What's next in JETSVILLE?

By: Ed Tait

There's a theory floating out there on Cloud 9 -- still crowded with Winnipeg Jets faithful locked arm in arm and singing merrily -- that GM Kevin Cheveldayoff has absolutely nailed this draft-and-develop blueprint.

So the Jets boss now needs only to ease back in his comfy chair, throw his feet up on his desk and light up a celebratory stogie. Playoffs? Heck, yeah. Been there, done that. And surely there will be more to follow now, year after year after year.

Well, about all that...

Look, this late-season push to the playoffs by the Jets and the euphoria that swallowed this town whole over the last week has been memorable, but it also considerably cranks up the level on expectations in these parts. And so while Cheveldayoff & Co. were drawing hearty slaps on the back for their starry prospect pool and their work this winter near the trade deadline, it's what happens next that will really determine whether this franchise continues to be represented by an upward arrow or flatlines.

With that in mind, we dive in with our annual mini-post-mortem, beginning with five questions/issues that will need tending to this off-season:

1. Can they stick together as a team?

There have been a ton of references over the last few days/weeks/months about how this bunch is so tight, about how much it cares and about how much it competes. That's just peachy. But this team could look considerably different when it lines up for training camp next September. Change happens to Stanley Cup champs, to contenders and clubs rebuilding. It's a given.

There are eight unrestricted free agents and there's no way in Hades all eight return. That UFA crew includes forwards Michael Frolik, Drew Stafford, Lee Stempniak, Jim Slater, Jiri Tlusty, Matt Halischuk and T.J. Galiardi and defenceman Adam Pardy. Couple that with the fact Andrew Ladd, Dustin Byfuglien, Jay Harrison and Grant Clitsome are scheduled to become UFAs in 2016, that Paul Postma and Ben Chiarot are restricted free agents this summer and young guns such as Jacob Trouba, Mark Scheifele and Adam Lowry see their entry-level deals expire after 2015-16 and the Jets have a pile of players who are or will soon be looking for a pile of money.
Getting to the playoffs is one thing. Staying there consistently on a budget is the real challenge.

2. Prime-time players or more seasoning required?

A few gems from the Jets stable of prospects who could push for work with the big club next season -- providing there is room:

-- Big, team-first, two-way centre Andrew Copp, who joined the Jets from the University of Michigan. Veteran Jim Slater may be looking over his shoulder here.

-- Slick Nik Ehlers, the nifty left-winger who just finished a season with the Halifax Mooseheads in which he had 47 goals and 132 points in 65 games, including playoffs, in the QMJHL. The Jets could use more skill up front, but it's either the big club or back to the Q for Ehlers, who isn't eligible yet for the AHL.

-- Josh Morrissey, the top D-man at the world juniors, had a good camp last year and is now with the Western Hockey League's Kelowna Rockets. Very smooth skater, through-the-roof hockey IQ.

-- Goaltender Connor Hellebuyck, who was so impressive in his first year as a pro in St. John's, going 28-22-5 with a 2.57 goals-against average and .921 save percentage. Is he ready now or in need of another heavy-workload year in the AHL?

-- Centre Nic Petan, who posted massive numbers with Portland of the WHL -- 322 points in 188 games over the last three years. Could be in the AHL. Small, but nifty.

3. Has the goaltending question been answered?

Ondrej Pavelec posted some solid numbers, thanks to a late-season stretch in which he helped drag the franchise into the playoffs. His GAA of 2.28, save percentage of .920 and five shutouts were all the best of his career. But he'll still have his doubters when the 2015-16 season opens and his paycheque jumps to $4.25 million and $4.75 million over the final two years of his contract.

Even though he lost the No. 1 gig to Pavelec late in the season, Michael Hutchinson finished 21-10-5 with a .914 save percentage and 2.39 GAA. His salary is also just $600,000. Consider this, as well: Over the last three years the Jets are 38-20-8 in games where somebody else -- namely Hutchinson or Al Montoya -- was tending the blue paint.

The playoffs have already shown that committing big money to netminders doesn't necessarily guarantee anything.

