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<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/blog-scheifele-happy-with-jets-off-season>

***BLOG: Scheifele happy with Jets off-season
"I really like the moves we made."***

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG – The last time we saw Mark Scheifele on the ice was Game 6 of the Winnipeg Jets series with the Dallas Stars at American Airlines Center, a 2-1 overtime loss that ended the team's season.

Earlier that day, Scheifele lost his father Brad. The outpouring of support from the Jets organization, his teammates, the Dallas Stars players, coaches and from the hockey community was noticeable.

Following the first day of training camp at hockey for all centre, the 32-year-old started his media availability with a statement.

"I really want to say thank you to the guys in this room, the brothers, obviously my family, my friends," said Scheifele.

"All the guys in the league that reached out, the organization and especially the fans, the support that that I had, and my family had the at the end of the season was amazing, and it just shows how great this hockey world can be."

Last season, Scheifele was a driving force behind the Jets Presidents' Trophy win with his career best 87-point season. He is currently nine points away from passing Blake Wheeler as the franchise's all-time leading scorer. The team looks poised to make a deep playoff run in 2025-26.

"Yeah, I'm really excited to get the season started," said Scheifele.

"Obviously a lot of unfinished business after last season. So just really excited to get going again."

During the first on-ice session of the day, Scheifele was paired up with his usual wingers, Kyle Connor and Gabe Vilardi. That trio was one of the NHL's best at five-on-five and certainly, one of the reasons the Jets power play led the way at 28.9%. A missing component from that top unit will be Nikolaj Ehlers who signed with the Carolina Hurricanes in the off-season.

The Jets added Jonathan Toews, Gustav Nyquist, Tanner Pearson and Cole Koepke to add even more depth up front.

"I think you just can't fill what Nikky does at the end of the day. He's an absolutely fantastic player. And obviously talked to him out throughout the summer. And obviously we're going to miss him a lot," said Scheifele.

"He's obviously a close friend. Played with him for 10 years. And we're going to miss him. But obviously, getting Toews, Nyquist, Pearson, you're doing it a little bit more cut by committee.

You're never going to find another Nikolaj Ehlers. He was absolutely so dynamic. And a fantastic part of this team for a long time. And you can't fill those shoes, but I really like the moves we made."

Like many of his teammates, Scheifele looked up to the three-time Stanley Cup champion Toews, who chose to sign with his hometown team. Scheifele then told a great story about having dinner with Toews when he was 18.

"I actually brought up this story to him the other day at dinner. I was like, 'do you remember having dinner with me when I was 18 years old? And he was like, you know what, a buddy brought that up to me actually the other day.' And I was like, 'yeah we had dinner together.' I was roommates with Andrew Ladd, and he was like, 'hey do you want to come to dinner with me and Buff?'," said Scheifele.

"And I was like 18 at the time, it was my first road trip, I was like, 'yeah of course.' And I show up and it's Taser and Duncan Keith, Marion Hossa and Brent Seabrook and I was like — I nearly crapped my pants. But I brought that up to him the other day and he was like, 'someone actually did bring that up to me the other day,' so it's kind of cool to re-live that story."

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/blog-connor-jets-excited-to-open-camp>

BLOG: Connor, Jets excited to open camp

"Today was great to be on the ice with everybody and have them pushing each other."

By Mitchell Clinton

WINNIPEG – There is just something special about the start of training camp.

All the excitement as a team begins the grind of training camp, the ups and (hopefully minimal) downs of the regular season, and the thrill of what could come in the postseason.

But it all begins with day one.

"Today was great to be on the ice with everybody and have them pushing each other and together as a team," said Kyle Connor, who posted a career-high of 97 points last season. "I'm really excited to get started and see the guys."

When the first ice session began on Thursday, Connor was alongside two familiar faces in Mark Scheifele and Gabriel Vilardi. The focus of day one wasn't so much on systems or developing chemistry within linemates, but keeping that trio – who outscored their opponents 49-36 at five-on-five last season, per Natural Stat Trick – together was a perfect way to kick off camp for Connor.

"They both look great, you can tell they put in the work," Connor said. "Even the skates coming up to camp, they were pushing the pace. It's day one, but I'm excited to build on what we've been doing as a team and as a line."

The 28-year-old winger is in the final year of his seven-year contract and plans to let the business side take care of itself while he focuses on being the best player he can for his team.

“Obviously it’s a family here. You feel that right from the beginning, even with opening remarks from (executive chairman and governor, Mark) Chipman, (general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff), coach (Scott Arniel). They’re all saying the same thing. It’s a family. We pride ourselves on the community and it’s a close-knit group. You can feel that just in the relationships around the room.”

Cheveldayoff said he’s had great dialogue with Connor’s representatives and continues to do so, adding that he sees both Connor and captain Adam Lowry (who also has an expiring contract at the end of this season) as big parts of this team’s roster. As a general manager, there are always tasks that need to be done, but when he looks at this Jets group in training camp, Cheveldayoff likes what he sees.

“It’s a very close group, obviously, during the season. I think it’s a very close group off ice, during the offseason,” Cheveldayoff said. “It’s the opportunity that’s in front of them and the hunger and the scars and the pain that get left behind when you don’t get as far as you collectively want to.

“Every group learns a certain something along the way.”

Perhaps Arniel put it best when reflecting on the Presidents’ Trophy (and William Jennings Trophy) winning regular season, and the triumph over the St. Louis Blues in a physical, down to the final second first round series.

“That playoff series, that was right out of the 80’s and 90’s for me. Maybe without the fighting,” said Arniel. “But that physicality of that series was something that, if we weren’t ready for it, that might have been over very quick and probably not in our favour.”

Building that kind of compete level doesn’t happen in one day. It’s built over 82 games. Thursday’s three sessions had aspects of one-on-ones, two-on-twos, and some small-area games as a way to start the building process.

“This group in the last three years, we’ve won the most regular season games in the league,” said Arniel. “Florida has played the most playoff games, like 63 playoff games. That’s the next goal, that’s what we have to get to.”

Despite all the success of last season, there is a noticeable ‘unfinished business’ feel around the group. The Jets added Stanley Cup winners in Jonathan Toews and Tanner Pearson, and brought in more depth in a number of positions, including Gustav Nyquist and Cole Koepke up front – just to name a couple.

It won’t be just one name that helps the Jets get where they want to go, but building a squad that wants to go on this journey together is a foundational piece.

“This group’s kind of been together a long time and we’re very comfortable picking up each other in any situation,” said Connor. “I think we pride ourselves as a team, you know, you look to that guy next to you in the locker room and it’s an open book. Whatever you’re feeling, whatever you can help the other guy with, we’re trying to be the players we can but also the best teammates we can. It starts with our leadership with (Adam Lowry), and Josh (Morrissey) and Mark are examples of that. It goes to the chemistry of this team.”

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/09/18/excited-to-build-on-what-weve-been-doing>

Excited to build on what we've been doing'
Jets' Connor focused on season ahead, mum on extending contract

By: Mike McIntyre

Kyle Connor knew the question was coming. And the talented Winnipeg Jets winger fired off a response about as quickly as he unleashes his wicked wrist shot in tight quarters.

"I'm really just focused on myself and being the best player that I can. Let the business take care of the business," Connor told a media scrum on Thursday following the first day of training camp.

