

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/04/08/toews-thankful-for-the-struggles>

Toews thankful for the struggles Masterton nod recognizes long return journey

By: Ken Wiebe

Jonathan Toews has seen and done a lot over the course of an NHL career that is close to spanning two decades, so it's hard to find a topic that leaves him short on words.

The Winnipeg Jets centre has always taken pride in a team-first approach; leading by example is always what he's done best.

After a two-and-a-half year health-related absence that included travelling around the world to seek treatment, the former Chicago Blackhawks captain made a successful return to the NHL this season with his hometown team that speaks to his perseverance.

Coupled with his dedication to the game and sportsmanship, it's easy to see why Toews is the Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy nominee for the Winnipeg chapter of the Professional Hockey Writers' Association.

The award is handed out annually to the NHL player who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey.

"It's not like you're consciously thinking about that, but I guess if I do stop to kind of look back at what the last four or five years have been like, it's definitely been super unpredictable," said Toews, who is playing his 16th NHL season. "Something that I never thought I would have to go through in my life. At the same time, I am very thankful for all of the struggles because honestly, it is cliché but it's where I've learned the most about myself. About hockey, about life and all of those things."

The journey wasn't an easy one.

Although he never fully considered retirement when he stepped away from the sport to prioritize his health at the end of the 2022-23 season, Toews was never sure he was going to be able to play again either.

Healing from the lingering effects of long COVID and Chronic Inflammatory Response Syndrome, Toews had a health breakthrough after undergoing Ayurveda, a traditional form of alternative medicine that involves herbal medicines, yoga, meditation and enemas during a five-week stint in India.

The amount of work required by Toews — both physically and mentally — to return to the NHL was immense and intense, but his passion for the sport he nearly lost was a driving force throughout the healing process.

"There have been a lot of challenging, difficult days but it's all worth it."

“Even this season, it’s been a struggle. Every day I’m digging deep and trying to find the energy, find a way to contribute in any way and kind of set aside your ego,” said Toews, who has 10 goals and 27 points while appearing in all 77 games this season heading into Thursday’s battle with the St. Louis Blues. “The challenge has been in my mind. I know what I’m capable of doing and how I can play the game, but just going out there with limited capability and in a limited role, you just try and do the best you can within those parameters I guess.

“I’m honoured by the recognition and I’m not sure what else to say.”

If there’s one thing that can occasionally make Toews feel uncomfortable, it’s having to talk about himself.

He’s one of the only athletes to even attempt this kind of comeback in professional sports, but Toews hasn’t really enjoyed that part of the spotlight being shined on him — even if he understands the countless interview requests to delve into the topic.

“There have been a lot of challenging, difficult days but it’s all worth it,” said Toews, who signed a one-year deal with the Jets in the summer. “The way that the city has received me, the city, the organization but also the players in the locker room. I would do it all over again to be part of this group.”

Asked whether it was more physically or mentally taxing to accomplish his goal of returning to the NHL, Toews got philosophical.

“How do you really separate the two at the end of the day? I think we like to put things in categories and boxes, but they’re all part of the same thing,” he said. “For sure it’s psychological, it’s physical, it’s emotional, it’s all of the above. So yeah, I was eager to get the opportunity in the NHL again and I told myself I would do anything to go out there and help this team. Sometimes you have a story in your head as far as who you are as a person and as a player.

“I pride myself on my experience and what I accomplished in the game and the way I’ve played over the years. Like I said, sometimes you take a backseat or have a limited role and it’s a new opportunity to learn, to learn how to be a better teammate, a better person. That’s part of it. When there are moments like that, you have to check that ego at the door.”

“Those guys show up every day and they work so hard. They’re always positive, they’re always having fun and they’re keeping it light, even in the tougher moments.”

As a captain of a three-time Stanley Cup champion, integrating into a new locker room and finding your voice within the established leadership group wasn’t easy, but Toews is grateful for how he was welcomed in by the likes of captain Adam Lowry, alternate captains Josh Morrissey and Mark Scheifele and longtime core pieces like Kyle Connor and Connor Hellebuyck.

“I learned a lot being in a new room,” said Toews. “You go down the list and everyone brings something to the table. Those guys show up every day and they work so hard. They’re always positive, they’re always having fun and they’re keeping it light, even in the tougher moments. I realized over the years that when things don’t go my way, I definitely was riding the highs and lows more than I should have.

“That’s probably why I had to go through this. Obviously, these guys, they have good heads on their shoulders, they know how to play the game and the way they carry themselves, it’s been nice to be part of that.”

Toews perked up when asked about what he’s enjoyed most about being in the NHL this season.

“Just that right there. Being in this locker room,” said Toews. “Obviously, the season has been crazy busy, non-stop. You don’t get a whole lot of time to stop to breathe between games. Everything is about recovering any which way that you can. But we’ve enjoyed our time together on the road, in the room. The time around the guys, the meals and the time on the bus and the plane, that’s what it’s all about.”

Jets head coach Scott Arniel has used Toews in a variety of roles, starting him out as the second line centre but he’s also spent time on the third and fourth lines.

Toews is one of the league leaders in faceoff percentage, but also endured some tough patches where points were tough to come by and he had issues finding his rhythm.

“Mostly just trying to get your energy up for every single game. If you’re in your late 20s or early 30s, you’re in the best shape in your life, it’s going to be hard, no matter what,” said Toews. “It’s the kind of league where if you don’t do it, someone else will. The competition is always high, as you see again this year, the parity is incredible. The league just keeps getting better and it doesn’t get easier as you get older. The time away was a huge challenge, in trying to find my game.”

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Through it all, he’s been a calming presence for a group that was hoping his experience might help push them over the top.