4. The captain and the big man

Two key components -- both with Stanley Cup rings -- are coming up on the final years of their deals, as hinted at above. Andrew Ladd, as suspected, finished the regular season putting off surgery and playing hurt and it was reflected in his offensive totals over the last few weeks. Still, he also posted a career-high in points with 62 and, for all the criticisms he receives from outside the room, inside it he's a respected leader and will likely command a significant raise to his current $4.5-million deal.
And putting aside his last couple of weeks -- a suspension near the end of the season and a so-so playoffs -- Dustin Byfuglien was this team's MVP candidate for most of the campaign. But now what? Keeping him will cost, too -- he'll earn $6 million this year -- both in money and term. He just turned 30 and there is a risk in signing him to a long-term deal, not for what might be on the horizon, but what his game might look like five years from now.

5. A new name under the microscope?

Toby Enstrom has quietly and efficiently done his thing for the Jets over the past few years as a steady puck-moving defenceman who helps those paired with him take their game to new levels. He worked especially well with Tyler Myers after the trade with Buffalo and still sees a ton of time on the power play.

All that said, Enstrom turns 31 in November and is scheduled to earn $5.75 million next season, third highest on the team next year to Byfuglien ($6 million) and Blake Wheeler ($5.8 million). And during the playoffs he was pounded by Ducks forwards, fuelling debate about whether he can stand the heavy going in the Western Conference and knowing that Morrissey -- who has a similar skill set and is bigger -- might not be far off from cracking the roster.

The Jets/Thrashers are the only organization he's known and he does have a no-trade clause in his contract. But you wonder, especially as the Jets try to make pieces fit, what might be out there if his name is floated.


**Jets no match for quack attack**

By: Tim Campbell

Did you see that sweep coming?

Not many did, even though the pre-series data was there to suggest the Winnipeg Jets drew the worst possible playoff match-up when they were pitted against the top-seeded Anaheim Ducks.

Hindsight is, of course, perfect, so it's incorrect to simply use it to invalidate opinions on the series before it started. They varied widely, as did the logic and analysis and it was all fair debate.

Many saw the Jets' momentum late in the regular season as a large factor. Winnipeg went 10-3-1 down the stretch with a difficult schedule to reach 99 points and qualify for the playoffs for first time since the 2011 relocation.

Others looked at different statistics, including approximated possession numbers. Those that looked only there fell into a one-dimensional trap.
The Jets’ relative shortage of battle-tested playoff experience, especially recently, was reconciled by many as a non-factor, in part, because the Ducks' recent playoff history is hardly inspiring.

As we said, all fair debate.

What was likely overlooked and not given near enough weight, as it turned out, were the head-to-head factors.

The season series was three wins in three games by the Ducks. The Jets did manage two overtime points, which did offer some hope. But all of those games were in the first 43 of the season.

Where the Ducks were superior, and it showed in a big way in the series, was third periods.

Anaheim set an NHL playoff record by becoming the first team to lead a series 3-0 after trailing after the second period in each of the first three games. The team also set a record for the least amount of time leading games -- 38 minutes 26 seconds over all four games -- in winning by a 4-0 sweep.

(The Jets, by the way, led games for a total of 68:45 in the series.)

None of this should have been surprising from a team that set NHL records in 2014-15 by posting 18 third-period victories in games in which it trailed at some point in the third period.

The Jets had five in that category.

Anaheim also tied an NHL record with 12 wins (12-23-0) in games in which it trailed after two periods. The Jets were 1-20-4.

In themselves, those two superior comeback numbers suggested explosiveness and resilience.

And it also suggested opportunity when you examine one of the Jets’ vulnerabilities this season, in particular one stat that’s not readily available.

Winnipeg’s game chart showed that in 2014-15, the team had its struggles in the final five minutes of third periods when results swung.

The Jets did protect many leads, putting to bed 30 of the 38 times they lead heading for the third period.

But there were 11 instances over the course of the season where the Jets surrendered a goal or goals in those final five minutes of regulation that either brought a Winnipeg lead to a tie game or a tie game to a deficit.

For regulation losses (two points lost) or overtime or shootout losses (one point lost) those caused, the Jets let 18 points get away in this manner.

On the positive side of this chart, the Jets had just three instances where they rallied in the final five minutes, for a gain of five points.

