Cup — and doing so without three key members in shutdown centre Adam Lowry (hip), shutdown defenceman Dylan Samberg (wrist) and scoring winger Cole Perfetti (ankle).

What was a tight-checking 2-1 contest heading into the third period turned into a wide-open affair. Dallas scored three times in 2:22 to begin the final frame — only for the Jets to storm back with three of their own.

A final push couldn't net the equalizer.

"Certainly you have to give Dallas credit but for 50 minutes we were not a very good hockey team," said Jets coach Scott Arniel.

"Our structure and detail in all three areas wasn't very good. They're too good of a hockey team to make those kind of mistakes."

Winnipeg, which roared out to an 8-0-0 start last year and won 15 of their first 16 games, falls to 0-1-0. They'll look to get into the win column when they host the Los Angeles Kings (1-1-0) on Saturday afternoon.

Let's dig into this one further:

No opening-night jitters

Nobody can accuse Jets winger Kyle Connor of tip-toeing into a new hockey year. The sniper, fresh off signing the richest contract extension in Winnipeg history, scored his team's first goal of the campaign after some nifty passing from linemates Mark Scheifele and Gabe Vilardi early in the first period.

It's the eighth consecutive season-opener that Connor has lit the lamp. Turns out he was just getting warmed up.

Connor pulled his team to within two goals with just under nine minutes remaining in the game, taking a pass from Scheifele and converting his own rebound off a partial shorthanded breakaway.

Then, with just over three minutes left on the clock, he ripped a wicked wrister past Jake Oettinger — Scheifele once again was the set-up man — and the hats came raining down.

"It doesn't take much for him to find holes. To get that shot off," said Arniel.

"He's just a goal scorer. That's what he does. When he gets time, he gets space, he gets one-on-one with the goalie, 90 percent of the time it's in the net."

Basic mathematics would suggest he's now on pace for 246 goals this year, which would be 154 more than Wayne Gretzky's single-season record. In all seriousness, there's no reason the 28-year-old can't challenge his own personal high of 47 (set in 2021-22).

Toews watch

He got the biggest roar of the night during the pre-game ceremony, which also included the Central Division champion and Presidents' Trophy winning banners being unveiled.

Jonathan Toews might have brought the roof down had he hit the scoresheet in his first-ever game for the Jets — a whopping 910 days after he stepped away from the NHL due to health issues.

He came close on a few occasions, with one shot on goal (and three shot attempts) and several clever passes which his linemates nearly converted. Ultimately, the 37-year-old played 17:46 and won seven of 15 faceoffs while taking one minor penalty.

"A lot of room for improvement, a lot of little things I can do better," was Toews' assessment after the game.

"Definitely trying to start the play with the puck off the face-offs; didn't really get that going for my line out there. But other than that there were some situations where the three of us created and had some chances, even on the power play as well. I was pretty close to making things happen, getting us on the board, so I think there are some positives I'm excited about. (I'll) just keep trying to build on it."

Special teams

Winnipeg's power play was a major weapon last year and a big reason they won the Presidents' Trophy, which was on display in the concourse Thursday night along with the William Jennings (fewest goals allowed), Hart (most valuable player) and Vezina (best goaltender) which belong to Connor Hellebuyck.

They came up empty on a night they sure could have used a goal with the man advantage. The 0-for-4 showing included a late power play after Stars defenceman Thomas Harley accidentally flipped the puck into the crowd.

The penalty kill, however, was a different story. Winnipeg killed off four of the five chances from Dallas, with the only blemish coming just as an extended 5-on-3 advantage was ending early in the third period. The Jets actually outscored the Stars at 4-on-5.

With Josh Morrissey in the box for tripping midway through the third period and the deficit standing at 5-1, Morgan Barron showed a burst of speed to go end-to-end and score on the ensuing breakaway. That was followed 76 seconds later by Connor's shorthanded goal.

"When you give a good team a 5-1 lead, it's tough, but this is a resilient group," said Connor.

"We've shown that a lot throughout last year and the years over the past. It was a great response, so we can take that out of it, for sure."

Goalie duel

One of the obvious storylines heading into this game was a showdown between the two best American goaltenders in the game, who will certainly be teammates next February at the Winter Olympics in Italy.

Hellebuyck was busier, stopping 32 of 37 shots that came his way including all 17 he faced in a lopsided second period. Mikko Rantanen, Nils Lundkvist, Jason Robertson, Tyler Seguin and Wyatt Johnston all got one by him.

Oettinger, who no doubt hopes to upend Hellebyyck as the No. 1 guy in Milan, turned away 21 of 25 shots.

Key play

Wyatt Johnston's goal at 3:23 of the third period made it 5-1 at the time and ended up being the game-winner.

