

Winnipegjets.com

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/three-things-jets-end-preseason-with-comeback-win>

THREE THINGS: Jets end preseason with comeback win Jets overcome 4-1 deficit to beat Flames, Perfetti and DeMelo leave game with injuries

By Jamie Thomas

The preseason is over for the Winnipeg Jets after a thrilling come from behind 5-4 win over the Calgary Flames at Scotiabank Saddledome. Tanner Pearson scored the shootout winner, Haydn Fleury, Gustav Nyquist, Alex Iafallo and Perker Ford scored the goals for Winnipeg who finished the preseason 2-3-1. Connor Hellebuyck made 25 saves in his second start, the Jets will open the regular season next Thursday at home against the Dallas Stars.

D-ZONE PLAY

With this being just the second game where the Jets played with most of their regular players in the lineup, it would be a pretty good reason for the team to not look as sharp as they did last season as the best defensive squad in the league. In the first, Nazem Kadri and Matvei Gridin got in behind the Jets defence to make it 2-0 just 11:17 into the game. In the second period and Calgary leading 3-1, Kadri played give and go with Kevin Bahl and the Flames forward had a wide-open net. Overall, there were a few goals tonight that you just didn't see happen last season when the Jets were on their game.

FIGHTING THEIR WAY BACK

Just after Kadri gave the Flames a 4-1 lead, the Jets began the comeback thanks to Gustav Nyquist first goal with Winnipeg at 6:14 of the middle frame. Off to the third period, Alex Iafallo pulled the Jets within one just under four minutes in and then Parker Ford redirected a shot from Logan Stanley at 12:57. Winnipeg had a couple of glorious chances in overtime before a seven round shootout that saw Tanner Pearson score a bizarre goal that turned out to be the winner.

"We certainly got down in the game, but I really liked our third period," said Scott Arniel on CJOB.

"That's all I said to them after the second, let's make sure we go out and we're real good in the third and we can do what we need to do to get ready for next week."

INJURY REPORT

The Jets played a big chunk of the game Friday night without Dylan DeMelo and Cole Perfetti. DeMelo was hit in the neck with a stick and was taken out for precautionary reasons. Perfetti has a lower body injury and Scott Arniel said they are hoping it's better than they think it is when the Jets forward gets reevaluated after the Jets get back to Winnipeg. The Jets are already without Adam Lowry and Dylan Samberg and Jonathan Toews is day-to-day.

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11464172/winnipeg-jets-end-pre-season-with-5-4-shootout-win-in-calgary/>

Winnipeg Jets end pre-season with 5-4 shootout win in Calgary

By Christian Aumell & Russ Hobson Global News

The Jets closed out their exhibition schedule with a 5-4 comeback victory over the Calgary Flames in a shootout Friday at the Scotiabank Saddledome.

The Jets allowed three goals in the first period to trail 3-1 after 20 minutes, but they scored three unanswered goals in the second and third periods to force overtime. After a scoreless OT period, the Jets won the game in the seventh round of the shootout after Flames goalie Dustin Wolf juggled the puck on a Tanner Pearson attempt before dropping it in his own net to hand the win to the Jets.

"It was a little sloppy those first two periods," Jets head coach Scott Arniel told the 680 CJOB post-game show. "There was spurts where we were doing some good things and then we made some uncharacteristic mistakes. Certainly, got down in the game, but really liked our third period. That's all I said to them after the second. Let's just make sure that we're real good in the third and do what we need to do to get ready for next week.

"Found a way – just kept plugging away and it was a crazy ending but it's nice to finish that way."

Haydn Fleury, Gustav Nyquist, Alex Iafallo, and Parker Ford scored for Winnipeg in the victory.

While the Jets went 0-for-3 on their power play, the penalty kill was perfect in all five opportunities the Flames had with the man advantage.

"Those kills were big," said Arniel. "They had some good kills in the third but it's important. Early on in the year you want to make sure your specialty teams are up and running."

But the win came with a price as Dylan DeMelo and Cole Perfetti both had to leave the game with injuries for Winnipeg and Perfetti could be a long-term injury.

"Precautionary for DeMelo," said Arniel. "He got a stick in the throat. With Perfetti – lower-body injury. We're gonna get him home here. At first glance, it doesn't look great, so we'll see when we get home. But hopefully it's not as bad,"

While the Jets used most of their regulars, Ford was in the lineup for Jonathan Toews after he was injured in their previous pre-season test.

Calgary opened the scoring just over seven minutes into the game when Nazem Kadri got loose in front of the net, took a pass from Adam Klapka and buried it past Connor Hellebuyck.

Just over four minutes later, the Flames doubled their lead. A point shot hit the stick of Fleury in the slot, which slowed the puck down as it landed on the stick of a wide open Matvei Gridin alone in front of Hellebuyck. He put it home to make it 2-0.

Winnipeg answered back at the 15:18 mark of the first when a point shot from Fleury found its way through traffic to beat Wolf.

But Calgary restored the two-goal lead less than two minutes later when a point shot from Joel Hanley made its way through traffic and beat Hellebuyck high.

Before the end of the period, DeMelo took a cross-check to the neck, skated off the ice in some discomfort and did not return to the game. That makes it three straight pre-season games in which a Winnipeg Jet player had to leave due to injury, with Dylan Samberg breaking his wrist Saturday and Jonathan Toews tweaking something Tuesday.

Kadri made it 4-1 Calgary just over four minutes into the second. Winnipeg rushed the puck up the ice but turned it over in the Flames end, igniting an odd-man rush the other way. As Klapka drew attention driving to the net, Kadri executed a perfect give-and-go with Kevin Bahl that ended with Kadri depositing the puck into a yawning cage.

At the 6:14 mark, Winnipeg cut the lead back to two when Nyquist won a net front battle and banged home a rebound off a Luke Schenn point shot.

It remained 4-2 Flames going to the third, but Winnipeg continued to rally, even though Perfetti did not return to the game for the third.

Iafallo cut the lead to one at the 3:47 mark of the period when Nyquist made a great play behind the net, sending a behind-the-back pass to Iafallo in the slot and he made no mistake.

The fourth line continued to have an impact for Winnipeg as they provided the game-tying goal. Ford had a partial 2-on-1 with Morgan Barron but Ford's pass to Barron went over his stick and into the corner. Barron tracked it down and sent it to the point where Logan Stanley's shot hit Ford in front and went in to make it 4-4.

Neither team scored in an entertaining, whistle-free overtime, sending the game to a shootout.

Calgary's second shooter Justin Kirkland scored the first goal, Winnipeg's third shooter Gabe Vilardi scored to extend things, the fifth shooters for both teams, Rasmus Andersson and Josh Morrissey also scored, as the shootout seemed like it might never end.

Pearson, Winnipeg's seventh shooter, had his shot denied by Wolf but the rebound fluttered high in the air. Wolf attempted to catch the loose puck but fumbled it into his own net, giving Pearson the goal and ending the game.

The Jets finish their exhibition schedule with a 2-3-1 record and will have to make some roster decisions by Monday before they begin the regular season Thursday night at home against Dallas.

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/winnipeg-jets-team-preview-what-does-jonathan-toews-have-left/>

Winnipeg Jets team preview: What does Jonathan Toews have left?

By Rory Boylen

Coming off a franchise-best 116-point season and Central Division title, the Jets started 2024-25 so fast and never looked back, but in the end, a six-game loss to the Dallas Stars in Round 2 left them well short of their goals.

