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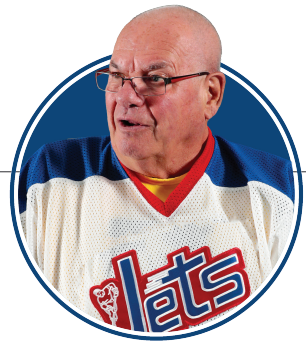


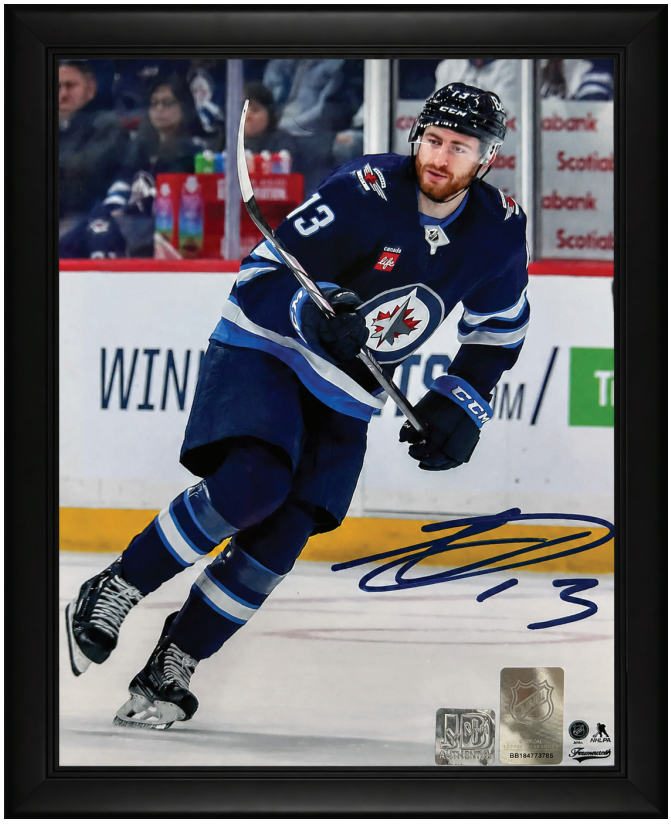
JETS' 30-GOAL SCORERS LEAD CANADA AT WORLDS

When Team Canada gets rolling at the 2026 IIHF World Senior Men's Championship in Zurich and Fribourg, Switzerland, two of the Winnipeg Jets' three 30-goal scorers will be wearing the Maple Leaf. Mark Scheifele and Gabriel Vilardi, along with defenceman Dylan DeMelo, will be trying to help Canada win its first gold medal at the Worlds since 2023.

The largest selection of Mark Scheifele and Gabriel Vilardi collectibles and memorabilia in Winnipeg can be found at Joe Daley's Sports and Framing.

From hockey cards to autographed cards and from framed autographed wall-hangings to autographed jerseys, Joe Daley's is the place to go. So, while you're cheering for your favourite Winnipeg Jets' offensive star at this year's IIHF Worlds on TSN, remember, Joe Daley's Sports and Framing can get you closer than anyone else in the city to the Team Canada players you love.

This will be the fourth time Scheifele has represented Canada at the World Championships (2016, 2017, 2019), but the first time in nearly a decade! This past season, Scheifele had 36 goals and 103 points and finished fifth in NHL scoring. For Vilardi, it's his second trip for Canada to the Worlds. He previously played in 2021. Vilardi just had the first 30-goal season of his career, and it was also the first time he's played all 82 games.



GABRIEL VILARDI



MARK SCHEIFELE

Photo by Images on Ice/Hockey Hall of Fame

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A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

BY SCOTT TAYLOR

Photos courtesy of Taylor Sakwi

On any given winter Saturday morning at Seven Oaks Arena, the scoreboard doesn't matter, the standings don't exist and the final buzzer never feels like an ending. For the players in Winnipeg's SuperHEROS hockey program, simply stepping onto the ice is the victory.

Born out of a national need and built on inclusion, SuperHEROS has quietly become one of the most meaningful grassroots hockey initiatives in Canada. What started in 2018 as a response to a glaring gap in the game - the absence of accessible programming for youth living with physical or cognitive barriers in Western Canada - has grown into a national movement. In Winnipeg, it has found a home, a heartbeat and perhaps most importantly, a family.

Now entering its fifth season in Winnipeg this fall, the program continues to thrive under the guidance of head coach Hailey Clendenning, whose passion for the game is matched only by her commitment to the players she leads.

"This program gives these kids a feeling of involvement," Clendenning said. "They're so excited to come to hockey every week, and it's such a great community to be a part of. It's one of my favourite things to look forward to in the winter."

Clendenning's hockey roots run deep. Raised in Fort Frances, Ontario, she grew up playing the game, later suiting up at Rainy River College and staying involved through coaching and training roles. Today, she balances her full-time career in asset management with time on the ice - both as a player in Winnipeg's Dakota women's league and as part of the Ice Crew for the city's professional teams. Still, it's SuperHEROS that stands apart.

"This is special," she said simply.

The Winnipeg roster reflects that spirit. Players range in age from seven to 17, with one longtime participant - now 21 - continuing to skate as a mentor and role model. It's not about competition in the traditional sense; practices blend skill development with fun, often ending in spirited intrasquad scrimmages where smiles are as common as goals.

Of course, there have been glimpses of something more. A trip to Calgary for the Friendship Series tournament offered players a rare chance to test themselves against peers from other cities — and to experience the camaraderie that defines the program on a national scale.

That national footprint is something Josh Delves knows well. As the organization's Donor Engagement and Sponsorship Lead based in Ottawa, he's seen firsthand how programming has expanded into nine cities across the country, from Ottawa to Victoria.

"When SuperHEROS started in 2018, there just weren't options for families with kids living with disabilities to play hockey in a safe and inclusive environment," Delves explained. "SuperHEROS was created to fill that gap."

While the program operates primarily in Western Canada - where adapted hockey opportunities have historically been limited - it complements the organization's flagship "HEROS" initiative, which focuses on removing financial and social barriers to the sport.

In Winnipeg, though, the impact is personal. It's in the weekly rituals, the familiar faces, the volunteer mentors who guide players both on and off the ice. It's in the parents who watch from the stands, knowing their children have found a place where they belong.

THE LINEUP

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MANITOBA'S BEST

CELEBRATING OUR PLAYERS OF THE MONTH



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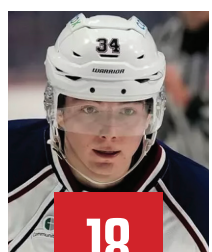

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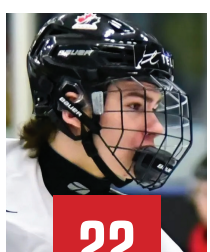

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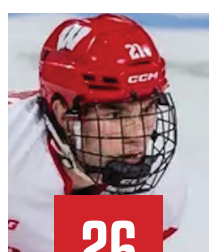

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GAME ON is Manitoba's hockey community. This is where hockey fans will meet the stars of the game here in Manitoba and where our goal is to pay tribute to those who make hockey this province's most beloved sport.
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Magazines Canada

CHAMPIONS OF MANITOBA

The final buzzer sounded weeks ago, but across Winnipeg and much of Manitoba, the sting still lingers.

After last season's Presidents' Trophy-winning campaign, expectations surrounding the Winnipeg Jets reached heights this market has rarely experienced. For months, Jets fans believed they could be witnessing something special. Instead, another long summer arrived far earlier than many had hoped.

But Manitoba is not a one-trick pony. Hockey within the province delivered yet another remarkable season.

Sure, the Jets occupy the largest spotlight and understandably so, but championships, growth and memorable moments happened all around us this year, often in places that deserve far more attention than they receive.

In only their fourth season in the MJHL, the Niverville Nighthawks authored one of the most impressive campaigns Manitoba junior hockey has seen in recent years. Built quickly, properly and backed by a passionate community, the Nighthawks transformed from expansion franchise into legitimate powerhouse in record time.

And they were not alone. The Flin Flon Bombers captured the SJHL championship before joining Niverville at the Centennial Cup, marking a rare and impressive moment for the province with two Manitoba-based clubs competing at the National Junior A Championship. In a hockey-rich province, junior hockey continues to thrive from one end of Manitoba to the other.

The MMJHL once again showcased just how deep Manitoba hockey runs. The Transcona Railer Express and St. Boniface Riels squared off in the championship final for the second consecutive season, with Transcona capturing a dramatic Game 7 victory to reclaim the title.

The Manitoba Moose also gave local fans meaningful spring hockey again, advancing in the Calder Cup Playoffs and winning a postseason round for the first time since 2018.

On the international stage, Manitobans continued leaving fingerprints all over the hockey world.

Winnipeg products Mark Stone and Seth Jarvis, along with Elkhorn's Travis Sanheim, took home silver at the 2026 Olympic Winter Games. On the women's side, Ste. Anne's Jocelyne Larocque and Winnipeg's Kati Tabin proudly also represented Manitoba on hockey's biggest international stage.

The PWHL's sold-out takeover event in Winnipeg demonstrated loudly and clearly that this city is ready for women's professional hockey at the highest level. The Winnipeg Freeze entered a new era with their transition to the Monarchs. Steinbach unveiled a stunning new hockey facility, reinforcing continued investment in the future of the sport across rural Manitoba. Athletes like Sara Manness continue competing and succeeding on some of hockey's biggest stages.

Generations ago, Manitoba established itself as a hockey factory. Today, it remains one.

And the next wave is already coming. Cypress River's Carson Carels is expected to hear his name called extremely early at the 2026 NHL Draft, positioning himself among the highest-rated Manitoba prospects in recent memory.

No, the Jets did not provide the ending many envisioned this season, but this is the Champions Issue for a reason.

Champions are not found only in Stanley Cup runs. They are found in packed community arenas, breakthrough junior seasons, Olympic podiums, playoff victories and growing opportunities for the next generation. They are found in the people continuing to push the game forward across Manitoba every single year. And when you take a step back and look at the bigger picture, hockey in this province is still winning in plenty of ways.

CARTER BROOKS,
Editor-in-Chief



Photo by James Carey Lauder

GAME ON MAGAZINE'S 2025-26
FEMALE PLAYER OF THE YEAR

JOCELYNE LAROCQUE

Photos by James Carey Lauder, Rusty Barton, Danny Truong and Images on Ice/Hockey Hall of Fame

At 37, Jocelyne Larocque remains one of the most trusted and enduring figures in Canadian women's hockey - a steady, elite defender still earning her place on the game's biggest stage. In 2025-26, Larocque won a silver medal at her fourth Olympic Games, in Milano/Cortina, Italy - a feat that places her in rare company in Canadian hockey history. Already the most internationally decorated Indigenous athlete the country has ever produced, the steady, ultra-reliable defender from Ste. Anne, Man., has now won Olympic gold in 2014, silver in 2018, gold again in 2022 and now a second silver medal.

A trailblazer as the first Indigenous woman to represent Canada in Olympic hockey, Larocque has built a career defined not by flash, but by reliability, composure and unmatched consistency in critical moments. From NCAA stardom to international dominance and now as a cornerstone of the Ottawa Charge in the PWHL – who continues to garner 25-30 minutes of icetime a night – she is still driven and still playing at the top of her game.

Game On Magazine is proud to announce that for the sixth time in 15 seasons, Jocelyne Larocque has been named Manitoba's Female Player of the Year.

FEMALE PLAYER







OF THE YEAR



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COLE KOEPKE

45

FORWARD // SHOOTS LEFT // 6'1" // 207 POUNDS

BORN MAY 17, 1998 // TWO HARBORS, MN.

2025-26 TEAM: WINNIPEG JETS

2025-26 SEASON STATS
WINNIPEG JETS

66
GAMES

8
GOALS

17
POINTS

For a team that endured its share of ups and downs, Cole Koepke quietly carved out a blue collar role as the season wore on.

Arriving in Winnipeg with limited familiarity and adjusting to a new country, Koepke's early months were defined by patience. In and out of the lineup as a healthy scratch, the 27-year-old forward stayed ready, gradually earning more opportunities as the schedule progressed. By season's end, his impact was far more noticeable, particularly in the second half, where his pace and physicality became reliable elements in the Jets' bottom six.

Koepke finished the campaign with modest numbers, while ranking among the team's leaders in hits – a reflection of his physical, north-south style. His value extended beyond the scoresheet, becoming a trusted option on the penalty kill and delivering consistent, high-energy shifts at five-on-five.

That dependability did not go unnoticed. Koepke was rewarded with a two-year contract extension worth $2.9 million following the season, ensuring he remains in Winnipeg for the foreseeable future, rather than testing the unrestricted free agent market.



Photos by James Carey Lauder and Rusty Barton

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KATE MANNESS

24

DEFENDER // SHOOTS RIGHT // 5'5"

BORN SEPTEMBER 26, 2007 // LASALLE, MANITOBA

2025-26 TEAM: CLARKSON UNIVERSITY (NCAA D-1)

2025-26 SEASON STATS

CLARKSON UNIVERSITY (NCAA D-1)

35
GAMES

6
GOALS

32
POINTS

While her sister Sara spent the 2025-26 NCAA D-1 hockey season among the leading scorers in the country, Kate was doing the same thing among defenders. This former member of Team Manitoba U18 and a star at Balmoral Hall spent the 2023-24 and 2024-25 seasons with the Burlington Barracudas of the OWHL U22 AA league. She was also a member of U18 Team Canada that won the gold medal at the 2024-25 IIHF U18 women's World Championship, before entering Clarkson University in Potsdam, NY this past fall. In her freshman year, she helped Clarkson finish fifth in the ECAC and No. 15 in the nation. She was tied for first in scoring among defenders in the ECAC and was fourth in the entire country in assists. While her sister Sara finished first in freshman scoring in the NCAA this past season, Kate finished second, tied for first among defenders. At 18, she is already one of the best defenders in NCAA women's hockey.

Photos courtesy of the NCAA



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LUCIEN TAIT-REAUME

12

FORWARD // SHOOTS RIGHT // 5'11"

BORN SEPTEMBER 28, 2004 // NORWAY HOUSE, MANITOBA

2025-26 TEAM: NORWAY HOUSE NORTH STARS (KJHL)

2025-26 SEASON STATS

NORWAY HOUSE NORTH STARS (KJHL)

32 GAMES

42 GOALS

83 POINTS

The 2025-26 Keystone Junior Hockey League scoring champion, Tait-Reaume has had a brilliant season and was even named an all-star game captain. He just finished his fifth full campaign in the KJHL and finished with 165 goals and 325 points in just 144 games. “He’s our captain, he’s 21 now and this was his last year in junior,” said North Stars head coach Skylar Tait-Reaume, Lucien’s older brother. “I'm just really proud of the young man because he's working full-time as a carpenter. He's also raising his baby and his family. He's balancing his life. He’s also a great guy in the room. All the boys look up to him. He sets the example, and he also sets the tone for the other guys.”



Photos by Ava Cameron

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KJHL

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CONNER ROULETTE

14

FORWARD // SHOOTS LEFT // 6'0"

BORN MAY 13, 2003 // WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

2026-27 TEAM: MICHIGAN TECH HUSKIES (NCAA D-1)

2025-26 SEASON STATS

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN (U SPORTS)

28 GAMES

15 GOALS

35 POINTS

Winnipeg's Conner Roulette, a two-time member of Indigenous Team Manitoba – in 2018 and 2019 – and a gold medal winner in 2018, has committed to play the 2026-27 hockey season with the NCAA D-1's Michigan Tech University Huskies. After a strong rookie pro season with the Tulsa Oilers in 2024-25, the former Spokane Chiefs star exploded onto the U SPORTS scene with the University of Saskatchewan Huskies last year, capturing the Clare Drake Trophy as the nation's top rookie. The 6-foot forward posted 35 points in 2025-26 and elevated his game in the playoffs, leading all scorers while helping Saskatchewan to a conference title. A former Dallas Stars draft pick, Roulette continues to build on a standout junior career that included a 108-point WHL season. The 22-year-old gold medallist at the 2021 IIHF World U18 championship, is a member of Misipawistik Cree Nation.



Photos courtesy of the University of Saskatchewan

2026 MANITOBA INDIGENOUS SUMMER GAMES

PHASE 1: NORWAY HOUSE CREE NATION JULY 8 - 12, 2026

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Manitoba



DANA GOERTZEN

2

FORWARD // SHOOTS RIGHT // 5'6"

BORN JANUARY 18, 2004 // WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

2026-27 TEAM: UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA BISONS (U SPORTS)

2025-26 SEASON STATS

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA BISONS (U SPORTS)

28
GAMES

6
GOALS

14
POINTS

A former captain of the Blazers, Dana played on the 2019 team that won BH's only Junior Women's Hockey League championship. Now the captain of the University of Manitoba Bisons, she just led her team all the way to the 2025-26 U SPORTS National Women's Hockey Championship in Elmira, Ont. (hosted by the University of Guelph). "After our first week of training camp, I said to our group, 'You know, I have this feeling we're going to Nationals this year. I think we can do it,'" she recalled. "And then we went on an 11-game losing streak. "Then we went into the second half of the season and I think we only lost one game in regulation. Then we beat Alberta in the first round of the playoffs and then beat MRU (Mount Royal University of Calgary) to reach the Nationals. It was a very rewarding year."



Photos courtesy of Dave Mahussier/U of M and Skylar Bear/MASRC

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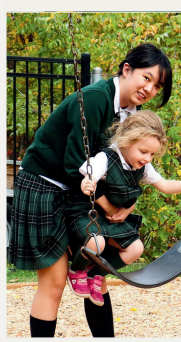

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CARSON CARELS

24

DEFENDER // SHOOTS LEFT // 6'2"

BORN JUNE 23, 2008 // CYPRESS RIVER, MANITOBA

2025-26 TEAM: PRINCE GEORGE COUGARS (WHL)

2025-26 SEASON STATS

PRINCE GEORGE COUGARS (WHL)

58
GAMES

20
GOALS

73
POINTS

From the 2021-22 season until the 2023-24 season, when he joined the Western Hockey League's Prince George Cougars after his prep school season ended, Carels, 17, was the star of the Pilot Mound Buffaloes' U15 Prep and U17 Prep teams. This past season he wore the A for the Cougars and helped the team reach the WHL playoffs. Carels has also represented Canada on the international stage at the 2024 WHC U17 championships (Canada Red) where he won the silver medal, the 2025 World U18 championship where he won gold and the 2026 World U20 championship where he won bronze. At the end of March, Carels was named to the WHL's Western Division First All-Star team. Eligible for the 2026 NHL Draft, Carels is ranked third among North American skaters in NHL Central Scouting's midterm rankings. In November, he was selected to represent Team CHL in the CHL USA Prospects Challenge. In February, Carels was named captain of Team West for the 2026 WHL Prospects Game. Originally selected by the Cougars in the first round (16th overall) of the 2023 WHL Draft, Carels has played 125 WHL games and has 26 goals and 111 points.



Photos courtesy of the Western Hockey League

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MANNY MINUK

FIRST YEAR

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

2025-26 SEASON STATS

HEAD COACH

25-19-1
RECORD

31
POINT IMPROVEMENT

11
YEARS SINCE LAST SEMIFINAL APPEARANCE

Manny Minuk's impact behind the bench this season was undeniable, earning MMJHL Coach of the Year honours after engineering one of the league's most impressive turnarounds. Taking over a River East Royal Knights team that finished ninth in 2024-25 with just 18 points, Minuk guided the club to 51 points and a .567 winning percentage this season, vaulting the Knights into sixth place and back into the playoffs.

The progress didn't stop there. River East advanced to the semifinals for the first time since 2015 – a significant step forward for a group that had missed the postseason in eight of the previous 10 campaigns.

Historically, the franchise has seen limited success in this category, with Minuk earning just the sixth Coach of the Year award in team history, and first by someone not named 'Bonni.'

"Manny preached a consistent message from day one of training camp; he set a work ethic that was expected of every player," assistant coach Anthony Jacob said. "It was all the little things he implemented that helped us beat a very talented and experienced Stonewall team."

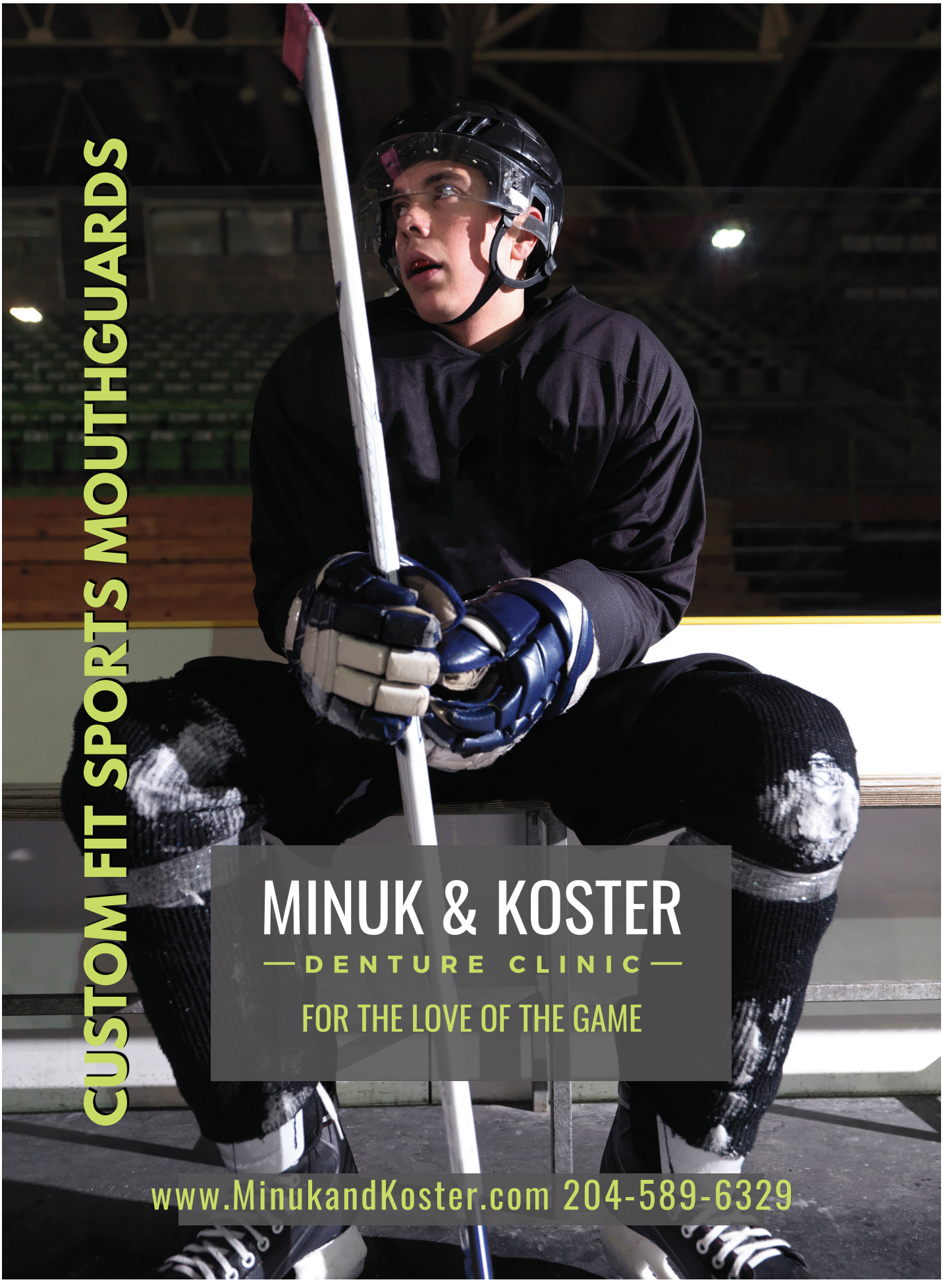
Minuk's ability to instill structure, accountability and belief quickly reshaped the team's identity.



Photos courtesy of Manny Minuk

"IT MEANT A LOT BEING VOTED BY THE MANAGEMENT AND COACHES FROM OTHER TEAMS. THOSE PEOPLE UNDERSTAND HOW MUCH WORK IT TAKES TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN THIS LEAGUE, SO BEING CHOSEN BY YOUR PEERS AND COMPETITORS IS SOMETHING I DON'T TAKE LIGHTLY."