Three stars

Jets LW Kyle Connor: 3 goals

Stars RW Mikko Rantanen: 1 goal, 2 assists

Jets C Mark Scheifele: 3 assists

Packing the place

The Jets have now played in front of 16 sellouts in a row at the downtown rink dating back to last year, which ended with the final eight regular-season games and all seven home playoff dates being sold out.

Such an accomplishment wouldn't have even been a footnote when the NHL first returned to Winnipeg in 2011, but it's notable in a post-pandemic world which saw the ticket base take a big hit.

Goodbye, Gus bus

Winnipeg made a somewhat surprising roster decision on Thursday, placing forward David Gustafsson on waivers in order to make room for Toews on their 23-man roster.

That means young wingers Parker Ford and Brad Lambert, who were both healthy scratches against the Stars, remain with the big club even though neither would have needed waivers.

Gustafsson, 25, was the 60th-overall pick in the 2018 draft and has 149 games with the Jets on his resume, scoring six goals and adding 14 assists.

The defensive-minded skater only played 36 games last year as a frequent healthy scratch but will now get the chance to suit up — either with another NHL claim who puts in a claim by Friday afternoon or, if he clears, the Manitoba Moose.

Defenceman Colin Miller was Winnipeg's other healthy scratch against Dallas.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/10/09/puck-drops-on-toews-next-chapter>

***Puck drops on Toews' next chapter
Storied centre remains hungry for fourth Stanley Cup***

By: Ken Wiebe

Brent Seabrook didn't need long to pour freezing cold water on a theory that has been making the rounds.

Seabrook, a longtime teammate and former roommate of Jonathan Toews when they played for the Chicago Blackhawks, has been around long enough to know that the Winnipeg Jets centre didn't put himself through everything on this long and winding road to recovery just to say that he could make it back.

While it's true there are no guarantees in professional sports, Seabrook is convinced that Toews can still be an important contributor on a winning hockey club.

"Average? That doesn't sound like Johnny Toews. That doesn't sound like him," Seabrook said in a recent telephone interview. "He's not going to come back and do something if he's not ready. He knows where he's at — where his body is at and his game is at.

"I think the Jets are going to be pretty pleased with what they get out of him in a full season of work there."

More than two years after playing his last NHL game, Toews accelerated the process of rewriting the next chapter of his decorated career on Thursday night by suiting up in the season opener for the Jets against the Dallas Stars before a packed house inside Canada Life Centre.

The favourite son had returned home plenty of times throughout his 15 seasons with the Chicago Blackhawks and Toews always enjoyed having his parents and friends in the stands supporting him.

But this experience offered a new wrinkle for him.

"I always enjoyed that part, coming back to play here against the Jets all these years," said Toews, who centred a line with Gustav Nyquist and Nikita Chibirkov.

"My family would come out to morning skate, some buddies would maybe take the morning off work and come watch the skate, too.

"But it's a little bit different this time, playing for the home team."

"I think the Jets are going to be pretty pleased with what they get out of him in a full season of work there."

Toews, now 37, admitted after the morning skate that he's tired of answering questions about getting back to playing and is eager for that part of his life to feel normal again.

It was essentially a way of life for his previous 15 NHL seasons before some debilitating health issues prevented him from doing the thing he enjoys most and threatened to end his career prematurely.

With ample time for reflection on this arduous journey, Toews has altered his mentality somewhat.

"As you get older, your motivation has to change," said Toews.

"I used to be pretty hard on myself and I would do so until I got what I wanted or got where I wanted to go. I've gotten to the point where I realized that that's not really an effective way to keep going about things. For me, it's about being as connected as I can be to the process, being in the present moment and enjoying every moment, especially the ones that maybe don't feel so good or are more challenging."

Toews has made himself vulnerable enough to know that not everything will be perfect, while never losing the will to succeed or the hunger that has allowed him to be a winner throughout his Hall of Fame career.

"He's everything (as) advertised," said Jets head coach Scott Arniel, who is responsible for allotting the ice time for Toews.

"But it's a little bit different this time, playing for the home team."

“He’s intense, he’s driven. He’s in fantastic shape. He’s excited about being here. Again, just wants to fit in, just wants to be a part of our room, be a part of hopefully helping us have success.

“You know, it’s going to be a grind for him. He’s been away for a while. That’s the biggest thing for me, every day he’s gotten stronger and better and feeling more comfortable.”

Jets forward Tanner Pearson faced Toews a lot during the glory days of the rivalry between the Los Angeles Kings and Blackhawks — when the Kings won the Stanley Cup in 2014 and the Blackhawks captured their third Cup in six seasons in 2015) and he’s seen the two-way centre have a massive impact on the outcome of games.