The Jets see themselves as Stanley Cup contenders, and why not when your goalie is the best in the world and the reigning MVP of the league? Winnipeg will go as far as Connor Hellebuyck will take them, though his playoff numbers haven't been as standout for the past three years in a row -- and in the series the Jets were eliminated in, he was outplayed by fellow American Jake Oettinger.

Winnipeg is certainly hoping their Stanley Cup window is still open this season, though it's hard to see them getting off to as fast a start in 2025-26. First, there are the injury holes left behind by Adam Lowry and Dylan Samberg, two key players who will miss at least the first month or more. Then there is the loss of highly productive winger Nikolaj Ehlers, a key second-line contributor who drove that trio with great per-minute output at 5-on-5. He's in Carolina now, and the Jets weren't able to replace him from the outside, so they have to make do with what they have within.

As we wrap up our look at the 32 NHL teams in 32 days, we take a look at the Winnipeg Jets.

Newcomer to watch: Jonathan Toews

After two years away, 'Captain Serious' returns to the NHL, now 37 years old and a member of his hometown team. The idea isn't that Toews has to jump straight into a key role where the Jets need him to be what he was to the Blackhawks. Toews' contract is one with a \$2 million base salary, plus \$5 million in performance bonuses that are mostly games played benchmarks. It's a big question how well he'll handle the grind of an 82-game season after being out for so long; for now, he's day-to-day and will miss their pre-season finale on Friday.

The hope is that by the second half of the season, and certainly the playoffs, Toews is playing a difference-making role down the middle and give the team quality centre depth. Best case scenario is that Toews can end up in the 2C role, and if healthy, he will have to start there with Adam Lowry out until November. If he ends up as their 3C when Lowry returns, that could work out, too. But the worst-case scenario is that the grind is overwhelming, or he can't stay healthy, which would leave the Jets with yet another questionable hole.

Under-the-radar player to watch: Gustav Nyquist

Losing Nikolaj Ehlers to Carolina in free agency leaves a big hole in Winnipeg's lineup as he was a key line driver on the second unit, and there's no way to directly fill in for him. Gustav Nyquist is likely to start the season on right wing of the second line, opposite Cole Perfetti, and while two years ago Nyquist was a 75-point scorer in Nashville, he managed just 28 points between the Predators and Wild in 2024-25. This is a 36-year-old player now whose best years are behind him, yet the Jets are hoping he can hang in the top six. If he can stay there all season, it's because things are going right -- best case scenario is that the trio of Nyquist, Perfetti and Toews finds chemistry and gets better as the year goes. But if Nyquist is slow to produce, the team will have to look to Alex Lafallo or Vlad Namestnikov to step up and at that point, the second line could be a sore issue for the team, especially if Toews also struggles.

Top Prospect: Brayden Yager

Acquired in last year's Rutger McGroarty trade, Yager -- the 14th overall pick in 2023 -- is graduating from major junior and though he got better as Winnipeg's pre-season went along, was unsurprisingly sent to AHL Manitoba. The Jets won't want to rush their top prospects so it wouldn't be surprising if Yager spends the whole year in the AHL. In time, the hope is that he becomes a second-line NHL centre, but that will take some patience. Yager was a solid

producer in the WHL, though his offensive numbers did dip last season and the Jets will be cautious with rushing him along.

Three Burning Questions

1. How will they fare without Adam Lowry to start the season?

Hip surgery has Lowry on the sidelines to start the year, with a target to return in November. This right away will put stress on the forwards, especially the centres, as Lowry is not just a smart and reliable defensive pivot, but also one that can deliver enough offence to hang on the second line when needed. With Toews coming back from two years off and Ehlers gone, Winnipeg's second line is facing some serious questions and, without Lowry, they don't have any cover from the third line either. The good news is that of the 11 games Winnipeg plays in October, only three come against teams that made the playoffs last season. On top of Lowry, the Jets will miss key defenceman Dylan Samberg for six-to-eight weeks after he broke his wrist, so how the Jets manage in the early-going with these key injuries will set the tone for the rest of their season. Will they be chasing, or in control, when everyone gets back?

2. Can Cole Perfetti have a breakout season?

Perfetti might be the Jets' most important X-Factor because he is the only returning line driver to that second unit facing so many questions and concerns. Once the prized prospect in Winnipeg's system, the 23-year-old Perfetti had a career-high 50 points last season but needs to push that higher and be someone who can elevate Toews, Nyquist, or whoever ends up alongside him this season with his playmaking ability. If Perfetti doesn't take a step, it's another concern the Jets have to manage and puts them behind the other contenders in their own division.

3. How will Kyle Connor's contract negotiations go?

The rising salary has the NHL in a weird place, where prior comparables are out the window and new benchmarks are being set. Connor is one of this year's top pending free agents, and while he won't push anywhere near Kirill Kaprizov's \$17 million, what's interesting is how the resetting market will impact Winnipeg's internal cap. Mark Scheifele and Connor Hellebuyck are their highest-paid players, both signed for \$8.5 million through the 2030-31 season, but the market conditions Connor is negotiating in are wildly different now. With two 40-goal seasons in the past four years (and four 30-goal seasons), Connor ranks 13th in NHL goal scoring over that span and would be a highly attractive free agent -- or trade target -- if it came to that. But if the Jets have to lose another key offensive contributor, it would be devastating to their standing as a Cup contender.

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/10/03/book-closes-on-jets-training-camp>

Book closes on Jets training camp

Final pre-season game pairings offer insight into current pecking

By: Mike McIntyre

Training camp is in the books for the Winnipeg Jets. Now comes the hard part for coaches and management — finalizing an opening-night roster that can't exceed 23 healthy skaters.

The deadline isn't until Monday under NHL rules, but Friday's pre-season finale in Calgary may have already tipped the Jets' hand on how those last cuts will play out.

Consider this: 30 players remain in camp, though that number includes captain Adam Lowry (hip surgery) and defenceman Dylan Samberg (broken wrist), who will both start the season on injured reserve. It also includes third-string goalie Domenic DiVincentiis, who's headed to the Manitoba Moose this weekend.

That leaves four more moves to make, assuming Jonathan Toews (lower body, day-to-day) is ready for Thursday's season opener against Dallas and no other surprises crop up via injury, waivers or trades.

Chances are those remaining decisions will all come up front. The Jets still have 17 forwards in camp (including Toews) and typically carry 13. For what it's worth, David Gustafsson, Walker Duehr, Brad Lambert and Nikita Chibrikov were the four healthy scratches Friday in Calgary.

"This is as close to our lineup as possible," head coach Scott Arniel said following the morning skate.

On defence, Winnipeg currently has eight skaters, and that's likely where they'll stay for now. The Jets planned to take Saturday off before regrouping Sunday for a full practice, giving Arniel and company a little more time to finalize their choices.

"Obviously waivers fall into this," Arniel said of these difficult decisions.

"There's lot of guys that have had pretty good camps. We're going to kind of watch that game (Friday night), re-evaluate everybody throughout probably this last 10 days and make a decision. Like I said before, how we start the year isn't how we may look in November, December. We've gotta talk to management, talk to coaches and kind of take it after (Friday)."

Gustafsson and Duehr would need waivers to be assigned to the Moose, while Lambert and Chibrikov could be sent down freely. Winnipeg has already passed seven players through waivers this week, including forwards Phil Di Giuseppe, Jaret Anderson-Dolan, Samuel Fagemo and Mason Shaw, along with defencemen Kale Clague, Tyrel Bauer and Isaak Phillips.