“Obviously he’s intense. I think he’s a guy that you can tell is a winner. He wants to win,” said Arniel. “That’s one of the biggest things. He’s having a lot of fun while he’s doing it. Obviously, being able to be back has been big for him. I think it adds to our leadership group.”

Toews, who turns 38 later this month, hasn’t decided on his future yet, but there’s a chance he could return with the Jets next season.

“Honestly, a huge fan of Toews. He stung me in 2015, but I got to spend some time with him a couple of years ago,” Tampa Bay Lightning head coach Jon Cooper said during a visit to Winnipeg last month. “Personally, it’s a feel-good story, not only for him but for Winnipeg. He doesn’t want to go anywhere, he wants to play here and that speaks (volumes) for his loyalty. Whatever he’s gone through in his last couple of years to come all the way back the way he has is really impressive.”

The full list of each team’s nominees will be revealed Wednesday morning, with the winner announced during the Stanley Cup playoffs.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/04/07/i-still-would-have-retired>

'I'm really shocked at the response'

Accolades pour in for Scott Oake ahead of impending sendoff

By: Mike McIntyre

Truth be told, Scott Oake wanted what is commonly known as an Irish goodbye.

The veteran Winnipeg broadcaster had hoped to keep his retirement to himself until sometime this summer, then casually let it slip he wouldn't be returning in the fall for another season on Hockey Night in Canada.

No fuss. No muss. A quick fade to black.

"I had hoped to go out quietly, but I'm to blame for what's going on," Oake told the Free Press with a laugh. "You know, I told a few people, word got around and here we are."

His bosses at Sportsnet had other ideas, wanting Oake to be celebrated — even if briefly — for the legend he is. And so, on Saturday night in Edmonton, Oake wrapped up his popular After Hours segment by telling viewers from coast-to-coast-to-coast the clock was rapidly running out on his career.

Hilariously, a miscommunication — or, more likely, a convenient "mistake" by a producer — made the moment even bigger. Oake had suggested a simple drum roll sound effect before his on-air announcement. Instead, the network rolled out a full-blown marching band, adding plenty of pomp and circumstance.

His phone blew up. The accolades started rolling in. And Oake has been left shaking his head.

"This is all highly overdone. You know, I abhor these long farewell tours. I don't want to be the centre of attention," he said.

"You know, I've been joking with people that I actually retired two years ago. I just never told anyone."

The 72-year-old, who became a household name to Winnipeggers during his decade-long run on CBC's 24 Hours program (1979–1989) before shifting to the country's flagship hockey broadcast for the past 37 years, is applying the theory that all good things must come to an end.

"My insurance agent has an expression that 70 is the new 60. A lot of people are living longer and taking care of themselves, right? But when you're 80, you're 80. And there's no way out of it," said Oake.

"This summer, I'll turn seven years away from 80, and I want to enjoy those years with my grandchildren and devoting myself to the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre and the Anne Oake Family Recovery Centre, which is the project that's moving full steam ahead now. Both places will take up a lot of my time. That's my passion, and I'm looking forward to it."

"This is all highly overdone. You know, I abhor these long farewell tours."

Oake's son, Bruce, died in 2011 of a heroin overdose at the age of 25. The Hamilton Avenue facility that bears his name is a non-profit, 50-bed residential treatment program that opened in 2021. His wife, Anne, died in 2021 at the age of 65. The 75-bed facility in her name will be a women's-only addictions treatment centre with a daycare near Victoria General Hospital.

Oake admits both personal tragedies gave him a new perspective on life, including how he wants to spend his remaining days.

"I take my job seriously. I'm responsible. But it's not as important as the work being done at the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre and the work that will be done at the Anne Oake Recovery Centre. Lives are truly being saved," he said.

"You know, pretty much from the start of this season, I was thinking about whether or not I would come back. But I made the decision and this time, for the first time in five years, I stood behind it. I'm really shocked at the response. I guess if I realized I was that important in the minds of so many people....I still would have retired!"

Oake has clearly struck a chord with viewers by hosting After Hours since the 2000-01 NHL season. It follows the second game of the Saturday night doubleheader and typically features an in-depth sit-down with a player, coach or manager.

It can be humorous. Poignant. Emotional.

"Hopefully people learn something about the guests they didn't know before."

"The goal of the show has always been to move past the nuts and bolts of hockey, you know, the 'get pucks deep' stuff. Sometimes, we don't even mention the game at all," he said.

"Hopefully people learn something about the guests they didn't know before. I think, on that level, the show has generally succeeded. But everything runs its course."

Winnipeg Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey recalled growing up in Calgary and staying up late with his family to watch the HNIC doubleheader, which always included the nightcap featuring Oake and his guest. It was appointment viewing in his home.

"He's just incredible," said Morrissey, who marvels at the way Oake gets his subjects to open up in ways you'll almost never see in traditional scrums.

Years later, Morrissey was thrilled to be the player sitting across from Oake on live television as he made his After Hours debut in his sophomore NHL season — a true "pinch-me" moment.

Jets head coach Scott Arniel has a close connection to Oake dating to the early 1980s, when he was a member of the original Jets.

"Scott is a walking masterclass in how to do the job, with personal grace to match."

"He was my neighbour, didn't live too far away from me. You talk about Hockey Night in Canada, turning games on and you see familiar faces. He's been one that an awful lot of people have been able to recognize," said Arniel.

"Obviously with his son, with what happened with all of that, just recognizing the work that he's put in, the awareness for mental health, all those things: He's been through some tough times, and it's amazing, he always weathered it. He's a true professional. It's tough to see him go."

Jon Morosi, a U.S. broadcaster who primarily covers MLB, posted the following on social media this week: “Coaches watch game film. Players practice their craft. Well, I have studied how Scott Oake does his job — the careful phrasing of a question, the diligent research that leads to the right detail in a clinching interview.