“His hockey IQ is through the roof and he’s so strong on the puck. He always has been,” said Pearson. “He’s a top, two-way centreman in the league. I would bet money on it that he still is that guy — and that would be huge for us.”

That’s a bet the Jets are making as well, with Toews being counted on to handle the second-line centre responsibilities as he works his way up to full speed.

“It’s inspirational,” said Pearson, who appreciates the steps Toews took to make it back. “Not too many guys in the league can do that or are willing to do that. We’re really lucky to have him.”

Stars forward Matt Duchene arrived in the NHL two seasons after Toews and was a teammate with Team Canada along the way.

Duchene conceded that he did some off-season recruiting and had hoped to convince Toews to join the Stars as an unrestricted free agent back in the spring.

He seemed to speak for many players around the league when asked about his comeback on Thursday morning.

“I hate that he’s in the Central (Division), but I love that he’s back,” said Duchene. “I texted him in the spring, (to) kind of see what he was thinking and maybe end up wearing green, white and black at some point but no. It’s great to see him back. He’s had such an amazing career and it’s too bad what he’s gone through, but this looks like a great situation for him.”

After wearing a single jersey for his NHL career until Thursday night, the adjustment process officially kicks into high gear with the regular season underway.

There will be more standing ovations and highlight-reel moments in the months to follow.

And with each subsequent stride in that Jets jersey, the next chapter in Toews’ storied NHL career will be building towards the pursuit of a fourth Stanley Cup ring.

“He’s the kind of person that cares about people, he’s including people and he wants to take care of people — and that’s just off the ice,” said Seabrook. “He’s very calculated in what he says and when he says it. He’s got a knack for saying things at the right time.

“On the ice, that’s where Johnny is the leader. He’s the kind of guy that drags you into the fight and he’s got your back. He’s just one of those people. That’s the kind of guy you want to follow. He’s a special person and a special player. I’m pumped for him and with everything he’s been through, it’s nice to see that there’s some light at the end of the tunnel for him.”

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipegsun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-lose-home-opener-despite-kyle-connor-hat-trick>

Jets lose home opener despite Kyle Connor hat trick

By Gordon Anderson

Kyle Connor is trying to lead the way on the ice and off the ice, as well.

“The bottom is you want to get some wins in this league, and it’s a lot more fun when you’re winning in this league,” Connor said. “I’m just trying to contribute as much as I can and show a little more leadership this year. Over the years, I’ve definitely grown into that.”

Despite a hat-trick from Connor, the Jets dropped a 5-4 decision to the Dallas Stars in the home opener on Thursday night.

Connor signed an eight-year extension worth US \$96 million earlier in the week. The Jets announced the signing via social media on Wednesday morning. The contract kicks in at the beginning of next season. Connor will make an average annual value of \$12 million per season.

“He’s a special player,” Jonathan Toews said. “Such a huge moment for this franchise and this city to sign a player of his calibre, given what he’s already contributed to this city and what he’s done for this team on the ice. He’s obviously, very deserving of (the contract) and went out there and proved it again tonight.”

The visitors held a 2-1 margin entering the third period, further padding the advantage with three goals before the period was five minutes old as Jason Robertson, Tyler Seguin and Wyatt Johnston notched markers. Johnston’s eventual game-winning goal came at 3:23.

After Morgan Barron brought the Jets within three on a breakaway short-handed goal at 9:33 of the period, Connor took over.

He trimmed the deficit to 5-3 at 11:09 when he converted a rebound off his original shot for his second goal of the game.

Connor then notched his hat trick at 16:57 when he ripped a shot to the short side on Stars netminder Jake Oettinger. Connor also scored a first-period goal. He has now notched a goal in eight consecutive season openers.

"It doesn't take much for him to find holes," Jets head coach Scott Arniel said. "He's just a goal scorer. That's what he does. When he gets time, he gets space, he gets one on one with the goalie, 90 per cent of the time it's in the net."

Dallas defender Thomas Harley was assessed for a delay of game minor at 17:04, but the Jets couldn't capitalize on the ensuing powerplay. The Jets were blanked on four powerplay chances. Dallas converted once on five man-advantage opportunities.

The Jets pulled Connor Hellebuyck with 1:16 remaining in the game but couldn't find the equalizer. Hellebuyck turned aside 32 of 27 shots in the loss. Oettinger stopped 21 of 25 shots for the victory. Final shots on net favoured Dallas 37-25.

"That has to happen for 60 minutes," Arniel said about the comeback. "That's kind of been our DNA. That is our work ethic and compete. We lost a lot of battles. Whether that was man-on-man or one-on-one or battles for good spots. They beat us to positions, they got to inside (space) on us a few times. We certainly know that we can be better in those areas."