He's talking about his contract status, which is a hot-button topic around here given that he's set to enter the final year of his current deal and could conceivably find a new hockey home as of July 1 if he doesn't put pen to paper before then.

"All I can do is control how I come to the rink every day and that stuff will take care of itself," added the Michigan native.

"I'm really just focused on myself and being the best player that I can. Let the business take care of the business."

Reason for optimism? Panic? Or somewhere in between? Connor is notoriously private, but he did make a point of praising the only NHL city and organization he's ever known — Winnipeg drafted him 17th overall a decade ago.

"It's a great community. Obviously it's a family here," said Connor, who recently saw his own clan expand after his wife, Ally, gave birth to a daughter last March.

"We pride ourselves on community, and it's a close-knit group. You can just feel that in the relationships around the room."

Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff was a bit more forthcoming when asked for an update.

"We've had great dialogue with KC's representatives and we continue to have that," he said Thursday.

"You'd like to have it done yesterday. Those are things that you keep pushing towards. Every conversation, you're hopeful that this is the one that closes it type thing. But it's not... I don't know that it's a timeframe sort of thing. You just keep on working at it. I wouldn't even say grinding at it. It's just working at it."

There's no doubt Connor is due for a significant raise from the US\$7,142,857 he's set to make this year, which is fourth-most on the team behind goaltender Connor Hellebuyck (US\$8.5 million) and linemates Mark Scheifele (US\$8.5 million) and Gabe Vilardi (US\$7.5 million).

Think something in the range of US\$11-12 million, given the rising salary cap.

“That’s the state we’re in here,” Cheveldayoff said of a sudden spike in pay, especially for high-end players, after years of a mostly flat cap.

“There’s an economic climate that’s somewhat new and still somewhat unfolding. All those things factor into every decision you make. Especially if you’re talking about trying to make decisions that are far, far reaching as far as term in an organization.”

Connor has already topped 30 goals seven times in his career — the only exception a pandemic-shortened 2021 season when he scored 26 in 56 games. He enters this year with 582 points (284 goals, 298 assists) in 613 regular-season games.

At the age of 28, he’s still very much in his prime years. No doubt the Jets would love to lock him up with a lengthy extension, but you wonder if Connor might prefer something a bit shorter-term — think three or four years — which might allow for one more big cash-in down the road?

Connor insists he’s not worried about this becoming a distraction should it not get resolved before puck drops on the 2025-26 season on Oct. 9 when the Jets host the Dallas Stars.

“I don’t think there’s one way. There’s so many different ways something can come together or not. Just kind of leave that to the business side of it,” he said.

His teammates and coaches might not be quite as patient.

“With KC, he’s earned the right to sit back and figure out what he wants to do, with his family and himself. As a coach, I’m going to do everything in my power to talk him into getting it signed as fast as possible,” said Jets bench boss Scott Arniel.

“He means an awful lot to this team and this organization. I’d like to think he’s pretty happy about how he’s used and how he plays here, the things he’s done over the years. As a coach, you’re hoping that it goes in the right direction. We went through it with Nik last year, hopefully, the ending is a little different.”

“With KC, he’s earned the right to sit back and figure out what he wants to do... As a coach, I’m going to do everything in my power to talk him into getting it signed as fast as possible.”

Indeed, Nikolaj Ehlers was in this exact situation 12 months ago, ultimately walking in free agency and signing with the Carolina Hurricanes. That cloud of uncertainty didn’t stop the Jets from having their best regular season in franchise history, winning the Central Division, Western Conference and Presidents’ Trophy.

No doubt many are hoping Connor’s situation — and that of captain Adam Lowry, who is also going to be in the final year of his deal — takes the same route as Scheifele and Hellebuyck, who both signed extensions at the end of training camp in 2023 to clear up any doubt about their futures.

“If he comes to me and wants to talk about it, I’m obviously all ears,” Scheifele said Thursday.

“He’s a friend, first and foremost. And the business side of things is his own personal business. All you can do is just be there as a friend and help him through if he has questions or has

thoughts that he wants to run by you. But, obviously I'm a big fan of his and would love if he stuck around longer, but obviously I just want the best for him and leave it at that."

Connor skated Thursday with his familiar linemates and said he's excited to see what one of the NHL's top-producing trios can do this season.

"Super excited to get back with those two players. They both look great, you can tell they put in the work," he said.

"Even the skates coming up to camp, they were pushing the pace. It's day one, but I'm excited to build on what we've been doing as a team and as a line."

How they lined up

The Jets have 31 forwards, 18 defencemen and six goaltenders in camp this year and are currently broken into three groups.

Lowry continues to skate by himself on a separate sheet of ice as he recovers from off-season hip surgery, while Kieron Walton is currently sidelined after suffering a concussion during a prospects game last Saturday.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/09/18/jets-embracing-lofty-expectations>

Jets embracing lofty expectations

Adding Cup-winning vets part of belief in nabbing Lord Stanley's mug

By: Ken Wiebe

Expectations can often be a tricky subject to navigate, though that did not prevent Scott Arniel from going down that road during the first on-ice sessions of training camp.

With medicals and physicals in the rearview mirror, the head coach of the Winnipeg Jets leaned in on the pursuit of the ultimate goal in his first question and answer period with reporters on Thursday at Hockey For All Centre.

"Every one of us in this room, we've talked about it and we're not afraid to talk about the Stanley Cup," said Arniel, back for a fourth season and the second as the head coach after finishing second in Jack Adams Trophy voting behind Spencer Carbery. "There's a ton of work that has to happen to get there. Our group realizes that when we play our style, when we attack the way we attack, when we defend the way we defend, our specialty teams are good and we get real good goaltending, that we're as good as anybody in this league."

Looking for more proof?

The Jets captured a second consecutive Jennings Trophy for allowing the fewest goals in the NHL last season, they had the top power play in the league, showed improvement on the penalty kill, and finished in the top-10 in goals scored.

They got off to the best start in NHL history (15-1) and set franchise marks for wins (56) and points (116) on the way to capturing the Presidents' Trophy as the best team during the regular season.

In short, the Jets do a lot of important — not to mention difficult — things really well.

They know what they're supposed to look like and they bring that to the ice on a consistent basis.

This group has built an identity, one that includes being fully committed to defending well while also having the ability to create offence.

Even with all of those things going the Jets' way, they were left disappointed after a heartbreaking, overtime loss in Game 6 in the second-round playoff series with the Dallas Stars.

No, this wasn't a third consecutive first-round ouster, but the memorable season still ended up 10 wins shy of the ultimate goal.

So, as much progress was made — and make no mistake, there was significant progress — there is further ground to cover before a parade can be planned.

"Obviously that has to all come into the playoffs, and we won't really talk about that yet," said Arniel. "It's all about building to get there. But this group, in the last three years, we've won the most regular-season games in the league. Florida has played the most playoff games, 63 playoff games. That's the next goal, that's what we have to get to."

So how do the Jets get there? And how do they get over the hump?

That's what the coaching staff, management team and players spent the summer trying to figure out individually and collectively.

Lessons have been learned, including some painful ones that left scars — though it's often said that the toughest portions of the trek are what often makes the pursuit worthwhile.

"It's the opportunity that's in front of them and the hunger and the scars and the pain that get left behind when you don't get as far as you collectively want to," said Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff. "Every group learns a certain something along the way. Very fortunately for us, this group shares in its successes and shares in its disappointments. It's about even taking it to another level."