“Scott is a walking masterclass in how to do the job, with personal grace to match.”

One of Oake’s all-time favourite guests was former tough guy Brian McGrattan, who candidly opened up about his battle with addiction during a memorable segment years ago and has since done work with the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre.

Another is his good family friend and former neighbour, Winnipegger Ryan Reaves, who plays for the San Jose Sharks.

“Let’s put it this way: Everything I did was a violation of workplace safety.”

“He grew up kitty-corner to our house. He was a good friend of both Bruce and Darcy (Oake’s other son, a magician). They have remained close. Darcy was the best man at his wedding. I emceed his wedding. I’m fond of telling Ryan on occasion that his wedding would have been a disaster without our family,” said Oake.

Fittingly, Reaves will be Oake’s final guest on his final show this Saturday from San Jose following their game against Vancouver.

Another personal highlight was covering his hometown Jets during their magical 2018 run to the Western Conference final. Who can forget the image of Oake among “my people” outside Canada Life Centre during the massive Whiteout street party, standing on a makeshift platform above a sea of humanity?

“I remember standing on the platform, which was a packing crate with a piece of plywood on top of it. If I had shifted the wrong way, I was going to go flying into that crowd. Let’s put it this way: Everything I did was a violation of workplace safety,” he said.

“But that was so neat. And, as it turned out, the conference final was against Vegas and Ryan Reaves scored the goal that knocked the Jets out.”

Oake isn’t quite done after this weekend. He plans to work at least one round of the Stanley Cup playoffs and would love to see the Jets claim the final wild-card spot so he can have one last hurrah at home.

What’s he going to miss the most?

“It’s the same as when a player has to leave the game. What’s he always say? I’m going to miss the guys, right? So there’s that, the camaraderie of our crew, which is so good,” said Oake.

“Getting together with them for dinner the night before the game. The day of the game, there’s a real buzz leading up to getting on the air and doing something that you think is good work. There’s a sense of satisfaction. And then meeting after the game for some refreshments, which we often refer to as show erasers.”

Oake may not be getting the silent send-off he had hoped for, but after decades of telling other people's stories, it's only fitting that his own is being told so loudly.

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11769207/analysis-winnipeg-jets-future-impacting-the-present/>

ANALYSIS: Winnipeg Jets' future impacting the present

By Paul Edmonds CJOB

Within this whirlwind of a playoff push by the Winnipeg Jets, one aspect that's most striking about the way it's unfolding is how some of the organization's prospects are handling the moment.

From Elias Salomonsson to Isak Rosen to Brad Lambert, the calculated injection of youth since the Olympic break has not only made the Jets faster and quicker, but arguably better.

In an environment soaked with desperation and urgency — and truly with no room for error in their team's pursuit of a post-season berth — they don't seem to be wilting under the pressure at all.

In fact, the most recent example of that would probably be Lambert's third-period goal on Monday night in Winnipeg's win over Seattle, where the 22-year-old flew down wing, looked off a passing option and slung a shot to the top corner to restore a two-goal lead and essentially end any comeback hopes the visiting Kraken possessed.

It was Lambert's third career NHL goal. And it was big league!

Since his recall to the Jets a month ago, Lambert has shown himself to have made enhancements in his game, especially on the defensive side of the puck, where his track backs and zone coverage have noticeably improved.

But when Lambert is at his best, it's when he's playing to his assets, which are major league skating and shooting, and both have been on display over his 16-game recall, in particular the last 10 games, as his confidence seems to be growing with every shift.

Now, there's certainly more room for growth as the Finnish-Canadian with Saskatchewan roots needs to cut down on turning over the puck and his strength in winning board battles has to improve, but overall, from what we have seen of late from Lambert should make everyone bullish about what might come next.

And the fact his performance — like some other team prospects — is shining in the midst of a pressure-packed playoff push, not only illustrates that he's handling the moment, but seizing it too.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11769158/jonathan-toews-chosen-as-winnipeg-jets-masterton-award-nominee/>

Jonathan Toews chosen as Winnipeg Jets' Masterton Award Nominee

By Kelly Moore Global News

The Winnipeg Chapter of the Professional Hockey Writers Association has named Jonathan Toews the Winnipeg Jets Nominee for the Bill Masterton Trophy.

The 37-year-old Winnipeg-born centre joined his hometown team for the 2025-26 NHL season after missing the two previous years recovering from the effects of long COVID.

Despite being away from the game for that considerable period of time, Toews has managed to play in all 77 of Winnipeg's games to date and ranks seventh in team scoring with 10-17-27.

Where the former Chicago Blackhawk Captain and three-time Stanley Cup champion has not missed a beat is at the faceoff dot. Toews has won 61.4 per cent of his draws (578-363), which is third best in the NHL among players who have taken 500 or more faceoffs this season.

There was a tremendous amount of excitement this past summer when the future Hockey Hall of Famer signed a one-year deal with the Jets to return to the NHL after spending his first 15 seasons with Chicago and leading the Hawks to Stanley Cup titles in 2010, 2013 and 2015.

Toews was treated to a hero's welcome from fans in the Windy City on Jan. 19 when he made his first return to the United Center before parting ways with the Blackhawks at the end of the 2022-23 season. The former Chicago captain received a standing ovation that lasted more than four minutes after a tribute video was shown during the first media timeout.

Toews will now join nominees from the NHL's 31 other teams and the winner will be determined following a poll of all chapters of the PHWA. The 2025-26 Masterton Award winner will be announced when the NHL holds its annual awards.

Last year's recipient was former Jet Sean Monahan of the Columbus Blue Jackets, while the most recent Winnipeg nominees include Eric Comrie (2020-21), Josh Morrissey (2021-22), Sam Gagner (2022-23), Laurent Brossoit (2023-24) and Neal Pionk (2024-25).