The net was 13 points lost based on the final five minutes where games changed, indicating a weakness.
And it was one the Ducks took advantage of in the series, twice affecting the lead in the final five minutes, not to mention doing the same thing in Game 1 in the final 6:39.

It would be wrong to leave out some evidence Winnipeg was resilient as well, but in different ways that didn't translate into effectiveness in the series. Its defence, for example, was much improved during the regular season -- becoming a top-10 team in goals against when it had never before been out of the bottom 10 -- but it lost the battle to contain the Ducks.

And the Jets had a couple of other games where they allowed leads to slip in third periods but rallied, including twice in the final five minutes to retake the lead or gain a tie and win in a shootout or overtime.

But when it came to close games, the Ducks just had their number, as they proved in four outings in the playoffs.

During the regular season, that was their MO, at 33-1-7 in one-goal decisions, far and away the league's best. Winnipeg was OK in that area, but more towards average at 19-7-13.

Finally, Winnipeg’s record within the Central this season was better, at a commendable 16-8-5 with no weak members, than its mark against the Pacific, 10-8-3 with two very weak teams.

When you’re the eighth and final team to claim a spot in the Western Conference, being choosey is not an option.

There’s no way to know if the Jets would have advanced in the Central Division bracket, but they didn’t match up near as poorly in any of these ways against their own division rivals.

Jets-Ducks turned out to be a bit of bad fortune for the underdogs who faced a very good team that played well.

While most were underselling it, this series turned out to be more of a true 1-8 matchup than most suspected.


Jets taking day off after losing series to Ducks

By: Tim Campbell

A bright, prairie spring sun came up on the Winnipeg Jets today but it's unlikely they’re feeling any better about their Stanley Cup playoff appearance.

Very late on Wednesday night, the Jets heard the final horn and the ovation from their fans after dropping a 5-2 decision to the Anaheim Ducks at the MTS Centre, a result that left them on the wrong side of a four-game sweep in the first round of the post-season.
Today, the Jets are closed for the day. The team’s players and hockey staff are taking a day to catch their collective breaths and there will be no practices, games or press conferences to cover.

On Friday, the team is planning to meet with reporters to share some final thoughts about the 2014-15 season before they disperse and go their separate ways for the off-season.

To set up the day, the Free Press sports team will have a live season-in-review webcast from the MTS Centre Friday at 9:30 a.m. That will be followed by full coverage of Friday’s player-interview availabilities and then head coach Paul Maurice’s end-of-year press conference from the MTS Centre’s Matt Frost Media Centre.

Winnipeg Sun

Note: Sun articles are incomplete – unable to get past paywall even with Ken Wiebe’s Sun+ account.


WHAT WENT WRONG? Lack of playoff experience played major role for Winnipeg Jets

By: Paul Friesen

It'll go down as just another broom-buster, a short-and-sweet “get out of our way” elimination of an eighth seed by a top seed.

But the first-round Stanley Cup Playoff series between the Winnipeg Jets and Anaheim Ducks did not go as many pundits predicted.

More than a few pegged the Jets as the team most likely to pull off an upset, helping to whip a playoff-starved fan base into a shimmering, white-clad frenzy.

Even the NHL scouts and executives we talked to leaned towards the upstarts from Winnipeg.

All the pressure was on the Ducks, they said.

Yet just like that — it was over.

So what went wrong?

With the help of our experts, let's revisit The Sweep.

The Experience Factor

Both sides downplayed it going in, but it quickly became obvious the lack of playoff seasoning in the Jets' room, compared to the thick post-season skin of the Ducks, was a major factor.

The Jets weren't as cool under pressure, weren't......
Future still looks bright for Winnipeg Jets

By: Ken Wiebe

Now that the identity is firmly established, it's time to see if those elements are enough to help the Winnipeg Jets reach the next level.

All season long, the Jets prided themselves on using their speed and being difficult to play against.

Those qualities were on full display, but the Jets were still swept in the opening round of the Stanley Cup playoffs by the Anaheim Ducks.

Winning at this level is incredibly hard, but there are no participation ribbons handed out. Ultimately, the goal of every franchise is to capture the Stanley Cup, not just make it to the first round.

The overwhelming feeling from Jets' players on Wednesday night was that this is the beginning of the journey, not the end.