– MANNY MINUK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RYAN BOTTERILL

21

FORWARD // SHOOTS RIGHT // 5'11"

BORN JULY 23, 2003 // PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE, MANITOBA

2026-27 TEAM: UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN (NCAA D-1)

2025-26 SEASON STATS

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN (NCAA D-1)

37 GAMES

10 GOALS

22 POINTS

While Winnipeg's Jayden Perron had a tremendous year at the University of Michigan, it was Ryan Botterill, the versatile forward from Portage la Prairie who scored the eventual winning goal against the University of North Dakota in the semifinal of this year's Frozen Four and played in the NCAA D-1's national championship game. Botterill has been a star everywhere he's played. He scored 45 goals in 48 games for the U18 AAA Central Plains Capitals in 2019-20, played three seasons with the MJHL's Portage Terriers and tallied 45 goals in 57 games in 2022-23. He played a year with the USHL's Youngstown Phantoms in 2023-24 where he scored 29 goals and 55 points in 57 games and he just finished his second year at Wisconsin, notching 22 points in 37 games.



Photos courtesy of the NCAA

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THORACIC SPINE MOBILITY AND SHOT POWER

When you think about shot power, players typically tend to focus on the obvious – stronger legs, a more explosive core, better technique, but one of the most overlooked contributors to a harder, better shot, is thoracic spine mobility. If you think of the spine as a spring, the more controlled rotation you can access the more power you can unleash into your shot.

The thoracic spine, the mid and upper back, is responsible for rotation – so, in addition to shot power, a healthy spine is critical for efficient movement and injury prevention. When mobility is limited, the body will compensate and find movement elsewhere. We "sell out" and move from the parts of the body not designed to carry the load, increasing the risk of injury, pain and unnecessary wear and tear.

Hockey players are especially prone to stiffness in the thoracic spine. Given their long hours in a flexed skating posture, time in the gym, travel schedules and off-ice habits that regularly include gaming and tablets, the upper back tends to become rounded and restricted. So, what can we do?

By incorporating even one or two intentional movements you can experience a measurable difference in rotation and overall ease of stiffness in the back and shoulders. There are so many fantastic movements to choose from, and I encourage you to work with a yoga practitioner, trainer or physical therapist to try out several. For the purposes of this article, I have selected four of my favorites:

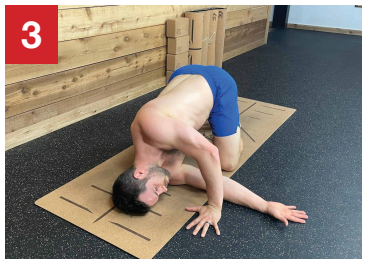
1. Twisted Table: come to rest on all fours ("table top") – thread the left hand behind the right wrist – if the body allows you can lower the back of the entire left arm down to the ground and rest the left temple against the earth. Hold for 3-5 breaths.
2. Open the Book – laying on the side, bend the knees to 90° (so they line up in front of your hips), extend the arms in front of you so wrists are in line with shoulders, palms facing each other. On your inhale, lift the top arm and let it "rainbow" across the body, as if you were opening a book, on your exhale "close the book" so hands rest together again. Repeat several times, or hold in the "open" position for 3-5 breaths.
3. Half Kneeling Thoracic Wall Rotations – come to a low lunge position with your left knee in front of you and your right hip against a wall, reach the arms in front of you – wrists in line with shoulders – open your outer arm to the side taking it as wide as it will go, eventually it may line up against the wall behind you. Repeat the movement several times, or hold for 3-5 breaths.
4. Extended Puppy – from table top, walk your hands ahead of your shoulders, let your chest melt to the ground, keeping your hips stacked over your knees. Gently firm your biceps towards your ears as you inhale. This movement can be performed as pictured here, or from standing, hinged at the hips, with the hands against a wall. Hold for 3-5 breaths.

Repeat each movement on both sides where applicable.

Consistency matters more than duration, so even just a few minutes added to a warmup or cooldown will lead to a noticeable improvement in movement. At competitive levels everyone is good, so it's all about gaining an edge and this work will help you get there.









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IT'S JUST AN ANKLE SPRAIN: WHY IS IT TAKING SO LONG TO HEAL?

The majority of us have either sprained an ankle or know someone who has.

The most common mechanism for an ankle sprain is an inversion sprain by which your foot turns inwards and you roll over on the outside of your foot.

Sprains are classified as either Grade I, Grade II or a Grade III sprain: Grade II being the most common. This is where anatomy, or the extent of disruption of our anatomy, becomes important with respect to grading the injury and providing a predictable window of time to return to hockey or whatever activity you enjoy.

In lateral ankle sprains, three ligaments can be disrupted: the anterior talofibular ligament (ATFL), calcaneofibular ligament (CFL) and the posterior talofibular ligament (PTFL); see Figure 1. Many ankle sprains involve the ATFL and the CFL. If there is a slight stretch of the ligament(s), this is classified as a Grade 1, partial tearing of the ligaments is a Grade 2, and complete rupture of the ligaments is considered Grade 3.

Depending on the severity of damage, recovery can take anywhere from a few days to weeks. However, in hockey, lateral ankle sprains are relatively uncommon compared to other sports due to the rigid skate boot that prevents the ankle from rolling over.

So, why then are hockey players sidelined for several weeks with an ankle sprain?

First of all, in hockey, it's usually not a lateral ankle sprain, but rather a high ankle sprain. Secondly, the distinction between a lateral ankle sprain and high ankle sprain comes down to anatomy.

A high ankle sprain is also known as a syndesmotic injury and the injured ligaments (and the function of these ligaments) are not the same as a lateral ankle sprain. The two ligaments that can be disrupted in a high ankle sprain are the anterior inferior tibiofibular ligament (AITFL) and the posterior inferior tibiofibular ligament (PITFL).

The mechanism of injury is external rotation of the foot, or in other words when the toes point outward. Think of a player catching the toe of his/her skate in the ice while being hit. The toe stays where it is and the foot rotates outwards. The purpose of the AITFL and PITFL are to prevent your tibia and fibula (two lower leg bones) from spreading apart. When the foot rotates outwards at a high velocity, the tibia and fibula are essentially pried apart and the AITFL and PITFL are torn or partially torn.

High ankle sprains are less common than lateral ankle sprains in most sports, but in hockey, high ankle sprains make up 36-74 per cent of ankle injuries.[1,2] Over a 5-year period in the NHL, 105 players sustained this injury and took an average of 41 days to return to play.[2]

Rehabilitation and long recovery periods can be frustrating for both the player and clinician. So be patient and ensure that you are following the recommended rehabilitation and reconditioning programs provided to you by your healthcare professional.

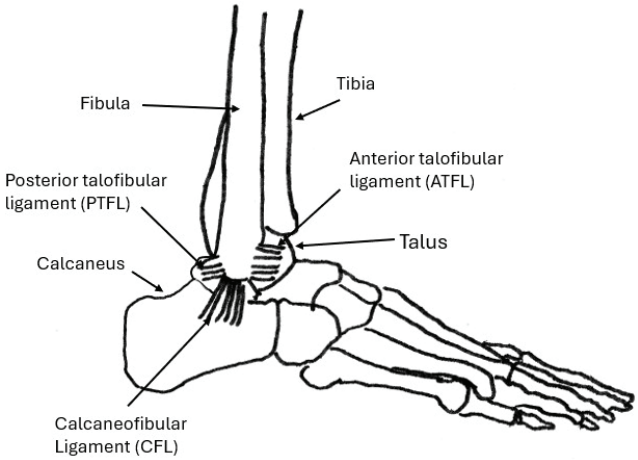

FIGURE 1. LIGAMENTS OF THE ANKLE THAT MAY BE AFFECTED WITH A LATERAL ANKLE SPRAIN; ANTERIOR TALOFIBULAR LIGAMENT, CALCANEOFIBULAR LIGAMENT AND POSTERIOR TALOFIBULAR LIGAMENT.

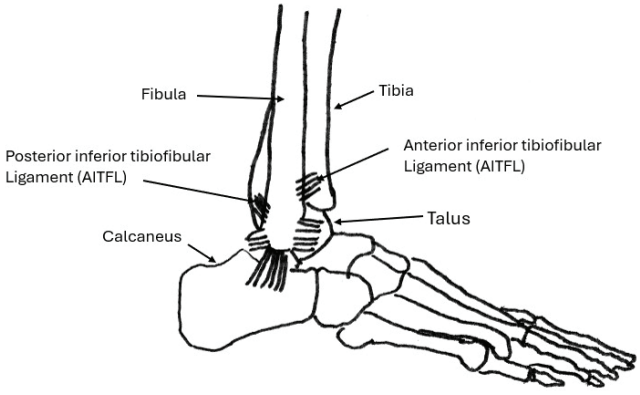

FIGURE 2. THE ANTERIOR INFERIOR TIBIOFIBULAR LIGAMENT AND POSTERIOR INFERIOR TIBIOFIBULAR LIGAMENT CAN BE DAMAGED WITH EXTERNAL ROTATION OF THE FOOT, RESULTING IN A HIGH ANKLE SPRAIN.

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FROM PRESIDENTS TO PROBLEMS

BY CARTER BROOKS
Photos by Danny Truong and James Carey Lauder

A year ago, the Winnipeg Jets were the standard. They defended with guts, controlled games with structure and finished atop the NHL standings. They won the league's Presidents' Trophy as the club with the very best record following the regular season. They entered the playoffs with legitimate Stanley Cup aspirations but fell short in the second round.

Twelve months later, the tone was entirely different. The room was quieter, the answers much harder to find and the season had come up very well short of the standard set over the past few years in hockey-crazy Winnipeg.

"To take the step back that we did this year just felt very wrong," reigning Hart and Vezina Trophy winner Connor Hellebuyck said following the conclusion of the 2025-26 regular season. "From the Presidents' Trophy to this, it felt like this should have never happened. And it did."

The warning signs were there early, even if the standings didn't reflect them. The Jets opened the year 9-3, but as the season unfolded, the underlying game never quite matched the results, creating a gap that eventually caught up to them.

That gap widened in the middle of the season, when an 11-game losing streak (0-7-4) shifted the trajectory entirely. What had been a strong start turned into a year-long climb that ultimately proved to be too steep.

"You lose 11 games in a row, you put yourself in a tough hole where you probably don't deserve to make the playoffs," captain Adam Lowry said. "We believe in this group, but the consistency just wasn't there."

Even when the Jets stabilized and pushed late in the season, the damage lingered. They spent the rest of the year chasing ground they had already given away, a reality that defined their finish as much as any single stretch.



THE JETS SALUTE THEIR FANS ONE FINAL TIME

If there was a common theme that connected the season from start to finish, it was that of inconsistency. Not a lack of talent or belief, but an inability to sustain good hockey over long stretches and across different situations – very different than what fans had come to enjoy over the past number of seasons in Winnipeg.

"It just wasn't good enough this year," Kyle Connor said. "We had such high expectations, and the biggest issue was inconsistency and how we find that more nights than not."

That inconsistency showed up most clearly in tight games, where the margins were the smallest. A year after consistently finding ways to win one-goal contests, Winnipeg struggled to close them out.

"You look at last season, it seemed like we were winning those tight games," forward Gabe Vilardi said. "This year it felt like we were finding ways to lose them."



HEAD COACH SCOTT ARNIEL

Underneath those results was a deeper issue: a gradual drift away from identity. The Jets' success had been built on structure and commitment to defending, but that foundation slipped as the season wore on.

For Hellebuyck, the change was noticeable in both feel and result. "It was chaos," he said. "We were a little bit loose and caught in the middle far too often, and that leads to screens, tips and broken plays."

For a goaltender who thrives on predictability, those details mattered likely the most. When structure breaks down, the margin for error shrinks, and over the course of a season, those moments begin to stack.

Part of that shift can be traced to the league itself, which continues to evolve toward speed and pace. Teams are getting quicker, systems are adapting and the ability to keep up has become just as important as executing a game plan.

"The league's changing," Connor shared. "Teams are getting a lot quicker, systems are adjusting and you need to stay with that to stay relevant in this game."

The Jets, meanwhile, spent much of the season trying to find that balance within their own group. Early injuries, new personnel and limited practice time created a lack of continuity that made it difficult to settle into a consistent identity.

Again, the key word here being consistency – or lack there of.

That stability only began to emerge later in the year, particularly after the Olympic break. By then, however, the climb back into the playoff race required near perfection. And at one point, it actually seemed possible. Winnipeg managed to crawl back to within one point of

the final wild card spot. But its performance in the final four games of the season (outscored 24-7) did itself in.

And yet, for all the frustration, the belief inside the Jets' room remains intact. Players continue to point to both last season's success and the late push this year as proof of what the group is capable of.

"I think we know what we have in here," Cole Perfetti said. "There's no doubt that we're a playoff team and that this was just a one-off. We're all determined to make sure this doesn't happen again."

That sentiment is echoed by veterans throughout the lineup. There is no sense of panic or fracture, only a recognition that the standard wasn't met and that it has to be reclaimed.

"There's a lot of belief in this group that this team is right there," Winnipeg product Jonathan Toews said. "You get in the door and there's no telling how far you can go, but we just didn't get there this year."

The accountability has been just as consistent. Players have been clear that improvement starts internally, with a collective responsibility to address what went wrong.

"Everyone has to look at themselves and how they could have been better," Norris Trophy caliber defenceman Josh Morrissey said. "That's what happens when you don't make the playoffs - you go find solutions."

For fellow Calgary product Lowry, that reflection includes his role as captain, particularly in navigating adversity. After two relatively smooth seasons, this year presented challenges that required a different approach.

"Sometimes it's finding the right words at the right time, sometimes it's leading with your actions," Lowry said. "There's things I learned this year that will make us stronger moving forward."

Still, belief and accountability alone won't be enough to change the outcome. The questions facing the Jets are real, and they extend beyond a single stretch or a single season.

Hellebuyck, candid as ever, didn't shy away from that reality. "Complacency is not going to get us moving forward," he said. "Something has got to happen, because putting that same product on the ice didn't work for a reason."

Whether that change comes through internal growth, roster adjustments or a renewed commitment to identity remains to be seen. What is clear is that the expectations inside the room have not shifted.

For veterans like Toews, the season also brought a different kind of perspective. After returning from a two-year absence, he found himself reflecting not just on performance, but on how quickly opportunities can pass.

"You never know when your next game is going to be your last," he said, emotionally. "I'm grateful for the chance to be here, even if it didn't end the way we wanted."

The offseason now becomes a pivot point, a chance to reset and recalibrate. It offers time to address the gaps that emerged and to ensure the past season becomes an outlier, rather than the start of a new trend. Winnipeg will need some secondary scoring. Scheifele, Connor, Vilardi and Morrissey simply cannot do it all. They will need help next year, and that's on management to make it happen.

From Presidents' Trophy to questions, the drop was steep. What comes next will determine whether it was a stumble, or something long lasting.

"There's no doubt we're a better team than we showed this year," Lowry concluded. "It's on us to make sure we prove that when we come back."



CONNOR HELLEBUYCK FISHING ANOTHER PUCK OUT OF THE BLUE ICE



DESPITE POPULAR BELIEF, CAPTAIN ADAM LOWRY SIMPLY CANNOT DO IT ALL HIMSELF

BITTER SWEET

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by Scott Stroh, Danny Truong and James Carey Lauder

Mark Scheifele always answers the call. For many NHL players, when the hour is dark, avoiding the media seems to be a calling. Don't say anything. Don't even be seen.

But the night in Las Vegas when the Winnipeg Jets were mathematically eliminated from the Stanley Cup playoffs, Scheifele stood up in front of the camera and answered every question thrown his way.

Sadly, it was a night in which he should have been allowed to celebrate. In a 6-2 loss to Vegas, the Jets leading scorer notched a goal and dished out an assist to claim his 100th and 101st points of the season, becoming the highest-scoring player in the history of the Atlanta Thrashers/Winnipeg Jets. He became the first player since Dale Hawerchuk to tally 100 points and wear a Jets uniform.

Scheifele, who was snubbed by Hockey Canada's Olympic selection committee for reasons that no one with a functioning brain stem understood or could justify, finished the 2025-26 season with 36 goals and 103 points – good enough for fifth in the NHL scoring race. There is no question that his presence in Team Canada's lineup for the Olympic gold medal game would have been the difference maker. Especially considering Canada's 2-1 overtime loss to the United States.

Late in the season, he reached the 900-point plateau. In his 15th season in Jets Blue, he officially became the highest-scoring player in Jets 2.0 history and along the way, earned the Jets Three-Star Award for 2025-26. He also played in all 82 games and when the season ended, he accepted an invitation to play for Canada at the 2026 IIHF World Championship tournament in Switzerland.

"I'm really excited for it," Scheifele said. "Any chance you have the opportunity to compete for your country, you've got to take it with honour, and I'm just excited to play more hockey.

"I love this game, I love playing, I love competing, and I want to go over there and win a gold medal and do that with some good friends, so I'm really excited for that opportunity."

It was truly a paradoxical year for Scheifele – absolute brilliance often smothered by absolute disappointment.

To his credit, however, when it was all but over, when the heavy-heartedness of a spring without playoff hockey became a reality, Scheifele stood up and faced the music. Here is that interview: Five questions for Mark Scheifele...


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GO: Mark, you probably knew in your gut after Saturday night's 7-1 loss to the Flyers that maybe there wasn't a chance to make the playoffs, but I'm sure this mathematical finality was hard to take.
MS: Yeah, it sucks. You know, we were pushing until the end and it's a tough reality. That's just the game of hockey.

GO: You still have to be proud of your season. The first Jets 2.0 player to reach 100 points. It's a remarkable performance.
MS: I'm a very blessed man. I've just got to thank God for it all. I'm proud of myself and I know there's still more, so that's exciting.

GO: After the disappointment of not going to the Olympics, I'm sure this was a nice way for you to finish the season and to show people that you're an elite player in this league.
MS: Yeah, for sure. I know that about myself. There's a reason for everything and you just have to trust in the plan and keep doing what you do.

GO: What do you guys do for the last two games of the year to get that competitive spirit up again?
MS: Yeah, it is difficult, but we have some young guys coming in the lineup and they're playing the early games of their careers, so it's time for those guys to show their stuff. We're going to have spots open next year and it's time for young guys to show what they have. We have two games left, and we have to play them and we have to give it our all. That's going to be my mentality down the stretch.



GO: You mentioned you play with some very good players: Kyle Connor, Gabriel Vilardi, Alex Iafallo, Josh Morrissey and others. Do you want to give them a little shout out?
MS: Yeah, they're all amazing. I'm very, very lucky to play with all of them. Josh Morrissey is a guy who does so much for this team and a lot of it goes unrecognized. He's one of the best defencemen in the league. KC (Connor) is one of the best players in this league, too. That's my boy and I'm very, very lucky to have him on my wing. Gaber (Vilardi) is just getting better each and every year. And Al, who obviously wasn't here. We missed him out there. He sent me a nice text this morning. I'm very, very lucky and very blessed to play with the guys I play with.

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OWEN WITH THE U13 THRASHERS

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A FAMILY GAME

BY SCOTT TAYLOR

Photos courtesy of Darryl Gershman and the Mathison family

HOW OWEN MATHISON'S RISE IN HOCKEY IS POWERED BY CULTURE, COMMITMENT AND A SUPPORT SYSTEM THAT NEVER MISSES A SHIFT

The next step in Owen Mathison's hockey journey didn't come with a spotlight or a ceremony—just an opportunity, a quiet moment, and a realization.

After years of early mornings, backyard rinks and steady progression through Manitoba's minor hockey system, Mathison will take his next step: playing in the Canadian Sport School Hockey League (CSSHL), one of the country's premier development circuits, for Winnipeg's RINK Hockey Academy.

For a young player still years away from junior hockey, it was a meaningful milestone. Not an ending—but a clear beginning.

"It's pretty exciting," said Owen, who attended the R1 Rink hockey program which prepared him for the next level at RHA. "When I first got the contract from the RINK, I was like, 'Wow, this is pretty cool.'"

And just like that, the path ahead came into sharper focus.



OWEN AND HIS DAD JEREMY

FIRST STRIDES

Like so many Canadian hockey stories, Owen's began simply—with skates that were a little too big and a balance that wasn't quite there yet.

His first experience on the ice came as a toddler, gripping his parents' hands at an outdoor rink near his uncle's home. There were stumbles. There was a training bar that didn't last long. But there was also something else—something harder to define, but easy to recognize.

A spark.

By age three, Owen was in learn-to-skate programs at St. Andrews Community Centre. It wasn't hockey yet—not really. It was just movement, coordination, learning how to glide. But from those early lessons, the path began to take shape.



OWEN COMPETING AT THE GOLD STANDARD TOURNAMENT

"That's basically what sparked my hockey career," Owen said.

From there, the progression followed a familiar Canadian rhythm: Timbits hockey, then minor hockey with the Selkirk Fishermen, steadily climbing through the ranks from Timbits to U11 A1, and then into AA competition.

But somewhere along the way, the story shifted. Owen wasn't just participating anymore—he was emerging.

BUILDING A PLAYER

By the time he reached U13 with the Thrashers, Owen had begun to distinguish himself—not through flash alone, but through consistency, awareness and a relentless work ethic.

He is, after all, the kind of player that coaches trust. The kind, who is committed to mastering his skills, who competes in all situations, who looks for ways to improve rather than waiting for them to appear.

That approach extends beyond the rink.

Owen maintains a strong academic standing, applying the same discipline in the classroom as he does on the ice. It's a balance that's becoming increasingly important at higher levels of hockey—and one he's already learned to manage.

On the ice, he continues to develop into a well-rounded player known for his drive, strength, dedication and ability to contribute in all areas of the game and on-ice presence as a defenceman. Whether it's positioning, puck support, or simply making the right play at the right time, Owen's growth has been steady—and intentional.

And that growth hasn't gone unnoticed.

After completing his U13 AA season, Owen earned an opportunity that represents a significant step forward: a spot with RHA's U15 program, competing in the CSSHL.

THE NEXT LEVEL

For young players in Manitoba, Rink Hockey Academy represents more than just a team. It's a pathway.

At RHA, Owen will enter a world of structured development—daily on-ice sessions, off-ice training, and academics carefully integrated into a demanding schedule. It's designed to prepare athletes for the next stages of hockey, whether that's major junior, NCAA opportunities, or beyond.

For Owen, the future is still unfolding.

"I want to play university hockey so maybe the WHL and then university," he said. "We'll see what happens."

It's a measured answer, grounded and realistic. But the ambition is there. And so is the foundation.



FAMILY FOUNDATION

Owen's hockey journey has been shaped as much by the people around him as by the time he's spent on the ice.

His father, Jeremy, a successful Winnipeg businessman who grew up playing the game himself, introduced both Owen and his younger brother Noah to hockey early in their lives. His philosophy was simple: if they could skate, they could play.

That early introduction to the game built both comfort and confidence—but it was the family's collective commitment that allowed Owen to keep progressing.

Grace, meanwhile, came to the sport from a very different starting point.

"I knew nothing about hockey or skating," she admitted.

But that didn't last long.

What she lacked in experience, she made up for in commitment. She immersed herself in the game—learning it from the stands, from conversations, from simply being there every step of the way.

She became the organizer, the driver, the constant.

"A fan and an Uber," she joked. "And snacks and snacks and snacks."

Over time, she evolved into something every young athlete needs: a steady presence who never wavers.

The Mathison family's story also reflects something broader—something happening across Winnipeg and throughout Canadian hockey. It's about shared heritage.

Grace's parents immigrated to Canada in the 1970s from the Philippines, and while hockey wasn't central to their upbringing, it gradually became part of the family through relatives who embraced the sport and fell in love with the Winnipeg Jets.

Jeremy's family history carries European roots, with connections to France and Switzerland—another reminder of how diverse backgrounds are coming together to shape today's game.

Across Manitoba, more families from Filipino, South Asian and East Asian communities are discovering hockey—not just as spectators, but as participants. It's becoming a shared experience across cultures, a bridge between generations.

Grace sees it happening in real time.

"It's actually quite cute," she says.

But she also knows it's more than that. It's meaningful.