As an organization looking to take the next steps and reach that next level, speaking with confidence is only part of the battle — though having belief in the program that has been installed and the players that surround you is essential.

Adding three players with Stanley Cup pedigree since the last NHL trade deadline — Luke Schenn in a deal with the Nashville Predators and Jonathan Toews and Tanner Pearson in free agency — was not a coincidence.

"That's the dream. That's the goal. You don't just get to the dream, you don't just get to the goal," said Cheveldayoff. "You have to embrace that journey. One thing I know for sure, you can't win the Stanley Cup by yourself. It has to be a group. It has to be a team. And there's never going to be a straight line to that success."

“There are going to be peaks and valleys and twists and turns. To have people that have endured the peaks and valleys and the twists and turns and have been able to hoist the actual prize, those are valuable things that you always can learn from.”

On-ice actions will ultimately speak the loudest, but Cheveldayoff has consistently shown that he believes in this core group and that core group continues to believe in what is being built.

That’s why so many homegrown players have made a long-term commitment to sticking around and seeing it through.

Certainly there have been some notable departures, but the additions to personnel should allow the Jets to remain in the legitimate contender category — though they’re not overly concerned with the outside noise or whether or not they’re being chosen by the pundits during prediction season.

“You didn’t use the word — that ‘window’ word — but for me, it’s the worst word a coach could ever hear because if that window closes and you’re still here, that’s usually not good,” said Arniel. “We’ve been trying to build a foundation. Our structure, our dressing room has become unbelievable. Our leadership has really stepped up. All of these different things that helped us to build these last couple of years.

“We’re trying to win a Stanley Cup. We’ve put a lot of good pieces of our foundation in the last couple years and now it’s time to step forward again this year. Hopefully it’s this year but it’s all about what we’ve been building to get to this part.”

Now comes the fun part.

As the Jets found out after their lone trip to the Western Conference final back in 2018, future playoff success is far from a guarantee — even when a lot of the building blocks appear to be firmly in place.

The 82-game regular season is a grind and it requires a team’s full attention. It is not a time for shortcuts and you don’t get to just pick up where you left off the spring before. Good habits are mandatory and incremental growth must be a constant.

There’s a heightened sense of urgency for a group that features plenty of key players either approaching or are already north of 30 years old.

“They’re driven to win,” said Arniel. “They recognize how good of a hockey team we are. Sure, we lost some players that were a big part of this organization that helped us have success the last couple of years, but we’ve also added some really good pieces.

“If we go out and do what we expect and hope that we can do... we’re going to be a successful hockey team again.”

Just how successful a hockey team won’t be determined until Games 83 and beyond, though it’s easy to see why there’s plenty of optimism around these parts.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/2025/09/18/bidding-an-unfond-farewell-to-the-fitness-test>

***Bidding an unfond farewell to the fitness test
Sore spot for players eliminated during bargaining agreement***

By: Mike McIntyre

Goodbye — and good riddance.

A new collective bargaining agreement means a long-standing pre-season ritual — timed sprint skates, measured jumps, weight-lifting contests and lung-capacity tests — is about to become a thing of the past. This September marks the final round of fitness testing, a development that Winnipeg Jets centre Mark Scheifele nearly commemorated with a T-shirt on Wednesday.

So why was this such a sore spot for players?

"I think it stems from last year and a lot of injuries coming in the pre-season, a lot of marquee guys around the league," said Jets winger Kyle Connor.

"Guys come in now and have put in a lot of work in the off-season. So I think whether there's testing or not, it's not going to change guys' motivation coming in to try and be the best player that they can be. Nowadays it's pretty much 24/7, 365 to be a pro athlete. So I don't think there's really going to be much of a huge difference. The only thing I'd really say is, in our minds, it takes away completely the chance of getting an injury in one of those situations."

There was a time when training camp was when hockey players got back into shape. Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff, a first-round pick by the New York Islanders in 1988, can attest to that.

"I remember my training camps when I was with the Islanders and you walked into the dressing room and said, 'Wow, these guys are serious, they have an (exercise) bike,'" he recalled Thursday.

Those were the not-so-good old days, when gruelling skates were routine and garbage cans doubled as vomit buckets. The modern game is faster, more skilled, and far more demanding.

"Things evolve. The players understand their bodies so much and are so invested into it," said Cheveldayoff.

That shift made fitness testing feel like an unnecessary evil, and players pushed to have it eliminated during bargaining with the league earlier this year.

"It can kind of go both ways. I think as a young guy you prided yourself on coming to camp in good shape and showing it in those aspects. Now that I'm older, I'm very, very excited that it's not a part of it anymore," said Scheifele.

"Nowadays it's so much about training, it's so much about being on the ice in the summer and coming into camp being kind of at your peak. So I can't see guys now just slacking all summer, because there's no fitness testing. But I always say, once you get on the ice for the first practice you can kind of see who's struggling a little bit or who's not."

The NHL didn't fight the change, though Cheveldayoff still sees some value in the old approach.

"The benefits of fitness testing can be having base levels when guys are coming back from injuries," he said. "As an organization, you want to put the players in the best situation to succeed in coming back off injuries and stuff like that. The medical staff, the training staff, those are things that we're going to have to evolve with."

Veteran defenceman Dylan DeMelo, entering his 13th full pro season, believes peer pressure, self-policing and overall performance will keep standards high and weed out any slackers who feel they can put their "feet up a little bit."

"Will guys still do those extra skates (in the summer) knowing that you don't have to test now? Sometimes you train essentially for the test," he said. "It will be interesting to see how guys attack that. I think if you have a diligent group that's training hard no matter, even if there's no testing, maybe that team can get a bit of a head start."

He's seen countless examples over the years where players, not wanting to be embarrassed, have suffered an injury as they push themselves during on and off-ice testing. After all, there's no hiding from your results, which are posted within the dressing room for all to see.

"I'm always trying to best myself, but there's some guys in here that are absolute freaks of nature that I'm never going to beat in any of these tests," he said.

"I think ultimately this is not only good for individual players and teams, but for the product. You want your best players playing every night. We've always done a good job here in Winnipeg. The testing was pretty fair. It wasn't trying to kill you."

While results aren't made public, DeMelo said this year's final round of testing showed the Jets, as a whole, are fitter than ever, with many players surpassing previous bests.

"We had one last shot at them so we really went hard at them this year," joked head coach Scott Arniel.

"The one thing about the players today in this game, they're athletes 12 months of the year. They're not coming to camp to get into shape. So I'm hoping that continues. I sure hope that we don't get into a situation where it does get backed off and then we see a ton of injuries early on in the season. The biggest thing about training camp, it is about getting your structure and your systems in place, your personnel, figuring out who they are, but the biggest thing, the conditioning gets you up into high gear."

That's especially important in a condensed Olympic year schedule, with the Jets playing nearly every other night before and after a 20-day February break. There's no room for sluggish starts.

"We can't try to get in shape as the season starts. We don't have the time. We don't have the practice time. We can't play catchup," said Arniel.

"I'm hoping that next year (without testing), it's the same mentality. Just look at what we did last year coming out of the gate (15 wins in the first 16 games). We eliminated teams in the first month and a half and because of that great start, because I felt our team was in great shape."

