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Jonathan Toews brings healthy body, healthy attitude to his first game against the Blackhawks

By Mark Lazerus

The 37-year-old Winnipegger is all about his hometown Jets, of course. He's stoked that Kyle Connor just signed a long-term contract extension and that this talented and accomplished core will be chasing the Stanley Cup for years to come. The little market that could deserves nothing less, and this guy is bursting with hometown pride.

But like a lot of other hockey fans, this one grew awfully fond of the Chicago Blackhawks during their championship years in the 2010s. So when the Jets are off and the Hawks are on, it's a safe bet that he's watching from home.

No, Jonathan Toews can't quite quit the Blackhawks.

"They've been fun to watch — they have a lot of good, young talent," Toews told The Athletic on Monday. "I think Kyle (Davidson) and Norm (Maciver) have a pretty good idea of where the team has come from and what we've lacked as far as replenishing the team with draft picks. And now they have a good idea where the team is headed. There's no guarantees, but it looks like some of the young picks are going to turn into good players."

Yes, that was a "we" in there. You can take the captain out of Chicago, but you can't take the Chicago out of the captain. So it's no surprise Toews has had Thursday's home game against the Blackhawks circled on his calendar ever since he signed a one-year contract with the Jets after two years away from the game for health reasons.

"I'll be ready, that's for sure," he said.

Ready for what, though? The only Blackhawks left with whom Toews spent any significant time with are Connor Murphy and Jason Dickinson. Nick Foligno is wearing Toews' "C." Connor Bedard is wearing Toews' burden. Other than the equipment and support staff — almost all of whom Toews rattled off by name, the smile on his face evident in his voice — these are his Blackhawks in laundry only.

"I've been watching them a lot on TV and it's strange — it does feel like a completely different team," he said. "They're just wearing the same jerseys."

It's been more than 30 months since Toews played his final game in that jersey, scoring one last goal before a raucous and appreciative United Center crowd. Given his age and chronic health issues, which hindered his fitness and his recovery over that last season, it seemed reasonable to believe it would be the last time Toews would wear any NHL uniform.

But Toews' well-documented healing journey over two long years away has brought him back to hockey, back to his native Winnipeg, and back to those dirty areas around the net and in the corners where he made his living for all those years in Chicago. The colors are unfamiliar, but

the hallmarks are all there — the heavy stride, the savvy stick, the fiery facial expressions contorted with concentration. A step slower, perhaps, but still Jonathan Toews. Still pretty darn good.

It's been a remarkable story, perhaps underplayed league-wide because it's been tucked away in Manitoba, far from the spotlight. Remember, Toews' comeback bid was greeted with a heavy dose of skepticism back in March when he made his intentions clear. After he signed with the Jets, the hockey world wondered if he'd even make it out of training camp.

So did Toews, from time to time.

"I've always been pretty confident that my game is in there," he said. "I watch hockey and I can still see things that I did well, and things that I understood about the game — things that a lot of young players with tons of skill and tons of energy, flying all over the ice, still have to learn. I had confidence I could go in and contribute. But a little fear, a little doubt will creep in once in a while. In a way, it's a good motivating factor, to keep you grounded."

Toews talks a lot about that these days: staying grounded, living in the moment, smelling the roses. That was never his strong suit as a player in Chicago. He'd take a bad shift back with him to the bench and chew out his linemates. He'd take a bad game home with him and spend the night staring at the ceiling instead of sleeping. He'd dwell on the negative, stew on it, even as he was winning championships and gold medals and the Conn Smythe and Selke trophies.

His time away from the game forced him to see things differently. Or, at least, to try to see things differently.

"The struggle is to walk the line of appreciating how far I've been able to come and acknowledging how difficult that journey has been to get to this point, to be patient and allow the process to keep unfolding," he said. "You score a goal and it's a good feeling, and you want to go out and score again the next game. When that doesn't happen, those old expectations and frustrations set in. You have to catch yourself and take a second."

Those expectations always weighed heavily on Toews in Chicago — particularly as he got older and the team got worse. It's the primary reason he didn't even consider the Blackhawks as an option when he decided to make his comeback. He wanted to start again, free of the history and encumbrances that came with being Jonathan Toews, captain of the Chicago Blackhawks. The hill he was climbing was steep enough without having to carry all that on his back.

Those last few years in Chicago took their toll emotionally, Toews said. He saw Duncan Keith and Patrick Kane get traded, Brent Seabrook and Corey Crawford retire. New players would sign with the Blackhawks and Toews would embrace them and work with them to show them the ropes, to connect with them, "but they were in one year and out the next year," he said.