LIFE IN MOTION

If hockey is a lifestyle, the Mathisons are living it at full speed.

Practices. Games. Travel. Tournaments.

Spring hockey alone has Owen competing with multiple programs, including the Everest Hockey Group and Battery Hockey Academy, where he'll skate in the prestigious Chowder Cup. He's also appeared at elite showcases like the Prospects by Sports Illustrated All-Star Challenge, earning recognition among top performers.

He'll also attend the Draft Day Western Prospects event, where elite athletes compete for a chance to represent Manitoba. Through it all, he maintains a strong academic performance.

Meanwhile, younger brother Noah is building his own path—playing with the Selkirk Fishermen and skating spring hockey with the JR Monarchs.

It's a demanding schedule, but it's handled together.

"Pretty much," Jeremy said when asked if they're a hockey family through and through. "One weekend Grace was with Noah in Winnipeg while I was in Russell with Owen. We get it done."

MORE THAN HOCKEY

What sets Owen apart isn't just his development as a player—it's his ability to balance it all.

Hockey. School. Family.

And even acting.

Owen has appeared in some TV commercials—including spots aired during Winnipeg Jets broadcasts—and in motion pictures filmed in Manitoba.

"I do both, hockey and acting," he says. "Whenever I have time, I try and find roles."

It's an unusual combination, but it speaks to his confidence and versatility.

Still, hockey remains the focus. The transition to RHA will bring new challenges: faster pace, stronger competition, higher expectations. But it also brings tremendous opportunity. An opportunity to grow. To test himself. To take the next step.

And as Owen moves forward, the support system behind him remains constant. Because in the end, this isn't just about one player's rise. It's about a family that grew into the game together.

A journey that began with a young man's first strides on the ice, and a journey that continues, one shift at a time.



THE MASESAR BROTHERS WITH ALLAN CHAN AND THE NATIONAL CHAMPION WINNIPEG EMPERORS

FULL CIRCLE ON THE ICE

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos courtesy of Shawn Masesar and the Masesar Family

HOW SHAWN MASESAR IS OPENING HOCKEY'S DOORS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

On winter evenings in Winnipeg's West End, a familiar sound echoes through neighbourhood rinks - the scrape of skates and the laughter of kids discovering hockey for the first time.

Standing at the boards, offering encouragement and instruction, is Shawn Masesar, a Filipino-Canadian hockey coach continuing a journey that began decades earlier with a television set in a California hotel room and a Filipino immigrant watching hockey for the very first time.

Now a teacher, coach and community builder, Masesar has become one of the driving forces behind programs that introduce new Canadians and inner-city kids to the sport - ensuring the game that welcomed his family continues to grow in Winnipeg's diverse new communities.

However, Masesar's hockey roots actually begin thousands of kilometres away from Manitoba.

His father, Othello, immigrated to Canada from the Philippines in the 1970s. On the way, during a stopover in California, he turned on the television in his hotel room and stumbled across an NHL game - Philadelphia against Pittsburgh.

"He didn't fully understand the rules," Shawn said. "But he was captivated. The speed, the hitting, the action. He said he didn't really know what was going on, but he loved watching it."

When Othello eventually settled in Winnipeg and started a family with his wife Angelina, he remembered that first encounter with hockey. And with long prairie winters ahead, he figured the sport might be a good way for his children to stay active.

Soon, hockey became part of the family routine.

Shawn grew up alongside three siblings - older brothers Jomar (JJ) and Ken, and older sister Sheena - in a household where the rink quickly became a second home.

His mother, who had little familiarity with hockey at first, soon embraced it.

"She loved the community around it," Masesar said. "The parents talking to each other, the kids playing together. It was such a welcoming environment.

"We weren't a rich family, but our parents sacrificed a lot of time, energy, and money to put us in the things we loved to do. Sometimes our Dad would work a 12-hour day and still drive us to our hockey that evening before having a bite to eat. Those are the sacrifices that I remember and that I'm forever grateful for."

FOLLOWING IN HIS BROTHERS' SKATES

Like many youngest siblings, Shawn grew up chasing the example set by his older brothers. His earliest skating memories date back to Winnipeg's outdoor rinks - particularly at the Sargent Park Speedskating Oval, now known as Cindy Klassen Recreation Complex.

"I remember my brothers basically sling-shotting me around the ice when I was learning to skate," he said with a laugh. "By the time I was old enough to play organized hockey, I pretty much followed the same path as my brothers through the minor hockey system."



THE MASESAR BROTHERS WIN THEIR SECOND LUNAR NEW YEAR'S TOURNAMENT IN 2024 AT HOCKEY FOR ALL CENTRE. IT'S A RED DRAGON JERSEY FOR THE YEAR OF THE DRAGON.

> "JUST SEEING THESE KIDS SMILE WHEN THEY LACE UP FOR THE FIRST TIME — THAT'S THE JOY OF IT."

He began in house league at Isaac Brock Community Centre before moving into the Orioles program and later playing A1 hockey with the Tyndall Park Thunder. Eventually, he reached the AA level with the Northwest Stars.

"For my siblings and I, the work ethic that we developed from our extra-curricular activities set us apart from the others in our community," he said. "Whether it was on the ice, court, field, or at the piano - the effort to try our best in everything that we did, made us stand out."

To his credit, Masesar was also an accomplished soccer player, eventually earning a spot on Manitoba's provincial team. Basketball and volleyball also became important parts of his athletic life.

Eventually, however, like many young athletes, the realities of life - and finances - forced choices. With his brothers playing competitive hockey, the COSTS of the sport became difficult for the family to manage, and organized hockey eventually took a back seat to school sports.

But the connection to the game never disappeared.

RE-CONNECTING WITH THE GAME

After high school, hockey found its way back into Masesar's life.

His older brothers continued playing senior men's hockey, eventually connecting with Winnipeg's Asian hockey community - including longtime organizer Allan Chan.

That connection led to weekly skates at the Winter Club and a place with the Emperors, a competitive Asian-Canadian team that has represented Winnipeg at major tournaments across North America.

Shawn joined the group more than a decade ago and quickly became part of this tight-knit hockey family.



LEFT TO RIGHT, SHAWN, KEN AND JOMAR MASESAR

"It's such a great group of guys and when I joined, I was one of the youngest, so they're all like my older brothers," he said. "You get that sense of belonging. It's not just hockey - it's community."

The Emperors have enjoyed plenty of success, winning multiple tournament championships, but for Masesar, the team represents Asian players in a sport where visible diversity is still growing.

"A lot of us are Filipino, Chinese, Japanese - different backgrounds," he said. "It's great to showcase that talent and represent our communities."

Still, the most important turning point in his hockey journey turned out to be coaching. Something that came unexpectedly.

A COACH IS BORN

Masesar's wife, Jessica, was teaching at Sir William Osler School in River Heights. The school had a skating and hockey program for students, and one day she asked her husband to help.



THE MASESAR FAMILY FROM LEFT, SHEENA, JOMAR, KEN AND SHAWN

"I said, sure. I coached junior high and high school volleyball and basketball for several years at Sargent Park School and DMCI before I ever coached hockey," he said. "Those prior experiences helped me in this new role."

What he found at his wife's school changed everything.

"Behind the school was a rink where students would gather after classes, bringing their equipment and spending hours skating," he explained. "This school and community had built a system that gave kids access to the ice - many for the first time. I was just amazed."

The experience opened his eyes to the power of grassroots hockey.

"Here I was, this Filipino guy from the West End coaching hockey," Shawn said with a laugh. "These were River Heights kids and yet they were all so respectful and so willing to listen. That was my first real exposure to coaching hockey, and it stuck with me."

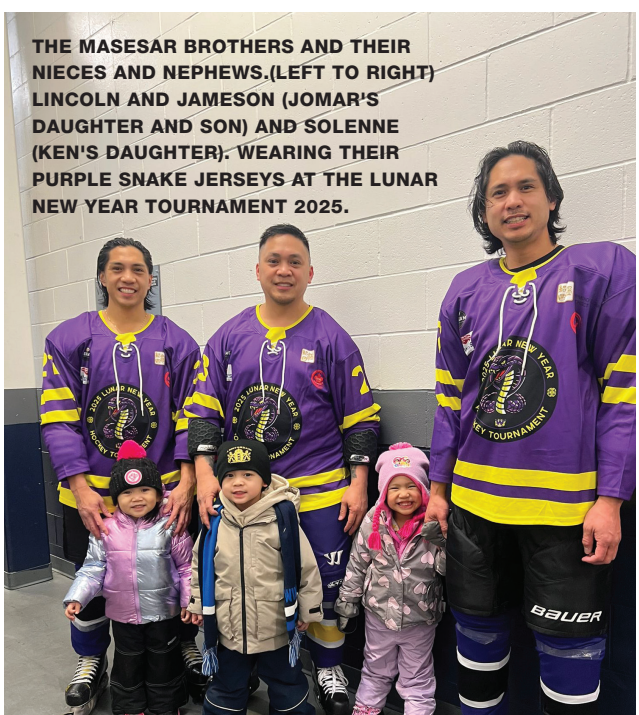
Soon afterward, Masesar began taking Hockey Canada coaching courses and before long, new opportunities came knocking.

FIRST SHIFT AND OUR GAME

Today, Masesar is deeply involved in one of Winnipeg's most important grassroots hockey initiatives.

Working alongside community leaders such as Allan Chan, Ganni Maan and others in the Our Game Hockey program, he also helps coach in the hockey for all centre's First Shift program. He, Chan and Maan are directors in the Our Game program.

The program is designed to introduce hockey to kids who might otherwise never have the chance to play - particularly newcomers to Canada and families from lower-income communities.



THE MASESAR BROTHERS AND THEIR NIECES AND NEPHEWS.(LEFT TO RIGHT) LINCOLN AND JAMESON (JOMAR'S DAUGHTER AND SON) AND SOLENNE (KEN'S DAUGHTER). WEARING THEIR PURPLE SNAKE JERSEYS AT THE LUNAR NEW YEAR TOURNAMENT 2025.

"OG Hockey has removed that financial barrier that has prevented families from trying out hockey," said Masesar. "It has given them the opportunity to experience it in a fun, encouraging, and inclusive environment."

Most of the children come from immigrant families, much like his own. And the excitement is contagious.

"Parents tell us their kids go to school for show and tell, carrying their hockey gear and telling everyone, 'I'm playing hockey now,'" he said. "They were so proud to be part of the community and the culture. That's what it's all about."

The program has exploded.

Through outreach efforts with Winnipeg schools - especially those serving newcomer communities - Masesar and his colleagues have built a waiting list that already stretches into the hundreds.

"It's proof," he said. "That the appetite for hockey is growing far beyond traditional pathways."

Away from the rink, Masesar works where his journey once began. He now teaches physical education to Grades 9 through 12 at the school he once attended as a student: Daniel McIntyre Collegiate Institute.

For him, the classroom and the rink are connected.

"At DMCI we have academies for basketball, volleyball, and fitness training," Shawn explained. "My five-year plan is to develop and offer a skating academy course and to utilize neighbouring facilities in the West End such as Sargent Park Arena, Cindy Klassen Recreation Complex and various outdoor rinks, in order to facilitate learning."

The idea would introduce students to multiple forms of skating - including hockey and roller sports - and eventually offer the program as a course for credit.

For Shawn Masesar, the journey from a West End kid chasing his brothers around the rink to a coach shaping the next generation feels almost surreal.

But when he reflects on how it all began - with a Filipino immigrant watching hockey on television decades ago - the story suddenly makes sense.

Hockey welcomed his family. Now he's helping ensure the game welcomes everyone.

"It's about making sure these kids feel like they belong," he said. "And once they feel that hockey becomes their game too."



GABRIEL VILARDI WITH THE WJHA U11 BOYS TEAM HE COACHED THIS SEASON.



GABE GIVES BACK

BY CHRISTINA KLYSH
Photos by Cameron Penney and Nicole McAlpine

WINNIPEG JETS FORWARD'S COMMUNITY WORK EARNS HIM NOMINATION FOR KING CLANCY MEMORIAL TROPHY

Whenever he has a day off, Winnipeg Jets forward Gabriel Vilardi always tries to give back to the fans and community. It's something that has been instilled in him since he was young.

"We were always told that there's always someone who has less then you and someone that has more than you," said Vilardi when reflecting on how his parents influenced his philanthropic approach. "It's important to give back and help, not just as athletes, but whoever you are, you should spend time doing something that matters to you to help others."

His commitment to volunteering and working with Manitoba youth earned him this season's King Clancy Memorial Trophy nomination for the Jets.

The award is presented to "the player who best exemplifies leadership qualities on and off the ice and has made a noteworthy humanitarian contribution in his community."

The nominee with the most votes by the selection committee will receive a $25,000 donation for a charity or charities of his choice and his Club will receive a grant from the NHL to help organize a special activation related to his cause.

"I'm honoured to get nominated for that," said Vilardi. "I think us as a team and an organization do a great job. It's more credit to the Jets because they make it so easy for us."



TALKING TO STUDENTS ABOUT PROJECT 11 WITH TEAMMATE ERIC COMRIE



Vilardi has become involved in the community through the True North Youth Foundation (TNYF), which is the charitable arm of the Winnipeg Jets, Manitoba Moose and True North Sports + Entertainment. The TNYF has three core programs – the Winnipeg Jets Hockey Academy (WJHA), Project 11 and Camp Manitou.

"Gabe has made a genuine and lasting impact through his authenticity and willingness to connect with students in a real way," said Suzi Friesen, director of educational programs for the TNYF. "Students see him not just as an NHL player, but as someone who is relatable, thoughtful and genuinely invested in their well-being."

When Vilardi has a day off between road trips and games, he often reaches out to Friesen to see how he can help. During the 2025-26 season, Vilardi made several visits to classrooms to discuss mental health and wellness with students and spoke on a panel at the Project 11 Youth Summit in front of 900 early years students from across Manitoba. Project 11 provides mental health-focused curriculum for classrooms to increase students' awareness of mental wellness and to teach skills and coping strategies, annually hosting summits to bring together students from across Manitoba to discuss mental health.

"When an NHL player like Gabe speaks openly about mental wellness, it helps shift the conversation in a powerful way. For many young people, especially athletes, there can still be a belief that strength means pushing through or staying silent," said Friesen. "Seeing someone they look up to model openness and self-awareness challenges that idea. It helps students understand that taking care of your mental wellness is a part of performing at your best, not separate from it."

Vilardi was also a coach and mentor for the WJHA U11 boys team this season. The WJHA uses hockey to engage youth from socially and economically challenged schools across Winnipeg, with the goal of increasing school attendance and graduation rates.

"Gabe is amazing with the kids and naturally finds the right balance between teaching them some valuable pointers about hockey and having fun. His genuine care for the WJHA kids is clear to see and anytime he drops by the kids have an amazing day," said Murray Cobb, director of the WJHA. "It's great for the WJHA kids to see a Jets player take so much enjoyment out of the game of hockey and just having fun with your teammates."

Along with coaching practices and games, Vilardi also hosted his WJHA team at a Jets game this season. He finds giving back and spending time with his players personally rewarding.

"A lot of times I'll leave different events and people are thanking me and saying how big a deal it is, and I'm like, there's no need to thank me at all because honestly it's fun work, especially when you're with kids and you know you've made a difference in their day," said Vilardi. "I know I'm not a kid obviously, but I feel like a kid in a lot of ways, so for me to spend time on the ice with them is even more easy and fun."

Vilardi has done a lot of volunteer work for Project 11 and the WJHA alongside his girlfriend Megan, who has volunteered with the WJHA for the past few years and worked with the Toba Centre, which the Winnipeg Jets raise awareness and support for during Child Advocacy Month and at their annual Child Advocacy Night game.

"She's done a great job since we moved here, and she takes pride and has fun just as much as I do going and working with the kids," said Vilardi.

Vilardi understands the unique connection between the Jets, their fans and the community and is excited to continue to work with Manitoba youth next season.

"Here, the community is so important and it's important to give back when you can," said Vilardi. "It's something that I'm proud of and that I'm going to keep doing as long as I'm here."

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THE 3 Gs

Two helpful tools we can use when reflecting on our performance are talking about it with someone we trust or writing about it, also known as journaling. The challenging part of self-reflection can come from not knowing where to start, whether it's not knowing what to write down or not being sure how to approach the conversation. In these situations, using a prompt can be helpful. Prompts help give us direction. They can encourage a positive, productive conversation, even if we do not feel like talking, and they can guide an efficient and effective writing process.





MOOSE GOALTENDERS, DOMINIC DIVINCENTIIS (50) AND THOMAS MILIC (32) HAVE USED THE 3 GS TO IMPROVE THEIR PERFORMANCE.

A prompt I like to use with the athletes I work with is called "The 3 Gs." The Gs are greatness, growth and gratitude. The prompt is simple. When reflecting on your performance, whether through talking or journaling, identify something you thought you excelled in, an area you can continue to grow in and something that you are grateful for.

It's easy to identify things we did wrong or mistakes we made, but it is a real skill to highlight our strengths and give ourselves credit for things we did well. Taking some time to acknowledge something we did well is an integral part of maintaining confidence.

We all have the ability to grow and get better. It is life's greatest gift. Being aware of areas of growth allows us to see every perceived setback as an opportunity to improve. Language matters, so instead of saying "I am terrible at this," you can say "I recognize I have the opportunity to improve on this." You can take it one step further by telling yourself how you are going to do it. For example, when recognizing that you can improve at getting the puck out of the zone, you can say "I am going to get my body in better position to help get the puck out of the zone." Identifying how you are going to make improvements helps your mind take the first step in doing so. You now believe it is possible and achievable.

The quality of our thoughts influences what we notice around us. At any given time, we are surrounded by just as many positive things as negative. What changes is what we pay attention to. By expressing some simple gratitude, it helps orientate our thoughts in a positive direction, raises our awareness and helps us see the opportunity in every struggle.

So, whether it is a conversation with a trusted person, or a journal entry, The 3 Gs can help provide structure to the process. This structure helps ensure our reflection is productive and positive even if the motivation is not there.

What is something you did great today? What is an area you can grow in? What are you grateful for?

Until next time, **Strength, Courage, Hustle, Commitment**

Photos by Jonathan Kozub



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PROGRAM COORDINATOR AND HEAD COACH SCARLETTE DORN (MIDDLE BACK ROW) WITH PLAYERS AND COACHES FROM THIS SEASON'S BLIND HOCKEY PROGRAM

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

BY CHRISTINA KLYSH
Photos by Scarlette Dorn and Carlos Lopez

HOCKEY FOR ALL CENTRE AND CANADIAN BLIND HOCKEY HAVE LAUNCHED THE FIRST BLIND HOCKEY PROGRAM IN MANITOBA.

This season, hockey for all centre partnered with Canadian Blind Hockey to launch the first blind hockey First Shift program in Manitoba.

"It brought a lot of people to a program that was designed for them," said Scarlette Dorn, program coordinator and interim head coach for Winnipeg's blind hockey First Shift program. Dorn started playing blind hockey in 2015, however there were few blind hockey opportunities in Manitoba, forcing her to travel across Canada for events.

"Back then they were just trying to find enough numbers to grow it nationally," said Dorn. "So, when I heard Winnipeg was one of the options for expansion if there was a person willing to spearhead it, I agreed to do it."

Thanks to a partnership between Canadian Blind Hockey, True North Sports + Entertainment, Jumpstart, Manitoba Possible and the NHL and NHLPA's First Shift, obstacles like high costs and acquiring equipment were removed for participants, allowing more blind and partially sighted youth and adults the chance to learn hockey.

"We want to get as many people on the ice as possible, especially those who might face barriers to playing hockey," said David Sattler, general manager at hockey for all centre.

hockey for all centre offers several First Shift programs for families and participants new to hockey that provide a stress-free experience with reduced costs, equipment fitting demonstrations, a manageable and consistent time commitment and sessions that focus on fun and learning.



BLIND HOCKEY PLAYERS RELY ON AUDITORY INSTRUCTION FROM COACHES.



THRILLS OF A LIFETIME PLAYING THE GREATEST GAME OF ALL

"There were a lot of laughs," said Dorn. "One of the biggest aspects of the program was the friendship and communication between participants."

As all participants were blind or partially sighted, verbal communication between teammates and coaches was important.

"It was a bit of a learning curve because everyone has a different level of vision. Some are completely blind, some have some usable vision left," said Dorn. "Some kids see out of their peripheral, so sometimes you can show them what to do, but a lot of times it was being very auditory or physically moving their limbs into position."

Auditory cues are also incorporated into blind hockey equipment and rules. Blind hockey pucks are larger than traditional pucks and are constructed out of thin, hollow steel with ball bearings inside that make noise to alert players where the puck is on the ice.

Another auditory aspect of the game is the "pass rule," which is when the attacking team must complete one pass after they cross the offensive blue line before they can score. Once the pass has been completed, the referee will sound a whistle, alerting the defensive players and goalie that a shot is coming.

Another adapted rule is the blind hockey net, which is three-feet-high rather than the traditional four feet, allowing blind goalies a higher chance of saving goals since blind hockey pucks don't make noise while airborne.

"It was very helpful that we didn't have to go searching for donations and equipment," said Dorn. "With First Shift, it was much easier to break down barriers and get participants on the ice."

With a wide range of ages, skill levels and vision capabilities in the program, by the end of the three-month long First Shift blind hockey sessions last fall and winter, every player showed great improvement.

"We managed to get everyone skating independently, which was a big success," said Dorn. "It was a lot of trial and error and repeating simple movements until it became a foundational thing where they didn't have think about it and could just get in the position to skate."

Once players complete the First Shift blind hockey program, they can sign up for the next First Shift blind hockey session to continue working on their skills or pursue other recreational and competitive opportunities.

Canadian Blind Hockey has greatly expanded across Canada, with the largest blind hockey event in the world, the Canadian National Blind Hockey Tournament, happening every March in Toronto. This year, for the first, time the event featured a blind ice hockey series between Canada, the U.S. and Team World.

To learn more about the First Shift Blind Hockey program or to register for the 2026-27 season, email winnipegblindhockey@gmail.com or visit canadianblindhockey.com

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- NEXT SHIFT
- INTRO TO POWER SKATING
- POWER SKATING

U11/U13
- POWER SKATING

SECOND SHIFT

ADULT SKILL DEVELOPMENT





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hockey for all centre



COLBY BARLOW

ROOKIE BARLOW CAPS REGULAR SEASON WITH STRONG FINISH

BY FRANKIE BENVENUTI
Photos by Jonathan Kozub and Darcy Finley

Colby Barlow joined the Manitoba Moose ahead of the 2025-26 season to much fanfare following a prolific junior career. Barlow went on to skate in 65 games throughout his rookie season in the AHL.

The Orillia, Ont. native was one of the OHL's most dangerous offensive threats between 2021 and 2025, never scoring fewer than 30 goals in any of his four seasons. Barlow recorded 245 points (148G, 97A) across 230 games, playing 168 games as a member of the Owen Sound Attack, before rounding out his junior career with the Oshawa Generals in 2024-25, where his team captured the Eastern Conference Championship.

The Winnipeg Jets picked Barlow with the 18th overall selection in the 2023 NHL Draft, the highest any Orillia native has been taken. Only four people from the town of roughly 33,500 people have ever played in the NHL. The most recent to appear at the highest level was Chris Bigras, who coincidentally also played his junior hockey with Owen Sound.

Barlow finished strong in his first season with the Moose, scoring four goals in his final four games. He achieved the mark while recording 10 shots on goal, boasting a plus-three rating over that span.

"It was nice to see that start to happen," Barlow said of the puck going in the net. "I've been working toward that. There has been a lot of progression over the course of the season and a lot of learning, but I think it's all coming together now."

The winger detailed a growing confidence in the professional ranks, translating to more poise when carrying the puck and seeing the ice. The uptick in Barlow's offensive production was a welcome revelation for the Club, but he says it's been about doing the right things rather than a grand change responsible for the recent surge.

"I'm just bearing down on my chances, just sticking with it," Barlow explained. "I've been doing it my whole life, so play the game and have fun with it. That's a big thing, and it's working."

Barlow wasn't used to being held off the scoresheet for long in junior, with his longest drought lasting just seven games immediately following his trade to Oshawa. Offence in the pro ranks took some time for the rookie forward, but the focus remained on the rest of his game. The offensive outburst was laying just beneath the surface all season long.