Canadian Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/hockey/2025/09/18/winnipeg-jets-hope-to-take-the-next-step-after-falling-in-second-round-of-playoffs>

Winnipeg Jets hope to take the next step after falling in second round of playoffs

By: Jim Bender, The Canadian Press

WINNIPEG – It seems to be a go-to question whenever the Winnipeg Jets begin training camp: can the team take the next step and go on a deep playoff run?

The Jets won the Presidents Trophy for posting the best record in the NHL last season before winning their first playoff series since 2021. But their Stanley Cup chase ended when they lost the second round of the playoffs.

“I think it’s the opportunity that’s in front of them, and the hunger and the scars and the pain that get left behind when you don’t get as far as you collectively want to, every group learns a certain something along the way,” Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff said Thursday. “I think, very fortunately for us, this group shares in its successes and shares in its disappointments. It’s a very close group.”

Things have changed significantly ahead of the 2025-26 season.

The Jets lost high-scoring winger Nikolaj Ehlers to free agency, as well as forwards Mason Appleton and Brandon Tanev. Centre Adam Lowry will be recovering from hip surgery until late October or early November.

Cheveldayoff signed veteran centre Jonathan Toews after he missed the last two seasons due to illness. He also signed some journeymen forwards to help address those departures.

With Lowry out, much will be expected from Toews.

“The biggest thing you see is the level of enthusiasm,” Cheveldayoff said. “When you are potentially losing something, then you get a chance to get it back, you really appreciate just how fortunate you are.”

“I am excited for him because he gets to have that chance to play the game that he loves and excited for us because he gets to do it here, and excited for his mom and dad because it is that storybook thing.”

Toews underwent an intensive detox to get healthy enough to attempt a return to the NHL. He missed time due to Chronic Immune Response Syndrome and the effects of long COVID-19.

Toews, nicknamed Captain Serious, adds some intangibles to the roster along with plenty of post-season experience after leading the Chicago Blackhawks to three Stanley Cup championships.

“It was the little things that he did, the things that he did to make linemates better,” said Cheveldayoff, a former Blackhawks assistant GM. “Those aren’t things you lose because of age or not playing. We will see how things progress and everything like that, but I think the true measure of what he is going to bring to the team is how he elevates people around him.”

"Let's not talk about him right now. Let's just let him play and let it all unfold. The greater likelihood of the impact is going to continue to come as the days go on."

Cheveldayoff still needs to sign both Lowry and high-scoring winger Kyle Connor to new pacts before they become unrestricted free agents in July.

"Kyle Connor, Adam Lowry are very important aspects of the organization here," Cheveldayoff said. "We've had great dialogue with (Connor's) representatives and we continue to have that. He's obviously a big part, Adam's a big part."

Connor, 28, led the Jets in scoring with 47 goals and 93 points in 79 games last season.

"I'm really just focused on myself and being the best player that I can," Connor said at the Hockey For All Centre. "Let the business take care of the business. All I can do is control how I come to the rink every day and that stuff will take care of itself."

The Jets signed free-agent forwards Gustav Nyqvist and Tanner Pearson in the off-season.

"We signed some different faces in different areas of the lineup and we're hopeful that there's some players that really have taken notice that their time could be right now," Cheveldayoff said.

The GM remains optimistic that the Jets will have a competitive season once again.

"I have a lot of belief in the group of guys that are in there," he said. "Even more so and even more importantly, they have a lot of belief in each other."

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-gm-cheveldayoff-toews-shows-level-of-enthusiasm-not-seen-in-years>

Jets GM Cheveldayoff: Toews shows 'level of enthusiasm' not seen in years

By Gordon Anderson

Jonathan Toews is taking full advantage in regard to his new lease on life, and it seems everyone around him is taking notice.

"The biggest thing you see is the level of enthusiasm," Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff said on Thursday morning, as the Jets opened training camp at the Hockey For All Centre. "I have talked to his agent a few times, and he was like, 'I haven't seen him like this in years. I haven't seen him like this since he was breaking into the league, as far as the excitement levels.'"

Cheveldayoff inked the 37-year-old to an incentive-laden one-year deal on July 2.

After two full seasons removed from the game, there are concerns about the Winnipeg native's speed and ability to play the game at or near his previous levels, but the GM chooses to focus on other things besides goals and assists.

"I was fortunate enough to watch him when he was coming into his prime and becoming Captain Serious, and it was the little things that he did, the things that he did to make linemates better,"

Cheveldayoff said. "Those aren't things you lose because of age or not playing, those are intangibles and that is what he has. We will see how things progress and everything like that, but I think the true measure of what he is going to bring to the team is how he elevates people around him."

Cheveldayoff stressed time and patience in allowing the former Blackhawks captain time to get up to speed.

"He is one of those guys that, let's not talk about him right now," the GM said. "Let's just let him play and let it all unfold. The greater likelihood of the impact is going to continue to come as the days go on."

Amid all the niceties, there is a business side, an expectations level built into this deal. Cheveldayoff says the signing wasn't about the feelgood narrative or placating a past their prime rock band on a reunion tour.

"I am excited for him because he gets to have that chance to play the game that he loves and excited for us because he gets to do it here and excited for his mom and dad because it is that storybook thing," Cheveldayoff said. "But, make no mistake, when I sat with his agent, I said: 'Well, all those things are wonderful,' but our goal is to win and that is what JT brings to the table. He is not doing this just for fun. He is doing this to win."

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-winger-kyle-connor-quiet-on-contract-talk>

Jets winger Kyle Connor quiet on contract talk

By Gordon Anderson

Jets winger Kyle Connor has commented on his contract status, predictably he was guarded with his comments.

"I'm just focused on myself and being the best player that I can," Connor said at the Hockey For All Centre on Wednesday morning. "Let the business take care of the business. All I can do is control how I come to the rink every day and that stuff will take care of itself."

Connor signed a seven-year \$49,999,999 US contract with the Jets in September of 2019. Last season, he led the team in goals (41), assists (56) and points (97) in 82 regular-season games played. He is a UFA come next July.

"Kyle Connor and Adam Lowry are very important aspects of the organization here," Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff said. "And everything takes on different things. Every contract negotiation is different. Every player is different. We've had a great dialogue with KC's representatives, and we continue to have that. He's obviously a big part. Lowry is a big part. We've had great success as a group, and we'd like to keep pushing forward."

Lowry is also in the final year of a five-year, \$16.25 million contract he signed in April of 2021. Lowry is also a UFA come July next.

Mark Scheifele and Connor Hellebuyck signed contracts towards the end of training camp two seasons ago. Certainly, there is precedence for the Jets and Connor to arrive at a deal sooner rather than later.

“You’d like to have it done yesterday,” Cheveldayoff said. “Those are things that you keep pushing towards. Every conversation, you’re hopeful that this is the one that closes it type thing. But it’s not ... I don’t know that it’s a timeframe sort of thing. You just keep on working at it. I wouldn’t even say grinding at it. It’s just working at it.”

The Jets entered last season with Nikolaj Ehlers in the same scenario as Connor, and that so-called distraction didn’t seem to bother the squad as they set a franchise record with 56 regular-season wins and a first Presidents’ Trophy.