The team was going in one direction while Toews was desperately — futilely — trying to drag it in another. It wasn't ideal for either side, and so they parted ways. Amicably, but painfully all the same.

"There's definitely — I don't know if prestige is the right word, but it's pretty cool to be that guy that ultimately was a cornerstone of a team his entire career," he said. "That's something you take pride in. But it's pro sports, right? You've got to do what you've got to do for your career sometimes, and go where the opportunities are. It's nice to be the guy who didn't switch sides."

There's an aspect of that in my mind. But it is what it is. The Hawks wanted to move on. It was probably best for me, too."

Toews could have been that one-jersey player, a Chicago institution. He could have just skated off into the sunset after that final game, his on-ice legacy secure. But the lost time gnawed at him. He was robbed of three seasons by chronic inflammatory response syndrome and symptoms of long COVID, not to mention another half season by the 2012 lockout. He won't reach 500 goals and he's still 112 points shy of 1,000. Yes, his two-way brilliance and the reverence he commands in the hockey world as a heart-and-soul leader make him a shoo-in for the Hockey Hall of Fame, but Toews left Chicago unsatisfied. His career felt abridged, incomplete. He still had something to prove — to himself, to the Blackhawks, to the hockey world at large.

So here he is, Jonathan Toews, Winnipeg Jet: a depth scorer and a middle-six center without a letter on his sweater. It's all so ... odd. For Toews more than anybody. And the surreality of it all hits him at the strangest moments.

On Sunday night, in the home locker room at Canada Life Centre in Winnipeg, Toews found his mind wandering to what his pregame routine was like in Chicago. Head equipment manager Troy Parchman knew exactly how he liked his skates. Mike Gapski and the athletic training staff knew exactly what he wanted and when. Even massage therapist Pawel Prylinski was always in sync with Toews' needs.

It's not like that in Winnipeg. Not yet, at least.

"You're in a whole new ecosystem with different guys and different staff," he said. "So you just slowly find your way."

There are other differences, of course. Toews is recognized in Winnipeg a lot more than he was in Chicago. After Sunday's game, his parents and a few friends were waiting for Toews back at his house. That didn't happen in Chicago. There will be regular family dinners once the Jets' hectic early-season schedule lets up a bit. Toews was a full-time Chicago resident for most of his career, so it's been jarring to come back home and have it feel like ... well, home.

"I couldn't have imagined a better reception from the people here," he said. "I think they're really proud and happy to have one of their own playing for the Jets. It's a wild thing — after being in Chicago all those years, after a while, Chicago feels small. But it was easy to forget how small Winnipeg really is, and how everyone pretty much knows each other."

It couldn't be going much better on the ice, either. Toews has two goals and three assists in nine games. He's not the dominant two-way force he once was, but he still looks like he belongs. He can hang. He bounced back quickly from an early injury, and his body has so far held up well under the relentless stresses of the NHL season. He feels good — physically, mentally, emotionally. And he said he's certain he'll keep getting better, that he'll be "a completely different player" by the time the postseason — Toews' time — rolls around.

He's no longer dwelling on the lost years, the lost milestones, the lost time. He's just grateful for this time, right now.

So, no, the Toews that lines up against the Blackhawks on Thursday won't be the same player who used to line up for the Blackhawks. Not even close.

But that's not necessarily a bad thing at all.

"It definitely is a thought that pops in my head once in a while," he said of the lost years. "But that comes with the attitude of 'Why me?' and I'm trying my best not to think that way anymore. I'm grateful for the challenges I've had these last few years, because ultimately, there's more to life than hockey. Besides, I don't want to be one of those guys who just hangs his hat on the goals and assists and numbers you can see on a sheet of paper at the end of his career. Quite frankly, there's more to the game than that. Right now, it's cool to be in a new environment, with new guys, in a new organization, wearing a new jersey. It's fun and it's exciting. I'm happy I'm here in Winnipeg and I'm super excited to see how things go this season. I'm just extremely grateful for everything.

"And hopefully, there's a few more milestones coming up."

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6754203/2025/10/28/winnipeg-jets-stock-watch-scheifele-toews-stanley/>

Winnipeg Jets stock watch: Players rising, falling or confusing to start the season

By Murat Ates

Scott Arniel challenged his players after Sunday's loss to the Utah Mammoth, saying the Winnipeg Jets must have decided their strong first period was "too much work."