Perhaps the biggest surprise was seeing Parker Ford — who doesn't require waivers — centring the fourth line between Cole Koepke and Tanner Pearson against Calgary. Has the college free agent signing beaten out a drafted-and-developed prospect like Gustafsson for the final forward spot?

"Just another opportunity for a young guy to go and show what he can do. He's had a good camp and kind of improved through each day," Arniel said.

Ford, 25, admitted it was encouraging to be in the final dress rehearsal, but he wasn't declaring victory just yet.

"I think it's a great opportunity. I just have to continue to do my thing and show them I'm a reliable forward and can do my job," he said.

A natural centre during his Providence College days, Ford has mostly played wing in three seasons with the Moose, producing 66 points (34G, 32A) in 121 AHL games. He also made his NHL debut last year on the wing, scoring once in three appearances with the Jets.

"It's definitely an adjustment at the pro level," said Ford.

"There's definitely a lot more responsibility in the D-zone and just little things that you have to kind of pick up. I'm super comfortable there, taking faceoffs is something I like to do and one of my strong suits. I've loved it so far."

With Toews sidelined, Vlad Namestnikov slid up to the second line, Morgan Barron bumped into Namestnikov's spot on the third line, and Ford — who might otherwise be the 13th forward — filled in on the fourth.

On the blue line, the eight skaters still in camp would all require waivers, and it would seem Samberg's unfortunate injury has delayed deciding which one must go. The pairings Friday offered some insight into the current pecking order.

The top duo of Josh Morrissey and Dylan DeMelo remained together, while Logan Stanley got a second straight game in Samberg's spot with Neal Pionk.

"I want to run it again and see with Stan's size and P's mobility," said Arniel. "We're just still kind of playing along with that right now and seeing how it works itself out. We weren't really expecting this, with Sammy being hurt, so we're kind of playing catchup to see how it works with each group."

Haydn Fleury and Luke Schenn were on the third pairing Friday night while Colin Miller and Ville Heinola were the two parked in the press box.

"I had some time with him last year. He's a great skater, kills plays with his skating ability and his stick, and makes a pretty good first pass and moves the puck and communicates well out there," Schenn said of his partner.

"This is our first pre-season game together, so it's exciting to get going and get a couple more practice sessions with him and then we're on our way."

The Jets went 1-3-1 through their first five exhibition games, but iced their most experienced lineup yet in Calgary.

"I think everyone's kind of got the same goal in mind where you definitely want to get your timing down and be sharp out there," Schenn said of the final tune up.

On a personal level, Schenn — a trade deadline pickup last spring that threw his family life into chaos — said he feels much more settled this fall.

"I think the biggest thing last year was just sort of balancing the hockey aspect with family at home. And now, this year, everyone's in Winnipeg and it's just a way better feel, not only for myself, but for my wife and kids, too," he said.

"Just way more familiarity with the coaching staff, everyone in the organization, the players, trainers. You're not the new guy coming in anymore, kind of learning on the fly with just a

handful of games left and jumping right in, trying to balance everything all at once. I'm excited to get going here this year with this group from the start."

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/10/03/jets-rally-to-earn-a-5-4-shootout-victory-over-flames-but-demelo-and-perfetti-leave-early>

Jets rally to earn a 5-4 shootout victory over Flames, but DeMelo and Perfetti leave early

By: Ken Wiebe

You will forgive Scott Arniel if he happened to mutter a quick "good riddance" to the exhibition season before hopping on the plane back home to Winnipeg on Friday night.

For as much as the head coach of the Winnipeg Jets enjoys the time he got to evaluate and install a few wrinkles to the system during training camp, Arniel had to adjust on the fly once again after a pair of players left the game against the Calgary Flames.

The Jets ended up rallying from a 4-1 deficit to earn a 5-4 shootout victory to finish with a 2-3-1 record in the pre-season, but it came at a cost.

After losing defenceman Dylan Samberg to a broken wrist during the first exhibition meeting between the two teams last Saturday, blue-liner Dylan DeMelo left Friday's outing with just under seven minutes to go in the first period and forward Cole Perfetti didn't come out for the third.

Winnipeg opens the 2025-26 campaign on Thursday night against the Dallas Stars.

DeMelo took a stick from Flames forward Blake Coleman in the neck/throat area, and he was clearly in discomfort as he made his way to the bench and eventually down the tunnel.

The reason for Perfetti's departure wasn't as clear, though the Jets forward was favouring his right leg after finishing a check on Flames defenceman Kevin Bahl near the end of the second period.

Arniel told the CJOB post-game show that the lack of a return for DeMelo was "precautionary," but the news wasn't quite as optimistic for Perfetti.

"It's a lower-body issue," said Arniel. "We've got to get him home here. The first glance doesn't look great, so we'll see when we get home. Hopefully it's not as bad (as it looks)."

Perfetti is being counted on to take another important step forward in his development this season, so missing time would leave a substantial hole to fill on the Jets' second line.

The Jets must submit their opening-day roster on Monday and it's clear some questions remain, especially with the status of Perfetti less than certain after linemate Jonathan Toews "tweaked something" earlier this week and is also dealing with a lower-body issue.

"Obviously, the injuries now play into it a little bit," said Arniel. "We'll get ourselves sorted out on how we're going to move forward."

Let's take a closer look at what else unfolded in this one:

FORD LEAVES FINAL IMPRESSION

It was already a good sign for forward Parker Ford that he was in the lineup for the exhibition finale ahead of several hopefuls. After a strong training camp, he had another strong showing on Friday while playing centre on the fourth line.

Ford redirected a point shot from Stanley with his chest at 12:57 of the third period by getting to the front of the net.

Ford was noticeable throughout the contest, skating mostly as a trio with Cole Koepke and Tanner Pearson and finishing with seven hits.

"I've been really impressed with all three of those guys," Arniel told CJOB. "Every chance they've had at getting in the lineup, they've tried to show coaches and management that they deserve the opportunity to be here.

Throughout training camp and his exhibition games, Ford has shown well while moving from the wing back to his natural position of centre.

He could provide another right-handed faceoff option along with Mark Scheifele, while killing penalties and providing a physical element as a relentless forechecker.

Ford is essentially in a battle with the likes of David Gustafsson, Walker Duehr, Brad Lambert and Nikita Chibrikov, with more clarity expected to arrive before Monday's roster deadline.

HEAVY LIFTING

For the second time in the past three exhibition games, the Jets were forced to go with five defencemen for an extended period of time.

Although most eyes going into the contest were on how Logan Stanley would fare in a second consecutive game on a pairing with Neal Pionk, the injury to DeMelo meant that things were jumbled for the bulk of the final 47 minutes and change.

"You're not really worried about much, just getting out there, getting back to the bench, getting rested for the next one, it kind of takes the brain out of it," Jets defenceman Haydn Fleury told CJOB. "You're not really thinking too much, and you just kind of get in that rhythm and just try and give the guys all you have."

Fleury scored a goal on a point shot through traffic and finished with five blocked shots.

As is often the case, Josh Morrissey led the Jets' minute-munching, taking 34 shifts for 28:10 of ice time, with Pionk next at 26:11.

For folks looking for clues on who would be alongside Pionk next Thursday, no further hints will be coming until the Jets return to the ice for practice on Monday.