"It's hard not to get frustrated," Barlow admitted. "But you know, when you start getting those looks, and you know you're producing those chances, you know you're doing something right. It's about sticking with it and keeping that belief in yourself."

With one full season under his belt, Barlow says all the tropes of the next level ring true. The players are bigger, faster, and stronger, and he spent the first part of the season adapting. He worked to shake some old habits and round out his game, ultimately molding himself into the player with the best chance to make the jump to the NHL.





When the season comes to a close following Manitoba's journey in the Calder Cup Playoffs, Barlow will return home with valuable experience.

The lessons learned as a rookie provide a roadmap forward as he continues his ascension toward skating for the Winnipeg Jets.

"I just have to keep evolving the body," Barlow said. "You can never be too fast, and something I have to work on is being fast, but for three periods. Keep growing that motor and put on some muscle to be stronger in those corner battles and hard to move in front of the net. That's it."

Ticket Memberships for the 2026-27 Manitoba Moose season are available now. Choose the option that fits your schedule from Full or Half-Season Memberships to 12-Game Packs and the Flex 15. Plus, enjoy membership benefits like discounts at Jets Gear or Canada Life Centre concessions.

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AA HIGH-PERFORMANCE

AAA HIGH-PERFORMANC

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THE ORIGINAL JET NORM BEAUDIN WITH SOME FUTURE STARS AT WINNIPEG CONVENTION CENTRE. NORM WILL BE IN WINNIPEG TO GET STICKS IN HANDS AT THE HERITAGE CLASSIC.



BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos courtesy of Hockeyball

STICKS IN HANDS

THE WINNIPEG JETS AND HOCKEYBALL WILL TEAM UP TO GROW HOCKEYBALL, BALL HOCKEY AND FLOOR HOCKEY IN WINNIPEG SCHOOLS SIMPLY BY GETTING STICKS INTO KIDS' HANDS



HOCKEYBALL

The next generation of Winnipeg hockey players might not take their first strides on ice - they might lace up sneakers instead.

Game On has learned that this fall, thanks to an evolving partnership between the Winnipeg Jets and Hockeyball, hundreds of students across Winnipeg are expected to get the chance to experience hockey in a whole new way, one gymnasium at a time.

The initiative, appropriately called *Sticks in Hands* by hockey for all centre general manager David Sattler, is designed to introduce Hockeyball into schools at a reasonable cost and with virtually no barriers to participation. Schools are slated to receive Jets-branded equipment packages, training resources and curriculum support, all aimed at giving kids a chance to discover the sport while building stronger community connections through hockey.

For Hockeyball co-founder Greg Beaudin, the project is more than another grassroots sports program. It's the realization of something he dreamed about as a kid growing up in Winnipeg.

"It's been a childhood dream," Beaudin said. "My family played basketball, volleyball and track and field for our schools, but we never had the opportunity to play the sport we loved for our school. Now floor hockey is going to be played as a school sport, and I think that's extremely cool."

Discussions are underway with multiple school divisions in Winnipeg with programs planned to launch this fall. Through a pending partnership with Sport for Life, the equipment packages will feature Jets branding prominently, helping merge sport participation with community engagement and fan development.

For organizers, the appeal of Hockeyball is simple: It's hockey without the traditional barriers.

No expensive ice time. No costly equipment. No early-morning drives to arenas. Just a stick, a ball and a chance to play.

"The mood in the community is that we need to improve health and wellness with kids and build that through sport," said Beaudin. "When you take a team sport like Hockeyball and give kids the opportunity to participate, it becomes hockey without limits.

"This is why Sweden, Finland, Switzerland, Czechia are so strong in ice hockey these days, they come with such a high-level base of skills, cultivated through floorball. This Jets program and the one we see with the Canucks in BC is changing that landscape. This new version of floor hockey should not just be for the Hockey Academy kids, it's for everyone."

The Jets organization sees the program as an opportunity to expand access to hockey while also introducing students to a sport ecosystem that already exists in Manitoba.

Sattler said the organization will provide schools with both equipment and physical education training resources so programs can continue long after the initial launch. Each participating school is expected to receive 40 sticks and 50 Hockeyballs.

That philosophy - participation first - sits at the core of the initiative.

"What we've said to the schools is we're going to provide the equipment and the training," said Sattler. "What they do with it after that is up to them. If they want intramurals, great. Before or after-school programs, fantastic."

The plan is for schools to receive a six-week curriculum guide and ongoing support, including drills and activity plans designed to help physical education teachers keep students engaged throughout the year.

At its heart, however, the program is about exposure to the game.

Organizers want kids - especially those who may never have had the opportunity to try hockey - to discover that a pathway exists for them.

"Our goal is to get sticks in the hands of kids," Sattler said. "If they've never played before, they get to hold a stick for the first time. If they have played, then they get more practice time in the gym."

The hope is that many of those students eventually transition into Winnipeg's growing ball hockey community, which already offers learn-to-play programs and organized spring leagues.

Organizers hope that the official launch will coincide with one of the biggest hockey celebrations Winnipeg has seen in years: the upcoming Heritage Classic matchup between Winnipeg and Montreal.

Beaudin said organizers are planning clinics and school visits leading into the outdoor NHL event, creating a city-wide celebration of hockey in all its forms.

And for longtime Winnipeg hockey fans, there's even a little history attached to the moment.

Beaudin noted that 50 years ago, the Jets and Canadiens stood atop the hockey world - Winnipeg winning the AVCO Cup and Montreal capturing the Stanley Cup. A proposed challenge series between the clubs never materialized back then.

Now, half a century later, the rivalry will be revisited outdoors in front of a new generation of Manitoba hockey fans. Only this time, the biggest victory might not happen at the stadium. It could happen in a school gym somewhere in Winnipeg, where a child picks up a stick for the very first time.



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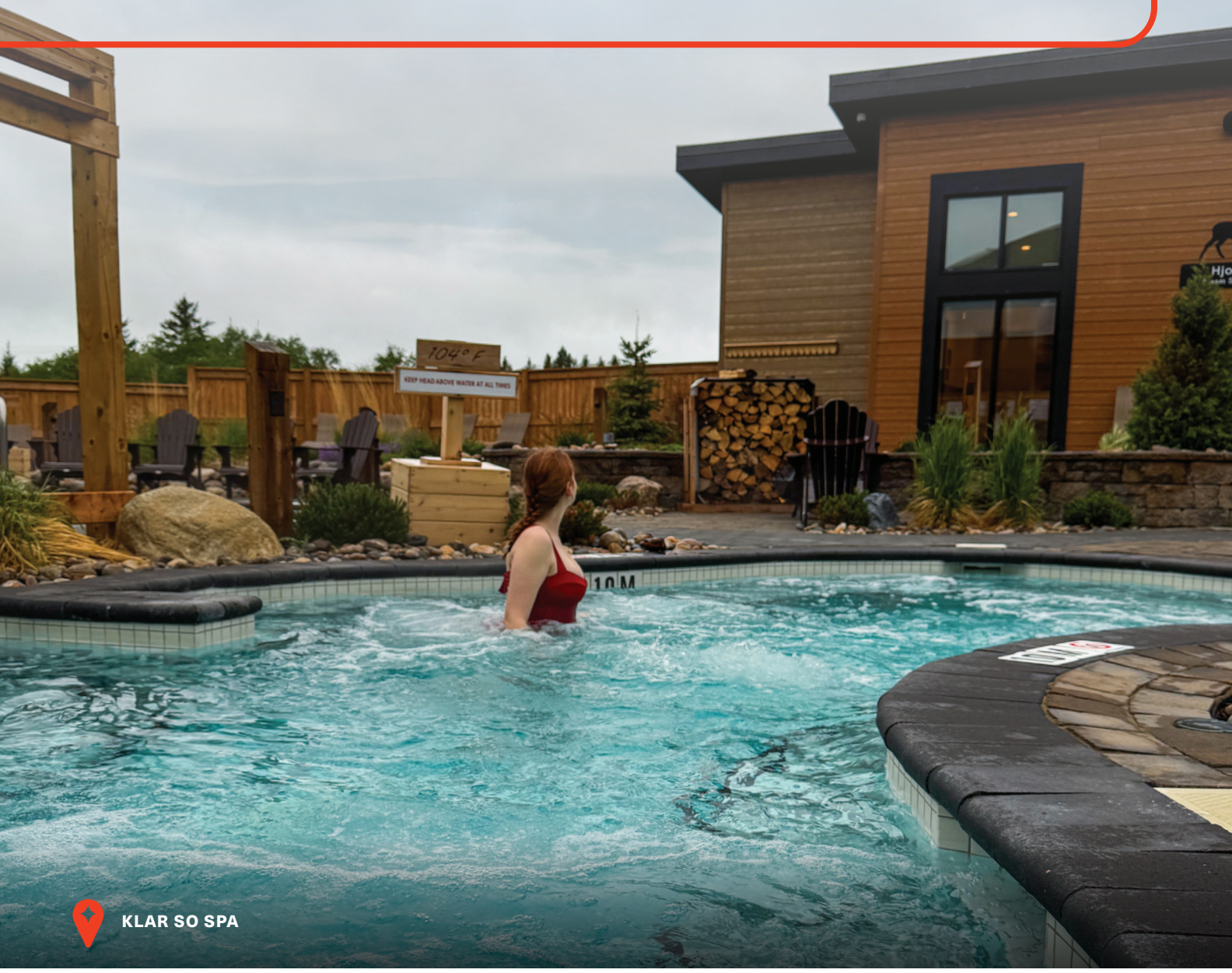
MANITOBA

31 Amazing Accommodations in Manitoba with Pools, Spas and Scenic Stays

Whether you're heading down the road for a staycation, venturing out to a new town or city or visiting Manitoba for the first time, there's nothing like booking THAT hotel with the rooftop pool, the luxury spa on-site or the perfect scenic view. You won't regret treating yourself to a little extra comfort while on vacation and, lucky for you, Manitoba has amazing hotels, cabins and resorts to choose from.



KLAR SO SPA

Winnipeg Stays

1 DELTA HOTELS WINNIPEG
Downtown Winnipeg

Head to the Delta Hotels by Marriott Winnipeg in the heart of downtown for a stay that blends contemporary style with effortless comfort. From on-site dining to inviting, well-appointed rooms and a fully equipped fitness centre, every detail is designed with relaxation in mind.

The true highlight, however, is the stunning rooftop pool – a unique urban oasis where you can soak up sweeping city views under the prairie sky. Prefer to unwind indoors? A second pool offers year-round enjoyment.

Delta Hotels is also a great home base for exploring downtown Winnipeg. You're mere moments from the city's must-see attractions, including the bustling Hargrave St. Market – an ideal stop for a pre-game bite before catching the Winnipeg Sea Bears or a concert at Canada Life Centre.


INN AT THE FORKS

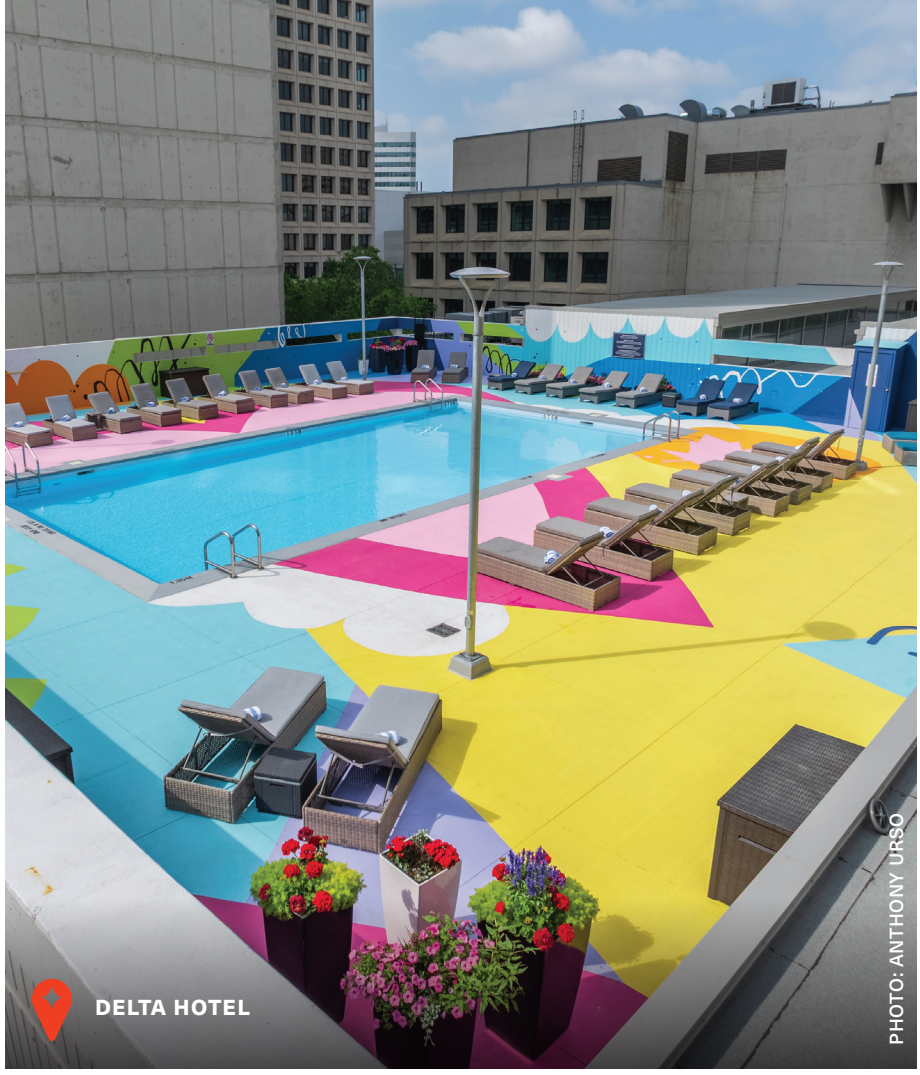

DELTA HOTEL

PHOTO: ANTHONY URSO

2 INN AT THE FORKS
Winnipeg

Set in the heart of Winnipeg's historic Forks district, Inn at the Forks offers a refined, boutique-style stay. Elegant accommodations, exceptional dining at SMITH Restaurant and immediate access to The Forks and nearby St. Boniface make it an ideal urban retreat.

During your stay, visit Riverstone Spa – a serene sanctuary designed to rejuvenate mind, body and spirit. Choose from an extensive menu of massages, skincare treatments and more, or indulge in a couples' experience for a memorable romantic escape.

3 WYNDHAM GARDEN WINNIPEG AIRPORT
Winnipeg

Stunning art graces the walls of the Wyndham Garden Winnipeg Airport Hotel, a full-service hotel located on Winnipeg's first urban reserve. Long Plain First Nation made the hotel a reality and brings Indigenous touches to the property including at Manoomin Restaurant where Red Seal Chef Jennifer Ballantyne, a member of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, features bison, berries, grains, seeds and walleye on the menu.

The hotel comes equipped with a pool and waterslide, indoor fitness centre and is nearby CF Polo Park for shopping, Royal Aviation Museum of Western Canada, Assiniboine Park & Zoo and The Leaf for exploring.

Southern Manitoba & Prairie Region

4 TURTLE MOUNTAIN RESORT
Lake Metigoshe

Manitoba's best kept secret just might be Lake Metigoshe, the border-straddling body of water that's famous for crappie and bluegill fishing, lakeside lounging and stunning sunsets. Make Turtle Mountain Resort your home base for a deep dive into the southernmost playground, Turtle Mountain Provincial Park. Grab a cabin, feast at the Velvet Antler Café and venture into the park that boasts a 245-metre rise over the prairie, making it a win for mountain bikers and hikers.


CANAD INNS

5 NATURE'S HIDEAWAY
Brandon

Spend a weekend off the beaten path. Situated in the Brandon Hills, Nature's Hideaway is a couple's getaway with masterfully crafted wood cabins, hand-built by the owners, and tucked away on the family acreage that overlooks kilometres of rolling farmland.

During your stay, stop for a bite at one of several local options including Chez Angela, Komfort Kitchen, Lady of the Lake, Chili Chutney and Sabor Latino.

6 BLUE CRESCENT HOTEL
Carman

There are some new places to lay your head down in rural Manitoba thanks to Blue Crescent Hotels. Now open in both Carman and Arborg, these modern properties offer stylish, spacious rooms equipped with fridges, microwaves and Keurig coffee makers. There are even family rooms with separate bedrooms and two sets of bunk beds for a crowd. The Carman location has a sports equipment storage room, pool and waterslide, perfect for those hockey road trips!


NATURE'S HIDEAWAY

7 BEST WESTERN PLUS
Winkler

At Best Western Plus Winkler, comfort and convenience come together to create a true home away from home. Guests can enjoy the indoor pool and hot tub, making it easy to unwind after a day of exploring.

The Morden-Winkler area is rich in local flavour, from family-run restaurants to charming cafés and unique spots like Dead Horse Cider. Pair your visit to the region with the Canadian Fossil Discovery Centre in Morden or go for a swim at Lake Minnewasta and finish the day with a relaxed meal at Le Parq or Rendezvous Brewery.

8 CANAD INNS
Portage la Prairie & Brandon

Travelling west across Manitoba? Make a well-timed stop at Canad Inns in Portage la Prairie or Brandon. Both locations feature Splasher's, an on-site waterpark complete with towering waterslides, kiddie pools and soothing hot tubs – guaranteed to delight travellers of all ages.

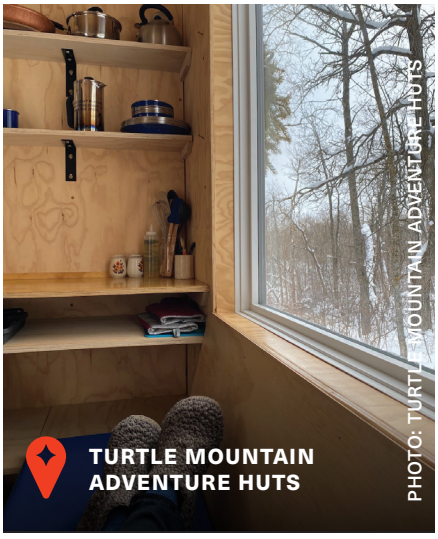
While in Portage la Prairie, take time to wander through scenic Island Park or explore the trail along Crescent Lake. Add a visit to the National Indigenous Residential School Museum of Canada to your itinerary to learn more about the policies and practices that shaped and forever changed multiple generations of First Nations people.

In Brandon, discover the city's vibrant arts scene with a self-guided tour of its striking downtown murals and visit the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba (free admission!) for exhibits featuring local artists. Don't miss the Riverbank Discovery Centre for sweeping Assiniboine River views and a look at the local flora and fauna.

9 TURTLE MOUNTAIN ADVENTURE HUTS

Turtle Mountain Provincial Park

Turtle Mountain Adventure Huts are minimalistic, off-grid accommodations designed to fuse wilderness and comfort seamlessly. These huts offer a cozy escape in the southwestern part of the province, furnished with essential amenities including a wood-burning stove, solar lights, cooking facilities, gear storage and a cozy sleeping area. As autumn paints the landscape in breathtaking hues, explore an array of trails, including the exhilarating Turtle's Back for mountain biking. Travelling with a pet? Jay Hut extends its welcome to your furry companion.



Whiteshell & Eastern Manitoba

10 SOUTH BEACH CASINO

Scanterbury

For a getaway just a short drive from Winnipeg, South Beach Casino & Resort delivers excitement from the moment you arrive thanks to an eye-catching exterior that sets the tone for a stay filled with fun.

Choose from a variety of stay-and-play packages and enjoy everything from gaming and on-site dining to spacious, comfortable rooms. The expansive pool area is perfect for both relaxation and family fun.

When you're ready to explore, head to the nearby Beaches of (Highway) 59 – Patricia, Beaconia, Grand and Victoria – or experience the natural beauty of the Brokenhead Wetland Interpretive Trail.

The surrounding region is ideal for a classic Manitoba beach day. Pack a picnic or stop into seasonal eateries and lakeside spots along the way for the perfect pairing of laid-back lake life and lively entertainment.

11 PINEWOOD LODGE

Whiteshell Provincial Park

Nestled in the heart of Whiteshell Provincial Park, Pinewood Lodge offers a seamless blend of outdoor adventure and cozy retreat. Choose from a poolside suite or a lakeside chalet, whether you're planning a romantic escape or a family getaway.

Spend your days immersed in nature, then return to unwind in the saltwater pool – always a hit with kids – or slip into the hot tub for a relaxing soak.

Nearby, discover iconic Whiteshell sights, including the suspension bridge over the Whiteshell River near Nutimik Lake and the ancient Bannock Point Petroforms.

12 BARRIER BAY RESORT

Whiteshell Provincial Park

Three Rs rule at Barrier Bay Resort – retreat, rest and romance. Tuck into one of the cozy adults-only cabins – each with a fireplace – and settle into the Whiteshell Provincial Park vibe. Do as much or as little as you choose. Get on the water in a canoe, kayak or standup paddleboard, lounge on the dock or explore nearby Bannock Point Petroforms. As night falls, roast marshmallows and cuddle under the stars by the light of your private campfire.







13 TALL PINE LODGES
Whiteshell Provincial Park

Seeking sanctuary? Everything about Tall Pine Lodges was designed to tick all the boxes – a quiet cove of cabins, the tranquility of soaring evergreens, fireplaces, jetted tubs, indoor saunas and oh-so-comfy big beds. The adults-only resort rests at West Hawk Lake in Whiteshell Provincial Park where the granite outcroppings of the Canadian Shield invite curious hikers. Afterward, soak in the outdoor pool at the lodge where friendly white-tailed deer just might stop by to say hello.

14 THE HOTEL AT FALCON LAKE
Whiteshell Provincial Park

Another great option in the Whiteshell is the newly renovated Hotel at Falcon Lake, where you'll find a range of amenities like a sauna, steam room, plus two on-site restaurants: 1964 and The Black Bear Tavern. Did we mention the swanky 1960s-inspired Sinatra's Lounge? When it's time to relax, there are plenty of quiet spots throughout the hotel to read, play board games or simply unwind.

15 GLAMPING INSTEAD
Stead

For a stay that blends sustainability with style, Glamping InSTEAD offers a unique take on outdoor accommodations in Manitoba. Located just 45 minutes northeast of Winnipeg, this eco-friendly glamping experience provides a comfortable way to experience the province's natural beauty without sacrificing modern touches.

In summer, rent bikes, kayaks and paddleboards with Nirvana Rentals or explore the nearby trails, including the Brokenhead Wetland Interpretive Trail, Northstar Trail and Whistle Pig Trail.

16 VOYAGEUR HOUSEBOATS
Pinawa

For a completely different kind of Manitoba getaway, Voyageur Houseboats invites you to take your accommodations onto the water.

Days are spent swimming, fishing or exploring quiet coves by kayak, while evenings bring sunsets over the water and nights under the stars. With all the comforts of home onboard, it's a unique way to experience Manitoba's waterways – equal parts adventure and relaxation.



17 NAVIGATE PINAWA
Pinawa

Blending outdoor adventure with a touch of comfort, Navigate Pinawa offers a glamping-style stay near Pinawa Dam Provincial Heritage Park. The property sits close to scenic trails, river routes and iconic viewpoints, making it an ideal base for exploration.

After a day of hiking, paddling or floating down the Pinawa Channel, return to unwind in the on-site sauna or wood-fired hot tub. The combination of fresh air, natural surroundings and simple comforts creates a relaxing experience that feels both restorative and memorable.

18 EAGLE'S NEST LODGE
Winnipeg River

Indulge in the exceptional fly-and-dine adventure at Eagle's Nest Lodge. Embark on a scenic 20-minute float plane journey from Lac du Bonnet to the resort, where you can bask in the mesmerizing vistas of the Winnipeg River. Your visit includes a delectable three-course meal served in the lodge's dining room.

19 THOMAS BUNN HOUSE
Near Selkirk

Quiet country living is within reach at the Thomas Bunn House near Selkirk. Designated as a Red River Heritage Home, the cottage was built in 1862 for Thomas Bunn, a member of Louis Riel's council. It features thick stone walls and a charming interior that will immerse you in the 19th century. Stroll the grounds on the banks of the Red River, explore nearby hiking and biking trails in the area or venture out to visit several other nearby historic sites in the area. Well-behaved pets are welcome!