Mark Scheifele picked up three assists for the Jets. Dylan DeMelo had two helpers in a losing effort.

Making his season debut with the hometown club, Toews received a thunderous round of applause when he skated onto the ice for the player introductions prior to puck drop.

"I thought I saw changes in his game in that second period," Arniel said. "He started to have the puck a little bit more, had some looks, that line started to do some things. At the end of the day, that's a tough one because our whole group wasn't good and for him, certainly would've liked for it to be a better first game. Jonathan, every day is a new day and he'll just continue to get better."

Toews logged 18:19 of ice time in his first regular-season game since April of 2023. He also picked up a slashing penalty in the second period.

"(There is) a lot of room for improvement, a lot of little things I can do better," Toews said. "Definitely trying to start the play with the puck off the face-offs; didn't really get that going for my line out there. But other than that, there were some situations where the three of us created and had some chances, even on the power play as well. I was pretty close to making things happen,

getting us on the board, so I think there are some positives I'm excited about. [I'll] just keep trying to build on it."

Rantanen and Nils Lundkvist also scored for the Stars. Rantanen added two assists for a three-point night. In the second-round playoff series last May, Rantanen had four goals and four assists in the six-game series, as the Stars advanced to the Western Conference final at the expense of the Jets. Robertson also added an assist for the winners.

The Jets host the Los Angeles Kings on Saturday. Puck drop is 12:30 p.m.

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jonathan-toews-takes-on-opening-night-against-the-dallas-stars>

Jets' Jonathan Toews eager to tackle challenges of a compact schedule

By Gordon Anderson

As the NHL season begins in earnest this week, Jets centre Jonathan Toews knows the long runway to April will be a mélange of glory and grind.

The compacted regular-season schedule, because of the league's participation in the 2026 Winter Olympics, will be a significant physical and mental hurdle to clear for the 37-year-old. The Jets play 11 games during October, 13 in November and 14 to finish the calendar year.

"There are a lot of challenges that come your way throughout the year," Toews said on Thursday morning at the Canada Life Centre, prior to the season opener against the visiting Dallas Stars. "It's just fatigue and trying to recover and trying to deal with little minor injuries that pile up here or there.

"It's the same for everybody and I'm just happy and grateful to be back at that point where I know I'm confident I can contribute to this team, put these last few years behind me, and just go enjoy this life once again."

Jets head coach Scott Arniel knows Toews will be tested mentally and physically, and there is nothing that can be done to prepare him for what lies ahead. And while the team will manage his off the ice routine, from the sounds of it, there are no plans to ease Toews into the year.

The Winnipeg native is jumping in at full throttle.

"It's going to be a grind for him," Arniel said. "He's been away for a while. I think every day, that's the biggest thing for me, every day he's gotten stronger and better and feeling more comfortable."

Arniel says his second-line centre recognizes the significance of his first game in two seasons, as Toews missed the previous two campaigns due to chronic inflammatory response syndrome, connected with a COVID-19 infection early in 2020.

"I think everybody recognizes one of the great players of the game, obviously his resume is amazing," Arniel said.

"Having to come home here in front of his family and his friends and our fans, to see him in that jersey, is a great moment. And our players are excited."

Getting back to availability and managing ice time, there were questions about the ex-Chicago Blackhawks captain's availability for the home opener against the Stars after he departed the game against the Minnesota Wild on Sept. 30 with a non-contact lower-body injury.

Toews practised with the team on a regular basis after the incident against the Wild. He was in the lineup, centring a line between Gustav Nyquist and Nikitia Chibrikov.

"He's in fantastic shape," Arniel said. "He's excited about being here. Again, he just wants to fit in, just wants to be a part of our room, and be a part of helping us have success."

The time is now at hand for Toews. It is time to go play the game he loves, the game he missed dearly during his time in absentia.

"I want to stop talking about it. I just want to go play hockey and be part of this team," Toews said. "It (will be a) long season. The guys worked hard just to get here to the first game and have the opportunity to suit up for an NHL hockey club."

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11473163/analysis-shannon-nhl-playoffs-canadian-teams/>

ANALYSIS: Will Jets, other Canadian teams make NHL playoffs?

By John Shannon CJOB

Here we are, approaching the Thanksgiving weekend, and another NHL season is underway.

Between now and April 16, more than 1,300 games will fill the schedule for the 32 teams, and the Stanley Cup will be given out on or before June 21 of next year.

There will be just a handful of days that don't have at least one NHL game, and that doesn't include those games that we will watch from Italy at the Olympic Winter Games. Fresh from the 4 Nations Face-Off, Canada should be considered the favourite in that tournament.