“Connor has earned the right to sit back and figure out what he wants to do, with his family and himself,” head coach Scott Arniel said. “I’m going to do everything in my power to talk him into getting it signed as fast as possible. Connor means an awful lot to this team and this organization. I’d like to think he’s pretty happy about how he’s used, along with the things he’s done over the years. Our guys are professional enough to recognize that we have a game to play.”

In 613 regular season games with the Jets, the Michigan native has scored 284 goals and added 298 assists for 582 points.

During his lengthy interview on the first day of training camp, Connor voiced his positivity for Winnipeg and the team.

“Yeah, it’s a great community,” he said. “It’s a family. We pride ourselves on the community and it’s a close-knit group. You can feel that just in the relationships around the room.”

The American winger has zero preference when and if the deal gets done. Either now or later will suit him fine.

“I don’t think there’s one way,” Connor said. “There are many ways something can come together or not. Just kind of leave that to the business side of it.”

https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-open-training-camp-sep-19-2025?utm_source=winnipeg-jets

Jets open training camp with 55 players and 'a lot of belief'

By Gordon Anderson

There was double-barrel action on the positivity front on the first day at Winnipeg Jets training camp.

“I have a lot of belief in the group of guys that are in there,” Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff said. “Even more so and even more importantly, they have a lot of belief in each other.”

Winnipeg kicked off training camp on Thursday morning at the Hockey For All Centre, with 55 players participating.

"Every one of us in this room, we've talked about it and we're not afraid to talk about the Stanley Cup," head coach Scott Arniel said. "There's a ton of work that has to happen to get there. Our group realizes that when we play our style, when we attack the way we attack, when we defend the way we defend, our specialty teams are good and we get good goaltending, that we're as good as anybody in this league."

The Jets half-proved Arniel's point as they won the Presidents' Trophy as the top regular-season team with 56 wins last season. They also set a franchise record in the road wins category with 26. An overwhelming majority of that team has returned to take another run at it.

But the team bowed out in the second round of the Stanley Cup playoffs, losing in six games to the Dallas Stars. The Jets reached the Western Conference semifinal after a knock 'em down, drag 'em out seven-game series win over the St. Louis Blues.

Perhaps another early exit from the dance is one reason why the team went out and added playoff experience to its roster. Until the addition of defenceman Luke Schenn at the trade deadline last year, the team didn't have a player on the playoff roster who had won a Stanley Cup in previous years.

This year, they have a total of six rings, with three belonging to Jonathan Toews, two from Schenn, and one belonging to forward Tanner Pearson.

"To have people that have endured the peaks and valleys and the twists and turns (of the post-season), and have been able to hoist the actual prize, those are valuable things that you always can learn from," the GM said.

"We have guys that have been there and that's kind of what you need to help these other guys that haven't really had the opportunity to live it," Arniel added. "At the same time, it's depth for us, it's experience, it's guys that know how to play in this league."

Along with Pearson and Toews, the Jets also added forwards Gustav Nyquist and Cole Koepke to the depth of the regular lineup. The team lost Nikolaj Ehlers, Brandon Tanev and Mason Appleton to free agency. The team also brought back Haydn Fleury on a two-year deal.

Despite all the regular-season accolades, the end goal of a championship came up 10 games short.

Arniel says they are close to hitting their target.

"That has to all come into the playoffs, and we won't really talk about that yet," he said. "It's all about building to get there. But this group in the last three years, we've won the most regular season games in the league. Florida has played the most playoff games, like 63 playoff games. That's the next goal, that's what we have to get to. But at the end of the day, we feel that when we're at our best, when we play the way we can play, we're hard to beat."

The GM was asked what the team learned from last season's exit, a lesson that could hopefully propel them all the way through June this time.

"You see how tough and different every round in the playoffs can be," he said. "You build the habits and the different styles of play, the different things to be able to do so that when you get into game 83 and beyond you can play the different styles. The St. Louis series was as physical

as you will ever see for a long time. So, the guys can add that in their memory belt and say I got that. Dallas, a little kick here and there and things might be different. But you just never know. That is what the playoffs are all about. You have to be prepared. They go by fast.”

The ‘kick’ the GM mentioned occurred in Game 3, the winning goal coming when Alexander Petrovic directed the puck off Connor Hellebuyck for the eventual game-winner in a 5-2 triumph.

At the time, the on-ice call from the officiating crew determined Petrovic ‘propelled’ the puck towards the net.

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11435930/winnipeg-jets-start-training-camp-with-high-expectations/>

Winnipeg Jets start training camp with high expectations

By Russ Hobson Global News

The waiting is finally over as the Winnipeg Jets started their 15th training camp in Winnipeg.

54 players are vying for only 23 jobs, and they have just three days of skates before their first pre-season test on Sunday against the Minnesota Wild.

Jets hopefuls were skating in three different groups at the Hockey For All Centre, but prospect Kieron Walton was not on the ice and is in concussion protocol after getting hurt at last weekend’s rookie tournament.

Forward Mark Scheifele is entering his 13th season with the Jets. The 32-year-old had a devastating end to his season after the death of his father just hours before they were eventually eliminated from the Stanley Cup Playoffs where he was in the penalty box for the series-clinching overtime goal.

Before taking any questions, Scheifele thanked his teammates, fans, and even opposition players for all the support he received over the summer, but he only wanted to talk about hockey.

Scheifele has high hopes for the season after the Jets took a big step forward by winning the Presidents’ Trophy as the best team in the regular season last spring.

“I’m really excited to get the season started,” said Scheifele. “Obviously a lot of unfinished business after last season, so just really excited to get going again.

“Obviously won the President’s Trophy, obviously didn’t win the Stanley Cup last year, so we didn’t reach our goal, but the thoughts are continually to push towards winning a Stanley Cup.”

Scheifele is a big fan of the moves they made over the summer but admitted you can’t easily replace a player like Nikolaj Ehlers who signed with the Carolina Hurricanes.

Scheifele looked up to his new teammate Jonathan Toews as a youngster and still remembers meeting Toews when he went out for dinner with then Jets captain Andrew Ladd when Scheifele was just a fresh-faced 18-year-old on his first NHL road trip.

"I show up and it's Tazer (Toews) and Duncan Keith, Marian Hossa and Brent Seabrook," Scheifele said. "I was like – I nearly crapped my pants. But I brought that up to him the other day and he was like, somebody actually did bring that up to me the other day, so it's kinda cool to relive that story. It was a pretty unbelievable night for me. I was absolutely terrible the next night too. I was in awe of all the guys I was playing against, and I just had dinner with."

Training camp had barely even begun when the talk shifted to next summer. Jets captain Adam Lowry and sniper Kyle Connor are both entering the final season of their contracts and are scheduled to become unrestricted free agents next July.

General manager Kevin Cheveldayoff said he would have liked to have Connor's contract done yesterday.

"We've had great dialogue with KC's representatives and continue to have that," he said. "He's a big part. Adam's a big part. We had great success as a group and we'd like to keep on pushing forward."

"Every conversation you're kinda hopeful that this is the one that closes it."

Connor is making an average of \$7.1 million on his current seven-year deal and is due for a raise after leading the club in goals and assists last season with 41 markers and 56 helpers for a career-best 97 points.

"He's earned the right to sit back and figure out what he wants to do with his family and his self," said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. "As a coach, I'm going to do everything in my power to talk him into getting it signed as fast as possible."

Connor is trying to keep his mind solely on hockey and leave it in the hands of his agent.