“So for us, I think we set a standard of how we need to work and how we need to play, and show up every day and now it’s up to us to keep that standard and get back here next year,” said Jets captain Andrew Ladd.

Jets were banged-up heading into series

By: Paul Friesen

The details may emerge in the days ahead — word of a surgery needed here, a ligament issue there.

But head coach Paul Maurice confirmed after Wednesday's season-ending loss to Anaheim his Winnipeg Jets were a battered group in the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

“We probably have eight significant injuries, four of those we brought into the series,” Maurice said. “We had a number of guys that couldn't do parts of the games as well.”

Topping the list of suspected wounded would be captain Andrew Ladd, who often didn't take part in the morning game-day skates.

Bryan Little and Mathieu Perreault also came back from injuries late in the season and may not have been close to 100%.

“You never quit on a brother,” Maurice said. “You'll do whatever you have to do for family. Adam Pardy wanted to play. He really, really wanted to play and he tried to fight his way into the lineup.”

Pardy, rocked by a check in Game 3, was replaced by Ben Chiarot for....
Banged-up Winnipeg Jets see signs of progress

By: Stephen Whyno

Battered and bruised by an 82-game grind and four-game playoff sweep, the Winnipeg Jets are already taking stock and looking ahead to next season.

The Jets withstood a barrage of injuries that at one point knocked out their top four defencemen and later forced general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff to make a series of trades, but against the playoff-tested Anaheim Ducks, there ultimately wasn’t enough left in the tank to muster even one post-season victory.

“We’ve got a lot of room to improve and to get better with experience,” coach Paul Maurice said after Wednesday’s 5-2 home loss in Game 4. “But before you get to any of that, you’ve got to accomplish, I think, what went on here … that guy over there’s playing with a broken bone, that guy’s playing over there with a tear and there’s no way I’m not going to give what I have.”

Maurice said the Jets dealt with eight significant injuries, including four at the start of the playoffs. Mathieu Perreault had a lower-body injury that caused him to miss Game 1 while captain Andrew Ladd’s undisclosed injury often kept him from practising over the past two-plus months.

“You need that from your captain, you need that guy in the room doing whatever he can to stay in and he did,” Maurice said. “I would never, ever question his willingness, grit, determination. He could’ve very easily come out of that lineup 2 1/2 months ago and nobody would’ve said a word to him. But he wouldn’t.”

Defenceman Adam Pardy took a big hit from Anaheim’s Matt Beleskey in Game 3 and Maurice said he “couldn’t in good conscience put him in the lineup” for Game 4.

“We’ve got guys playing with broken bones,” Maurice said. “It’s a good learning experience for your room because it sets a level of willingness that you need to carry with you.”

No matter how beat up the Jets were, Maurice pointed out that the Ducks were likely dealing with their own injuries. The bottom line is Anaheim was the better team in the series, even though the first three games were decided by a total of four goals.

What the Ducks have that the Jets didn’t, at least until now, is the experience of winning and losing in the playoffs. A year ago Anaheim beat Dallas in the first round before losing in seven games to the Stanley Cup-champion Los Angeles Kings.
The Jets were making their first playoff appearance since the franchise moved to Winnipeg from Atlanta in 2011.

“We don’t have a lot of experience in these types of situations and maybe that was a factor in some of those games that we couldn’t close out,” winger Blake Wheeler said. “As a group the strides we took this year, in a few weeks I think we’re going to look back and be pretty happy with where we sit today compared to where we were.”

Corey Perry, the Ducks winger who’s tied for the playoff lead in scoring with seven points in four games, called the Jets “a heck of a hockey team.”

“They’re going to have a lot of success coming forward,” Perry said. “They get behind this crowd, they push and away they go.”

The boisterous “whiteout” crowd at the MTS Centre was one of the Jets’ biggest advantages, but the fans couldn’t propel them to a home victory. The next step is to reward the loyal fans with more than just a playoff appearance.

Cheveldayoff and Maurice are in place for the long-term, and while there are several unrestricted free agents who need contracts, the core group led by Ladd, Bryan Little and Wheeler isn’t going anywhere.