20 TAMARACK SHACK AND TIPI

Woodridge

Tamarack Shack and Tipi offers an off-grid glamping experience designed to help guests reconnect with nature. Each cabin sits on its own private site powered by solar energy, surrounded by quiet forest landscapes that encourage visitors to relax and spend time outdoors.

Guests share access to a wood-fired barrel sauna, which provides a warm place to unwind after hiking and exploring the surrounding area. The property also features an organic swimming pool that uses natural plants to filter the water, creating a swimming experience that feels closely connected to the area.



Riding Mountain & Parkland

21 ELKHORN RESORT

Onanole

With prime access to Riding Mountain National Park, Elkhorn Resort is a destination you'll want to return to again and again.

After a day exploring the park, unwind at Klar So Nordic Spa, where steam saunas and cold plunges offer a restorative experience. Families will love the lively pool area, complete with a waterslide, bucket brigade and lily pad walk.

For a unique way to explore, rent an e-bike and cruise around Clear Lake and the charming townsite of Wasagaming.

Wasagaming offers a delightful mix of casual dining, ice cream shops and lakeside patios – perfect for refuelling after a day outdoors. Browse local boutiques, enjoy beachside views, or linger over dinner as the sun sets over Clear Lake.

22 MOOSWA RESORT

Riding Mountain National Park

Mooswa Resort offers a quintessential stay in Riding Mountain National Park with charming chalets – with lofts no less – circling an outdoor pool. It's all so very summer vacation! For over half a century, the resort has offered R and R to those exploring every nook and cranny of the park. And part of the Mooswa family are Arbutus Cabins offering family accommodations in big and bright cottages. It's all about location, location, location, on enviable Mooswa Drive, where everything is a summer stroll away.

23 TURTLE VILLAGE

Riding Mountain National Park

Located within the Wasagaming campground, Turtle Village is the first of its kind as an Indigenous-owned and operated year-round accommodation on Treaty 2 territory, the traditional home of the Seven Nations Anishinaabe people of Riding Mountain. Each Turtle Shell offers an off-grid package that includes solar panels and a battery bank for power. There are eight units available, two of which are dog-friendly!







24 STAY IN AN OTENTIK

Riding Mountain National Park

Get closer to the wilds of Riding Mountain National Park by staying in an oTENTik. These Parks Canada canvas, A-frame structures provide comfort and coziness complete with electric heat, a wood-burning stove, USB chargers, nearby heated bathrooms and a fire-warmed cook shack. There is plenty to do in the area known as Clear Lake Country year-round!

25 RUSSELL INN

Russell

In Manitoba's scenic Parkland region, the Russell Inn offers more than just a place to stay – it's a destination in its own right. With more than 120 rooms spread across three properties, guests enjoy access to an indoor pool, hot tub and waterslide.

For a deeper level of relaxation, visit the on-site Stag + Raven Spa, where treatments range from seaweed body wraps to Swedish massages and revitalizing facials. Younger guests can even enjoy kid-friendly spa services, adding a playful twist to the experience.

From here, explore nearby highlights like Asessippi Provincial Park, the historic Inglis Grain Elevators and the many trails and landscapes that define this beautiful region.

Interlake

26 LAKEVIEW HECLA RESORT

Hecla-Grindstone Provincial Park

Surrounded by the natural beauty of Hecla-Grindstone Provincial Park, Lakeview Hecla Resort offers an experience that's equal parts adventure and indulgence.

Enjoy indoor and outdoor pools, a waterslide, or retreat to the adult-only Salka Spa featuring a hot tub, Nordic plunge and mineral pool for even more opportunities to unwind.

Venture beyond the resort to explore the historic village, tee off at the golf course or hike scenic trails and don't miss the ever-popular Lighthouse Trail. Wrap up your day with a hearty meal from Seagulls Restaurant and Lounge.

27 RUBBER DUCKY RESORT & CAMPGROUND

Near Warren

Check into a cozy cabin or motel-style cabin room at Rubber Ducky Resort and Campground for a getaway full of family fun. Enjoy the various scheduled activities, pools and hot tubs, playgrounds, mini golf, bumper boats, a petting farm and even a pond stocked with trout for fishing. Visit the RDR Grill & Ice Cream snack bar for a treat!



Northern Manitoba

28 PAINT LAKE LODGE

Near Thompson

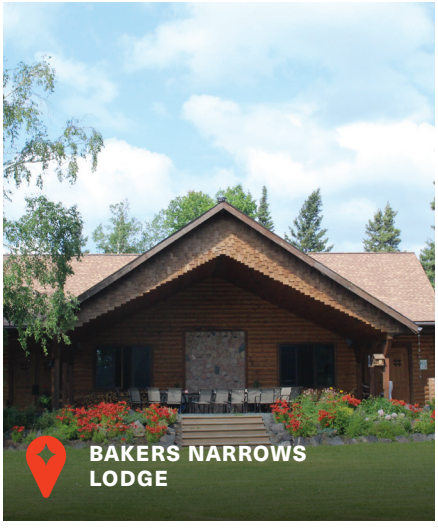
Northern Manitoba's charms start at Paint Lake Lodge, where the expansive deck perches over that deep, dark lake and invites one and all to share the day's adventures. Perhaps it was an exploration of nearby Pisew Falls or a record-breaking session of plucking hungry walleyes from the lake... however you spent the day, visitors are rewarded with heaping plates of signature ribs and irresistible desserts at the on-site restaurant. Everything you need is here – boat rentals, firewood, a convenience store, guided fishing, tackle shop and even ice cream! Settle into a cozy cabin and rest up for more adventurous days ahead.

29 BAKERS NARROWS LODGE

Near Flin Flon

The campfire glow dances off the walls in your very own, fully equipped log cabin at Bakers Narrows Lodge near Flin Flon. It's that northern Manitoba vibe at its best. Book a guided day of fishing and hang on as feisty northern pike and chunky lake trout get interested on legendary Lake Athapapuskow. Let the lodge do the cooking with an all-inclusive package, giving you more time for fun, including fat biking, hiking and kayaking.


PAINT LAKE LODGE


BAKERS NARROWS LODGE


WEKUSKO FALLS LODGE

30 RAVENS HOLLOW ECO DOME RESORT

Near Flin Flon

Tucked into the rugged beauty of northern Manitoba, Ravens Hollow Eco Dome Resort offers a quiet luxury escape designed for those seeking solitude and connection with nature. Surrounded by boreal forest and pristine waterways, this eco-conscious retreat invites guests to slow down and settle into the rhythm of the North.

Spend your days paddling quiet lakes (the resort offers rentals!), hiking forested trails or simply soaking in the stillness of the landscape. Accommodations blend rustic charm with thoughtful comforts, creating a cozy base after a day outdoors.

Ravens Hollow also operates an animal sanctuary. Guests can meet the resident animals, including furry friends Sayler and Captain who keep a watchful eye over the property. You can even book a goat walk to explore the surrounding area in a delightfully unexpected way.

31 WEKUSKO FALLS LODGE

Wekusko Falls Provincial Park

The mighty Grass River snakes its way through Wekusko Falls Provincial Park before taking a 12-metre tumble to create its namesake waterfall. Get a front row seat at Wekusko Falls Lodge with its roomy cabins, homecooked meals and uncommon views of northern scenery along Manitoba's Waterfall Alley. Take a seat on the porch swing, warm your toes by the campfire and watch the river flow by. These cold and clear waters are the stuff of dreams for diehard anglers.


RAVENS HOLLOW ECO DOME RESORT

Plan Your Adventure

Whether you're chasing waterslides with the kids, unwinding in a Nordic spa or soaking up lakeside views after a day outdoors, Manitoba offers the perfect blend of relaxation and adventure.

Map out your route, pack your swimsuit and discover just how refreshing a Manitoba getaway can be. However you choose to explore, unforgettable stays, welcoming communities and plenty of poolside (or lakeside!) moments are waiting for you across the province.

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CO-HEAD COACHES JAMIE JOHNSON (LEFT) AND HANNAH PALES WITH CAPTAIN EMERSON SHIER

A DYNASTY

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by Darryl Gershman

DESPITE GOING 18-5-5, PRAIRIE BLAZE OFFICIALLY FINISHED IN THIRD PLACE AT THE END OF THE 2025-26 SEASON OF THE MANITOBA WOMEN'S JUNIOR HOCKEY LEAGUE. BUT HEAD COACH JAMIE JOHNSON HAD THE BLAZE READY FOR THE PLAYOFFS AND AFTER THEY DEFEATED THE WESTERN PREDATORS 3-2 IN THE CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES, THEY CELEBRATED THEIR FOURTH PROVINCIAL CHAMPIONSHIP IN THE LAST SEVEN SEASONS.

The final standings said third place.

However, the final scoreboard at hockey for all centre back in March said champions.

In a season that tested their resolve and sharpened their identity, the Prairie Blaze proved that timing, not seeding, defines a winner. Peaking at precisely the right moment, the Blaze stormed through the playoffs and capped their run with a dramatic 3–2 series victory over the Western Predators in the Manitoba Women's Junior Hockey League final — a five-game battle that demanded everything they had.

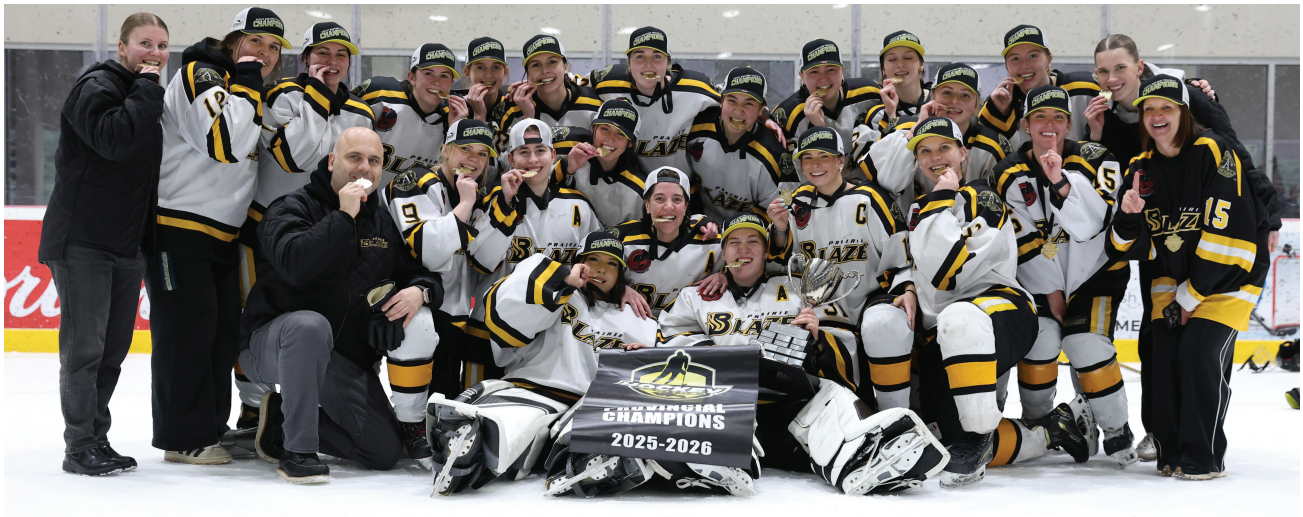
In the end, the Blaze beat the Preds 2-0 in the fifth and deciding game of the championship series, as co-head coaches Jamie Johnson and Hannah Pales won their fourth titles in seven seasons – two each as players, one each as assistant coaches and now, one each as co-head coaches.

They won, of course, because when it mattered most, their players delivered.

And for Johnson, the championship wasn't a surprise - just the realization of a belief that never wavered.

"We knew from the beginning of the season that we had a winning team," Johnson said. "We hit some adversity in the middle of the year, but we peaked at the right time. That's what you want."

The Blaze's 18-5-5 regular season record placed them third overall, hardly the profile of a runaway favourite. But the playoffs are a different game - and Prairie Blaze played it better than anyone.



THE MWJHL CHAMPIONS, PRAIRIE BLAZE



THE SILVER MEDALLISTS, WESTERN PREDATORS

A SERIES OF SWINGS

The championship series itself mirrored the Blaze's season: resilient, unpredictable and ultimately triumphant.

Prairie Blaze jumped out to a commanding 2-0 series lead, putting the Predators on their heels early. But Western responded with two straight wins of their own, forcing a winner-take-all Game 5 — a pressure-packed finale that could have gone either way.

Instead, the Prairie Blaze slammed the door.

Behind a composed, disciplined effort and stellar goaltending, the Blaze shut out the Predators in the deciding game, reclaiming control of the series and sealing yet another championship in franchise history.

"It was definitely a bit of a shake for the girls when we lost those two games," Johnson admitted. "But they showed resilience. They came together and pulled out the win when it mattered."

That ability to respond, not panic, is what defines champions.

At the heart of the Blaze's playoff run were the goaltenders, Abegael Glass and Arianna Murdock along with forward Kenady Christensen, a player whose story is as compelling as her production.

Christensen scored the game-winning goal in Game 5 - a fitting exclamation point for a player who led the playoffs in goals despite missing time earlier in the postseason.

"It was just a shot from the point, and I got the rebound and put it high," Christensen said with characteristic understatement.

Simple? Maybe. Clutch? Absolutely.

Christensen finished the playoffs with seven goals and 11 points, emerging as the Blaze's offensive catalyst when they needed it most. Her ability to battle through adversity - including a three-game suspension earlier in the playoffs - only added to her impact.

"She's a natural goal scorer," Johnson said. "She battles hard and comes out of almost every puck battle with it. She makes a big difference for us."

It's no surprise.

For Christensen, hockey has always been more than a game. Growing up in Lundar, she followed her older brother Logan into the sport, building her foundation in small-town rinks before advancing through programs like Interlake Lightning and RINK Hockey Academy. She even captured a gold medal with Team Manitoba at the 2022 National Aboriginal Hockey Championship.

But her path hasn't been linear.

After high school, Christensen stepped away from hockey for a year to focus on school - only to realize something was missing.

"I came back because I missed it," she said.

That return has paid off in a big way.

Now in her third MWJHL season, Christensen has become one of the league's most complete players - balancing elite-level performance with the demands of a rigorous nursing program at Red River College.

"It gives me a break from school," she said. "A way to get my mind off everything."

That balance - between ambition and perspective - defines both Christensen and the league she plays in.



THE LEADERSHIP GROUP WITH THE PROVINCIAL BANNER AND MWJHL TROPHY



ABEGAEL GLASS AND KENADY CHRISTENSEN

While Christensen provided the finish, Prairie Blaze's success was built on depth, chemistry and a shared belief.

In the championship game, captain Emerson Shier scored the other Blaze goal while Phoenix Freis, Téa Desrosiers, Annika Russell and Emily Foster all garnered assists. Glass made 24 saves to get the shutout.

"It's a great group," Christensen said. "Everyone gets along, and we come together well on the ice."

That unity was especially evident in goal, where Prairie Blaze rotated netminders throughout the playoffs - a rare approach that paid dividends.

"Both of our goalies were awesome," Johnson said. "Being able to rotate them and have both performing at that level was huge."

BUILDING A DYNASTY

By winning the 2026 championship, Prairie Blaze captured its fourth provincial title in the past seven seasons - a stretch that firmly establishes them as one of the MWJHL's premier franchises.

"That's pretty good," Christensen said with a smile. "Pretty proud of that."

It's more than pretty good. It actually qualifies as a dynasty.

More than anyone else, Coach Johnson understands what makes this run special.

"We've had a really solid core of players coming up for a long time," she said. "It was exciting for a lot of them to go out with a win."

That core, however, is about to change.

With several players aging out, Prairie Blaze will enter next season facing a significant rebuild. Up to seven players could be moving on, leaving the coaching staff with tough decisions about which overage players to retain — including, potentially, Christensen.

"I'd love to come back," Christensen said. "But I have to consider school and everything else."

In the end, Prairie Blaze's championship wasn't about where they finished in the standings - it was about who they became when it mattered most.

They were tested. They stumbled. They responded.

And when the series was on the line in a pressure-packed Game 5, they didn't just win - they shut the door.

From third place to the top of the podium, the Prairie Blaze proved a simple truth that echoes through every level of hockey: It's not how you start. It's how you finish.

PRAIRIE BLAZE

2026 MWJHL CHAMPIONS

3.	Nicole Romaniuk (A)	F
4.	Sydney Laurin	F
5.	Jayna Veldhuis	F
6.	Ariana Wery	D
7.	Kenady Christensen	F
8.	Haley Ichiiwa	D
9.	Sienna Eliasson	D
12.	Zoe Comte	F
13.	Emerson Shier (C)	D
14.	Jaida Silvaggio	F
15.	Annika Russell	F
16.	Phoenix Freis (A)	F
18.	Taylor Morden	F
19.	Téa Desrosiers	D
21.	Jaycie May	F
25.	Emily Foster	D
29.	Emily Van Leeuwen	F
31.	Abegael Glass (A)	G
33.	Arianna Murdock	G

CO-HEAD COACHES
Jamie Johnson
Hannah Pales

ASSISTANT COACH
Sam Pales

MANAGER
Sheri Russell



THE 2025-26 MJHL CHAMPION NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS

CHAMPS IN JUST FOUR YEARS

BY JIM BENDER
Photos by Kalee Haasbeek

The Niverville Nighthawks capped off one of the most dominating seasons in the history of the Manitoba Junior Hockey League by capturing the Turnbull Cup in relatively short order.

Niverville posted a 51-6-1 record during the regular season – only the Portage Terriers had a better season at 53-3-4 in 2014-15. The Nighthawks then skated through the playoffs at 12-1, sweeping the Virden Oil Capitals 4-0 in the final.

It was just their fourth year in the Junior A circuit.

"Yeah, it has been amazing," said Nighthawks coach Dwight Hirst, who was actually part of the ownership group that brought the franchise to Niverville. With 14 games left in the second season, Hirst replaced the coach that the Nighthawks fired.

"We got into the playoffs and the franchise turned around right there," said the current Coach of the Year.

"You don't hear of too many teams as dominant as us in a while," said forward Marlen Edwards, who scored two goals to lead Niverville to a 6-2 victory over the Oil Caps in Virden in Game 4.

"We all had the mindset that we're going to win every single game that we can."

They won all but one in the playoffs.

"Oh man, it's such a surreal feeling," said captain Adam Vigfusson, who has been with the franchise since its first year. "I'm so proud of this team. I'm so proud of this group. Everyone is so deserving of this. We all did the work and it's so nice to get rewarded for it.

"Everyone knows what it takes. We've got a couple of former MJHL champions and everybody knows what they're supposed to do on the ice. Everybody knows their role. Everybody knows what we had was special and ultimately, we got the job done, so it's pretty special."

Defenceman Aaron Krestanowich, forwards Tyler Bernier and Edwards won the Turnbull Cup with the Northern Manitoba Blizzard last year.

"Both of them are just unreal," said Edwards, who was acquired in a trade deadline deal. "With the Turnbull, it's a feeling that you just can't explain or put into words. It just feels amazing."

Niverville netminder Austin Dubinsky was named playoff MVP after earning

the Ed Belfour Award as the MJHL's top goalie during the regular season.

"It's pretty lucky," said Dubinsky, who finished with a stingy 1.31 GAA, with three shutouts and a .956 save percentage in the playoffs. "I've got a pretty good group in front of me. Our defence is incredible. Like, they made it pretty easy on me throughout the playoff run. I didn't see too many high-quality chances."

The Ardrossan, Alta., native also had faith in the team's offence.

"In the last game, we went down a goal and I had zero worries," Dubinsky said. "Like, I let in one, but I knew we were going to score two more. No matter how many I let in, we would always outscore the other teams. So, that makes it pretty easy on me."

The defence also relied on Dubinsky.

"He makes our job so much easier," Krestanovich said. "You have that confidence where you can make aggressive plays because you have that confidence behind you, knowing he's going to stop the puck. Having such a good group with our D corps is also so powerful because I think it brings him a little bit of confidence, too, knowing we're going to shut things down for him."

The Nighthawks were actually ranked No. 2 nation-wide all season.

"The keys to our victory is just our total team buy-in," Hirst said. "These guys are probably the most unselfish kids I've coached in hockey in years. Their success came from them being happy for each other's success first."

The key forwards in the playoffs were Hayden Wheddon, Merik Boles, Johnny Scott, Bernier, Edwards and Vigfusson, Hirst said. Krestanovich led a defence that included such stalwarts as Parker Carrier and Jase Konecsni.

The Nighthawks are currently representing Manitoba at the Centennial Cup in Summerside, P.E.I., May 7-17. They are joined there by another Manitoba team, the Flin Flon Bombers, the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League champs.

"We're excited," Hirst said before the team left. "We sensed since the beginning of the season, not only did I see this team being the Turnbull Cup champions, which we are now, but I really see this team being the Centennial Cup champ."

The Terriers were the last MJHL team to win the Centennial Cup back in 2014.



MJHL COMMISSIONER KEVIN SAURETTE PRESENTS THE TURNBULL CUP TO NIVERVILLE CAPTAIN ADAM VIGFUSSON

THE 2025-26 MJHL CHAMPIONS NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS

1.	Ben Chornomydz	G
2.	Beckham Garchinski	D
3.	Jaden Mah	D
5.	Jake Demome	D
6.	Kole Mears	F
7.	Tyler Bernier	F
8.	Thomas Phillips	D
9.	Loik Leduc	F
10.	Evan Panzer	F
11.	Marlen Edwards	F
12.	Jase Konecsni	D
14.	Aaron Krestanowich (A)	D
15.	Adam Vigfusson (C)	F
16.	Ryken Arran	F
17.	Parker Carrier (A)	D
18.	Parker Rolston	F
19.	Calyb Moore	F
20.	John Scott	F
21.	Dawson Zeller (A)	F
22.	Luke Wagner	D
25.	Max Dowse	F
29.	Hayden Wheddon	F
33.	Austin Dubinsky	G
37.	Tegan Kurtz	F
55.	Merik Boles	F

GENERAL MANAGER
Mike McAulay

HEAD COACH
Dwight Hirst

ASSISTANT COACHES
Tyler Anderson
Jeff McGill

PHYSIOTHERAPIST
Justin Giesbrecht

STRENGTH & CONDITIONING COACH
Rob Pambrun

DOMINANCE

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by Darryl Gershman

AFTER LOSING GAME 1 OF THE MFHL U18 AAA CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES 5-0 TO THE DEFENDING CHAMPION EASTMAN SELECTS, THE WINNIPEG ICE CAME BACK WITH THREE-STRAIGHT WINS, TWO OF THEM IN OVERTIME, TO CLAIM THEIR FOURTH LEAGUE AND PROVINCIAL CHAMPIONSHIP IN THE LAST FOUR YEARS. THEN, A WEEK LATER, THE ICE TOOK OUT THE SASKATCHEWAN CHAMPIONS TO WIN MANITOBA'S FIRST WESTERN TITLE SINCE 2015 AND EARN A SPOT IN THE ESSO CUP NATIONAL U18 AAA CHAMPIONSHIP.

Championship teams are often defined not by how they start, but by how they respond. For the Winnipeg Ice, during two championship series within a week, their response to adversity was everything. Let's start right here in Manitoba.

After being steamrolled 5-0 in Game 1 of the best-of-five Manitoba Female Hockey League U18 AAA Championship series, the Ice looked nothing like the dominant team that had spent the winter atop the standings. The Selects had seized control, and for a brief moment, it appeared the crown might be staying in their hands.

Then the Ice flipped the script.

Three straight wins later - two of them in overtime - the Ice had reclaimed the provincial title and captured their fourth championship in five seasons with a dramatic 3-2 overtime victory in Game 4, sealed just 25 seconds into the extra frame by Gabby Robbins.

It wasn't just a win. It was a statement.

Then, one week later at Varsity View Arena in Winnipeg, the Ice beat the Battlefords WPD Ambulance Sharks two games to one in the best-of-three Western championship series.

However, they didn't win that series easily. After taking Game 1, 4-2, the Sharks came back and whipped the Ice 4-1 in Game 2. In Game 3, the Ice took a 3-1 lead, but the Sharks battled back to tie it before Callie Adams scored the winner with just four minutes remaining in regulation time.