Arniel and his coaching staff have a number of options available to them, but the Jets might need to do some additional tinkering before finding the optimal pairings with Samberg expected to be out for six to eight weeks.

NYQUIST DELIVERS

Veteran winger Gustav Nyquist scored his first goal by heading towards the blue paint and finding a rebound after a point shot from Luke Schenn.

Nyquist then showcased his vision with a beautiful backhand pass in front for a goal by Alex Iafallo that cut the Flames lead to 4-3 at 3:47 of the third period.

After the departure of Nikolaj Ehlers in free agency, the Jets are banking on Nyquist playing a middle-six role and becoming an important part of the secondary scoring.

The offensive instincts were on display in this one, and should Perfetti miss some time due to injury to start the season, the Jets are going to need Nyquist and several other forwards to help pick up the offensive slack.

THE KEY PLAY

Tanner Pearson ends the shootout in the seventh round with a shot that was initially stopped by the blocker of Dustin Wolf, but after the puck went up in the air, the Flames goalie tried to catch it but instead knocked the puck into his own net to end the penalty-shot contest.

THE THREE STARS

Gustav Nyquist, Jets — Scored a goal to cue the comeback and chipped in an assist to round out his evening.

Nazem Kadri, Flames — The veteran centre scored twice, including a beauty off an odd-man rush on a perfect give-and-go.

Parker Ford, Jets — Fighting for a roster spot, the feisty forward scored the equalizer and finished with seven hits.

EXTRA, EXTRA

Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck made his second start of the exhibition season and finished with 24 saves.... The Jets penalty kill finished five-for-five while the power play was zero-for-three.... Winnipeg won 29 draws and lost 36 (45 per cent), with Vlad Namestnikov leading the way, going eight-for-14 (57 per cent).... Since there were no Jets placed on waivers on Saturday, it looks like the final decisions for the opening-day roster will stretch into Sunday or even Monday.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/10/03/road-to-the-stanley-cup-set-to-begin>

Road to the Stanley Cup set to begin

Storylines to follow as the puck officially drops on new season Tuesday

By: Mike McIntyre and Ken Wiebe

Is it October yet? You bet it is.

That means a brand-new hockey season is here — full of fresh starts, clean slates and endless possibilities.

The puck officially drops on Tuesday with a trio of games and will keep rolling for more than eight action-packed months until a champion is crowned.

To get you ready, Dump & Chase dives into some of the season's most compelling storylines and dusts off the crystal ball for some fearless puck predictions.

Three-peat?

The NHL hasn't seen a three-peat since the New York Islanders dominated the early 1980s, winning four consecutive Cups before the Edmonton Oilers ended their reign in 1984.

After ex-Jets head coach Paul Maurice guided the Florida Panthers to consecutive titles, it will be fascinating to see if they can capture a third straight Eastern Conference crown — something the Tampa Bay Lightning nearly accomplished earlier this decade.

The Lightning won two straight Cups before falling to the Colorado Avalanche in the 2022 Final, showing that a three-peat is possible, even if Tampa Bay didn't quite finish the job.

Panthers GM Bill Zito did the unthinkable, retaining three key pending unrestricted free agents — Sam Bennett, Brad Marchand and Aaron Ekblad — while also handing blue-liner Niko Mikkola an eight-year extension. This followed Sam Reinhart's eight-year deal, keeping Florida's competitive window wide open.

However, a potential season-ending knee injury to captain Aleksander Barkov, who joins Matthew Tkachuk on the shelf, means the Panthers will have to lean on their depth and experience, with others stepping up in their absence.

Still, with stud goalie Sergei Bobrovsky between the pipes and a deep roster, Florida has the pieces to make another Cup run. Their biggest challenge is the number of rising teams in the Atlantic Division, echoing the competitive landscape the Oilers faced in the Smythe Division of the 1980s.

There's enough skill and grit to mount another charge, and you can be sure Zito will be exploring creative solutions down the middle if Barkov is eventually ruled out for the season.

Olympic dreams

The 4 Nations Face-Off last February was just the delicious appetizer. Now comes the savoury main course: best-on-best hockey returning to the biggest stage in sports for the first time since 2014.

A Canada vs. U.S.A. showdown for gold would be hockey perfection, but don't count out Sweden, Finland, Slovakia or Czechia.

Several Jets players — Connor Hellebuyck (USA), Kyle Connor (USA), Josh Morrissey (Canada) and Nino Niederreiter (Switzerland) — should be locks for their national teams, while Mark Scheifele (Canada) and Neal Pionk (USA) will need strong starts to earn spots.

Manitoba-born stars like Mark Stone, Seth Jarvis and Travis Sanheim — all of whom wore the Maple Leaf last winter — will also be in the mix to compete in Italy.

We can't wait.

Sid the Kid

This is a story that just won't go away — even if Pittsburgh Penguins captain Sidney Crosby would prefer it did.

As he prepares for his 21st NHL season, the first-overall pick in the 2005 draft has made it clear time and again: he wants to continue — and eventually conclude — his career with the Penguins.

But when Crosby's agent, Pat Brisson, seemed to leave the door open to a trade in an interview with Pierre LeBrun of *The Athletic*, the hockey world interpreted it as a signal: another season of losing could make Crosby more open to moving to a contender.

What we do know is that Crosby is coming off an exceptional year, finishing 10th in NHL scoring with 91 points, averaging nearly 21 minutes per game, and excelling in all situations.

He also impressed for Team Canada at the 4 Nations — a gold medal performance that left fans wondering what adding a two-way centre of his calibre could mean for a team chasing the Stanley Cup.

Most observers never expected Marchand to play for anyone other than the Boston Bruins, yet he claimed his second Cup last spring and played a key role. In Crosby's case, the Avalanche and Montreal Canadiens are often mentioned whenever trade rumours swirl.

If — and it remains a very big if — Crosby reaches the point where he prefers a move, teams would be lining up with their best offers. The decision is entirely in Crosby's hands, and it's not one he would take lightly.

Our best guess: Crosby plays out the season with the Penguins. But after four years out of the playoffs, the temptation to consider a change will likely be stronger than ever during the 2026 off-season.

Woe, Canada

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, could this finally be the year the Stanley Cup returns to Canada?

There have been multiple near misses since the Canadiens last won it all in 1993, including back-to-back Finals appearances by the Oilers.

Connor McDavid and company remain top contenders, eager to finally slay the beast. The Winnipeg Jets and Toronto Maple Leafs are firmly in "win-now" mode, while the other four northern teams — Vancouver, Calgary, Montreal and Ottawa — may not look as dominant on paper, but that's why games are played on the ice.

It's long overdue, don't you think?

Captain Serious

Speaking of players who never thought they'd pull on a new NHL jersey, the homecoming of former Chicago Blackhawks captain Jonathan Toews isn't just a local story. It's one that will grab the attention of hardcore fans and casual observers alike.

After a two-year absence due to health-related issues, Toews has plenty of supporters, past and present, rooting for his success.

During training camp and the pre-season, he's shown excellent physical condition, and his hockey sense is as sharp as ever. The 37-year-old is managing a lower-body issue, but all signs point to him being ready for the season opener next Thursday.

Questions remain about his offensive production, but it's important to remember that Toews has always been a value-added player — bringing intangibles, elevating teammates, and making those around him better.