The Masterton Trophy was first presented by the NHL Writers Association in 1968 to commemorate the late William Masterton, a player for the Minnesota North Stars, who was originally from Winnipeg and exhibited to a high degree the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey. Masterton died on Jan. 15, 1968, after sustaining an injury sustained during a hockey game.

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/do-the-jets-need-an-off-season-reset-regardless-of-how-this-ends/>

Do the Jets need an off-season reset regardless of how this ends? (VIDEO)

The FAN Hockey Show's Matt Marchese and Mike Futa along with guest, Kyle Bukauskas, a Sportsnet NHL reporter, discuss whether the Winnipeg Jets need an off-season reset, even if they push for the playoffs.

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/road-to-the-playoffs-pros-and-cons-for-every-potential-post-season-team/>

Road to the Playoffs: Pros and cons for every potential post-season team

By Ryan Dixon

On this edition of Hot Topic, the Hockey Central panel discusses who they believe should be the Stanley Cup favourite at this point of the season, including a Canadian dark horse team.

Even at the top of the table, there's no such thing as a flawless team. At the other end of the spectrum, every squad that qualifies for the Stanley Cup Playoffs has a punch or two they can throw at an opponent.

With less than two weeks to go before the puck drops on the post-season, the goal here is to highlight the good and bad — or, at least, slightly worrisome — elements of every club that still has a reasonable shot to qualify for the big dance.

It's a plus/minus of sorts, as we pat some backs while raising some flags.

We'll start in the *Western Conference* — with teams ordered by their points percentage — before heading to the East.

Colorado Avalanche (.724) Colorado scores the most goals per game (3.74) and gives up the fewest (2.50). You can't ask for much more than that. That said, with all those weapons, the Avs power play ranks 26th in the NHL (17.6 per cent).

Dallas Stars (.662) The Stars are a high-end, balanced team. It's worth noting, though, that Dallas has played a lot of hard hockey while skating in three consecutive Western Conference finals. Also, this would be just the second post-season appearance as the head man for coach Glen Gulutzan. In his first, Gulutzan's Calgary Flames were swept by the Anaheim Ducks in 2017.

Minnesota Wild (.649) Every trade rumour surrounding the Wild involves the team's need for a top centre. In a conference where you have to go through the likes of Nathan MacKinnon, Connor McDavid, Jack Eichel and Wyatt Johnston, Minny is lacking down the middle. On the plus side, how many teams can lean on a defence pair like Quinn Hughes and Brock Faber?

Utah Mammoth (.566) Utah's PP has been humming since play resumed after the Olympics, clipping along at 31.4 per cent (second-best in the NHL). You have to think the atmosphere in

Salt Lake City will be outrageous when this club plays Games 3 and 4 at home as part of the first playoff action in Mammoth history. Finally, Utah is likely to face the Pacific Division winner in Round 1, meaning the Mammoth — despite being a wild-card club — could well face an opponent with a worse record than their own. Of course, beyond the blueline trio of Mikhail Sergachev, Ian Cole and Nate Schmidt, there's not much in the way of playoff experience on this roster.

Edmonton Oilers (.565) Connor McDavid has the third-best playoff points-per-game mark in the history of the league (1.56) and Leon Draisaitl has the fourth (1.47). Of course, Draisaitl's status for Game 1 is up in the air at this point, and that's a monster concern for Edmonton. As always, questions about the Oilers crease are one crappy goal away.

Anaheim Ducks (.565) The Ducks, on the whole, might be inexperienced, but first-year Anaheim coach Joel Quenneville has 121 playoff wins and will pass Al Arbour for second place on the all-time list if Anaheim can win three second-season contests this year. (Nobody is catching Scotty Bowman at 223 career playoff victories). The problem for the Ducks is they allow more goals per game (3.52) than every team currently holding down a post-season slot.

Vegas Golden Knights (.558) The Knights have Cup pedigree and the potential for some new-coach bump, under John Tortorella, that spills into April and May. The problem all year has been goaltending, with Vegas sporting an .876 team save percentage that ranks 29th in the league.

Los Angeles Kings (.539) As always, the Kings have good underlying numbers, with an expected goals mark on the site MoneyPuck that ranks fourth in the West and seventh in the NHL (51.89 per cent). Also, as always, the Kings struggle to score. Los Angeles ranks 29th on the season in goals per game 2.68, though the club has pushed that up to 3.17 since March 1 (11th-best in the NHL during that span).

San Jose Sharks (.533) Ever heard of a young fella named Macklin Celebrini? He just might win the Hart Trophy if the Sharks squeeze into the playoffs. The issue in San Jose is keeping the puck out of their net; only the lowly Vancouver Canucks allow more goals per game than the 3.53 the Sharks surrender.

Nashville Predators (.532) The Preds boast strong special teams, with a league-best penalty-kill since the Olympics (86.4 per cent) and a PP that ranks seventh during that timeframe (25.9 per cent). The issue, as you might guess, is Nashville's five-on-five goal-differential is minus-29 on the season. The six teams worse than that are all lottery-bound.

Winnipeg Jets (.519) Kyle Connor has 36 goals, Mark Scheifele has 34 and Gabe Vilardi is on 28. After that, the next-highest total among Jets forwards is Cole Perfetti with 12. This team's high-end players can kill you, but there hasn't been enough support behind them.

St. Louis Blues (.513) The Blues have the best points percentage in the league since the Olympic break (.763), so they're clearly on a roll. St. Louis is managing to rip off all these wins with a power play that ranks 27th in the NHL (16.7 per cent) during that time.