In fact, if you include the Olympics, what we are witnessing right now just might be the golden era for hockey and for the National Hockey League in Canada.

Think about it. There is a real possibility that all seven Canadian-based teams will make the playoffs. And before you scoff at me, last season, five teams from Canada played in the post-season.

Only Vancouver and Calgary did not. And the Flames, in fact, had the same number of points as St. Louis but lost on the tiebreaker. Both the Flames and the Canucks are improved, and can challenge for the post-season in the West, no doubt about it.

Of the remaining five teams, the Winnipeg Jets, Toronto Maple Leafs and Edmonton Oilers are consensus playoff teams — and that leaves the Ottawa Senators and Montreal Canadiens, who both qualified last season and are better this year and prepared for the post-season.

So, there you have it: all seven Canadian teams in the Stanley Cup playoffs. It sounds so realistic — at least in October.

Seven chances to finally return the Stanley Cup to Canada. It's been 33 long years, and with the challenges the game of hockey has faced, both on and off the ice, winning hockey would be a great relief for many.

Add a chance to be Olympic champion, along with the Stanley Cup champion, and it's a real chance to stand taller and wave the Maple Leaf.

Because we always need a reason to wave the flag.

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/connors-heroics-toews-homecoming-nearly-deliver-storybook-night-for-jets/>

Connor's heroics, Toews' homecoming nearly deliver storybook night for Jets

By Ryan Dixon

WINNIPEG — The native son received a magical introduction, and the freshly signed star netted a hat trick. But on balance, the Winnipeg Jets didn't do enough to earn a happy ending in their season-opener.

Jonathan Toews' return to the NHL, in the city where he grew up, nearly dovetailed with a jaw-dropping comeback by his club versus the Dallas Stars. The Jets — fortunate to only trail 2-1 after 40 minutes — allowed three tallies in the first 3:23 of the final frame to fall four goals behind the visiting Stars on Thursday night at Canada Life Centre. However, by the time Kyle

Connor — the guy who just inked a 12-year, \$96-million contract extension — buried his third goal of the contest to pull his team within one score with 3:03 remaining on the clock, it truly felt like anything was possible.

That notion got a boost moments later when Winnipeg went on the power play thanks to a puck-over-glass boo-boo by Stars defenceman Thomas Harley. When Toews joined the power play as a sixth attacker with goalie Connor Hellebuyck pulled, you were just waiting for something to happen that might shake the whole of Manitoba.

The Stars squeaked it out, though, and after downing the Jets 4-2 in the second round of the 2025 Stanley Cup Playoffs, Dallas edged Winnipeg 5-4 in the contest that kicked off a new campaign for both clubs.

“Certainly you have to give Dallas credit, but for 50 minutes we were not a very good hockey team,” said Jets coach Scott Arniel. “Our structure and detail in all three areas wasn’t very good. They’re too good of a hockey team to make those kinds of mistakes.”

It must have felt a little strange for Arniel to give that glum assessment of his team’s showing. After all, Toews’ exhilarating pre-game introduction — and it was absolutely chill-inducing to hear the crowd drown out the public address announcer when Toews glided onto the ice — wasn’t the only bit of pageantry featured on the night. Winnipeg also hung a banner for winning the first Presidents’ Trophy in franchise history last year, a testament to a 116-point showing that was built largely on devotion to structure and a willingness to out-battle the opponent.

It’s fair to say the Jets did not pick up where they left off in either regard.

Even if you want to cut the club some slack — it is, after all, playing without top-four defenceman Dylan Samberg, top-six winger Cole Perfetti and captain Adam Lowry — there’s no question the Jets fell way short of their own expectations.

“We have capable people who are out there and playing,” Arniel said when asked about the impact of the missing, injured bodies. “If we’re better with our structure and our details, we’re not giving up those looks. They scored three goals off entries. That’s not us. We don’t give up those plays with a guy who is dead center in the middle of the ice, getting chances. We have to work on that. Again, it was totally unexpected, and at the end of the day, we’ll look at it. There are some areas we certainly need to clean up.”

The way Arniel spoke about his entire club was similar to the way Toews talked about his own game. Playing regular-season hockey for the first time since April 13, 2023, Toews — who struggled with long COVID and chronic inflammatory response syndrome — obviously knew it would be tough to make a seamless return to the best league in the world.

“You know, close, but a lot of room for improvement, a lot of little things I can do better,” he said. “Definitely trying to start the play with the puck off the face-offs; didn’t really get that going for my

line out there (Toews lost eight of the 15 draws he took). But other than that, there were some situations where the three of us (Toews played with Nikita Chibrikov and Gustav Nyquist) created and had some chances, even on the power play as well. I was pretty close to making things happen, getting us on the board, so I think there are some positives I'm excited about. (I'll) just keep trying to build on it."