A proven winner throughout his career, Toews's leadership is a major asset for a Jets team that captured the Presidents' Trophy last season but fell 10 wins short of the Stanley Cup. Adding a three-time Cup champion with his winning pedigree will surely attract national headlines in addition to local coverage.

Slotted as the Jets' second-line centre, Toews didn't return just to mentor. He's here to show he still has plenty left in the tank and to be part of a winning team again.

Bet against him at your own peril.

Ovie's swan song?

With no goal-scoring record left to chase, what's next for Alex Ovechkin, the "Great Eight"?

Now 40 and in the final year of his contract, Ovechkin hasn't revealed what's next. Washington Capitals PR hinted this past summer that 2025-26 might be his last season, then backtracked, saying no final decision has been made.

Last season showed there's still plenty of gas in the tank — he had every motivation to overtake Wayne Gretzky — but it would be understandable if he chose to hang up his skates.

We've never seen a player like him, and probably never will. Savour it. His only (potentially last) regular-season visit to Winnipeg is Dec. 13.

Surprise, surprise

A year ago, the runaway winner in this category was the Columbus Blue Jackets, who endured the unthinkable loss of star player Johnny Gaudreau yet still nearly reached the Eastern Conference playoffs.

This year could be a toss-up between the Utah Mammoth and the Anaheim Ducks.

The Ducks have done some smart work, locking in two emerging core players — forward Mason McTavish and defenceman Jackson LaCombe — to lengthy, lucrative contract extensions.

GM Pat Verbeek has bolstered the roster with veterans like Chris Kreider, Alex Killorn, Jacob Trouba and Radko Gudas, while Lukas Dostal has emerged as the clear-cut No. 1 goalie after John Gibson was traded in the off-season.

While Anaheim should be in the hunt for the final Western wild-card spot, it feels like the time is now for the Mammoth. Under GM Bill Armstrong and head coach André Tourigny, the team has been trending upward.

Armstrong added centre JJ Peterka over the summer to deepen the middle, and with plenty of draft capital and salary-cap space still available, the Mammoth could make further moves before the deadline.

Let's make a McDeal?

There's no debate: Connor McDavid is the best player in the NHL.

Yet at US\$12.5 million per season, he's only the fifth-highest-paid player, trailing Kirill Kaprizov (US\$17M), Leon Draisaitl (US\$14M), Auston Matthews (US\$13.25M) and Nathan MacKinnon (US\$12.6M).

That's likely to change with McDavid entering the final year of his contract, but questions remain: a long-term extension? A short-term deal at a lower cap hit? No new deal at all, making him the league's most coveted free agent next July 1?

No one knows yet, but the hockey world will be watching closely.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/betting/article/hellebuyck-favourite-to-win-third-straight-vezina-trophy/>

Hellebuyck favourite to win third straight Vezina Trophy

By Luke BellusOpens in new window

Connor Hellebuyck has a chance to add his name to a very short list of hockey history this season.

After winning the Vezina Trophy the last two seasons, the Winnipeg Jets goalie enters the season as the favourite to win his third straight this season, something no goalie has done since Dominik Hasek from 1996 to 1999.

Since the NHL adopted the current criteria for the Vezina Trophy in 1981–82, Hasek is the only goalie to win three straight.

Hellebuyck is just one of three goalies listed at shorter than 10-1 to win the award this season.

Vezina Trophy Candidates

Connor Hellebuyck +310

The 32-year-old posted a career-best .925 save percentage and 2.00 goals-against last season en route to his second straight Vezina Trophy.

It's expected to be another big season for the Jets netminder as he projects to lead Team USA in goal at the 2026 Olympics after being the team's starting goalie at the 2025 4 Nations Face-off.

Last year marked the fourth consecutive season he appeared in at least 60 games, and the sixth time in his 10 NHL seasons. Hellebuyck is happy to buck the current trend of seeing NHL starters owning a closer split with their backups.

"Yeah, the trend is the split, but I think that is like a [political] movement in that someone got lucky and made it work and now everyone else thinks, 'Oh, that's the right way to do it.' I don't agree with that," Hellebuyck said.

"I think the best way to bring out the best part of yourself is to play and get into a rhythm." He told NHL.com, "For me, I would like to go back to the days of 70-plus games. I think you can stay in a rhythm and once you're confident you can just ride it and you don't really have to think a whole lot, you're just playing because you're feeling it every single night."

Igor Shesterkin +650

Starting the first season of a new eight-year \$92 million, Igor Shesterkin is the biggest threat to win this award according to the odds at FanDuel.

It was a down 2024-25 for the Rangers goalie, posting a career-worst 2.86 GAA with a .905 save percentage.

The 2022 Vezina winner didn't earn a vote for the award last season for the first time since the 2020-21 season when he finished fifth in Calder voting.

Andrei Vasilevskiy +750

The only other goalie priced at shorter than 15-1 in this market is the Tampa Bay Lightning's Andrei Vasilevskiy.

The 31-year-old finished second in voting last season with a career-best 2.18 GAA and one of the best save percentages of his career at .921.

Outside of winning this award in 2018-19, Vasilevskiy finished inside the top five in voting for the Vezina in five of the last seven seasons.

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/its-all-about-the-right-numbers-for-jets-forward-cole-perfetti>

It's all about the right numbers for Jets forward Cole Perfetti

By Gordon Anderson

Numbers are important to a forward, and depending on the player, some numbers are more important than others

"Cole Perfetti was excited he got through (the entirety of last season), after having two years of not being able to play at the toughest time of the year, in the second half, and missing playoffs," Jets head coach Scott Arniel said.

For the first time in his NHL career, the Jets right-shot winger from Whitby, Ont., played in all 82 regular-season games for the club. He also played in every one of the team's 13 Stanley Cup playoff games. He was one of four players who reached number 95 in terms of total games played.

“(Playing in all 82 games) was an important goal for me, just because in the prior years I hadn’t been able to reach that number,” Perfetti said. “My first year coming in, I got hurt and missed the second half of the year. In my second year, I got hurt and missed the second half of the year. I could not stay healthy.”

Yes. Early on in his pro career, injuries along with ineffectiveness were issues.

In his first full-time season with the organization in 2021-22, his time split between the Jets and the Manitoba Moose, Perfetti played in 18 games for the big club and 17 with the Manitoba Moose. The following season he upped his game total to 51 with the Jets, but that was nowhere near good enough as injuries again derailed his progress.

In his third year he managed to stay healthy enough to be available every night, but he was scratched for 11 regular-season games and four playoff games. The Jets were grounded by the Colorado Avalanche in five games of the opening round of the postseason in April of '24.

Getting scratched on so many different occasions was the ultimate slap with the back of the hand. But he also knew he was at the root of the problem.

“I hated (getting scratched) but it was, looking back, everyone has to go through that kind of stuff,” Perfetti said.

And now fast forwarding comfortably to season No. 4, the 23-year-old product of the OHL’s Saginaw Spirit wants to duplicate his 82 regular-season games played, while increasing his playoff numbers.

Perfetti prefers to be known as an indispensable player who posts every night. He wants to be consistent every night, and he wants to be in the lineup every night. His entire summer was spent training with those intentions in mind.

The last thing the 10th overall pick in the 2020 draft wants is to get saddled with labels such as ‘injury prone’ or ‘inconsistent’ with his effort and attention to detail. He takes tremendous pride knowing he can be an ‘impact player’ from the mid-point to the back end of a six-month season and well beyond.