Eastern Conference

Carolina Hurricanes (.675) The Canes power play is on fire since the break, converting at an NHL-best rate of 34.5 per cent. Saves, though, are hard to come by, with a team save percentage of just .855 — worse than everybody except the Canucks — in that span.

Tampa Bay Lightning (.662) Tampa has been a little loose down the stretch, allowing 3.41 goals per game (23rd in the league) since the Olympics. And, overall, the Bolts are a fairly flat 10-9-2 in their past 21 outings. Of course, they've got an absolute killer in Nikita Kucherov, all kinds of playoff know-how and a hunger to go deep again after failing to make it out of the first round in three straight springs.

Buffalo Sabres (.654) It's hard to believe the vibes will be better anywhere in the NHL come playoff time than in Buffalo, where the local team will be seeing its first post-season action since 2011. The Sabres are the story of the second half, with a league-best .718 points percentage in 2026. Buffalo is only average by advanced metrics like expected goals for, and this will obviously be the first playoff action for a number of very prominent Sabres.

Montreal Canadiens (.649) The Canadiens have a deadly first line, with Nick Suzuki playing between Cole Caufield and Juraj Slafkovsky. The drop off to the second unit is precipitous, though, and Montreal will need offence from more than just its top three dudes to do post-season damage.

Pittsburgh Penguins (.615) Only two teams — the powerhouse Avs and Bolts — have a better five-on-five goal-differential than the wildly surprising Penguins (plus-28). The goaltending could be an issue, however, with neither Arturs Silovs nor Stuart Skinner seizing the net. Pittsburgh called up promising youngster Sergei Murashov on Tuesday, with Skinner listed as day-to-day.

Boston Bruins (.609) The Bruins are the best home team in the NHL, posting a .731 points percentage in Boston this season. They're also surrendering a league-best 2.62 goals per game in the second half and goalie Jeremy Swayman has the most goals saved above expected (28.5) in the entire league.

Strange as it is to say about a team we still associate with Patrice Bergeron and David Krejci, the B's are a little weak down the middle. Rookie Fraser Minten has been great and Pavel Zacha is on a heater, but they definitely don't stack up with what some of the better teams in the conference have at centre.

Ottawa Senators (.584) The Senators have had strong underlying numbers all year and hold the third-best expected goals mark (55.82 per cent) in the NHL behind only Carolina and Colorado. The bugaboo has been goaltending and — in related news — a penalty-kill that ranks 30th in the league (74.7 per cent). That said, the PK has been better since the Olympic break.

Philadelphia Flyers (.584) This team seemed dead and buried coming out of the February hiatus, but Philly has gone 14-5-1 in its past 20 outings to vault back into a playoff spot. The Flyers really struggle to score (2.71 goals per game since the Olympics, 27th in the NHL), but have become one of the best teams at keeping pucks out of their own net down the stretch (2.38 goals against per game, 2nd in the league).

New York Islanders (.571) The Isles have a new coach in Pete DeBoer, who'll debut with the team when it hosts the Leafs on Thursday. New York is among the worst clubs in the NHL in terms of expected goals (47.01 per cent, 28th in the league), but has a goalie — in Ilya Sorokin — who gives them a chance to hang with anybody.

Detroit Red Wings (.571) Detroit has been trending the wrong way for some time, posting a .423 points percentage since Jan. 22 that's worse than all but five teams in the league and every

squad on this list. The Wings are decent defensively, but have scored just 2.54 goals per game in 26 contests since that Jan. 22 date. Only Chicago (2.28) is worse in that timespan.

Columbus Blue Jackets (.571) Columbus has gone into a tailspin at the wrong time, losing six straight games. The Jackets have been stingy in the second half (2.79 goals against per game, 3rd in the NHL), but the offence can be lacking in stretches. Case in point: Columbus is scoring just 1.60 goals per game in its past eight showings.

Washington Capitals (.558) The Capitals have a strong foundation with Logan Thompson in goal, but even as they've picked up points down the stretch, the offence and power play have only been OK. Washington is also the worst road team on this list, ranking 27th in the NHL with a .447 points percentage away from home.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/article/celebrini-willing-sharks-playoff-push-jets-lurking-in-crowded-fight-for-final-wild-card-spot/>

Celebrini willing Sharks' playoff push, Jets lurking in crowded fight for final wild-card spot

By TSN.ca Staff

With only nine days remaining in the NHL season, the second wild-card spot in the Western Conference remains up for grabs, with as many as five teams fighting for the final berth.

The Los Angeles Kings jumped the Nashville Predators to sit in the playoff position with a crucial 3-2 shootout win in a matchup between the two teams Monday. The San Jose Sharks earned a 3-2 win over the Chicago Blackhawks earlier in the night to keep themselves two points back of the Kings with a game in hand, and the Winnipeg Jets crushed the Seattle Kraken 6-2 to sit three points back of Los Angeles, equal in games played.

The St. Louis Blues can join the Winnipeg Jets at 80 points with a win over the NHL-best Colorado Avalanche on Tuesday, but their playoff hopes are hanging by a thread in the crowded picture.

The Kings have been a steady 9-9-6 since Feb. 1, unable to pull away and claim either a wild-card spot or a place in the top three of the middling Pacific Division. The Predators, who are now a point back of Los Angeles, have gone 11-8-4 since Feb. 1 to re-enter the fight the playoffs after an extremely disappointing 2024-25 campaign.

"It was a playoff hockey game, and I thought it was a lot of fun to be a part of," Predators coach Andrew Brunette said of Monday's clash. "I thought both teams played extremely hard and were committed. There wasn't a lot of room out there, and unfortunately we didn't get the extra point."

Sharks relying on Celebrini's Hart push

The Sharks have gone 10-10-3 since the end of January, with their playoff hopes this season, and likely beyond, resting on the shoulders of sophomore Macklin Celebrini.