Two championship finals. Two incredible series. Two celebrations.

"I don't know if there's words to describe how we felt after beating Saskatchewan," said Ice captain Aliyah Teixeira, who was brilliant in the series. "It didn't feel real and to do it with this group, I was so proud. It feels so good."

It's interesting to note that while Isla Matthews was the Ice goaltender who got the job done against Eastman, it was Gina Plett who won the championship game against Battlefords. Nothing beats having two great goaltenders.



THE MFHL U18 AAA CHAMPIONS, WINNIPEG ICE



GABBY ROBBINS, CASSIE CARVALHO AND ALIYAH TEIXEIRA OF THE WINNIPEG ICE, THE 2025-26 CHAMPIONS



A CHAMPIONSHIP CELEBRATION

"We've been rotating all year," explained Ice head coach Eugene Kaminsky. "So, in Game 1 against Saskatchewan, Gina played amazing and we ended up winning 4-2. Then Isla went in for Game 2, and she struggled, so we put Gina back in for the second and third period in Game 2. Although we lost 4-1, we went back with Gina in Game 3, and she was amazing. She saw close to 40 shots and she was great for us. Breakaways, two-on-ones, she just made great saves. We're very fortunate to have two outstanding goaltenders."

With the victory over Battlefords, the Ice became the first Manitoba team to win the West and qualify for the ESSO Cup National U18 AAA championship since Central Plains went to the tournament in 2015. The last Manitoba team to win the ESSO Cup was the Pembina Valley Hawks in 2012.

MANITOBA CHAMPS

However, before getting the chance to even play in the Manitoba-Saskatchewan playdown, the Ice had to get past a very good Eastman club.

In fact, Eastman won the opener of the championship series decisively and appeared destined to win their second-straight title, but the Ice settled down defensively and simply shut the door. Winnipeg won Game 2 with a 2-0 shutout, took Game 3 with a 2-1 win in overtime and then won Game 4 in Niverville 3-2 in overtime.

The Robbins goal wrapped up a near-perfect season for the Ice. They went 25-2-1-0 in the regular season to finish first by a single point over the Selects then beat the Winnipeg Avros 3-1 in the semifinals before taking out the Selects 3-1 in the final.

However, if there was a turning point in the series, it came not in victory, but in that humbling Game 1 loss.

"It was probably the worst game I've seen us play in four years," admitted Kaminsky.

Coming off an emotional semifinal win over the Winnipeg Avros, the Ice entered the final with momentum - but not the edge required to win a championship.

Kaminsky sensed it before the puck even dropped.

"Even before the game, something just didn't feel right," he said. "And I should have twigged to it right then."

What followed was a hard reset - not just tactically, but mentally.

The Ice regrouped, had "significant conversations," and recommitted to the identity that had carried them to a 25-2-1 regular season and a first-place finish. From that point on, they didn't just play better. They played like champions.

DEFENCE, GOALTENDING AND BELIEF

Game 2 set the tone for the series. In fact, a 2-0 shutout win in Game 2 didn't just even the series, it re-established Winnipeg's structure, discipline and defensive commitment.

And it resulted in rookie goaltender Isla Matthews becoming a central figure in the turnaround.

Inserted after Game 1, Matthews delivered a shutout, then followed it with two more wins - including an overtime victory - to anchor the comeback.

"As a rookie goaltender, that's a huge accomplishment," Kaminsky said. "She didn't give away any easy rebounds and battled for every puck."

From there, the Ice leaned into their identity: tight defensively, relentless on pucks and unshakable under pressure.

Game 3? A 2-1 overtime win.

Game 4? Another nail-biter - and another comeback.

With just over two minutes left in regulation, and the championship slipping away, Claire Hudson stepped up. Her clutch power play goal forced overtime and a shot at a 3-1 series win.

THE MVP WHO NEVER QUIT

Hudson's equalizer wasn't just a big goal, it was a culmination of years of perseverance.

Named playoff MVP after scoring six goals - an impressive total for a defenceman - Hudson's journey to the top wasn't a straight line.

She didn't make the team the first time she tried out.

"I got cut my first year," Hudson said. "Then I went out to Interlake and came back the next year to try again."

Kaminsky. It would appear, saw something others didn't.

"We could identify that she had the skills and the opportunity to grow into a good defenceman," he said.

That growth became undeniable this season. Hudson's tying goal in Game 4 was also her 100th career AAA point - a milestone reached at the most important moment possible.

"I think it was just a lot of hard work," she said modestly. "And help from my team."



CLAIRE HUDSON, WINNIPEG ICE, PLAYOFF MVP WITH LEAGUE EXECUTIVES FERDI NELISSEN (LEFT) AND BRAD KIRK

OVERTIME MAGIC AGAIN

If Hudson forced overtime, Robbins finished it.

Just 25 seconds into the extra frame, the puck found its way to the net off a familiar sequence - a shot from captain Aliyah Teixeira and a fortunate deflection. Off Robbins' leg and into the net.

Game over. Series over.

"Free goal," Robbins said with a grin.

It may have been lucky, but the Ice had earned that bounce.

Robbins' winner capped a postseason defined by resilience and reinforced a mindset that had been there all season.

"From the start, that was our main goal," she said. "We really worked to get to this point."

Even after the Game 1 loss, belief in the team never disappeared. If anything, it sharpened.

"It was definitely a wake-up call," Robbins admitted.

What made this Ice team special wasn't just talent, it was the players' refusal to fold. Kaminsky pointed to multiple moments throughout the season where his team trailed late and found a way back.

"There's no give-up in this group," he said.

This championship wasn't just another banner. It was redemption. The Ice had won back-to-back titles in 2023 and 2024 before watching Eastman claim the crown last season. This year, they took it back.

WINNERS KNOW HOW TO WIN

For players like Robbins, the victory was another chapter in a career filled with championships. From U13 to U15 to national-level success, winning has followed her.

But this one hit different.

"This is my first U18 championship," she said.

And perhaps not her last. With another year of eligibility remaining, Robbins and the Ice aren't going anywhere.

Together, they form the backbone of a program that has become the standard in Manitoba.

THE 2026 MFHL U18 AAA AND WESTERN CANADIAN CHAMPIONS

1.	Isla Matthews	G
2.	Aliyah Teixeira	D
3.	Claire Hudson	D
4.	Leah Simes	D
5.	Sophie Ohta	D
6.	Chloe Nicolas	F
7.	Callie Adams	F
8.	Sophie Woznesensky	F
9.	Gabby Robbins	F
11.	Maren Temple	F
12.	Kate Cairns	F
14.	Teagan Walker	D
15.	Halle Chabluk	F
16.	Cassie Carvalho	F
17.	Talia Jones	F
19.	Chloe Delaquis	D
30.	Gina Plett	G

HEAD COACH
Eugene Kaminsky

ASSISTANT COACHES
Jessica Kaminsky
Kyle Klassen



LA BROQUERIE HABS, CRJHL CHAMPIONS

A RUN TO REMEMBER

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by Duncan Hasker

THE LA BROQUERIE HABS, AN EXPANSION FRANCHISE IN ONLY ITS SECOND SEASON OF EXISTENCE, FINISHED FOURTH IN THE CAPITAL REGION JUNIOR HOCKEY LEAGUE THIS YEAR. THEN, WHEN THE PLAYOFFS STARTED, THEY WENT ON A ROLL, BEATING ARBORG, FIRST-PLACE ST. MALO AND THIRD-PLACE SELKIRK TO CLAIM THEIR FIRST LEAGUE CHAMPIONSHIP. IT WAS AN UNFORGETTABLE PLAYOFF RUN.

They weren't supposed to win.

Not this year. Not this soon. Not against teams that were thought to be deeper, more experienced and, on paper, better.

But somewhere between a middle-of-the-pack regular season and a thunderous playoff run, the La Broquerie Habitants flipped the script — and in doing so, authored one of the most compelling championship stories the Capital Region Junior Hockey League has seen.

In just their second season of existence, the expansion Habs are CRJHL champions.

"We weren't the strongest, we knew that coming into the season," said the Habs' Colton Pakoo, the leading scorer in the playoffs. "We were just a second-year team, but throughout the season, we were putting pieces of the puzzle together and figuring out what kind of style we were going to go with. Our coaches did a great job with us and the locker room stayed together. I think it was a big part of the championship run. The room was so close and we had so much belief in each other. In the end, it was a run that I'll never forget. It was a ride I've never gone on before."

La Broquerie capped off a stunning 2025-26 postseason by defeating the heavily favoured Selkirk Fishermen in five games in the best-of-seven final, clinching the franchise's first CRJHL title in dominant fashion. The clincher? A composed, clinical 3-0 shutout on Selkirk ice — the kind of performance that defines champions and silences doubters.

A TEAM THAT GREW INTO ITSELF

The Habitants entered the playoffs as the fourth-place team, sitting a full 20 points behind the league-leading St. Malo Warriors. Respectable, yes, but hardly the profile of a championship favourite.

Inside the room, though, belief never wavered.

"We had beaten every team in the league during the season," said general manager Steve Hildebrand. "So, we knew if we played our game and stayed consistent, we could beat anyone."

Consistency, however, was elusive through much of the regular season. Injuries, work commitments and shifting lineups meant the Habs rarely iced the same group twice. Chemistry came in flashes, not in waves.

That changed when the playoffs began.

"Once we got healthy and had consistent lineups, everything settled," Hildebrand said. "And in the playoffs, there was just one focus. Everyone bought in."

The transformation was almost immediate.

La Broquerie dispatched Arborg in four games in the opening round, then faced its biggest test: the defending champion Warriors. Down 2-1 in the series, the Habs didn't blink. They responded with three straight wins — 5-2, 4-1 and a tight 3-2 decision — to punch their ticket to the final.

By then, something had clearly shifted. The Habs weren't just competing. They were rolling.

STARS SHINE WHEN IT MATTERS

Every championship run has its difference-makers. For La Broquerie, it was a trio that didn't just produce - they dominated.

Pakoo led all playoff scorers with nine goals and 19 points, elevating his game when it mattered most.

"Colton went to another level," Hildebrand said. "You could see his desire to win. It was awesome to watch."

Right behind him were Luka Tetrault (10 goals, 17 points) and Mario Gagnon (eight goals, 17 points), giving the Habs the top three scorers in the entire postseason - a staggering achievement and a testament to their depth and balance.

What made it even more impressive? They weren't all playing together.

"No, they weren't on the same line," said head coach Dan Taillefer. "That allowed us to spread out our offence. Mario and Colton had great chemistry, and Luka came in and made a huge impact for us."



YANIK GAGNON ENJOYS ONE OF THE GREATEST MOMENTS IN SPORTS NOTHING BEATS WINNING A CHAMPIONSHIP



CAPTAIN FELIX ASSELIN IS READY TO START THE PARTY



CAPTAIN FELIX ASSELIN AND HONOURARY TEAM MEMBER DALE PLETT RAISE THE CHAMPIONSHIP TROPHY



CHARLEAUX LAFRENIERE OF THE HABS DIVES PAST SELKIRK'S DEACON KEMP IN THE EXCITING GAME 5 AT SELKIRK

Tetrault's arrival midway through the playoffs added a new dimension. Fresh off a high school championship run, he injected energy and scoring touch at exactly the right time.

"It was just kind of everything clicking," Taillefer said. "Everyone bought into our system, especially defensively, and then we got offense when we needed it."

THE BACKBONE BETWEEN THE PIPES

While the offence grabbed headlines, the foundation of the Habs' run was built in goal. In fact, Jaxon Loewen was nothing short of spectacular.

The former Eastman Selects' star from Steinbach delivered calm, consistent goaltending throughout the run, highlighted by a 34-save shutout in the championship-clinching Game 5. It was his second shutout of the playoffs - and perhaps his most important.

"There's a reason he was CRJHL Goalie of the Year," Hildebrand said. "When you have that kind of consistency back there, it makes everything easier."

That confidence radiated through the lineup. Defenders played with more freedom. Forwards took calculated risks. The entire team operated with the assurance that their last line of defence would hold. And Loewen did.

If the final result suggested dominance, the games themselves told a different story. And it's why goaltending was so important. Three of the five games in the championship series were decided by a single goal, including a dramatic 4-3 overtime victory that swung momentum firmly in La Broquerie's favour.

These were tight, pressure-packed contests - the kind that often hinge on experience. But the Habs didn't flinch. They executed. They stayed composed. And when the moment came, they delivered.

A COMMUNITY IGNITED

If the players felt the momentum building, so did the town. The team that Ken Tallaire and a group of local businesspeople created two years ago came together at just the right time and the community loved it.

"I've never played in such a great atmosphere," said Pakoo, a member of Shoal Lake Cree Nation in Saskatchewan. "Having the fans behind our backs was a big part of the run. We couldn't have done it without them, honestly. With the support that we had, it was unreal and it was unreal all season. We had good turnouts every game.

"In the playoffs, though, the building was packed and everyone was standing. It was incredible."

With the local U18 team eliminated early, fans adopted the Habitants as their own. They packed the local Hylife Centre, travelled to road games and created an atmosphere that felt more NCAA than Junior B.

"There were drums, air horns, chants... it was unbelievable," Hildebrand said. "The fans brought so much energy."

That energy followed the team all the way to Selkirk for Game 5, where a vocal contingent of La Broquerie supporters turned an



GOALIE JAXON LOEWEN SAYS HIS 34-SAVE, 3-0 SHUTOUT WAS A-OK

opponent's rink into something resembling home ice.

"It wasn't just our team winning," Taillefer said. "It was the whole community."

The speed of La Broquerie's rise is almost as impressive as the title itself.

"It all happened pretty fast," Taillefer said. "But we had a great group of guys who really wanted to win."

That desire, more than anything, defined the team. They were all committed and, in the end, that made all the difference.

A CELEBRATION TO REMEMBER

When the final buzzer sounded in Game 5, the celebration began — and it didn't stop.

Winning on a Thursday only added fuel to the fire.

"No one went to work the next day," Taillefer said with a laugh. "And we had the whole weekend to celebrate."

Players, fans, families - the entire community joined in, soaking in a moment that will be remembered for years.

The celebration isn't over, either. There will be a parade of sorts.

The Habitants will take their championship on the road this summer, featured prominently in La Broquerie's annual St. Jean Festival parade - a fitting tribute for a team that brought so much pride back to its hometown.

In a league built on passion for the game and a commitment to community, the La Broquerie Habitants checked every box. They battled adversity. They found their identity. And they rose when it mattered most.

"They just believed," Hildebrand said.

That belief didn't just win a small Manitoba community a junior hockey championship - it built something that will last a lifetime.

LABROQUERIE Habs HABITANTS

THE 2025-26 CRJHL CHAMPIONS LA BROQUERIE HABS

1.	Jaxon Loewen	G
5.	Drew Heide	F
6.	Chris Tetrault	F
7.	Dawson Pow	D
8.	Mario Gagnon	F
9.	Charleaux Lafreniere	D
10.	Calem Normandeau	D
11.	Ty Mistelbacher	F
12.	Luka Tetrault	F
13.	Yanik Gagnon	F
15.	Colton Pakoo	F
16.	Carson Tallaire	D
17.	Payton Plett	F
18.	Davinault Lafreniere	F
19.	Nathan Storoschuk	F
21.	Alex Hildebrand	F
22.	Chase Plett	F
25.	Nathan Forster	D
27.	Felix Asselin	F
28.	Gabriel Asselin	F
31.	Caleb Legal	G
44.	Mark Plett	F
55.	Zavier Labossiere	F
67.	Grayson Plett	D
77.	Zane Koop	D
91.	Connor Tallaire	F

HEAD COACH
Dan Taillefer

ASSISTANT COACHES
Rejean Carriere
Jean Moquin

ATHLETIC THERAPIST
Manon Lafreniere

GENERAL MANAGER
Steve Hildebrand

PRESIDENT
Ken Tallaire



MVP SHADEN DULIAK WITH THE ED ALBERT CUP

BACK-TO-BACK

BY JOHNSTON HALL
Photos by Kelly Jacobson

THERE WAS ANOTHER STORM SURGE IN THE NORTH THIS SPRING AS THE OPASKWAYAK CREE NATION STORM WON THEIR SECOND CONSECUTIVE KEYSTONE JR. B HOCKEY LEAGUE AND PROVINCIAL JR. B CHAMPIONSHIP. THE STORM KNOCKED OFF THE NORWAY HOUSE NORTHSTARS IN SIX GAMES TO WIN THE ED ALBERT CUP AND EARN AN INVITATION TO THE CENTRAL CANADA CUP TOURNAMENT.

There is a level of character with championship teams that refuses to fade quietly. When the moment tightens, when the series swings, when the noise gets loud and the doubt creeps in, true winners don't just respond, they roar back.

And in northern Manitoba, inside rinks where the boards shake and the fans lean into every shift, the OCN Storm didn't just defend a title this spring, they reinforced a legacy.

On April 16 at the Kinosao Sipi Multiplex in Norway House, the Storm closed out a fierce Keystone Junior B Hockey League final with a commanding 7-3 victory over the Norway House Northstars, capturing the series four games to two and securing back-to-back league and provincial championships.

For a team that had already proven it could win, this one felt different. Harder. Grittier. Well-earned.

"This was a different kind of series," said head coach Ethan Constant, proud to bring the Ed Albert Cup back to OCN. "Both teams were close, top to bottom. We knew this wasn't going to be handed to us."

A SERIES THAT SWUNG LIKE A PENDULUM

At first, it looked like the Storm, the team that finished first during the regular season with a 25-5-1-3 record, were going to cruise.

OCN opened the series at home with authority, taking the first two games 6-3 and 4-1 at the Gordon Lathlin Memorial Centre - a rink as intimidating as any in Junior B hockey. The Storm were fast, confident, and in control.

Then came the shift.

Back in Norway House, the second-place Northstars (25-9-0-0) erupted. A stunning 13-2 blowout in Game 3 sent a message through the series - and perhaps into the Storm dressing room. Norway House followed that up with a tight 2-1 win in Game 4, suddenly evening the series and flipping momentum entirely.

"That was a bit of a reality check," Constant admitted. "It showed us this wasn't just going to be ours. We were going to have to work for it."

What followed was championship hockey at its finest.

OCN regrouped, returned home, and leaned into the energy of their building and community. They reclaimed control with a high-scoring 9-6 win in Game 5, thanks to hat tricks from playoff MVP Shaden Duliak and veteran Cedrick Puffalt, before heading back on the road with a chance to close it out.

They didn't miss.



THE 2025-26 KJHL CHAMPION OCN STORM

A CHAMPIONSHIP PEDIGREE

In the deciding game, the Storm delivered a performance that reflected everything they had built all season - depth, resilience, and timely execution.

Duliak led the way with two goals, finishing the postseason with a league-best 14 goals and 19 points. Drew Peters and Lazarus Constant each added a goal and an assist, while Mathis Bacon-Labbé, Liam Flett, and Riel Chartrand chipped in with singles.

Peters' second period, power-play marker stood as the game-winner—a fitting moment for a player who battled back from injury to play a key role down the stretch.

"Drew's just built different," said Constant. "He couldn't stay out long, so he came back from that hand injury, and just showed why he's one of the best in the league."

To be fair, Norway House didn't go quietly. Lucien Tait-Reaume, the league's regular-season scoring leader, posted a goal and an assist, and the Northstars pushed hard offensively. Despite facing 48 shots in Game 6, Storm goaltender Logan Grenier stood tall, turning aside 45 of them in a championship-clinching performance.

"He's been top-notch for us all playoffs," said Constant. "Both our goalies have been huge."

Special teams told another story. Norway House spent a staggering 57 minutes in the penalty box compared to OCN's 18, but the Northstars penalty kill held strong, limiting the Storm to two goals on 11 power-play opportunities.



THE ED ALBERT CUP

BUILT FOR THIS MOMENT

Championship teams are rarely built on one line, one player, or one moment. The Storm's strength came from everywhere.

From veteran presence to role players stepping up, OCN's lineup delivered.

Constant pointed to a long list of contributors - Duliak, Cedrick Puffalt, Lazarus Constant, Keestin Danielson, Drew Peters, Justin Eetuk, Carson Clemons, as well as players like Liam Flett and Riel Chartrand, who adapted to new roles when needed.

Even the newcomers made an impact.

Duliak, who arrived from Saskatchewan with a reputation as a high-level playoff performer, wasted no time living up to it.

"He told us he wanted to prove something," said Constant. "He wanted to show why he'd been an MVP in Saskatchewan. He did that and more."

The connection went deeper than hockey. With family ties in the region and a quick embrace of the team's culture, Duliak became more than just a scorer. He became part of the Storm identity.



COACH ETHAN CONSTANT WITH THE ED ALBERT CUP

"He really bought into what we're about here," said Constant. "That meant everything."

POWER OF HOME

If there's a heartbeat to the Storm, it echoes from the Gordon Lathlin Memorial Centre.

The building, steeped in history and packed with passionate fans, remains one of the most influential home-ice advantages in Manitoba hockey. And in this series, it played a defining role.

After the back-to-back losses in Norway House, returning home reset everything.

"It's just different playing there," Constant said. "Our fans, the energy - it gives you momentum right away. It's tough for visiting teams."

That Game 5 win wasn't just about goals, it was about reclaiming identity.

And once they did, the Storm carried it with them back on the road.

RESILIENCE CHAMPION

What separates a champion from a contender isn't perfection but rather response. The Storm didn't dominate wire-to-wire. They got punched. They got pushed. They got tested. And they answered.

From a 13-2 loss to lifting the trophy, their path demanded accountability, adjustment, and belief.

"We knew Norway House was going to be good," said Constant. "They've been building toward this. It was going to be a battle, and it was."

That battle made the victory sweeter.

With the KJHL championship secured, the Storm quickly turned their attention to the next challenge - the Central Canada Cup in Saskatoon.

Leaving just days after their Game 6 win, OCN headed into interprovincial competition carrying not just momentum, but confidence.

"We're ready," said Constant. "The guys are excited."

For a team that has now proven it can win—and win again—the expectations don't shrink. They grow. And the rise above all the adversity.