“Proving that I (can) stay healthy and play in Game 60, when the going gets tough, and playing down the stretch when the guys are tired, and it is playoff hockey almost (every night), that (is) a big thing for me,” Perfetti said.

He scored 18 goals and added 32 assists during the regular season. He notched three goals and added three assists in the six-game exit to the Dallas Stars in the Western Conference semifinal.

“I thought he was one of our best forwards, most consistent forwards — not so much scoring goals but just getting inside and playing hard,” Arniel said. “That St. Louis series, man, he played hard.”

Now, heading into his fourth season as a full-time member of the Jets, the coach hopes the overall experience of playing an entire season informs and directs the intention of this season.

"His maturity is on the right path," Arniel said. "I think he sort of stumbled along, obviously he was part of a COVID set-up that kind of screwed up a lot of young kids, but now he's a pro. He recognizes he's a top six forward on our hockey team, one of the best teams in the league, and he has something to bring every night and we're seeing that."

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/jets-forward-parker-ford-strongly-stating-his-case>

Jets forward Parker Ford strongly stating his case

By Gordon Anderson

Whether fringy forward Parker Ford ultimately survives the final cuts, the fact he is competing for a roster spot means he's moved up the depth chart.

"Well, he's still here," Jets head coach Scott Arniel said. "Ford is here with the rest of the other young guys. He impressed us last year with his details, his work ethic. We slid him into the middle and again, he (won six of seven faceoffs) the other night against the Minnesota Wild."

Ford played in two exhibition games for the Jets before he was sent to the Manitoba Moose in September of last season. A long-term upper-body injury limited him to 41 AHL games last season. He scored 14 goals and chipped in with seven assists.

The Wakefield, R.I. native played three games in the NHL in 2024-25. He made his debut against the Boston Bruins on Jan. 30 and scored his first NHL goal in a 6-2 road win.

"He is a right-handed (guy) on the draw," Arniel said when asked what he can bring to the club should he stick around beyond the weekend. "He's been doing a little penalty killing. There's a lot there that we like. He's still in the fight. That's all you ask of these kids, put your best foot forward and he's done that."

Ford was in the lineup for the fourth time this pre-season as the Jets played the Calgary Flames at the Saddledome on Friday night. The 25-year-old centered a line of Tanner Pearson and Cole Koepke.

The 5-foot-10 forward, who was an undrafted free agent, signed with Winnipeg in March of 2023. He scored 41 goals in four seasons at Providence College. Ford played for Team USA at the IIHF world juniors in Czechia in 2020.

Heading into Friday night's game with the Flames, the Jets were carrying three goalies, eight defencemen and 17 forwards on the roster, for a total of 28 players. The club will need to trim its numbers down to a 23-man opening day roster prior to the roster deadline at 3 p.m. on Oct. 6.

With Jonathan Toews expected to be OK following the lower-body injury he incurred in Minnesota on Tuesday night, there appears to be six players fighting for two spots on the club's opening night roster in Tanner Pearson, David Gustafsson, Brad Lambert, Nikita Chibrikov, Walker Duehr and Ford.

Lambert, Chibrikov and Ford do not need to enter the waiver process should the team choose to send one or all three of them to the Moose.

https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-win-5-4-in-a-shootout-over-the-flames-lose-demelo-and-perfetti?utm_source=winnipeg-jets

Jets win 5-4 in a shootout over the Flames, lose DeMelo and Perfetti

By Gordon Anderson

Tanner Pearson scored in the seventh round of the shootout as the Winnipeg Jets beat the Calgary Flames 5-4 at the Saddledome on Friday night.

Pearson's original shot was stopped, but Flames goalie Dustin Wolf tried to catch the puck but instead knocked the puck into the net. Wolf turned aside 31 of 35 shots in 65 minutes of action.

Gabe Vilardi and Josh Morrissey also scored for the Jets in the shootout. Kyle Connor, Mark Scheifele, Gustav Nyquist and Nino Niederreiter failed to score.

Justin Kirkland and Rasmus Andersson scored in the shootout for the Flames. Morgan Frost, Matvei Gridin, Yegor Sharangovich, Nazem Kadri and Matt Coronato failed to score for the Flames.

Dylan DeMelo played 5:04 in the first period. His final shift came with 6:58 remaining in the opening frame after he took a stick to the throat/face area from Blake Coleman in the defensive zone. Cole Perfetti did not return to the game for the third period.

The Jets entered the third period trailing by two goals with Alex Lafallo trimming the deficit to one at 3:47. The Jets tied the game at four apiece when Logan Stanley's point shot deflected off Parker Ford and snuck behind Wolf at 12:57 of the third period.

Haydn Fleury and Nyquist also scored in regulation for the Jets. Winnipeg went 0-for-3 with the man advantage.

Hellebuyck stopped 25 of 29 shots in regulation and overtime combined.

Kadri scored twice for the Flames. Gridin and Joel Hanley also scored for the Flames. The Flames went 0-for-5 with the powerplay.

Winnipeg finished the pre-season with a 2-3-1 record. The Jets begin the regular season when they host the Dallas Stars on Thursday night.

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6681352/2025/10/03/winnipeg-jets-2025-26-injuries-playoffs/>

The Winnipeg Jets are going to struggle. Don't count them out when they do

By Murat Ates

Scott Arniel has named the Stanley Cup as the Winnipeg Jets' goal for this season.

It is reasonable. The Jets are coming off the best season in franchise history. They have a veteran roster backed by Connor Hellebuyck, who is coming off a Hart Trophy-winning performance, and are projected to be a top-10 team once again this season.

Even acknowledging the lack of a Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl, Aleksander Barkov or Matthew Tkachuk — and even using a model that treats Jonathan Toews as a below-replacement level player — Winnipeg has a case to be a 100-point, playoff-bound team. Get that far and anything is possible, especially if Toews returns to form and Hellebuyck can deliver postseason quality.

But the best-case version of the 2025-26 Jets will involve growing pains.

Adam Lowry, Winnipeg's captain and de facto No. 2 centre, is targeting a November return from hip surgery and may take time to reclaim his form. Toews, the nominal No. 2 centre, has yet to prove he can endure the rigors of an NHL season for the first time in over two years. The injury Toews sustained against the Minnesota Wild is believed to be minor, but it's a good reminder that 37-year-olds can miss time for ordinary injuries regardless of bigger-picture health concerns.

Winnipeg's defence corps is also depleted to start the season. Dylan Samberg's broken wrist is a concern, given Haydn Fleury and Neal Pionk were outscored 9-5 and badly outshot when Samberg was hurt last season and Winnipeg's penalty kill also struggled. At Thursday's practice, Logan Stanley skated alongside Pionk; Stanley's slow pivots combine with poor reads to put Winnipeg's second pair in a dubious position. Their job is to play big minutes against top-six competition and they're likely outmatched.

The Jets' power play scored 13 goals in its first 10 games last season, before returning to earth with 50 goals in the 72 games that came next. Winnipeg still finished tops in the league with the man advantage. It's still worth noting that there are goals to be lost if the Jets' power play remains "good" instead of "on pace to be the best in NHL history."

In the same vein, Hellebuyck left the ice before Monday's practice because he "had a rib out of place," prompting a quick trip to his chiropractor. Hellebuyck played on Tuesday in Minnesota and is expected to be a 60-game workhorse again this season. Still, Hellebuyck's save percentage would only have to drop to his own career average (.918) from last year's Hart Trophy-winning high (.925) to cost Winnipeg an extra 12 goals compared to last year.