Arniel has been frustrated by Winnipeg's inability to play a complete game for most of the season. The Jets' second periods have been a particular sore spot: Winnipeg looks overly ambitious with the puck and a step slow without it.

It's not unusual for a team's second period to look different — each team's bench is farther away from the net they're protecting.

The unusual part is that Arniel is challenging Winnipeg's effort level. It's fundamental to the Jets' identity that they work hard enough to stay on the right side of their checks, whether the situation calls for smart positioning and hard skating during transition play or hard work to get inside position in front of Connor Hellebuyck on defence. The Jets have worked hard to raise their standards since Arniel (and Rick Bowness) arrived in Winnipeg.

"We're in Game 9 here. It's time to end that stuff," Arniel said.

We'll take a broader view of Winnipeg's strong 6-3-0 record, its sometimes underwhelming process and some spectacular moments from star players and depth contributors alike.

These are Winnipeg's risers, fallers and most confusing players to start the season.

Rising

Morgan Barron

There's no more obvious riser than Barron. The 26-year-old Nova Scotian forward represents the opposite of Arniel's frustrations to start the season: He's all effort, all the time, and has mostly had a strong defensive start despite being beaten by Logan Cooley's game-winning pass to Dylan Guenther on Sunday.

He's also one of the league's fastest skaters on a team that needs speed. His backhand is perfect on this goal, but it's Barron's footspeed that allows him to turn defence into offence like he does here:

On top of that, Barron has been a critical part of Winnipeg's penalty kill, leading all Jets forwards in minutes and picking up a short-handed assist on Mark Scheifele's goal against the Los Angeles Kings.

The Jets needed a story like this one when the season began.

Mark Scheifele

Scheifele is expected to be the offensive pulse of the Winnipeg Jets. That he leads the team in scoring is not remarkable in and of itself — he led the Jets in points just two seasons ago and was second last season — but Scheifele has eight goals and five assists in nine games. Forget about the Jets: Scheifele's eight goals tie him with Jack Hughes and Shane Pinto for the league lead. His 13 points tie him for ninth. He's hot out of the gate and making an even better case to make Team Canada at the Olympics.

Scheifele stands out on the Jets, too, of course. Winnipeg is beating teams with special-teams success and goaltending excellence, but Scheifele has scored a team-leading 6 points at five-on-five. He's one of only three forwards with more than 2 points per 60 minutes of five-on-five play and one of only four forwards to be winning their minutes.

There are moments when Scheifele and Kyle Connor try to go Harlem Globetrotters in the offensive zone, chasing seam passes in the name of their team-leading offence. One wonders what the pressure is like for key players counted upon to score goals on a team with which secondary scoring has been limited. Overall, though, Scheifele is at the head of the class.

Kyle Connor

Connor and Scheifele are too intertwined for one to be red-hot all by himself.

They play together at five-on-five, on the power play and on the penalty kill. They've created seven goals together, with Connor getting the primary assist on four of Scheifele's goals and Scheifele getting the primary assist on all three goals Connor scored against the Dallas Stars to open the season. Everything we shared about Scheifele's even-strength success applies to Connor, too, as do the moments when it looks like Winnipeg's dynamic duo is pushing for more than what's available on a given shift.

Connor is tied with Josh Morrissey for the team lead with seven assists and is second only to Scheifele in points.

Josh Morrissey

Morrissey had horrible luck in pivotal moments last season: missing the 4 Nations final due to illness, getting hurt during Game 7 against the St. Louis Blues, then exiting Game 6 against Dallas with an injury that would have kept him out of the playoffs even if Winnipeg had advanced to the conference final.

I invoke that pair of playoff injuries to remind readers Morrissey had to put in work this summer to get back to the level he's playing at now. He has picked up six assists in his last four games, including the beauty to Connor in the clip above, improving to 7 points in nine games. Morrissey

has yet to score his first goal, but he's playing an even bigger role than he did last season, doubling his penalty-killing duties with Dylan Samberg hurt to start the season.

The extra ice time hasn't hurt Morrissey at even strength, either: no Jet comes close to the 10-3 lead in goals scored while he's on the ice at five-on-five.

Jonathan Toews

Toews took off two seasons of NHL hockey, battled through health problems and has scored 5 points in nine games to start the season. He's Winnipeg's second-line centre in name and usage, too: Toews is fourth among Jets forwards in time on ice per game, trailing only Connor, Scheifele and Gabriel Vilardi. That in and of itself is a win, given the mystery-box nature of Toews' unique health situation.