Toews, who saw 18:19 of ice time, did get a great look in the second frame when Chibrikov sent him streaking in over the right side of the blueline. Toews wired the puck toward goalie Jake Oettinger, but wound up missing the mark in a moment where the crowd was dreaming of that first tally in a Jets uniform.

"I thought I had high, far side, and I think the puck just stood up on me a little bit, and I ended up just riming it around the glass," he said. "It was a tough one to pass up and miss the net on that one."

Even without the signature moment that a goal or assist would have provided, Dallas coach Glen Gulutzan saw shades of the old Toews in the player wearing No. 19 in blue on this night.

"I've watched him and, you know, still a big body, strong on pucks, and you can see just some of his headiness (is there)," Gulutzan said. "And for a guy who hasn't played for a while, boy, he's a great player. He still looks good."

It's fair to say that was the case, and then some, when it came to Connor. Winnipeg's top sniper evened the game 1-1 with a first-period strike, finding the back of the net for an incredible eighth consecutive season-opening game.

And he sure wasn't done there.

After Morgan Barron scored a short-handed beauty of his own just before the midway mark of the third to breathe a little life into the building, Connor cut Dallas' lead to two goals with a shorty of his own. With the crowd now officially on tilt, Connor got his third of the night when Dallas defenceman Miro Heiskanen lost his footing, giving No. 81 all the room he needed in the slot to rip one past Oettinger on the blocker side.

It was the kind of performance that demonstrated why Winnipeg was only too happy to hand this guy the richest contract in franchise history.

"It doesn't take much for him to find holes, to get that shot off," Arniel said. "Even the first one (where Connor had a little bobble), it looked like he was running out of room, but he gets it back on his stick and puts it under the bar. He's just a goal-scorer. That's what he does. When he gets time, he gets space, he gets one-on-one with the goalie, 90 per cent of the time it's in the net."

In truth, no matter what Connor or anybody else did on this night, the story was always going to be Toews taking the ice again in a place where he's already so revered. With the first-game jitters gone and at least one layer of rust removed, Toews can keep progressing on his comeback journey when the Los Angeles Kings visit on Saturday.

"I think it was just really exciting before the game," he said. "But then once you get your legs under you, you just go out there and play. As the game went on, you just try not to think about it too much and just enjoy it. You enjoy it when you play your best, and I just tried to find a way to do that."

Bank on Toews — and his entire team — trying to be a little bit better next time out.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/2025/10/09/arniel-talks-connor-extension-expectations-for-toews-this-season-and-more/>

Arniel talks Connor extension, expectations for Toews this season and more (VIDEO)

Winnipeg Jets head coach Scott Arniel sat down with TSN Hockey Insider Darren Dreger to discuss the upcoming season for his club, including the long term contract extension signed by star winger Kyle Connor, the expectations for Jonathan Toews this year, and more.

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/2025/10/10/scheifele-on-connor-extension-im-excited-i-have-my-winger-locked-up-for-a-long-time/>

Scheifele on Connor extension: 'I'm excited. I have my winger locked up for a long time' (VIDEO)

Mark Scheifele sat down with TSN Hockey Insider Darren Dreger to discuss the long term extension signed by his linemate Kyle Connor, what he's been able to learn from Jonathan Toews so far, and how he and his family are doing after the death of his father this summer.

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/2025/10/10/sawyer-connor-a-shining-star-despite-jets-falling-short-to-stars-in-season-opener/>

Sawyer: Connor a 'shining star' despite Jets falling short to Stars in season opener

TSN's Kevin Sawyer and Dan Robertson discuss Kyle Connor's brilliant hat trick performance despite the Jets falling short to the Stars, and why Jonathan Toews "exceeded expectations" in his Winnipeg debut.

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/2025/10/10/button-assesses-toews-debut-with-jets-shares-who-stood-out-in-habs-bounce-back-win/>

Button assesses Toews' debut with Jets, shares who stood out in Habs' bounce back win (VIDEO)

TSN Director of Scouting Craig Button joins Jay Onrait to assess Jonathan Toews' debut with the Jets in their season opening loss to the Stars, share who stood out in the Canadiens' bounce back win against the Red Wings, and explain how important Brady Tkachuk is to the Senators' success.

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6700137/2025/10/09/kyle-connor-jets-contract-extension-analysis/>

What Kyle Connor's contract extension tells us about Jets' Stanley Cup window

By Murat Ates

Kyle Connor took time to himself this offseason, evaluated his and his family's priorities, and decided that Winnipeg was the place he wanted to finish his career.