So the Jets are banged up to start the season. Last year's 15-1-0 start seems well out of reach; depending on Toews' level and the length of Samberg and Lowry's absences, it would make sense if they flat-out struggle to start the season.

Just don't draw any long-term conclusions too quickly.

Winnipeg's bet on Toews is not about his timing and pace in October; it's that he'll be a veteran difference-maker after the Olympic break and into the playoffs. Given the length of his absence and his own self-assessment — he's still working on timing and conditioning — it would make sense to hold off final judgment until he's had half a season to shake off the rust. Lowry's decision to have surgery was also made with the playoffs in mind. He said in September that he'd spoken with other players who have undergone the process to understand how to best time his recovery.

If Lowry returns in early November, he could play many as 24 games before the Christmas shutdown and 25 more games between Christmas and the Olympic break. Even a little bit of load management on that front would give Lowry half a season before the stretch drive — and if all goes well, Toews will be playing at a level that reduces Lowry's nightly workload.

Samberg's fractured wrist was a clean break that didn't require surgery and he will be back in the Jets' top four in six to eight weeks. Meanwhile, the Jets are set to accrue cap space throughout the season, perhaps being able to add as much as \$18 million in contracts on deadline day. There's good news coming, even if it's not soon.

Until then, the Jets will have to fight for a playoff spot by making the most of their many strengths. Kyle Connor, Mark Scheifele and Gabriel Vilardi were great individually and together last season; as a line, they outscored their opponents by 13 goals, while all three players set career highs in points. Cole Perfetti is stepping into Nikolaj Ehlers' vacant minutes and has already shown the ability to produce points on the power play. Josh Morrissey is back from his playoff injury and his footwork is every bit as good as the past several seasons, and the team's overall commitment to defence has improved in three consecutive seasons.

There is room for this team to score less and to be scored on more, and still hit 100 points. The Jets have also earned the right to use the regular season as a training ground, progressively building their game to a playoff level in time for the stretch run. The President's Trophy was meaningful — the first in franchise history — but it didn't give Winnipeg a head start against St. Louis. Instead, the Blues proved to be a physical force that pushed Winnipeg to the limit. Arniel has spent his offseason preparing to push Winnipeg past that limit this time around.

"We talked last year about getting our compete level up ... getting into the battle," Arniel said. "Now it's about winning the battles."

In the best-case version of this Jets season, they get back to the playoffs — but this time, with a healthy Lowry, Toews and a more veteran group ready to elevate its game beyond its regular-season accomplishments. They stay healthy throughout the playoffs, with Scheifele and Morrissey playing in every game, and Hellebuyck delivers a postseason reminiscent of his 2021 dominance against Edmonton.

Even if all of those factors work out in Winnipeg's favour, the Jets are going to start their season understaffed. Even with a relatively kind schedule where only three of Winnipeg's first 12 games come against opponents who made the playoffs last season, the Jets' injury problems plus expected power play and goaltending regression put a 15-1-0 start well out of reach. If Winnipeg comes back from its six-game November road trip with a mediocre record — say, 9-9-0 like last season's Avalanche, or 8-10-1 like last season's Blues — it will be important to maintain realistic expectations.

But this is a playoff-bound team (short of regular-season catastrophe) that finished last season with a +85 goal differential. It can absorb regression. It can afford for its power play and goaltending to return to earth. It can afford the loss of Ehlers and arrive at the playoffs better prepared for the grind, thanks in part to the lessons of last year.

At times, these Jets are going to struggle. Don't count them out when they do.

Daily Faceoff

<https://www.dailyfaceoff.com/news/2025-26-nhl-team-preview-prediction-winnipeg-jets-kyle-connor-hellebuyck-mark-scheifele>

2025–26 NHL team preview: Winnipeg Jets

By Mike Gould

LAST SEASON

It still doesn't feel real, but the Winnipeg Jets are the reigning Presidents' Trophy winners. The 2024-25 season will rank for some time among the very best in Jets history — yes, including both iterations of the franchise — with the team winning a record 56 games en route to a staggering 116-point campaign. They still aren't without their flaws, but the Jets did a lot last season to establish themselves as legitimate contenders. If nothing else, they gained a ton of respect around the league.

You can't talk about the 2024-25 Jets without first mentioning Connor Hellebuyck, who won both the Vezina Trophy and Hart Trophies after putting together inarguably the greatest individual season of the Jets 2.0 era. The 32-year-old goaltender stands alone as the very best at his position today, having recorded back-to-back-back seasons at or above a .920 save percentage in a league where scoring has skyrocketed. Hellebuyck put up his best numbers to date in 2024-25, compiling a remarkable 47-12-3 record to go with eight shutouts and a .925 save percentage in 63 games. He was an extremely deserving MVP pick, even if his playoff performance left a lot to be desired.

The Jets snuck past the St. Louis Blues in the first round of the 2025 playoffs by the thinnest of margins, winning Game 7 in overtime after scoring a tying goal with just seconds remaining in the third period. They fell to the Dallas Stars in six games in the second round, ending their season — and with it, Nikolaj Ehlers' tenure with the Jets. The Danish winger signed with the Carolina Hurricanes in free agency this past summer, leaving a hole that the Jets have yet to adequately fill.

As long as Hellebuyck continues his dominance in the regular season, the Jets will be a safe bet to make the playoffs. They've got a great defensive group in front of him, even if it's currently a little depleted by injuries. But for the first time in a while, the Jets have major questions to answer about their forward group, and they'll be in tough to repeat as Central Division champs, let alone leading the entire league in points.

KEY ADDITIONS & DEPARTURES

Additions

Jonathan Toews, C
Gustav Nyquist, RW
Tanner Pearson, LW
Cole Koepke, LW

Departures

Nikolaj Ehlers, LW (Car)
Mason Appleton, RW (Det)
Brandon Tanev, LW (Utah)
Rasmus Kupari, C (HC Lugano)

OFFENSE

The Jets tied the Stars and Colorado Avalanche for third in the entire NHL with 277 goals last season. Kyle Connor has increasingly served as Winnipeg's primary offensive catalyst in recent years and continued in that role last year, setting a new career high with 97 points (41 goals, 56 assists) in 82 regular-season games before leading the team with 17 points in 13 playoff contests. The 28-year-old winger is now entering the final year of his contract and will be extra motivated to put himself in line for a major payday, whether it's in Winnipeg or somewhere else.

Mark Scheifele, Gabe Vilardi, and Cole Perfetti all remain in key roles for this Jets team, but their secondary scoring took a big hit over the summer as Ehlers departed for Carolina on a seven-year deal. Consistently overlooked for top-line duty by pretty much all of his Jets coaches, Ehlers nevertheless remained one of the league's most efficient scorers throughout his time in Winnipeg and will be very difficult to replace. Bless them, the Jets tried, but can two veterans on the wrong side of 35 really make up for the loss of a top-six talent in his prime?

The Jets went out and made Gustav Nyquist and Jonathan Toews (!) their two key UFA acquisitions this summer, with the latter making his return to the NHL after a two-year absence. Had the Jets made these moves 10 years ago, we'd have crowned them the uncontested off-season champions — but, alas, it's 2025. Nyquist, 36, scored 28 points in 79 games split between the Nashville Predators and Minnesota Wild last season; Toews, 37, last suited up for the Chicago Blackhawks in April 2023 and dealt with a variety of different health issues in the years before his sabbatical. The Jets would be asking a lot of these two players even if they hadn't lost Ehlers.