"Really just focused on myself and being the best player I can," said Connor. "Let the business take care of the business and all I can do is control how I come to the rink every day and that stuff will take care of itself."

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11432339/analysis-winnipeg-jets-training-camp-2/>

ANALYSIS: Great excitement, expectations as Winnipeg Jets training camp set to begin

By Paul Edmonds CJOB

In their now 15 years of existence, it would be difficult to find a comparison to any previous campaign that offers the excitement and anticipation that this camp starts with for the Winnipeg Jets and their fans.

Sure, 2011 was monumental for the team's return to the city and 2018 holds a lot of value for the deep run the Jets made the previous spring, but this year is different in the tangible fervor leading up to the puck dropping in October.

As one player mentioned this week in earnest, there are a few simple reasons for that: namely, the signing of local star Jonathan Toews along with other NHL veterans in Gus Nyquist and

Tanner Pearson. Between them, they have four Stanley Cups and more than 2,500 NHL games played.

Even without Nikolaj Ehlers in the mix, the sentiment in the Jets' room is that they believe they upgraded their roster this off-season with those acquisitions and, to a player, are excited to prove it.

With a bolstered lineup focusing on adding more depth for a second straight summer, netting a legitimate second-line centre and a few more NHL miles on players like Cole Perfetti, Morgan Barron and Dylan Samberg, the Jets feel they are even better prepared to not only navigate the long season ahead, but perhaps find uncharted waters next spring.

Now, what should be made clear here is that even with the team's strong belief in themselves, there will be obstacles along the way – many of them in fact, as a new season commences – but the barometer of success shouldn't be to repeat as Presidents' Trophy champions, but rather how they perform after Game 82 is concluded.

To surmise, there is an old saying that suggests with great power comes great responsibility. In the case of the Jets this season, it might be more appropriate to say that with great excitement comes great expectations. And with training camp starting Thursday, those expectations might be incomparable to anything the last 14 seasons have presented.

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6642121/2025/09/19/nhl-jets-camp-scott-arniel-stanley-cup-ambitions/>

What I'm seeing at Jets camp: Scott Arniel is setting Stanley Cup ambitions

By Murat Ates

Mark Scheifele began his season with a heartfelt show of gratitude.

Standing in front of a group of Winnipeg Jets reporters for the first time since May 16 at the Winnipeg airport, Scheifele pre-empted questions with a message.

"I really want to say thank you to the guys in this room, the brothers, my family, my friends, all of the guys in the league that reached out, the organization — and especially the fans," Scheifele said before Game 6 against the Dallas Stars. "The support that I had and my family had at the end of last season was amazing, and it just shows how great this hockey world can be."

The next day, on May 17, Scheifele woke up to a phone call and the news that his dad, Brad, died from cancer. After a family discussion, Scheifele decided to play in Winnipeg's must-win Game 6, and even scored the game's first goal, putting the Jets up 1-0 in the second period. Winnipeg lost in overtime, with Scheifele in the penalty box, and following the game, his colleagues in Dallas expressed their devastation on Scheifele's behalf.

Dallas Stars fans initiated a "\$55 for 55" campaign to donate to the True North Youth Foundation and KidSport in Scheifele's honour. By the middle of June, City News reported that True North Youth Foundation had received over \$90,000.

To open camp this season, Scheifele again led with gratitude for all of the support. He then finished his skate by asking reporters to focus on hockey.

To that end, here are the five biggest takeaways from Day 1 of Jets camp — from updates on Kyle Connor's contract negotiations, including Scheifele's thoughts on the matter, to new power play personnel and an early look at Winnipeg's lines.

'We're not afraid to talk about the Stanley Cup.'

Scott Arniel's Jets head-coaching career began with a 14-1-0 run that set the record for best 15-game start in NHL history. He spent his summer studying the teams that went deeper in the playoffs than Winnipeg did, searching for clues.

Winnipeg's August coaching meetings sought to address where it measured up to the Cup finalists and where it fell short.

"Every one of us in this room, we've talked about it and we're not afraid to talk about the Stanley Cup," Arniel said. "There's a ton of work that has to happen to get there."

Arniel's team won the President's Trophy and gave up the fewest goals in the NHL during the regular season, augmenting good defence with elite goaltending before falling short in Round 2 of the playoffs. The Jets have won more regular-season games than any other team in the past three seasons, but have won only eight of 23 playoff games in that time. He says this season will be more about refinements and doubling down on Winnipeg's success than reinventing it.

"Our group realizes that when we play our style, when we attack the way we attack, when we defend the way we defend, our specialty teams are good and we get real good goaltending, that we're as good as anybody in this league," he said.

On whether Winnipeg would need to change its systemic approach to accommodate new players like Gustav Nyquist and Jonathan Toews — players without elite footspeed — Arniel put his focus on hockey sense and teamwork.

"No, I don't think so ... Our pressure isn't one guy, it's five guys," Arniel said. "But those two guys have hockey smarts. Really good hockey IQ. Sometimes that makes up for things. Until we get into these games and see them in some real situations, I'll kind of wait on that."

Expect the Jets to continue to focus on protecting the ice between the faceoff dots. They're great at trapping teams in corners, too, outmanning them when there's a battle to be won and preventing dangerous scoring chances from the middle of the ice.

The playoffs are a different animal, though, and Arniel knows it.

"My message to the team last night when we met for dinner, I said, 'We got our compete level up. We got into the fight. Now we've got to win the fight. We're getting into the battles. Now we've got to win the battles,'" Arniel said. "I know that sounds broad, but at the end of the day, I'm watching playoffs and when you're watching at the end, it's those teams that decide, 'OK, we're going to do this on a consistent basis. This is going to be how we play.'"

Kyle Connor and Kevin Cheveldayoff talk contract ... Sort of

Kyle Connor has posted 93- and 97-point seasons, setting and then beating the Jets 2.0 record for most points in a single season. His next contract is one Winnipeg has spent multiple seasons preparing for, and it should be the most lucrative in Jets history.

He says he's not thinking too much about it.

"I'm really just focused on myself and being the best player that I can," Connor said of his contract. "Let the business take care of the business. All I can do is control how I come to the rink every day, and that stuff will take care of itself."

It's the sort of perspective a player can take with confidence when the cap is going up, he has put together multiple seasons of offensive excellence and other star players are turning down record-setting money.

Put another way: Connor has a ton of leverage, particularly after Nikolaj Ehlers walked in the offseason. If he wants to wait and see what other players get — or sign a short-term deal to take another run at a big contract with an increasing salary cap — he has the resume to do so.

The Jets, meanwhile, don't have a route to another player with Connor's finishing skills. If Connor walks, most of the league will be interested in him, while the Jets would be in a tough spot trying to find a replacement. As such, it's far more incumbent on Winnipeg to get a deal done as expediently as possible.

"You'd like to have it done yesterday," Cheveldayoff said Thursday when asked if he'd be OK with talks continuing beyond training camp. "Every conversation, you're hopeful that this is the one that closes it type thing. But it's not ... I don't know that it's a timeframe sort of thing. You just keep on working at it."

We discussed ways to keep Connor's cap hit manageable in our state of the franchise story. The Jets may need to establish a new spending precedent, offering signing bonuses on a scale they've never offered before. The last time Cheveldayoff switched up his playbook, it yielded positive results. Two years ago, when Scheifele and Connor Hellebuyck were approaching UFA status, Cheveldayoff was able to sign them to matching \$8.5 million deals by sharing more long-term planning with them than he'd done in previous negotiations.