The 19-year-old centre is in the thick of the Hart Trophy conversation in his second season after being selected first overall in 2024.

Celebrini has 41 goals and 107 points in 76 games this season, with his totals nearly double that of the Sharks next-leading producer, centre Will Smith, who has 23 goals and 55 points. The Vancouver native is listed third in the Hart Trophy odds at FanDuel at +1400 with his case likely reliant on getting San Jose into the playoff picture.

Avalanche star Nathan MacKinnon is -114 to win the Hart, just ahead of Nikita Kucherov of the Tampa Bay Lightning at +116, with Edmonton Oilers superstar Connor McDavid the only other player listed at +2000.

MacKinnon has 51 goals and 122 points, while Kucherov and McDavid are equal with 43 goals and tied for the league lead with 126 points. Though Celebrini sits 19 points back of them, it may be hard to argue that against him being the “most valuable player to his team” if he can end San Jose’s seven-year playoff drought.

Taylor Hall won the award with the New Jersey Devils in 2018 with the team sneaking into the playoffs thanks to him posting 93 points, 41 more than his next-closest teammate. Celebrini currently leads Smith by 52 points.

Jets still battling back from ugly start

Reaching the playoffs would be an impressive feat for the Jets after sitting last in the NHL to start the new year on Jan. 1.

Winnipeg is trying to avoid the dubious history of becoming just the fifth-ever team to win the Presidents’ Trophy one season and miss the playoffs the next - something last accomplished by the New York Rangers just last season.

The Jets have gone 12-6-5 since Feb. 1 to enter the thick of the race but still face an uphill battle with just five games left in their season to make up the three-point deficit and hold off their competition.

The Jets will face the Blues Thursday in a game that could spell the end of either team’s hopes of making the playoffs.

The Blues have also made a late-season charge with a 13-5-3 record since Feb. 1 to enter the crowded race in the Western Conference. St. Louis earned a 3-2 win over the Avalanche Sunday on the road but now have to face them again Tuesday on home ice.

“We don’t talk about it, but I think it’s human nature. Everybody goes and looks (at the standings),” head coach Jim Montgomery said after Sunday’s victory. “I do my very poor mathematics, and I’m like, ‘Well, I don’t know. If we win our games we’ll get in.’”

While all five teams still control their destiny, the Sharks have games remaining against the Predators and Jets next week that vastly swing the playoff outlook. The Kings appear to have the easiest remaining schedule with two games remaining against the last-place Vancouver Canucks and only one of their five coming against a team currently in a playoff spot in the Oilers on Saturday.

Los Angeles is also just three points back of the Vegas Golden Knights for third in the Pacific Division and four points behind the Anaheim Ducks and Oilers for the division lead.

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7178359/2026/04/08/winnipeg-jets-playoffs-draft-lottery-toews-masterton-power-play/>

Charting the Winnipeg Jets' potential paths to the playoffs or the draft lottery

By Murat Ates

The Winnipeg Jets' .667 points percentage is sixth-best in the NHL since the Olympic break, and even though they can't afford to treat that as a reason to overlook their problems, it's motivating for Jets players.

Their pursuit of a perfect 5-0-0 run to close the season and the stunning late-season push to a playoff spot that might come with it has been admirable.

Mark Scheifele has scored his 900th point and tied Kyle Connor's franchise record with 97 points on the season. Connor has sailed past 30 goals for the eighth time in his career and is two goals away from reaching the 40-goal plateau for the second time.

And Josh Morrissey is making so much of it work. When the Jets' secondary scoring disappeared to start the season, Winnipeg started playing Morrissey behind the Connor-Scheifele duo as often as possible — almost as much as Morrissey's ice time behind the other three lines combined. It has led to Winnipeg's most decisive, dynamic offence and helped cover defensive issues, too: Connor and Scheifele have outscored teams 44-30 with Morrissey on the ice and are getting beaten 33-24 with him on the bench.

The good news — and part of what has made Winnipeg's late surge possible — is that the Jets are starting to get secondary scoring, too. This season, only four players have scored over half a point per game: Scheifele, Connor, Morrissey and Gabriel Vilardi. Seven Jets players accomplished that feat last season, with Vladislav Namestnikov missing by a single point.

But since the Olympic break, Cole Perfetti has 13 points in 21 games, and the Jets have also gotten points from Alex Iafallo, Jonathan Toews, Adam Lowry and Morgan Barron. Brad Lambert appears to have rediscovered high-end offensive instincts, Neal Pionk is producing again, and a truly horrific power play got three great bounces and seems to have come to life.

What a bittersweet moral victory.

Can't the Jets do better than that, whether by making the playoffs after all their struggles or struggling again and earning a top-end NHL Draft pick? We'll look at Winnipeg's route to the playoffs, the lottery and more in this look at Jets trends.

Path to a playoff spot, updated

The Jets have 80 points and five games remaining. A perfect 5-0-0 record would take them to 90 points by season's end.

They have also performed exactly as projected since we picked wins and losses for every game left on the schedule, which is a fun aside. (If we're right about what comes next, the Jets will go 3-1-1 and close out the season with 87 points.) The Jets have 27 regulation wins, giving them the tiebreaker advantage against three of four rivals at the moment.

What we can learn by examining the remaining schedule of all of the teams competing for the West's second wild-card spot.

Those competitors:

- Nashville Predators: 84 points, four games left, 27 regulation wins
- Los Angeles Kings: 83 points, five games left, 19 regulation wins
- San Jose Sharks: 81 points, six games left, 25 regulation wins
- St. Louis Blues: 78 points, five games left, 29 regulation wins

The Jets don't have complete control over their destiny. Enough of their opponents play each other to guarantee somebody will pick up points between now and the end of the season, and a 4-1-0 record for L.A. or 5-1-0 record for San Jose would sink even a flawless 5-0-0 Jets run.