"There was never any scenario where I could see myself going somewhere else," Connor said on Wednesday. "I wouldn't want to try to win a Stanley Cup with another group of players or another organization."

The 28-year-old has been Winnipeg's top contractual priority for a long time and his eight-year, \$12 million AAV extension, which kicks in next season, ensures he's going to be in Winnipeg for a long time. Signing him to a contract with \$41 million worth of signing bonuses took a seismic organizational shift — a commitment to a buyout-proof, lockout-proof contract that gives Connor more guaranteed money than any player in franchise history.

It's a bet the Jets needed to make.

Connor is the team's most consistent, most productive scorer. There is no UFA route to an instant Connor replacement, nor is there someone like him in the team's pipeline. Here's what his extension tells us about Winnipeg's window to win, the Jets' risk profile and the team's ability to build a winner — in 2026-27 and beyond.

1. The Jets can retain top-end talent — in part because they adapt

The most important takeaway from Connor's extension is that Winnipeg's core players continue to choose Winnipeg. The Jets are not a premier UFA destination. They've dealt with trade requests from Patrik Laine, Jack Roslovic, Pierre-Luc Dubois and others, and they watched Nikolaj Ehlers sign with the Carolina Hurricanes this summer. But Winnipeg keeps on keeping

the players it prioritizes: Connor joins Mark Scheifele, Connor Hellebuyck, Gabriel Vilardi and Neal Pionk among Jets signed past 2030.

“I wouldn’t want to try to win a Stanley Cup with another group of players,” Connor said. That is a crucial feeling for Winnipeg to maintain — and it’s one Josh Morrissey and Scheifele echoed on Wednesday.

“For a lot of us, to be part of one organization, you can feel that pride,” Morrissey said. “You want to make your mark on that team that drafted you and brought you in.”

“We’ve created a great room in here, a lot of great guys, and there’s a reason why guys stick around,” Scheifele said.

But it’s about more than vibes. One important takeaway is that Winnipeg is willing to change its contract playbook when it comes to core players. In Scheifele and Hellebuyck’s case, Kevin Cheveldayoff shared more of his long-term planning with the players themselves than he’d done during previous negotiations. To extend Connor, the Jets committed \$41 million in signing bonuses over the course of eight seasons. The Jets had not offered that level of guaranteed money on anything approaching a similar scale in the past.

As Connor said on Wednesday, signing bonuses are about more than just an influx of cash. They’re paid even if a player is bought out, which offers players an extra layer of long-term protection. Connor hopes to excel for all eight years but the future is promised to no one. This way, he could struggle by his mid-30s and get bought out like Blake Wheeler did — and he’d still get paid several million dollars via his signing bonuses.

But vibes matter, too.

“I think the culture and identity of this city and this organization fits well in my values,” Connor said. “You can see it top-down, starting with Mark Chipman, and giving us players — ever since I came into this organization — a chance to succeed and all the tools that you need.”

2. Winnipeg’s signings come with a tax

Call it a Winnipeg tax, call it a Canada tax, call it a “higher income tax” tax. Connor’s \$12 million AAV ties him for the seventh-highest cap hit next season (along with Mitch Marner and Mikko Rantanen, who each play in states with no income tax). Connor will not provide quite the same level of bang for the buck as those players do. That’s part of the cost of doing business in Winnipeg.

To be clear, there are several arguments to be made that the Jets needed to sign Connor.

The Jets are not such an attractive free agent destination that they can let a franchise icon walk and then sign his replacement as a UFA. The Tampa Bay Lightning did that in 2024 when it

replaced 35-year-old Steven Stamkos with 29-year-old Jake Guentzel. That's not an option for Winnipeg. Opportunity cost works differently here.

Connor is not the seventh-best player in the NHL. His cap efficiency will fall short of Connor McDavid, Auston Matthews, Nathan MacKinnon, Marner, Rantanen and Jack Eichel (who signed an eight-year, \$13.5 million AAV extension shortly after Connor's contract was announced Wednesday). It's not a matter of timing in all cases, either: Marner, Rantanen and Eichel's deals were all signed in the rising cap environment.

Winnipeg won't care if Connor's cap efficiency is seventh or 20th or 50th best. The part that matters most is that the Jets retained Connor and his unique offensive production. Cap efficiency can come elsewhere: Winnipeg needed Connor to stay and it made sure Connor stayed.

3. The Jets are still a win-now team

Kevin Cheveldayoff bristles at the concept of a team going "all-in." His argument is that every decision he makes, whether it appears to move the team forward or backward in the moment, is made with winning the Stanley Cup in mind.