Making matters more difficult, the Jets will be without captain and two-way force Adam Lowry for the first few weeks of the season as works to make his way back from off-season hip surgery. Toews may also be a little banged up. To even things out up front, don't be surprised if the Jets assign more duties to someone like Vilardi, fresh off signing a six-year, \$7.5 million AAV contract this summer.

DEFENSE

It's already been six years since the Dustin Byfuglien era ended in Winnipeg, and while it took him a while to pick up the baton, Josh Morrissey has gradually established himself as the new bona fide No. 1 defenseman on the block in Winnipeg. It's been extraordinary to watch Morrissey reinvent himself from a skilled puck-mover who needed a bit of sheltering to a do-it-all two-way dynamo and Norris Trophy contender, but that's exactly what's happened over the past three seasons and change.

Morrissey probably wouldn't be the defenseman he is today without the steadying presence of Dylan DeMelo on his right side. Since arriving from the Ottawa Senators in 2020, DeMelo has seen his role in Winnipeg increase with each passing season, to the point that he's firmly established himself as the Devon Toews to Morrissey's Cale Makar. He may not have the offensive upside of some of the league's other No. 2 defenders, but DeMelo is as steady as they come and is the perfect foil to Morrissey on the top pair.

The Jets will start the 2025-26 season without Dylan Samberg, who is expected to miss the first six to eight weeks while recovering from a broken wrist. It's a big loss for a Jets team that got a ton of mileage out of the Samberg/Neal Pionk pairing last season, to the point they rewarded both players with hefty contract extensions earlier this year. Did you know that Pionk now makes more than Morrissey, and Samberg makes more than DeMelo? That's the beauty of having two

strong and balanced top-four pairings. (In Samberg's absence, the Jets will likely turn to Haydn Fleury, Luke Schenn, and even Logan Stanley to pick up more of the slack).

GOALTENDING

Connor Hellebuyck, end of story. The Jets' workhorse will likely surpass the 350-win mark for his career this upcoming season and remains under contract with the club through 2031 at an \$8.5 million cap hit, which looks like a bargain in the wake of his MVP campaign. It's hard to fathom where the Jets would be without Hellebuyck, and thankfully for them, they won't have to know the answer to that question for a long, long time. He's the best goaltender in the NHL, and he's all theirs. With only the playoffs left for him to conquer, expect Hellebuyck to be at the top of his game yet again as he enters his 11th season in Winnipeg.

Eric Comrie returns as Hellebuyck's backup in 2025-26 after starting his third Jets tenure with a bang last year. The 30-year-old netminder, known for his good-natured and talkative demeanor off the ice, put up a solid .914 save percentage and two shutouts in 20 games with the 2024-25 Jets. He didn't get much run support, as evidenced by his pedestrian 9-10-1 record, but Comrie proved himself more than capable of holding up his end of the bargain while giving Hellebuyck a much-needed respite every now and then. Comrie is entering the back half of a two-year contract and is eligible for an extension at any time.

COACHING

Scott Arniel returns for his second year as head coach in Winnipeg and his fourth behind the bench, having previously served as an associate coach under Rick Bowness from 2021 to 2023. A second-round pick of the original Jets in 1981, Arniel played in Winnipeg for the majority of his career as an NHL winger and topped out at 56 points with the club in the 1983-84 season. He wrapped up his playing days with three seasons as a member of the Manitoba Moose in the late 1990s before retiring and becoming a coach for the team, eventually becoming their head coach in 2006.

Arniel parlayed a run to the 2009 Calder Cup Final with the Moose into his first NHL head coaching gig with the Columbus Blue Jackets in 2010. He led the Blue Jackets to an 81-point season in 2010-11 and was on pace to fall short of that mark by a significant margin the following year before being fired at the midway mark. From there, Arniel spent more than a decade as an assistant or associate for various teams before returning to Manitoba with the Jets. You can bet he's pretty safe after winning the Presidents' Trophy in his first year as their head coach, although it also means expectations will be through the roof in year two.

ROOKIES

The Jets have a pretty veteran-heavy roster as it stands, and seeing as they have legitimate championship aspirations, Arniel won't be going out of his way to let prospects audition for roster spots without a good reason. That being said, the Jets do have a decent collection of young talent, even if the Moose didn't exactly utilize it to the greatest degree last season (they finished 25-41-6 and missed the playoffs).

Nikita Chibrikov is likely the closest of the Jets' forward prospects to making the jump. The 22-year-old winger doesn't stand out physically (5'10", 170 pounds) but plays an up-tempo game centered around puck control and playmaking. Although he's not the most consistent player, Chibrikov has more than enough offense in his game to translate to the NHL level and could be the first forward called upon if one of the Jets' incumbents struggles or gets hurt.

There's also Elias Salomonsson, a smooth-skating right-shot defenseman coming off a terrific rookie season with the Moose. Daily Faceoff prospect guru Steven Ellis ranked Salomonsson as the Jets' No. 2 prospect this summer, behind only Brayden Yager, and described Salomonsson in his write-up as "a great skater with a big frame" and "as defensively sound as you'll find in this system." Don't be surprised to see Salomonsson eventually slot in behind DeMelo and Pionk on the right side for the Jets.

BURNING QUESTIONS

1. Can Cole Perfetti do more? With Ehlers no longer in the picture, it tracks that the Jets might look to shift gears a little bit up front. Would it make sense for them to embrace two forward "pairs," with Connor and Scheifele together on the top line and Perfetti with Vilardi on the second? Regardless of how they approach this upcoming season Jets need Perfetti to remain on his current upward trajectory. He reached 50 points for the first time in his career last year; now, they need him to show even more of the offensive flair he displayed with the OHL's Saginaw Spirit.

2. Will Nino Niederreiter step up? It always feels like Niederreiter is more productive than he actually is, but the Swiss winger has scored 50 points in a season only twice in his career and is coming off back-to-back years in the 30s with the Jets. Signed through 2027 at a \$4 million cap hit, Niederreiter is likely a better bet than Nyquist on the second line and is one of a handful of Jets who could play a bigger role with Ehlers out of the picture. This would be a great time for Niederreiter to score more than 25 goals for the first time.

3. Is it finally Ville Heinola's time? The Jets drafted Heinola in the first round all the way back in 2019, and he's played a total of 53 NHL games in the six seasons since. The young Finn is undeniably talented, but he's never been given much of a leash by his coaches in the 'Peg. With Samberg on the shelf to start, is this finally the year that Heinola gets an extended look with meaningful minutes?

PREDICTION

It was already shocking when the Jets won the Presidents' Trophy last year. For that reason, we don't expect them to do it again, although they should still get to the 100-point mark. Even without Ehlers, this is a very good team with a cheat code between the pipes, and Arniel still has a wide variety of intriguing options at his disposal as he looks to reshape his top six. Whether it's Perfetti, Vilardi, Toews, Nyquist, Niederreiter, Vlad Namestnikov, or Alex Iafallo getting the bump, the Jets should still be able to make do with what they have.

The Central Division is as stacked as it gets, and it'll always be a grind for any of those top five teams as they jostle for prime positioning. We'll say the Jets fall short of winning the Central but still finish in a divisional playoff spot, with a solid shot at locking down home-ice advantage for the second consecutive year — and then, Hellebuyck will exorcise his playoff demons and lead them on a deep run.