THE 2025-26 KJHL CHAMPIONS OCN STORM

1.	Kobe Knutson	G
3.	Wyatt Hall	F
6.	Dravin Ballantyne	D
7.	Riel Chartrand	D
8.	Prime Paniyuk	F
9.	Liam Flett	F
11.	Cedrick Puffalt	F
12.	Justin Eetuk	D
13.	Maddox Dominey	F
14.	Carson Clemons	D
16.	Logan Marr	F
17.	Jacey Melnyk	F
20.	Laryn Chaboyer	F
21.	Brody Burrell	D
23.	Gavin DeSerre	F
24.	Mathis Bacon-Labbé	F
25.	Carter Clemons (AP)	F
26.	Shaden Duliak	F
27.	Sanchez Bercier (AP)	D
28.	Drew Peters	F
29.	Logan Grenier	G
31.	Nolan Sinclair Jr.	G
34.	Rowan Fenner	D
37.	Keestin Danielson	F
51.	Lazarus Constant	F
61.	Reed Grenier (AP)	D
81.	Ozy Atkinson	F

GENERAL MANAGER
Alan Burrell

HEAD COACH
Ethan Constant

ASSISTANT COACHES
Donald Melnyk Jr.
Keilan Holland

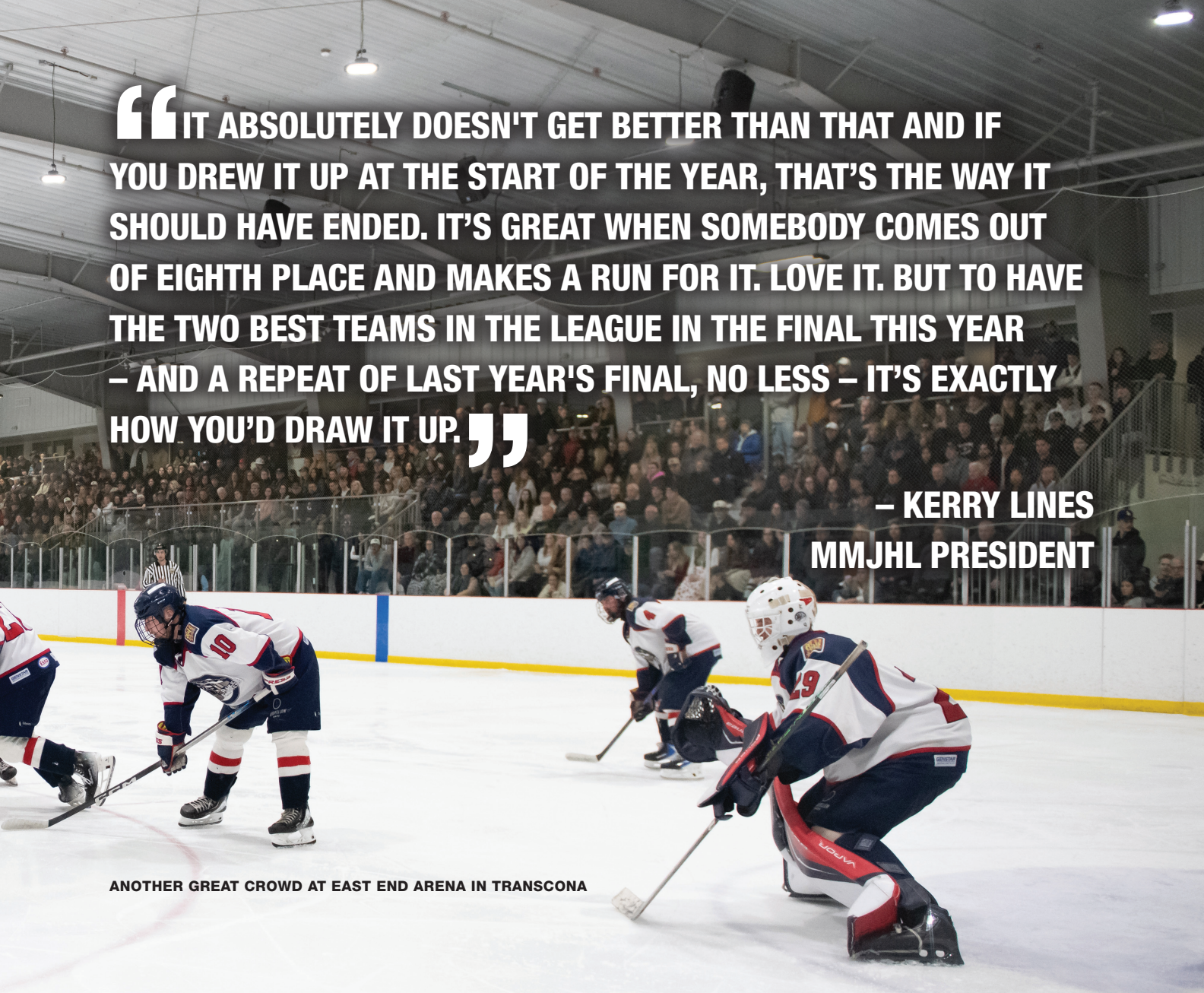
TRAINER
Jenelle Quiring



RAILER-EXPRESS DELIVER

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by Duncan Hasker

TRANSCONA'S 2026 REDEMPTION RUN HAS ENDED IN MMJHL GLORY. THE NEW CHAMPIONS BOUNCED BACK FROM LAST YEAR'S CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL LOSS TO ST. BONIFACE TO CLAIM THE FIRST LEAGUE TITLE IN RAILER-EXPRESS HISTORY



“IT ABSOLUTELY DOESN'T GET BETTER THAN THAT AND IF YOU DREW IT UP AT THE START OF THE YEAR, THAT’S THE WAY IT SHOULD HAVE ENDED. IT’S GREAT WHEN SOMEBODY COMES OUT OF EIGHTH PLACE AND MAKES A RUN FOR IT. LOVE IT. BUT TO HAVE THE TWO BEST TEAMS IN THE LEAGUE IN THE FINAL THIS YEAR – AND A REPEAT OF LAST YEAR'S FINAL, NO LESS – IT’S EXACTLY HOW YOU’D DRAW IT UP.”

– KERRY LINES
MMJHL PRESIDENT

ANOTHER GREAT CROWD AT EAST END ARENA IN TRANSCONA

On a cool spring night that crackled with noise, nerves and a long-awaited payoff, the Transcona Railer-Express didn’t just win a championship—they finished a story that was a full year in the making.

And they did it emphatically.

A 5-0 Game 7 victory over the St. Boniface Riels on April 28, sealed a Manitoba Major Junior Hockey League title in dramatic, cathartic fashion—exorcising the ghosts of last year’s final and cementing Transcona’s place atop the league after a season spent chasing one singular goal.

For head coach and general manager Derek Gagnon, the moment was equal parts relief and validation.

“It was nice to finish the job,” Gagnon said modestly. “Those were the top two teams all year, and to go through a team that good and beat them in the final, it means something.”

No kidding. It actually meant everything to a hockey club that had been there before—and come up short.

From October to April, the Railer-Express looked like a team on a mission. They finished first overall with a dominant 36-7-1-0 record, setting the tone as the league’s most complete squad.

But dominance in the regular season doesn’t guarantee anything in the playoffs—especially not against three rivals like the Raiders (quarter-final, four straight), River East (semi-final, four straight) and St. Boniface.

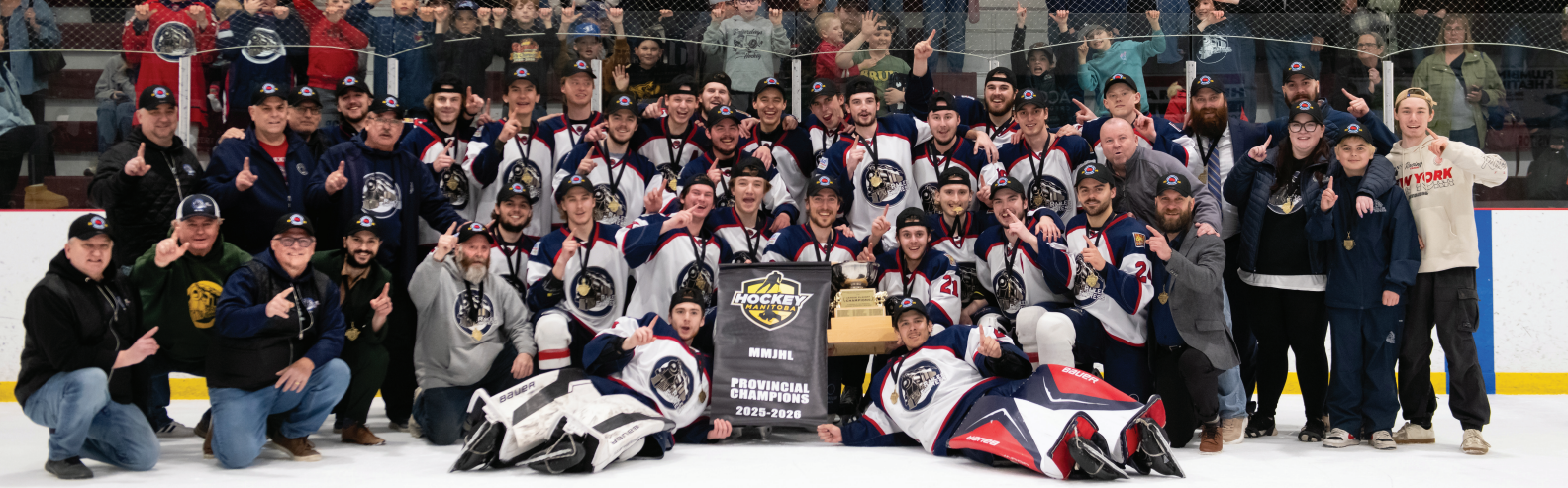
Make no mistake, the Riels pushed Transcona to the brink in a seven-game war that featured overtime thrillers, goaltending duels and momentum swings. It often felt like emotional whiplash.

Game 2 needed overtime. Game 5 needed overtime. Game 6 was a lopsided setback that forced a winner-take-all finale.

And then came Game 7.

The Railer-Express didn’t just win—they overwhelmed.

“It was perseverance,” Gagnon said. “We just kept going and going. That’s what it took.”



THE 2025-26 MMJHL CHAMPIONS, THE TRANSCONA RAILER-EXPRESS

A CAPTAIN'S CURTAIN CALL

At the heart of it all was captain Nolan Van Den Bussche, who delivered a performance for the ages when it mattered most -- four goals in Game 7. Playoff MVP. Final game of his junior career.

Not bad for a farewell.

"That's a pretty good way to go out," Van Den Bussche said with a grin.

If there was any doubt about his impact, it disappeared in the final moments of the series. For Van Den Bussche, the championship wasn't built in one night—it was forged over months of commitment.

"All year, we had one goal in mind," he said. "We bought in—from late-night practices to weekends—and when the playoffs came, we just stuck with it."

Even when things didn't go their way—when pucks wouldn't bounce, when opposing goaltenders stood on their heads—the Railer-Express refused to waver.

"We just had to battle through it," he said. "In Game 7, we wanted it so bad. And with the energy in the building—it was impossible not to be ready."

THE GOALTENDING BACKBONE

While Van Den Bussche supplied the offence, along with teammates Trey Sellen, Kaden Bruchanski, Nathan Turner and Declan Whiteman Transcona's foundation rested in goal.

Sage Delaronde, one of the league's most compelling stories, delivered a season—and a playoff run—that turned heads across Manitoba.

A product of high school hockey and a "diamond in the rough," De La Ronde didn't arrive with pedigree. He earned everything. And in the playoffs, he was exceptional.

Twelve wins. A 2.11 goals-against average. A .927 save percentage.

"He's earned every single thing he's gotten," Gagnon said. "Nothing's been given to him."

Across the ice, St. Boniface's Owen LaRocque was just as heroic at times—stealing games, frustrating shooters and nearly flipping the series single-handedly.

But in the end, Transcona's depth—and Delaronde's consistency—proved decisive.

A LEAGUE ON THE RISE

For MMJHL president Kerry Lines, the series was more than just a championship—it was a showcase.

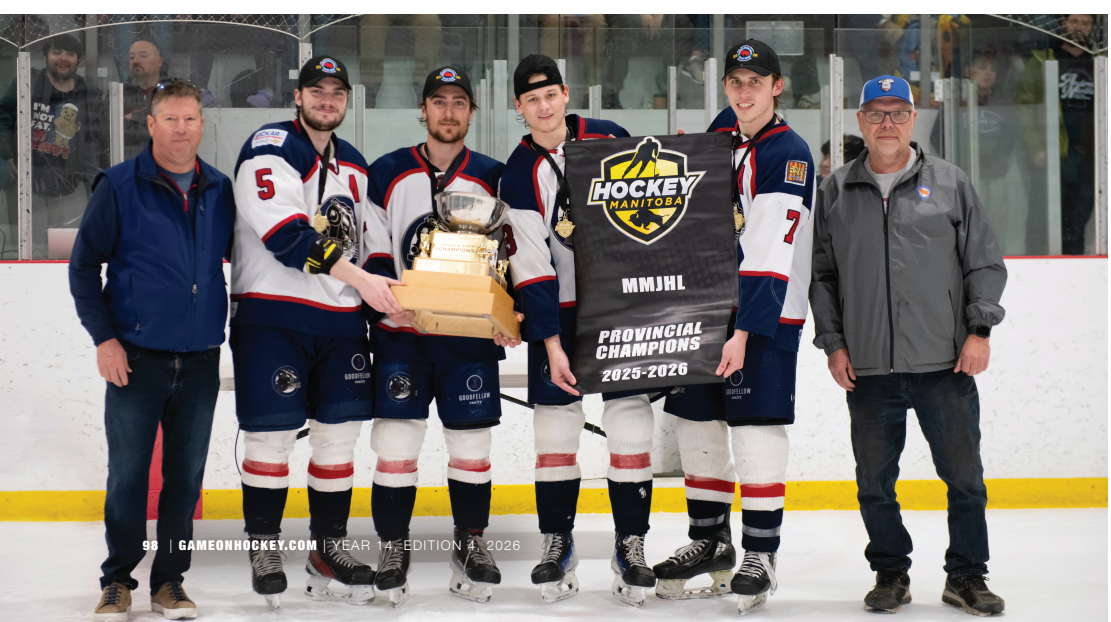
"It doesn't get better than that," Lines said. "Fast, clean, physical—everything hockey should be this time of year."

More importantly, it was a reflection of a league that continues to evolve.

The days of players chasing higher levels at all costs are shifting. Increasingly, athletes are choosing balance—pursuing education while still playing high-level hockey close to home.

"The parity in our league is really good," Gagnon said. "There are kids here who could play higher, but they're choosing this path—and it's making the league better."

That balance is evident across the Railer-Express roster, where players juggle school, careers and competitive hockey—without sacrificing excellence on the ice.



MMJHL PRESIDENT KERRY LINES AT THE 2026 CHAMPIONS



PLAYOFF MVP NOLAN VAN DEN BUSSCHE

REDEMPTION REALIZED

What made this championship resonate wasn't just the victory—it was the journey.

A year earlier, Transcona fell short against the same opponent. This time, they flipped the script.

From the opening round to the final buzzer of Game 7, they went 12-3 in the postseason—methodical, resilient and, when it mattered most, dominant.

"It felt awesome," Van Den Bussche said. "Especially after last year."

For a veteran core that had lived through that disappointment, the payoff was sweeter.

MORE THAN A TEAM

However, the Railer-Express story isn't just about a roster—it's about a community.

Nine players came out of Springfield Collegiate. Teammates grew up together. Played together. Won together.

And now, they'll celebrate together—taking a well-earned trip to Mexico, a bonding experience that feels like the perfect epilogue to a championship season.

"It's great," Gagnon said. "I wish I was 21 again and going to Mexico with those guys."

Meanwhile, championships are fleeting. Rosters change. Windows shift. Transcona will now lose seven players to age. But if this run proved anything, it's that the Railer-Express aren't built on a single group—they're built on a culture.

Young talent is already waiting in the wings. The expectation isn't to rebuild. It's to reload.

"We're always going to be competitive," Gagnon said. "That's just the culture within this organization."

In the end, the 2026 MMJHL final delivered exactly what hockey fans crave: tension, skill, heart—and a Game 7 that lived up to the moment.

Two top teams. Seven games. One champion. And for the Transcona Railer-Express, a finish that felt as inevitable as it was unforgettable.

They didn't just win. They delivered.

THE 2025-26 MMJHL CHAMPIONS TRANSCONA RAILER-EXPRESS

1.	Thomas Wyatt	G
2.	Matthew McCorrister	D
4.	Trey Sellen	F
5.	Jace Larkins (A)	D
6.	Kyle Todoruk	D
7.	Kaden Bruchanski (A)	D
8.	Ethan Morris	D
9.	Hayden Kochen	F
10.	Roan Koe	D
11.	Carter Johannesson	F
12.	Taigan Newton (AP)	D
13.	Tyson Vouriot	F
14.	Kaeden Siwak	F
15.	Griffin Boomer	F
16.	Declan Whiteman	F
17.	Tyson Pruden	F
18.	Cameron Sylvester	F
20.	Jacob Howell	D
21.	Noah St. Laurent	F
22.	Nolan Van Den Bussche (C)	F
23.	Nathan Turner (A)	F
24.	Jack Kabaluk	F
26.	Keaton Johnson	F
27.	Ryder McLure	F
28.	Luc De Gagne	F
29.	Sage Delaronde	G
30.	Carter Warren (AP)	G

PRESIDENT
Don Gale

DIRECTOR OF HOCKEY OPERATIONS
Bruce Schmidt

GM AND HEAD COACH
Derek Gagnon

ASSISTANT COACH/ASSISTANT GM
Pierre Landry

ASSISTANT COACHES
Cam Fehr
Connor Shaw

EQUIPMENT MANAGERS
Louis Bellavance
Zeb Phelps

TRAINER
Ashley Fergusson



TWISTERS' SCORING LEADER OWEN VANROBAEYS IS PEMBINA VALLEY'S PLAYER OF THE YEAR.

SMALL MAN, BIG HEART

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by Merlin Heppner

If Owen Vanrobaeys has learned anything over the past two seasons in the Manitoba Major Junior Hockey League, it's this: you don't need size to make an impact - you need timing, touch and a little bit of stubborn belief.

At five-foot-seven and 150 pounds on a generous day, the Pembina Valley Twisters' forward still disappears in the lineup card. But on the ice, he's becoming harder and harder to miss.

And now, heading into the final season of his junior career, Vanrobaeys is ready to make it count.

"I don't really pay attention to my size," he said with a laugh earlier this week. "I know I'm not the biggest guy out there, but I've always just tried to play my game - move, find space and make plays."

That game has evolved.

A year ago, Vanrobaeys was a promising but undersized rookie, finishing with five goals and 12 points in 45 games. This past season, he took a major step forward - leading the Twisters with 12 goals and 33 points in 44 games, earning praise from head coach Chris Unger who called Vanrobaeys, "the club's Player of the Year."

More importantly, Vanrobaeys became a driver. Not just on the scoresheet, but in the room.

"Yeah, I felt like I had a pretty solid year," he said. "Our line clicked most nights. Me, Darby (Olson) and



Ethan Wilde - we just kind of found some chemistry."

That chemistry wasn't accidental. Vanrobaeys and Olson have been playing together for years, dating back to their days in Morden minor hockey and high school with the Morden Thunder. The familiarity shows.

"We've been on the same line for, I don't know, five years now," he said. "You kind of just know where each other is going to be."

It's the kind of instinct that can't be coached - and the kind the Twisters will need moving forward.

Because while Vanrobaeys' individual numbers popped, the team's results did not.

Pembina Valley finished near the bottom of the standings again, continuing a difficult stretch for the franchise. But inside the room, something shifted late in the season - and Vanrobaeys believes it could be the turning point.

"When the new coaches came in, everything kind of changed," he said. "Before that, it felt like the room had kind of given up a bit. But once Chris (Unger) took over, there was a different energy. Guys started believing again."

The standings didn't flip overnight, but the attitude did. And for a player like Vanrobaeys, that mattered.

"Yeah, it gave us something to build on," he said. "Now we're pretty excited for next year. Hopefully we can turn things around even more."

Next year is his last year and that reality isn't lost on him.

"Yeah, it'll be my third year, my last one," he said. "So obviously you want to make it a big one."



There's a sense of urgency there, but also maturity.

Vanrobaeys isn't just a junior hockey player anymore. He's balancing life beyond the rink, completing his first year in electrical engineering at Red River Polytechnic while continuing to chase success with the Twisters.

"It's going good," he said of school. "Nothing to complain about. The plan right now is probably to get into the workforce after I finish this program, but we'll see. Things can change."

That grounded outlook mirrors his game - steady, unflashy, effective.

He's not going to overpower defenders or dominate physically. Instead, he slips through seams, shifts laterally to create space and distributes the puck with purpose.

"I've always been more of a playmaker," he said. "I like setting guys up. I'm more of an assist guy."

That identity has carried him from Morden to high school hockey, to a stint in the United States with Lake Region State College - where he put up 25 points in 25 games - and now back to Manitoba with the Twisters.

Each step has reinforced the same lesson: hockey IQ can level the playing field.

"I just try to stay shifty, move side-to-side and find openings," he said. "You've got to be smart when you're playing against bigger guys. You don't want to get caught."

It's a style built on survival - and success.

Off the ice, Vanrobaeys remains just as grounded. His summers are typically spent back home in Morden, working physical jobs like landscaping and tree work - a contrast to the finesse he shows on the ice.

This year figures to be no different.

"Yeah, I'll probably go back home and work for the city again if I can," he said. "Nothing locked in yet, but that's usually what I do."

It's that blend of blue-collar work ethic and on-ice creativity that makes him such a valuable piece for the Twisters - and a natural candidate to lead.

Not by the volume of his voice, but by the example he sets on the ice.

"He's exactly the kind of guy you want around," Unger said earlier this season. "He works hard, doesn't complain, and just gets better."

Now, the challenge is turning individual growth into team success. And nobody wants that more than Owen Vanrobaeys.

THREE-TIME MMJHL CHAMPION

PEMBINA VALLEY TWISTERS

ARE PROUD TO BE A PART OF THE
MANITOBA MAJOR JUNIOR HOCKEY LEAGUE



BIGWAY FOODS

MORRIS BIGWAY FOODS IS A PROUD SUPPORTER OF
THE PEMBINA VALLEY TWISTERS AND
THE MANITOBA MAJOR JUNIOR HOCKEY LEAGUE

654 MAIN STREET MORRIS, MB, ROG 1K0 1-204-746-2411



BY PAUL EDMONDS

Photos courtesy of Dave Willson, Brittyn Lanigan and Kale Nicol

BRUINS BREAK THROUGH



It was simply the moment Larry Woo knew he couldn't hold his group back.

Like an experienced jockey, the only option to satisfy his collective stable was to ease out the reins and let the young stallions run.

In the final week of the regular season, the U18 AAA Winnipeg Bruins were poised to finish first in the standings with two games remaining. A victory over the rival Winnipeg Wild secured top spot in the Manitoba U18 Hockey League (MU18HL), but it was two nights later in the finale where Woo noticed a shift.

Following a weather postponement earlier in the season, the Bruins completed their 48-game schedule with a February 24 make-up game in Brandon against the Wheat Kings. The outcome carried little meaning in the standings, especially for Winnipeg.

For a team already locked into first, it would have been understandable if the contest lacked urgency.

"I told the team beforehand it's a game that we have to play," said Woo, the Bruins' second-year head coach. "And I'm not going to change the structure too much, but let's not be stupid here. And let's just get home. It was a game that could have gone 100 different ways, but after it, I went, 'Wow.'"



The Bruins hit the ice that night in full gallop. In a "meaningless" game, they built a 5-0 lead after the first period and cruised to a 7-4 victory, finishing with a league-best 42-3-1-2 record.

DANNY CROSS

"There was a big difference with this group," said Woo. "With other teams sometimes as a coaching staff you feel that you have to do something to get them moving. With this group it was lay out the game plan and just let them go."

One of the key elements to the Bruins' success was roster composition. The team blended veteran leaders like captain and third-year defenceman Danny Cross with seven 15-year-olds.

That included Crewe Schimnowski, who finished second in league scoring with 42 goals and 98 points in 44 games. And like his coach, the talented forward viewed Game 48 as a turning point.

"It really showed how we approached the season regardless of the circumstances," said Schimnowski, a Grade 10 student at St. Paul's High School. "Right there, I knew we were going to take it far. That game was a lot of fun and it represented our team really well."

The Bruins not only made a statement that night, they carried it into a perfect playoff run, capturing the 2025-26 MU18HL championship with a three-game sweep of the Brandon Wheat Kings.

It was a dominant stretch, with the Bruins outscoring opponents 53-13 en route to a 9-0 record.

"That game played a huge role in our playoff success," said Schimnowski. "Ending the regular season on that note was huge for us, and it carried through in the playoffs."

For the Bruins, the title marked the program's first since its creation in 2017-18 following a zone restructuring that expanded Winnipeg's provincial U18 teams from two to three.

It was also a unique season structurally. The Bruins carried 11 forwards and seven defencemen, rather than the traditional 12 and six.

Woo said there were logistical challenges early - ice time, line combinations, and managing expectations - but the group adapted.

"The game has changed," said Woo. "If you come up with a structure that fits your team and gives players responsibility, then you're generally going to have success.

"This was one of those years that I kept reminding myself of that process. This team took on every challenge and I don't think anything was going to hold them back."

From a tactical standpoint, the Bruins were difficult to play against - fast, aggressive, and committed to a north-south style.



CREWE SCHIMNOWSKI

"We had set plays, but we also liked to hound the puck," said Schimnowski. "It's something we did well all year.

"This was probably my favourite season. Taking it all the way is not easy, but it was really special to be a part of."