"I think that shows a lot of class by Chevy, and that's just the Winnipeg Jets organization," Scheifele said on Thursday. "They're a class act, through and through."

Connor's connection to his teammates, the organization and the city of Winnipeg do offer reasons to believe he'll eventually find a contract that works for him.

"It's a great community. It's a family here. You feel that right from the beginning," Connor said. "We pride ourselves on the community, and it's a close-knit group. You can feel that just in the relationships around the room."

Cole Perfetti is first in line for Nikolaj Ehlers' power play spot

If you're looking for a Jet to break out this season, look no further than Cole Perfetti. The 23-year-old forward elevated his game last season, winning a greater share of his physical battles and scoring 50 points in a secondary role.

Arniel said on Thursday that Perfetti will be first in line for the open spot on the Jets' top power play. It's a role Perfetti filled when Ehlers was hurt last season, finishing behind Connor and ahead of Scheifele with 6.65 points per 60 minutes of 5-on-4 power-play action. The eye test made it clear that Perfetti belonged. He's a player who makes quick decisions and consistently chooses dangerous shooting or passing options, so he should be able to make good on the extra opportunity.

In terms of filling Ehlers' old role, remember that the Jets' power play breakout depended on Connor and Scheifele, not Ehlers. Perfetti should be capable of making the reads and consistently executing the plays that Ehlers did, although one area Ehlers excelled in was using his speed to get to rebounds on the boards before anyone else. This won back a lot of pucks and helped the No. 1 power play keep possession.

If Perfetti maintains the same power play scoring rate as last season but gets first-unit minutes, he'll reach 60 points. If he's improved as a player, as he's done in each season of his career, there's room for a breakout season.

Jonathan Toews was part of Mark Scheifele's welcome to the NHL

The second game of Mark Scheifele's NHL career was in Chicago on October 13, 2011. He still remembers it, partly for the game itself, but mostly for feeling awestruck at dinner the night before the game.

Back then, Scheifele was a wide-eyed 18-year-old prospect trying to win a full-time Jets job. The Jets wanted to support their first 2.0 era draft pick the best they could, so they partnered him with captain Andrew Ladd on the road.

"I was roommates with Andrew Ladd, and he was like, 'Hey, do you want to come to dinner with me and Buff?'" Scheifele said on Thursday. "And I was 18 at the time, it was my first road trip, and I was like, 'Yeah, of course.' I show up and it's Taser and Duncan Keith, Marion Hossa and Brent Seabrook, and I was like ... I nearly crapped my pants."

Scheifele is normally a talkative, exuberant person when he's with his friends. As a teenager at dinner with the defending Cup champions, he found himself too awestruck to speak.

"I did not say one word ... It was complete silence for the entire dinner, but I was just trying to soak it all in. I still remember Seabrook tapping me on the shin pads at warm up (the next day) and I was like, 'Oh my goodness, where am I?'"

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6634525/2025/09/18/jets-state-of-the-franchise-2025-toews-connor/>

State of the Jets franchise: The Toews variable, Kyle Connor's future and a secret weapon?

By Murat Ates

Gabriel Vilardi articulated the state of the Winnipeg Jets franchise perfectly when he signed his six-year, \$7.5 million AAV contract extension this summer.

"I think our window is four or five years," Vilardi said. "Our mindset is to win now, and we have the team to do it."

The Winnipeg Jets are a “win now” team. They’re the defending Presidents’ Trophy holders. Go back three seasons to the start of the Rick Bowness and Scott Arniel era of coaching, and Winnipeg has won more regular-season games than any other NHL team.

But the questions persist.

The Jets’ roster is older and slower than most contending teams. It is without play-driving superstars like Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl, Aleksander Barkov or Matthew Tkachuk. So, how does Winnipeg turn regular-season achievement into multiple playoff series wins? Do the Jets need better top-end talent beyond what Connor Hellebuyck, Mark Scheifele, Josh Morrissey and Kyle Connor can offer? And what will it take for Hellebuyck to push through recent playoff pain?

These are questions with more urgency every season. Vilardi’s four- or five-year “window” depends on Hellebuyck, Scheifele and Morrissey maintaining their quality well into their 30s. It could depend on a next generation of stars, if a youth movement were ready to emerge.

The Jets remain one of the best-built teams in the NHL — one that earned legitimate contender status last season after some networks predicted they’d miss the playoffs entirely. They’ve given up the fewest goals against in the league in back-to-back seasons, thanks to a combination of strong defensive metrics and elite goaltending. Winnipeg’s power play improved from 22nd two seasons ago to No. 1 under Davis Payne. The Jets are a great bet to make the playoffs again this season, whether or not they get respect from outside their market.

But how do the Jets go from good to great? Where is the next wave of franchise players? Can Winnipeg’s existing core push it over the top, or are Connor, Scheifele, Hellebuyck and company doomed to deliver great regular seasons without making it through the second round?

Jonathan Toews, Gustav Nyquist, Cole Koepke and Tanner Pearson are in. Nikolaj Ehlers, Mason Appleton, Brandon Tanev and Rasmus Kupari are out.

Hellebuyck and Scheifele will try to maintain form as they each turn 33 years old, and top youth such as Brad Lambert, Brayden Yager, Colby Barlow, Nikita Chibrikov and Elias Salomonsson will try to force Winnipeg to keep them with the big club. Meanwhile, general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff will try to keep Connor in Winnipeg for the long haul while navigating a strong, if complex, cap position.

This is Winnipeg’s “State of the Franchise” for 2025-26.

Some roster spots are already practically written in stone. Others are a lot more open. Here’s where you should keep an eye out.

Salary-cap watch: Roster structure, Toews’ bonuses

Will Winnipeg spend to the cap maximum this year? Toews’ contract structure makes things complicated, but the Jets are in a good spot.

PuckPedia projects Winnipeg’s opening-night roster to be under the cap maximum by approximately \$4 million. Unused cap space builds up on a prorated total throughout the season, though. Winnipeg could find itself capable of adding as much as \$18 million worth of players on deadline day.

That sounds enormous, but the Brock Nelson saga last season proved that Winnipeg having room isn't the same thing as a player waiving his no-trade clause when other options are on the table. If Winnipeg maxes out its cap space during the regular season — and then goes over the cap maximum because Toews hits all of his bonuses on a deep playoff run — the extra money will come off of next year's cap hit.

Toews starts the season with a \$2 million cap hit and can earn as much as \$5 million more through a series of bonuses:

\$550,000 for reaching each milestone of 20, 30, 40, 50 and 60 games played

\$500,000 if the Jets make the playoffs and Toews has played 50 regular-season games

\$250,000 if Winnipeg wins Round 1, Round 2 and Round 3 (with Toews playing at least 50 percent of the games)

\$1 million for a Stanley Cup win (with Toews playing at least 50 percent of the games)

No one will complain if Winnipeg wins the Cup, but the Jets might want to protect themselves against performance bonus overages heading into 2026-27. Their willingness to spend extra money in that fashion will contribute to how "all-in" things feel at the trade deadline.

Where might Winnipeg gain wiggle room?