He's also playing to the worst underlying numbers of his storied career.

Toews has never been outshot, outchanced or outscored at the rates he's posting this season — not even during those last, health-derailed seasons on an awful Chicago Blackhawks team. Toews has only 2 even-strength points in nine games: a second assist on Logan Stanley's four-on-four blast and a deft deflection of Morrissey's pass off a faceoff set play. Winnipeg has been outscored 6-2 with him on the ice at five-on-five.

Toews is a riser because of his circumstances and the reality that it will take him time to get to whatever level constitutes his 37-year-old best. If he's still struggling against the current at the midseason mark, he'll tumble down this list.

Falling

Luke Schenn

Schenn's tape-to-tape pass to Utah's Kevin Stenlund with 10:50 to go in the third period kick-started a full minute's worth of defensive-zone panic, leading to Schenn taking an interference penalty. There's a chance Olli Määttä got a stick on Schenn as he tried to make his 8-foot breakout pass to Cole Koepke, explaining the degree of misfire. It's also likely Schenn had a moment in which to make that pass before Määttä got to him, but Schenn handled the puck without seeing Koepke for long enough that Määttä had that chance.

A lot of Winnipeg's issues to start the season have involved speed. Schenn's slower skating is well established, but the 35-year-old defenceman has been able to make up for it, at times, with good decision-making. His physicality is rare for the Jets, as are his two Stanley Cup rings, but Schenn is a step behind this season. Winnipeg's opponents have outscored the Jets 5-0 and outshot them 44-21 with Schenn on the ice.

Nikita Chibrikov

Chibrikov may yet become many things in the NHL. He's a hard worker, he wins board battles, he gets under opponents' skin, and he has an impressive shot when he gets in position to use it. He's also just 22; it makes sense to take a long-term view of the player.

In the short term, Chibrikov is winning battles, but plays are ending on his stick. He hasn't found the balance between making simple plays and trying to stickhandle through neutral-zone problems. In the offensive zone, his reads have been a half-second off his veteran linemates, leading to sequences that look like they should lead to more than they do. Chibrikov has been on the ice for a higher percentage of the other team's shots than any other Jets skater. He has two shots on goal, which gives him the lowest rate of shots on goal per minute of any Jets

forward (despite a high number of shot attempts), and has taken two more minor penalties than he's drawn.

What should the Jets do, knowing the long-term outlook is better than the current product? Chibrikov isn't moving fast enough to justify the solo efforts and isn't making decisions fast enough to create offence with Toews and Alex Iafallo. He's a likely candidate to be scratched (or sent to the AHL) when Adam Lowry and Cole Perfetti return to the lineup, so the short-term solution might just be waiting out the growing pains.

Confusing

Logan Stanley

Stanley's shot metrics have been just as bad as Schenn's: Winnipeg has been outshot 83-42 when Stanley is on at five-on-five. He's getting dominated in terms of flow of play and scoring chances alike.

But Stanley has scored — twice. He has laid out Trevor Zegras and Alex Turcotte with heavy hits. He fought 6-foot-8 Calgary Flames forward Adam Klapka and took him to the ice. Most importantly, Stanley has managed to avoid The Big Mistake, wherein the Stanleys of seasons past were regularly burned for highlight-reel goals as a result of poor pivots against faster players.

Stanley is due for regression. He has spent his career scoring once out of every 34 shots he takes, but he has scored on one out of every three shots this season. It's also hard to believe any player can go a full season getting dominated in scoring chances during his shifts like Stanley has been, while coming out perfectly even on the scoresheet, with five goals for and five goals against in five-on-five action.

Stanley was booed as recently as January. Now the home crowd chants his name at every opportunity. Enjoy the ride, whatever this is.

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/10/27/tightening-rivets-key-for-jets-to-flourish>

Tightening rivets key for Jets to flourish

Inconsistency has plagued the club over season-opening stretch

By: Ken Wiebe

MINNEAPOLIS — In a sport where timing is everything, Scott Arniel wasn't about to let this opportunity pass him by.

No, this wasn't necessarily just about a homestand that included a 1-2 record, with losses to the Seattle Kraken and the Utah Mammoth.

This wasn't about a mediocre 3-3 home record out of the gate that makes the Jets 3-0 road record all the more impressive.