It hurts, too, that the Kings and Sharks have the easiest remaining schedule. Los Angeles has two games against the Vancouver Canucks, one against the Calgary Flames, one against the Seattle Kraken and a presumed tougher matchup against the Edmonton Oilers at home. San Jose's schedule is similar, with one game each against Edmonton, the Anaheim Ducks, Vancouver, Nashville, the Chicago Blackhawks and Winnipeg.

Let's look at the Jets' remaining games. They're 4-3-3 against this group of competitors thus far:

- April 9 at St. Louis
- April 11 vs. the Philadelphia Flyers
- April 13 at the Vegas Golden Knights
- April 14 at the Utah Mammoth
- April 16 vs. San Jose

Can you imagine if April 16's home game against San Jose had a playoff spot on the line?

The odds remain overwhelmingly against a playoff spot. I maintain my assertion that the Jets will play well but ultimately fall short. But there's a reason they play the games — and how funny would it be if I wrote a season preview titled, "The Winnipeg Jets are going to struggle. Don't count them out when they do," then proceeded to count them out too soon?

The path to a top draft pick

Five teams in the Eastern Conference are projected to miss the playoffs but have better records than Winnipeg does now. This has major implications for Winnipeg's draft pick.

If the Jets miss the playoffs and the standings remain as they are Wednesday, they'll pick ninth. If the Jets make the playoffs, the earliest they can pick is 17th — even if they finish with a worse record than a pile of teams in the East that don't make it. That drop-off is the difference between a projected second-line centre like Tynan Lawrence and a tier of players our analysts project to play further down an NHL lineup. (Corey Pronman projects a drop-off to that next tier starting at No. 9 overall, and Scott Wheeler's lower tier starts at No. 12.)

Why is that such a big deal?

Remember that a 27-point version of Toews is Winnipeg's biggest UFA signing of the Jets 2.0 era. If you ignore Toews' games-played bonuses and determine "biggest signing" by percentage of cap hit, the Jets' biggest UFA signing of the past 10 years is Gustav Nyquist. You have to go

back to Mathieu Perreault's \$3 million AAV signing back in 2014 to reach a bigger UFA signing relative to the salary cap. Every other Jets signing of note had been drafted and developed by Winnipeg or acquired by trade, then signed after they built a connection with the city.

But no-trade clauses are difficult to navigate, and the Jets' prospect pool isn't overflowing with tradeable excess; Winnipeg's best route to its next top-end player is through a top pick. If Pronman and Wheeler are right, there might be a tiny bit of wiggle room. I've also been told by an NHL source with draft expertise that the drop-off will start after pick No. 7. This season's accidental misery is a unique opportunity.

Jonathan Toews, Masterton Trophy nominee

The Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy is an annual award under the trusteeship of the Professional Hockey Writers Association and is given to the player "who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey."

No Winnipeg Jet has ever won the award, but Toews has a fighting chance. It is difficult to imagine a more extreme example of perseverance and dedication to hockey than Toews' health-induced departure from the NHL, worldwide journey in search of answers and return to the best hockey league in the world after two full seasons away from it.

"It's definitely been super unpredictable, something that I never thought I would have to go through in my life," Toews said Monday. "At the same time, I am very thankful for all of the struggles because, honestly, it is cliché, but it's where I've learned the most about myself — about hockey, about life and all of those things."

Many outside observers assumed Toews, 37, would retire, as his absence from the NHL stretched from one season to two. When he signed with Winnipeg last summer, it was reasonable to question what level he could get to. But Toews is one of the few players who have been forced to ask themselves who they were outside of hockey, then push through to the point that they could return to the sport.

I asked Toews about his oft-mentioned battle with his ego. How much of his struggle was psychological?

"How do you really separate the two, at the end of the day? I think we like to put things in categories and boxes, but they're all part of the same thing," Toews said. "For sure, it's psychological, it's physical, it's emotional — it's all of the above. So yeah, I was eager to get the opportunity in the NHL again, and I told myself I would do anything to go out there and help this team."

And his identity?

"Sometimes you have a story in your head as far as who you are as a person and as a player," he said. "I pride myself on my experience and what I accomplished in the game and the way I've played over the years. Like I said, sometimes you take a backseat or have a limited role, and it's a new opportunity to learn — to learn how to be a better teammate, a better person. That's part of it. When there are moments like that, you have to check that ego at the door."

The winner will be selected in a poll of all chapters of the PHWA at the end of the regular season.

Is the power play fixed?

Scott Arniel moved Toews to Winnipeg's top power-play unit Monday against Seattle, and suddenly the 28th-ranked power play caught fire. Winnipeg scored three power-play goals, with the first belonging to Toews, the second assisted by Toews and the third giving Scheifele his 900th career point.

The Jets are on pace to score 42 power-play goals this season — 21 fewer goals than the Presidents' Trophy-winning Jets scored with the man advantage one year ago. Is it that simple, then? Toews has fixed things? Winnipeg's going to rattle off five straight wins because of his faceoff prowess and his assist on the game-winning goal?

Obviously not. Toews did everything right on his goal, establishing inside position against Ryan Lindgren, knocking down a puck and putting it past Philipp Grubauer to score. Do that often enough and good things will happen, but Toews could make that boxout many times over without Vilardi's deflection bouncing off the end boards and out front for Toews to try to knock down.

Toews' assist was fortunate, too — a cross-crease pass attempt that hit two Kraken defenders' skates before bouncing to Vilardi with time and space in the slot. Vilardi didn't waste the freebie, burying his uncontested shot top shelf. Winnipeg's third power-play goal came from Connor and went in off Lindgren's stick.