That's tricky, too. Adam Lowry's offseason hip surgery should land him on injured reserve (where his cap hit will continue to apply). Winnipeg has often carried 22 players in the past, but it's headed for 24 cap hits via Lowry's surgery unless it's willing to waive two of Haydn Fleury, Luke Schenn, Logan Stanley, Colin Miller and Ville Heinola. The Jets should have enough space to make those decisions based on merit and keep eight defencemen if they prefer, though.

The urgency of the Jets' window will probably lead to keeping as many veterans on the roster as they can and attempting deadline-day swings. No one will worry about overages if Winnipeg finds a way into the conference finals (or beyond).

Is a big bet on veteran depth a hidden advantage?

Winnipeg's roster cannot match the West's top-end talent of McDavid, Nathan MacKinnon, Jack Eichel and Mikko Rantanen. There are times when Connor, Scheifele and Vilardi will outscore those players (and Connor's 97 points placed seventh in the NHL last season), but Winnipeg is unlikely to win the Clarence S. Campbell Bowl by going for power versus power and hoping for the best.

The defending Presidents' Trophy winner will have to find success by exploiting its unique wealth of depth players, just as it did last season. The Jets got positive results from their top scorers — Connor, in particular, took a defensive step forward — but the whole forward group delivered results. These middle-six numbers are outstanding:

Connor-Scheifele-Vilardi

49-36 (+13)

Perfetti-Namestnikov-Ehlers

24-14 (+10)

Niederreiter-Lowry-Appleton

22-12 (+10)

Barron-Kupari-lafallo
3-4 (-1)

The top line must win its minutes, but the depth will determine whether the Jets can put together another season of 50-plus wins. One little problem, though ... or is it an opportunity?

The Jets were the NHL's 11th-oldest team to start last season. Since that time, they've added Toews (37), Nyquist (36), Luke Schenn (35) and Pearson (33), and they're unlikely to promote elite youth to start the season. The data behind NHL aging curves is clear: Forwards peak between 25 and 27 years old, with steep declines after age 33. On defence, that steep decline begins closer to age 32.

If the Jets run Connor-Scheifele-Vilardi and Toews-Nyquist-Perfetti as their top two lines, half of Winnipeg's top six forwards will be in their steep decline era by season's end. Winnipeg has mitigated this risk by signing Toews and Nyquist to one-year deals. It's also betting on Scheifele's freakish dedication to his health to reduce the pace at which his game erodes.

But we've only just watched 37-year-old Brad Marchand score 20 playoff points en route to a Stanley Cup win. Most NHL players decline precipitously at this age, but there are exceptions. Winnipeg is gambling that cap hits like Toews' \$2 million (plus bonuses) and Nyquist's \$3.25 million will yield outsized results. If the NHL has moved past older players too quickly in recent seasons, overreacting to aging data, then perhaps there's good cap efficiency to be had by targeting the right older players. More realistically, it's just another reminder that Winnipeg should be treating its aging core with maximum urgency.

Biggest franchise-shifting decision: Does Connor get \$12 million?

Kyle Connor is going to become Winnipeg's highest-paid player in history or he's going to sign somewhere else next summer. The former appears to be more likely, with Connor enjoying a tremendous on- and off-ice situation in Winnipeg.

Connor is an elite scorer whose 20:23 per night — most of it alongside Scheifele and Vilardi — was 16th among forwards last season thanks to leading roles at even strength and on both special teams. Off the ice, Connor is more like Hellebuyck than Ehlers in terms of enjoying Manitoba's outdoor opportunities. He's an avid hunter and fisherman and isn't perturbed by Winnipeg's cold winters. Again, another win for Winnipeg.

What will Connor get paid, then?

This gets tricky. Consider that Connor is a 97-point scorer whose UFA rights coincide with a who's-who of NHL pacesetters. McDavid, Eichel, Artemi Panarin and Kirill Kaprizov could completely reset the NHL value system, creating a scenario where Connor's cap hit soars beyond \$12 million. The sheer volume of elite scorers approaching free agency may also encourage Connor's camp to wait and see what other players earn before zeroing in on a contract number.

The second item that could be a sticking point: Winnipeg historically avoids paying large signing bonuses. One way to keep a star player's AAV down is to put as much money in their pocket as early as possible, like the Vegas Golden Knights did by giving Mitch Marner \$60 million in signing bonuses, including \$11 million this season. Players are often willing to take a little less if they get paid out sooner, using the lump sum money to generate more wealth.

This isn't a path Winnipeg likes to take. Hellebuyck, Scheifele and Morrissey don't have any signing bonuses built into their contracts. Their salaries vary slightly year-over-year, but nobody is getting any form of immediate payout, let alone \$11 million.

The most likely outcome, as I see it today: Connor signs to the highest AAV in Jets history, perhaps for six years to match the 2031 UFA dates of Hellebuyck, Scheifele and Vilardi. It won't be the most cap-efficient contract in Jets history — I expect it to be well north of \$10 million — but the Jets place a premium on homegrown scoring stars, as well they should.

Winnipeg is not historically a premier UFA destination. It's tough to believe that cap space gained by letting Connor go could sign anyone nearly as good to replace him.

In the pipeline: Boumedienne, Lambert, Salomonsson and more

The Jets landed firmly in the "win now" portion of The Athletic's recent analysis of each team's Cup contention window. One item holding them back? Winnipeg's prospect pool is ranked last among all teams projected to finish in the top half of the standings.

Sascha Boumedienne and Elias Salomonsson project to be top-four defencemen, but we don't project Salomonsson to be a full-time NHL player until at least next season, with Boumedienne even further off. Brayden Yager, Brad Lambert, Nikita Chibrikov and Colby Barlow headline a forward group that projects to yield quality NHL players, but no one in either group is likely to approach the level of Connor, Scheifele or Morrissey.

This is partly the result of the Jets trading draft capital away, partly due to their lack of a top-10 pick since taking Perfetti in 2020, and partly due to the retirement of Chaz Lucius. Recent draft-day wins with Kieron Walton, Kevin He and others will help the franchise's outlook, but there's no certainty of an elite next wave for Winnipeg.

It adds yet another level of importance to Toews' signing. If Toews can turn back the clock and excel in a second-line role, then maybe — maybe — the Jets don't have to go shopping with their first-round pick at this year's deadline. Even if Toews does excel, the theme of the next few years is urgency; if the Jets are as clearly playoff-bound as we expect them to be, none of their future assets should be seen as untouchable at the deadline.

Final assessment

Winnipeg is an aging top-end team without an obvious next wave of elite talent. It's a contending team and boasts the most wins in the NHL over the last three seasons. Still, the Jets appear to be a superstar short of going toe-to-toe with the best in the West and making the final four.

The Jets will outperform expectations this season if Toews can turn back the clock, Perfetti can take a Dylan Samberg-sized leap forward or Winnipeg's coaching staff can turn a middling PK into another strength. It will falter if Toews, Nyquist and company are simply too old and slow to make an impact, Hellebuyck forgets how to Hellebuyck or the power play success was just a one-off. It will also be fascinating to see how the Jets deal with their unique cap situation and whether they take big midseason swings.

In the long run, Winnipeg needs a bridge between this core and the next one, whether its stars maintain peak performance longer or its youth take bigger leaps than expected. Failing that, there's a risk that the Jets slip into perennial mid-tier status, falling short of their ultimate goal. There is no rebuild in this market.