This wasn't about a pair of tightly-contested wins during the past week over a Calgary Flames team that is having an incredibly tough time scoring goals either.

It's the inconsistency that has plagued the Jets during the entirety of the nine-game block that had Arniel in a lather after the Jets dropped a 3-2 decision to the Mammoth on Sunday.

The Jets are a veteran team, one with a core group that knows how to play winning hockey and is committed to doing the little things that are required to take the next step.

As Arniel pointed out on Sunday, mistakes are going to happen over the course of a game — it's the self-inflicted ones that need to be minimized. Like the Jets getting mesmerized by the puck in the corner in the defensive zone, allowing Dylan Guenther to make his way to the high slot to rip home the game-winner with 5:36 to go in regulation time.

The Jets are a details-oriented team and this type of breakdown was completely avoidable.

It's not just that Guenther was left uncovered, even though there was a D-man in the vicinity of him.

If Guenther's stick is not tied up in this scenario, he remains one of the most dangerous players on the ice and he made the Jets pay for leaving him open.

On the second goal for the Mammoth, the Jets' failure to get the puck in deep at the offensive blue line allowed an odd-man rush the other way.

The Jets were well aware of how potent the Mammoth can be off the rush and still allowed Kailer Yamamoto to find Michael Carcone for a one-timer.

The other marker for the Mammoth came on the power play, after Nick Schmaltz won the draw cleanly in the offensive zone and the Jets were late in getting into the shooting lane before Mikhail Sergachev beat Connor Hellebuyck.

This is just a snapshot of the most recent game but, if you zoom out a bit, there are some themes emerging.

The inability to put together three strong periods has caught the attention of both Arniel and the players.

Ebbs and flows within a game are normal, but not putting in the work required to play this taxing system isn't something Arniel is going to stand for.

Neither are the players, who know that putting in a 60-minute effort is mandatory — and not up for debate.

"The goal would be a full 60 minutes of domination."

"The reality is that's the goal every single night," said Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey. "Some nights it's not going to go your way. But, (what) we have done a good job this year is finding ways to win hockey games.

"Whether that's late in the third or whenever that is, we found ways to stick with it and get those crucial points. (Sunday), we weren't able to do that, but definitely, to answer your question, the goal would be a full 60 minutes of domination."

Arniel was measured in his post-game comments, but he wasn't about to idly stand by.

This was similar to the way Arniel spoke publicly after a disappointing 5-2 loss to Utah last season, when his frustration was also evident.

While each year is different, it's worth noting that the Jets put together an 11-game winning streak after that public dressing down on Jan. 20.

The Jets have spoken openly about how they want to be pushed and coached like an elite team, so this is an opportunity to respond accordingly.

A Central Division battle with the Minnesota Wild on Tuesday night couldn't come at a better time, as both teams figure to be more than a bit surly.

While the Jets' focus is on themselves, the Wild have endured a disappointing start to the campaign that includes just three wins in the first 10 games (and a record of 3-5-2).

Minnesota has dropped consecutive games to open a pivotal six-game homestand and the urgency level for the Wild will be high, so the Jets can't afford another lengthy lull that stretches close to a full period.

If the Jets can find the win column on Tuesday, they would finish the 10-game block with seven wins and 14 points. That would be an impressive total, especially when you consider the three key injuries the Jets have been dealing with.

One of the Jets' superpowers during the past several seasons is their ability to get to their structure quicker than most — if not all — teams.

Although there are stretches when that's still been the case, the Jets are giving up more quality scoring chances than they would like.

While the integration of seven new forwards into the equation has surely contributed to that, steps forward need to be taken sooner than later.

It won't be long before the small sample size things transform to emerging trends.

And when that time comes, the Jets want those to include some of things that have become second nature to them.

"It's going to be one of those situations that doesn't get any better unless we start to do it on a consistent basis."

"Keep hammering it home," Arniel said, when asked how the issues can get cleaned up.

"There's a lot of ways that you can look at it. I know it's our puck management. It's getting on the right side of people 200 feet from your net. It's not pinching when we don't have an F3, it's not having three guys behind the goal line, it's D-zone, getting on the wrong side of people and them beating us to the net front.

“It’s stuff that we’ve been showing and we’ve been talking about it. And it’s going to be one of those situations that doesn’t get any better unless we start to do it on a consistent basis each and every period.”

An erosion of the standard that has been built simply can’t occur and that’s why Arniel felt it was time to share his feelings.

Now it’s time to see how the Jets respond to the challenge put forth by their head coach.