Despite the sudden scoring surge, several things are troubling about the Jets' power play:

- They've been awarded the ninth-fewest power-play opportunities.
- They've spent the least time in the league in the offensive zone.
- They've struggled on faceoffs and zone entries relative to the league.
- They're winning fewer races to the end boards to recover pucks after missed shots.

In a league in which every three goals tends to correspond to roughly 1 standings point, the Jets' drop-off in power-play efficiency alone could be blamed for their impending playoffs miss. Give Winnipeg 7 more points and we're not playing the "what if they go 5-0-0?" game at all.

Give Toews credit for his net-front commitment. Appreciate his 59.2 power-play faceoff win rate, 20th best among players who have taken at least 100 power-play faceoffs. It's hard to believe Arniel's hunch has become a surefire fix.

"We got a little lucky," Scheifele said. "But there's other games where we've had a lot of good looks and haven't gotten a goal. So, we just got rewarded for sticking with it."

A little luck would help for five more games, too, whether you're pulling for the draft pick or playoff hockey.

Winnipeg Sun

https://www.winnipegsun.com/sports/winnipeg/hard-road-back-jets-toews-up-for-masterton-trophy/article_baa4c947-ff57-4516-ba4f-4be9d6087694.html

Hard road back: Jets' Toews up for Masterton Trophy

By Paul Friesen

The comeback hasn't gone as Jonathan Toews envisioned it. Not individually, not as a team.

The Winnipeg Jets were supposed to "pick up where they left off" last season, he'd said going in. And he was going to be a much better player by the time they were making "a deep playoff run."

That's not likely to happen. But it doesn't diminish the road the Winnipegger has travelled to become an NHL player again.

That long, arduous journey has earned Toews the Jets' nomination for the Bill Masterton Trophy.

The three qualities the trophy calls for, perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey, Toews has shown in spades, enough to be a unanimous selection in a vote by local members of the Professional Hockey Writers Association.

"It's a weird thing," Toews said of being recognized for his journey back to the NHL after two years out of the game. "It's not like you're consciously thinking about that. But I guess if I do stop to look back at what the last four or five years have been like, it's definitely been super unpredictable.

"Something that I never thought I would have to go through in my life."

That the soon-to-be, 38-year-old is even playing again, when many had written him off, speaks to the perseverance and dedication part.

Not every player will travel to the other side of the world to get to the bottom of what ails them.

His chronic immune response issues, long COVID, a five-week detoxification process in India – Toews sees all of it now as a blessing, a road map to finding a better version of himself, whether his hockey numbers show it or not.

"I am very thankful for all of the struggles," he said. "Because honestly, it is cliché but it's where I've learned the most about myself. About hockey, about life and all of those things. So I'm thankful."

A three-time Stanley Cup winner with Chicago, Toews struggled with health issues in his last few seasons with the Blackhawks.

He missed the entire 2020-21 campaign and was sidelined again late in the 2022-23 season.

After two years off in search of answers, he signed a one-year deal with his hometown Jets, a team coming off a Presidents' Trophy as the NHL's best in the regular season.

A captain in Chicago since he was 20, he had to take a step back, which presented yet another challenge: checking his ego at the door.

"Every day I'm digging deep and trying to find the energy, find a way to contribute in any way, and set aside your ego," he said. "The challenge has been in my mind I know what I'm capable of doing and how I can play the game. But just going out there with limited capability and in a limited role, you just try and do the best you can within those parameters."

Toews scored his 10th goal of the season in the Jets' 6-2 win over Seattle on Monday and is likely to finish with the lowest total of his career.

Point production, however, is not a requirement for the Masterton Trophy. The fact he's played all 77 games after what he's been through is the stat line that matters.

"There have been a lot of challenging, difficult days," Toews said. "But it's all worth it. The way that the city has received me, the organization, but also the players in the locker room. I would do it all over again to be part of this group. Those guys show up every day and they work so hard. They're always positive, they're always having fun and they're keeping it light, even in the tougher moments."

That hasn't come naturally for Toews over his career.

A self-confessed perfectionist who wore failures like an iron yoke, he realized he had to work on that, too, not just his physical ailments. In fact, he's learned the two are intertwined.

"I definitely was riding the highs and lows more than I should have. That's probably why I had to go through this."

"Obviously he's intense," is how head coach Scott Arniel put it. "He's a guy that you can tell is a winner. He wants to win. You hear him talking to the guys, barking. Just the voice."

Arniel sees Toews having some fun, though, too. Even adding some leadership in the room, in what's been an up-and-down season that's perilously close to ending prematurely.

"There's been a lot of pressure since the Olympic break," the coach said. "And he's an extra voice in that room... we needed that."

It hasn't been the ideal season in which to make the kind of comeback Toews made, with an insane schedule brought on by the Olympic break.

It would be hard enough for someone in their 20's or early 30's, he acknowledged.

"The competition is always high, as you see again this year," he said. "The parity is incredible. The league just keeps getting better and it doesn't get easier as you get older."

One of the great NHLers to ever come out of Winnipeg, the kid from St. Vital already has a few individual trophies in his cabinet: the Conn Smythe as Stanley Cup Playoff MVP, the Selke as the NHL's best defensive forward and the Mark Messier Leadership Award.

He wouldn't be the first Winnipegger to win the Masterton, as Butch Goring won it in while with the L.A. Kings in 1978.

Flin Flon's Bobby Clarke took it six years earlier with the Flyers.

Safe to say the trophy wasn't on Toews' bucket list. Also safe to say he'd trade it for enough wins to get the Jets into the playoffs.

He takes the recognition as an honour, nonetheless.

“I was eager to get the opportunity in the NHL again,” he said. “And I told myself I would do anything to go out there and help this team.”