“I think we’re heading in the right direction,” Wheeler said. “We’re disappointed, don’t get me wrong. There are no feelings of being gratified right now. But I think the way this organization looks today compared to where it looked in September and October, we’re going in the right direction.”

Maurice talked of the “foundation” being in place but with the caveat that the Jets have to do all this again next season just to get back into the playoffs. He closed his final post-game news conference by saying his team “took a step forward.”

Some of that stepping forward has to do with accepting the sting of being swept.

“It’s hard to see it now, but hopefully it’s a good learning experience for everyone in this room, especially the young guys,” Little said. “I think this makes everyone hungrier for next year.”

NHL.com

http://www.nhl.com/ice/news.htm?id=764855

Chabot: Jets' playoff push hurt them vs. Ducks

By: Evan Sporer

When teams squeak into the Stanley Cup Playoffs, fighting through the last portion of their schedule to clinch a postseason berth, it can give them momentum when playoff hockey begins.
It also can create a late-season grind, and that's something Frederic Chabot said finally might have caught up to the Winnipeg Jets in their Western Conference First Round series four-game loss to the Anaheim Ducks.

"The big players for Anaheim were their best players, and it looked like to me that there were some leaders on Winnipeg who were not 100 percent because the four-line or three-line attack of Anaheim constantly won battles and established a forecheck and created scoring chances," Chabot said.

"Winnipeg didn't quite do that. At the end of the day it was a better playoff team for Anaheim, and more rested.

"The playoff drive for Winnipeg took its toll."

Jets coach Paul Maurice said his players were dealing with a number of significant injuries after Game 4. The Ducks were one of the first teams to clinch a playoff berth and had the Pacific Division all but clinched for the final two months of the season. Now the Ducks will get a chance to rest and recuperate before playing either the Calgary Flames or Vancouver Canucks in the second round.

Chabot said that creates a delicate situation for Ducks goaltender Frederik Andersen.

"There's always two sides to things like that," Chabot said of the extended rest. "Maybe on the first game next series it's going to be really important to be really prepared and see lots of shots in the previous days before the game to make sure that he's sharp, feeling good, feeling fresh, and feeling up to the speed of the playoffs.

"Also he gets to rest, which means if he goes a long way, like I think Anaheim can, it's going to be beneficial to him at the end. He's going to be rested, there's going to be less wear-and-tear, and it's going to be good for their older players."

The Ducks, who had a League-high 33 wins in one-goal games during the regular season, won two one-goal games in their sweep of the Jets. They also won three of their four games when trailing after two periods. But as was the case during the regular season, Chabot said the Ducks stuck to their game plan, something that will help them in the later rounds.

"It seems like they've done it all year," Chabot said. "They've won a lot of one-goal games; they've come from behind almost 20 times now.

"They're used to that. There's no panic. There's lots of good veterans all over the lineup and they just stick with it."

**Deadspin.com**


*Bless The Winnipeg Jets, For They Tried, And Failed*

By: Samar Kalaf
The current iteration of the Winnipeg Jets, formerly known as the Atlanta Thrashers, has never won a playoff game. They received a ticket to the postseason once, in the 2006-07 season. The Rangers swept them. This season’s Jets, bringing playoff hockey back to Winnipeg for the first time since 1996, hoped to break that ignominious streak against the Ducks. They did not.

The recurring theme of the series was Winnipeg’s inability to hold onto a lead in the third period. Game 1 saw a 2-1 Jets lead vanish as the Ducks scored three in the third. In Game 2, the Jets wasted a 1-0 lead by giving up two in final period. Game 3 required an overtime after the Jets couldn’t hold a 4-3 lead after the second. (Anaheim’s Rickard Rakell scored the game-winner.) The Ducks simply closed the book in Game 4 with a 5-2 victory.

The third star of last night’s game was cute, but also sad, in a way:

Before the series even started, the chances of Winnipeg advancing were highly unlikely, to put it nicely. But we—or, hell, speaking for myself here—I wanted to see them get one win, as a personal victory. Wash the stink off. Get something to build on. Just one. Nope. The streak continues.

As the final horn sounded, Winnipeg’s crowd thanked their team for the playoff run—even though it was a disappointing one—by starting up one more “Go Jets Go!” chant as the Jets and Ducks shook hands. They hope to be back next season.