He's also the GM of a team with a 32-year-old franchise goaltender and star centre. Most of Winnipeg's core players are at least 30. There is a distinct window to win that depends on Hellebuyck (32), Scheifele (32), Morrissey (30), Adam Lowry (32), Pionk (30), and Connor (29 in December). The Jets have won the most regular season games over the course of the past three seasons but have yet to make it out of the second round. The clock is ticking, whether the organization wants it to or not.

Keeping Connor helps the Jets win hockey games. It also helps them sell that they're "all-in" to their other pending free agents, to trade targets with no-movement clauses, and to UFAs next summer.

"For the guys here who have term, it's an exciting day to be able to keep playing with him and to continue to chase what we're after here," Morrissey said. "I just can't wait to keep feeding him one-timers for at least the next three years and hopefully beyond that."

Winnipeg does not have a top prospect at any position who is projected to achieve the success of Connor, Scheifele, Morrissey or Hellebuyck.

The Jets do have Vilardi, Cole Perfetti and Dylan Samberg among players in their mid-20s, but their prospect pool is not as deep as it was when the first generation of stars were coming up. You may recall that Ken Campbell's infamous Hockey News "meet your 2019 Stanley Cup champions" story was written four years in advance, in 2015. These Jets don't have four years.

Winnipeg needs to make a Stanley Cup push now, in the first half of Connor's deal, while Hellebuyck is still a perennial Vezina Trophy candidate. Otherwise, there's a long-term risk of

star players aging out, a lack of next wave to replace them and the growing pains of a rebuild on the horizon.

4. The 2026-27 Jets will have cap space to keep building

When a star player signs a big-ticket contract, there is always a fear that their team won't have the cap space to build a winner. McDavid chose his \$12.5 million AAV specifically to give Edmonton room to build, whereas Kirill Kaprizov's record-setting \$17 million will make team-building tougher in Minnesota.

Connor's contract doesn't stop the Jets from building a winner. Winnipeg is in a good spot next season to retain its own players and make additions, too.

The following roster needs a backup goalie, a seventh defenceman, and an entire second line, but it has approximately \$27 million in cap space to make it happen.

It's not a perfect lineup but it maintains Winnipeg's top line, its key pieces on defence, and Hellebuyck in goal. Meanwhile, \$27 million should be plenty for Winnipeg to sign Lowry, Perfetti, Jonathan Toews (or an upgrade) and a backup goaltender — with room left over. There's a chance the cap goes even higher than the current \$104 million projection, too. The Jets are fine.

5. There is long-term risk, even with a rising cap

Connor is a \$12 million player at his peak. His 97-point career season last season would be worth more than that to the Jets, particularly in a rising cap environment.

There is still plenty of long-term risk, depending on the rate at which Connor's game deteriorates in his 30s. If he ages like Stamkos did, the Jets will get plenty of value. If he starts getting dramatically outscored the way Phil Kessel did, the Jets have a big, buyout-proof problem.

Scott Arniel says he's optimistic about Connor's long-term evolution.

"Going back through the growth with KC, it is his play without the puck, how much he has bought in with a lot of our other top players to play without the puck, to get it back faster," Arniel said. "His attention to detail, his PK, those things are all stuff that sometimes gets overlooked."

One way to estimate Connor's long-term value is to look at his current offensive and defensive contributions, compare them to the way a typical player's game declines in their 30s, then project Connor to follow a similar path. Dom Luszczyszyn's model projects Connor's game to decline at roughly the same pace that the cap increases:

If Dom is right, then Connor won't help Winnipeg win as much as a \$12 million player "should." There is only a 30 percent probability of Connor offering surplus value at that price; there's even a chance Connor's game falls off precipitously in his mid-30s. But Connor is projected to help Winnipeg win games through the life of the contract.

Subjectively, I think Connor scores so many goals and has such a deceptive shot that he gets talked about as a pure sniper. He doesn't score a ton of goals from range, though; a large part of his scoring requires him to get into open space. Connor's first step out of a cutback change is extraordinary. His read of soft ice is excellent and his first step to accelerate into that space is too quick for most defenders.

My guess is that Connor's explosiveness determines his eventual decline from star winger to capable scorer, likely around age 33 or 34. Even then, I expect his quick thinking and fast hands to create offence for as long as his feet can get him into open spaces. The concern is that Connor's ability to win puck battles and help from a defensive point of view requires agility to win stick battles and escape quickly with the puck.

As with all of the concerns noted in this piece, these concerns are secondary to the Jets' need to retain their most productive forward. Connor wanted to be a Winnipeg Jet for life and it certainly looks like he's become one. That was the Jets' most important goal.

"It's something I don't take for granted: to be able to play for a single organization throughout my whole career," Connor said. "Just the trust that they have in me and the belief, ever since they drafted me in 2015, is awesome. It gives me confidence to be the player that I am and the person."