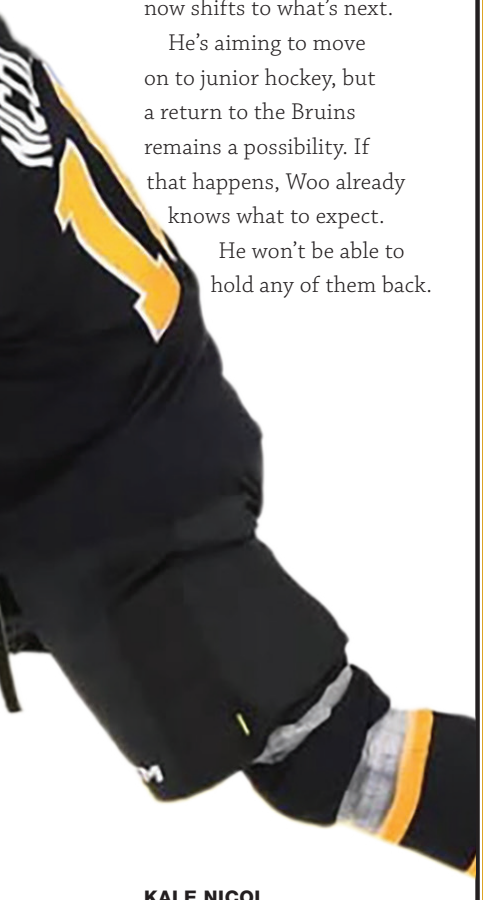
In addition to the league title, Schimnowski and the other six 15-year-olds were part of Team Manitoba's WHL Cup championship last fall.

"The boys were relentless," said Woo. "They worked for each other. They wanted to be better every day. They were a fun team to coach."

For Schimnowski the focus now shifts to what's next.

He's aiming to move on to junior hockey, but a return to the Bruins remains a possibility. If that happens, Woo already knows what to expect.

He won't be able to hold any of them back.



KALE NICOL



BRANDON'S BANNER YEAR

It was a bumper crop for AAA hockey in The Wheat City this season.

The Brandon Wheat Kings AAA program captured a pair of provincial titles and was a finalist in a third, making for an impressive yield in the city's hockey history.

"It was a very good year for Hockey Brandon," said Dave Lewis, head coach of the U15 AAA Wheat Kings. "It's part of a strong run the last four or five years."

His U15 team posted a 31-1-0 regular season before capturing the 2025-26 Winnipeg U15 AAA Hockey League A-Side championship.

It was the program's fourth title in five seasons, but a particularly meaningful one. The team dedicated the year to teammate Ryker Ethelston, who passed away two summers ago.

His parents, Craig and April, were on hand in Landmark to celebrate the series-clinching win over Eastman.

The victory capped a 9-3 playoff run, including a five-game semifinal series against the Winnipeg Bruins Gold.

Wheat Kings forward and 14-year-old phenom Kale Nicol paced all post-season scorers with 22 goals and 37 points in his team's 12 post-season games.

"It was a battle all the way through," said Lewis, who has coached in the Brandon area for nearly three decades and is also a retired teacher. "Sometimes it takes a little bit of luck to win, too."

On the other side, the Winnipeg Wild Red went 6-0 to claim the B-Side championship, sweeping the Yellowhead Chiefs.

At the U18 level, the Wheat Kings reached the MU18HL final for a third straight season, but fell to the Bruins in a three-game sweep.

The final championship piece came from the U17 AAA Wheat Kings.

In a league that has only recently expanded beyond Winnipeg, Brandon captured its first title at that level.

After finishing third in the regular season, the Wheat Kings surged in the playoffs, defeating both Eastman and Winnipeg en route to a 9-2 record, including a sweep of the Selects in the final.

"It was a sweep, but it didn't feel like that," said Wheat Kings head coach Aaron Rome, a former NHLer with Columbus, Dallas and Vancouver. "The kids worked for it."

"We had goals and expectations as a group and we were very pleased with the outcome," added Rome, who still farms near Nesbitt in the off-season. "We had a pretty steady regular season and we focused on playing the game the right way."

Wheaties forward Etienne Visser led the league in playoff scoring with nine goals and 20 points in 11 games.

Overall, it was a tremendously successful winter for Brandon AAA hockey, one they'd undoubtedly like seed again for another bumper crop next season.



CHA TEACHER/INSTRUCTOR MATTHEW VARNES RUNS A PROGRAM THAT HAS, IN JUST A DECADE OF OPERATION, TURNED OUT QUITE AN IMPRESSIVE LIST OF YOUNG HOCKEY STARS.

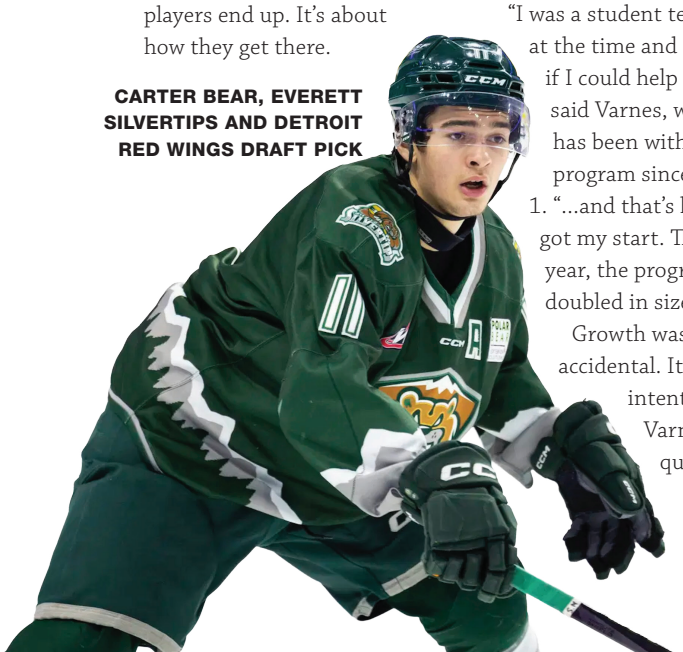
HOW FAR YOU WILL GO

BY SCOTT TAYLOR

Photos by Justin Berl, Dave Mahussier, Todd Pederson, Brian Johnson, Merrimack University, hockey for all centre, Dawson Petryshen, Michigan Hockey, @keithhershphoto, Doug Westcott and Evan Morud

Over the past decade, the Churchill Hockey Academy (CHA) has become one of Winnipeg's most influential development pipelines, shaping not just elite players, but resilient, driven young people who carry those on-ice lessons well beyond the rink.

Since its inception at Collège Churchill High School in 2015, CHA has grown from a modest idea into a thriving program that has produced NHL draft picks, NCAA standouts, WHL players and NCAA and U SPORTS stars. Yet, talk to those closest to the academy - from teacher Matt Varnes to its alumni - and a different story emerges. It's not just about where the players end up. It's about how they get there.



CARTER BEAR, EVERETT SILVERTIPS AND DETROIT RED WINGS DRAFT PICK

THE VISION

The foundation of the Churchill Hockey Academy was built on a simple observation: there was a gap in development opportunities within a public-school setting.

Roughly 11 years ago, Tim Friesen and Dom Zagari saw firsthand the need for a structured hockey program that balanced academics and high-level training. With support from Winnipeg School Division and school principal Donna Miller, that vision became reality.

The academy officially launched during the 2016–17 school year with about 25 Grade 7 students, and roughly 140 hours of ice time. It didn't take long for momentum to build.

"I was a student teacher at the time and asked if I could help out," said Varnes, who has been with the program since Day 1. "...and that's how I got my start. The next year, the program doubled in size."

Growth wasn't accidental. It was intentional. Varnes quickly recognized that to truly expand, the academy needed to extend into the high school level. Once that transition happened, CHA's trajectory changed.

"That's when players like Carter Bear decided to stick around," Varnes said. "From there, it's been constant growth."

A PROVEN PIPELINE

Today, Churchill Hockey Academy boasts an impressive alumni list that reads like a roadmap of hockey development success.

Players such as Bear—selected 13th overall by the Detroit Red Wings in the 2025 NHL Draft—and Owen Martin, a third-round pick of the Winnipeg Jets, both sharpened their skills within CHA's structure. NCAA Division I athletes like Jaydon Perron passed through the program, alongside a steady stream of WHL and USHL talent including Brek Liske, Jett Lajoie, Tyden Lafournaise, Hudson Kowalchuk and Avery Laliberte. As well, three members of Manitoba's WHL Cup champions all train and attend classes at Churchill today.

On the female side, the program has been equally impactful. NCAA stars Linnea Misner and Jordan Nishi; U SPORTS captains Dana Goertzen and Kara Yackel; along with players like Isabella Huculak and Selene Wozney, highlight CHA's ability to develop female athletes at a high level. More recently, multiple members of Team Manitoba's U18 and U16 squads have come through Churchill.

For Varnes, those names are a source of pride—but not necessarily for the reasons people might expect.

"As coaches, we were just a small piece," he said. "Those players put in the work. They deserve everything they get."



OWEN MARTIN, SPOKANE CHIEFS AND WINNIPEG JETS DRAFT PICK

MORE THAN ELITE

While CHA's résumé includes high-end talent, the program's true identity lies in its inclusivity.

"Our academy is not just for elite players," Varnes emphasized. "We work with athletes from AAA all the way down to recreational levels. The only requirement is that you're playing on a team."

That philosophy has become a defining feature. For every NHL draft pick, there are dozens of players who make significant leaps in their development - sometimes transforming their trajectory entirely.

"We've had kids go from single-A to AA or AAA in a year," Varnes said. "Those improvements can be just as meaningful as producing a high-end player."

It's a message that resonates with families. Parents often return to thank the program, not just for skill development, but for the confidence and maturity their children gain.

"By the time they leave Grade 9 or 10, you see growth in responsibility, accountability - life skills," Varnes said. "That's just as important as anything they do on the ice."

A COMPETITIVE CULTURE

For former CHA standout and University of Manitoba captain Dana Goertzen, the academy's impact was immediate and lasting.

"I loved it," she said. "I was part of the first group of girls in the program, and even then, you could see how special it was going to become."

Goertzen credits CHA with sharpening her competitive edge, particularly through its co-ed environment.

"I hadn't played boys hockey before," she said. "Being in that environment pushed me. There was that mindset - you're not losing to the boys - and it just made you better."

That blend of competition and camaraderie is a recurring theme among alumni.

Jordan Nishi, now playing at Merrimack University, recalls the experience as both challenging and fun.

"It was the camaraderie," she said. "You're with a group of players who all want to get better. You're competing, but you're also building friendships. It made going to the rink every morning something you looked forward to."

COUNTLESS REWARDS

For players like Alexandre Andre, now with the WHL's Wenatchee Wild, the academy experience was as much about consistency as it was about skill.

"You're on the ice every morning, getting extra reps," Andre said. "That adds up - 150 more skates a year than other players. It can only make you better."

But it wasn't just the ice time.

"It was everything," he added. "The coaching, the environment, being with your buddies every day. Everyone works hard, and you feed off that."

Andre's connection to the program remains strong. Still registered at Churchill, he returns whenever possible, sometimes even jumping on the ice with current players.

"That says a lot about the place," he said. "I'd do it all over again in a heartbeat."

ADAPTING AND EVOLVING

One of CHA's strengths is its ability to adapt. While the program operates with a structured framework, its day-to-day focus is shaped by the players themselves.

"We assess each group at the start of the year," Varnes explained. "If we have a highly-skilled group, we raise expectations. If not, we adjust accordingly."

That flexibility ensures that every athlete, regardless of skill level, receives meaningful development.

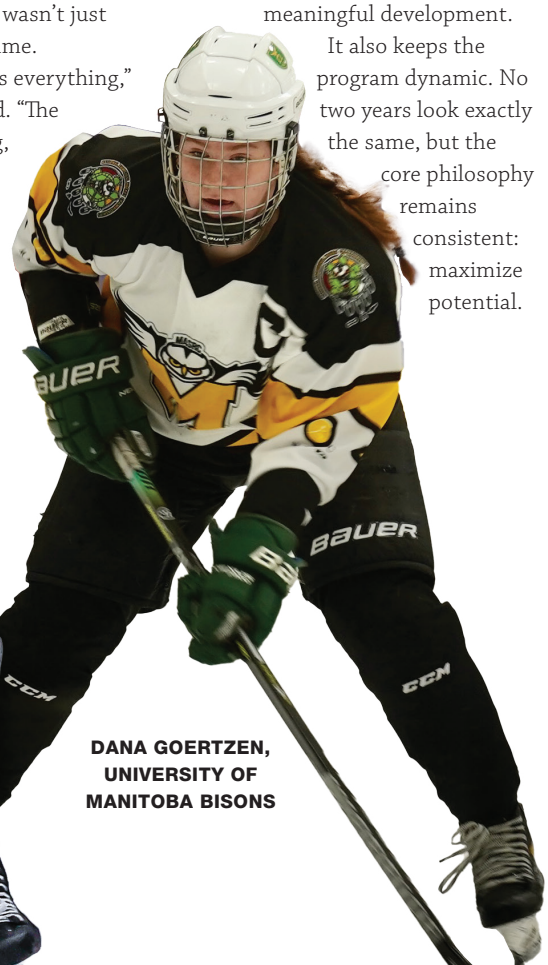
It also keeps the program dynamic. No two years look exactly the same, but the core philosophy remains consistent: maximize potential.



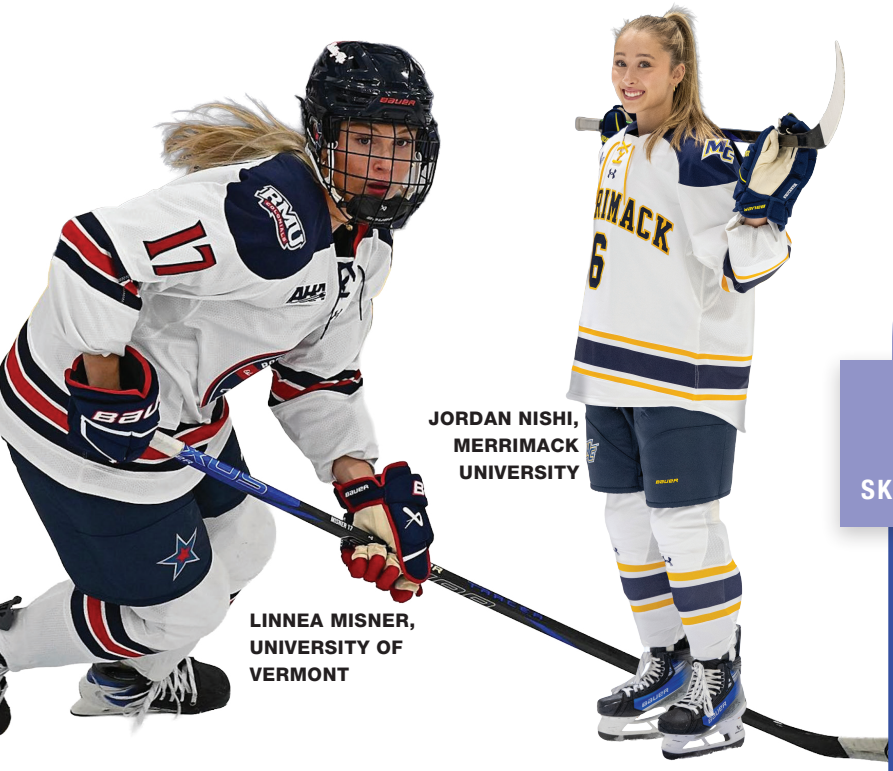
TYDEN LAFOURNAISE, LETHBRIDGE HURRICANES, OUT WITH JETS HOCKEY DEVELOPMENT



ALEXANDRE ANDRE, WENATCHEE WILD



DANA GOERTZEN, UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA BISONS



JORDAN NISHI, MERRIMACK UNIVERSITY

LINNEA MISNER, UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

CHA's growth in the female game has been particularly notable.

From a small group of early participants, the academy now features a strong and expanding female contingent, with dozens of players across grades contributing to its culture.

"We're seeing that growth come to fruition," Varnes said. "The level of talent among our female players is incredible."

While some eventually move on to specialized programs, their foundation at Churchill remains a key part of their development.

"We couldn't be more proud of them," Varnes said. "They're competing at national levels, and it's amazing to see."

THE CHURCHILL EFFECT

Perhaps the most telling sign of CHA's success isn't found in statistics or accolades... it's in the way former players talk about their time there.

They return. They stay connected. They advocate for the program. And that sense of belonging is no accident.

"When you're here, you're part of something," Varnes said. "It's not just hockey. It's community."

And that community continues to grow.

From its humble beginnings with a single class of Grade 7 students to a program that now produces high-level talent year after year, Churchill Hockey Academy has carved out a unique space in Manitoba's hockey landscape.

It's a place where early mornings turn into lifelong habits, where friendships are forged through competition, and where potential - at every level - is given the chance to rise.

For further information about the Churchill Hockey Academy, go to *https://www.churchillhigh.ca*

THE GRADS

SOME OF THE OUTSTANDING YOUNG PLAYERS WHO HAVE HONED THEIR SKILLS AT CHURCHILL HOCKEY ACADEMY.

Carter Bear	Everett Silvertips (Detroit Red Wings)
Jaydon Perron	University of Michigan
Brek Liske	Everett Silvertips
Owen Martin	Spokane Chiefs (Winnipeg Jets)
Zachary Lansard	Regina Pats
Avery Laliberte	Waterloo Blackhawks (USHL)
Tyden Lafournaise	Lethbridge Hurricanes
Linnea Misner	University of Vermont
Jordan Nishi	Merrimack University
Dana Goertzen	University of Manitoba (captain)
Kara Yackel	Trinity Western University (captain)
Jett Lajoie	Prince George Cougars
Alex Andre	Wenatchee Wild
Hudson Kowalchuk	Omaha Lancers (USHL)
Shea Rollason	Regina Pats
Madden Tymchak	Kamloops Blazers
Adam Kelly	Kingston Frontenacs
Isabella Huculak	York University
Selene Wozney	Nipissing University
Camryn Falloon	Midland University
Sophia Heidinger	University of Manitoba
Parker Rositon	Niverville Nighthawks
Nick Remple	Springfield Jr. Blues (NAHL)



HEAD COACH DALE BEAR AND FEMALE TEAM MANITOBA. THE 2025 AND 2026 NAHC GOLD MEDALLISTS.



HEAD COACH JOSH TRIPP AND MALE TEAM MANITOBA. THE 2025 AND 2026 NAHC GOLD MEDALLISTS.

MANITOBA'S GOLDEN STANDARD

BY SCOTT TAYLOR

Photos by Danny Truong, Darryl Gershman and courtesy of the Manitoba Aboriginal Sports & Recreation Council

SHOWING ITS DOMINANCE AT THE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL HOCKEY CHAMPIONSHIP FOR THE SECOND STRAIGHT YEAR, BOTH MALE AND FEMALE MANITOBA TEAMS GRABBED GOLD IN REGINA, PROVING BEYOND A DOUBT THAT MANITOBA REMAINS THE POWERHOUSE OF INDIGENOUS HOCKEY.

There was no panic on the Manitoba bench. No finger-pointing. No fear.

When Alberta handed Manitoba's U18 male team a wild 7-6 loss during the preliminary round at the 2026 National Aboriginal Hockey Championships in Regina, Team Manitoba didn't unravel. Instead, the group sharpened its focus.

By the end of the week, that loss looked less like a setback and more like a warning shot.

Hungry, determined and battle-tested, Manitoba's male and female teams stormed back to capture double-gold for the second straight year, sweeping the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships in dominant fashion and cementing Manitoba's place as the premier province for Indigenous hockey players in Canada.

The men edged Alberta 5-3 (with an empty-netter) in a thrilling championship final and then a few hours later, the women knocked off Alberta 5-2 at Regina's Co-operators Centre (on Treaty 4 Territory) to make May 9, a Golden Saturday Night. It also marked consecutive double-gold performances after Manitoba accomplished the same feat in Kamloops in 2025.

In the women's final, Chloe Carrierre, Cheyenne Scott Cooke, Kennedy Simpson, Braya Kapusta and Callie Paull all scored single goals as Manitoba built a 5-1 lead after two periods and cruised to the championship.

In the men's game, Manitoba built a 3-0 first-period lead on goals by Wyatt Dyck, Ryden Duchon and Chantyn Michell-Thompson, but Alberta fought back to tie it before Hank Thompson scored the eventual winner at 11:51 of the second. Carter Haney fed the empty net at 19:30 of the third to put another title on ice.

For the athletes, coaches and staff of head coach Josh Tripp's men's team, it was more than just another championship. It was a statement.

2026 FEMALE TEAM MANITOBA

1.	Isabelle Labossiere	G
2.	Keandra Broughton	D
6.	Attica Sobering	D
7.	Reese Schutte	F
8.	Cali Lavallee	F
9.	Rio Pierre	F
10.	Chloe Carriere	D
11.	Emilie Carriere	F
12.	Gabby Robbins	F
13.	Jade Pelland	F
14.	Brooklyn Collins	D
15.	Braya Kapusta	F
16.	Kennedy Simpson	F
17.	Callie Paull	F
19.	Teagan Walker	D
21.	Milla Blocker	D
22.	Lydia Hill	F
23.	Leah Klassen	F
25.	Cheyenne Scott Cooke	F
35.	Casey Morand	G

HEAD COACH
Dale Bear

ASSISTANT COACHES
Dana Goertzen
Ella Stewner

MANAGER
Jacinta Bear

TRAINER
Keyana Lea

SUPPORT STAFF
Jenna Goertzen



FEMALE TEAM MANITOBA HEAD COACH DALE BEAR

"We always need kind of a wake-up call sometimes," said men's GM Kevin Monkman after the championship victory over Alberta. "They beat us 7-6 in the round robin and that was fine. Our boys were hungry."

Hungry might have been an understatement.

The Manitoba men rolled into the gold-medal game after surviving a physical and emotional semifinal against Saskatchewan, winning 7-4 behind a spectacular three-goal performance from Waywayseecappo First Nation star Athens Shingoose.

Trace Langan, Graydon Taylor, Carter Haney and Wyatt Dyck added singles as Manitoba overwhelmed Saskatchewan with speed, relentless pressure and offensive depth.

That depth became a theme throughout the tournament.

Shingoose emerged as one of Manitoba's offensive catalysts, finishing among the scoring leaders while combining elite skill with composure beyond his years. Dyck exploded offensively during the preliminary round, including a four-goal performance against Eastern Door and the North in Manitoba's 7-2 victory to close out round-robin play.

Not surprisingly, the tournament began with an emphatic message.

Manitoba opened the championship by overwhelming Nova Scotia 7-0 before the first period was even completed, triggering the mercy rule in less than 16 minutes.

Alex Campbell had a goal and an assist, Trace Langan chipped in with two assists and Shingoose added a goal and a helper as Manitoba immediately established itself as a title contender.

But the real turning point came after the Alberta loss.

Instead of fracturing, Manitoba tightened defensively, trusted Coach Tripp's systems and leaned on leadership throughout the lineup. The response was immediate. Manitoba rebounded with a convincing 7-4 win over Saskatchewan during the round robin before rolling into the playoff round with momentum.

Monkman said the character of the roster separated this group from others.

"Everyone played solid," he said. "But Carter Haney, Athens Shingoose, Wyatt Dyck, Trace Langan, Chantyn Michell-Thompson, Max Dawson, Urijah Moosetail and Kaden Sutherland have really stepped up. Sam Grunewald has been excellent, and Liam Flett had a solid tournament too."

Still, Manitoba knew Alberta would be waiting. And Alberta was dangerous.

"They've built four solid lines," Monkman said. "Mobile defencemen, good puck movers and strong goaltending. We knew we'd get a good response from them."

But Manitoba answered every challenge.

While the men were chasing a bit of redemption in the final, Manitoba's female squad was authoring a championship story of resilience.

The women opened the tournament with a strong 5-2 win over Alberta before stumbling against British Columbia, falling 5-2 in a game that left head coach Dale Bear searching for answers.



MALE TEAM MANITOBA GM KEVIN MONKMAN

"We came out flat against B.C. in the round robin and we just never got going," Bear admitted.

The response from his team was immediate and emphatic.

Manitoba rebounded with a 7-0 shutout over Nova Scotia and then defeated Saskatchewan 6-4 to finish preliminary-round play at 3-1-0. Attica Sobering and Rio Pierre each scored twice in the win over Saskatchewan as Manitoba rediscovered its offensive swagger.

That set up a semifinal rematch against British Columbia - the same team that had beaten Manitoba earlier in the week.

This time, Manitoba was ready.

B.C. jumped out to an early lead, but Callie Paull responded to tie the game before the teams entered the first intermission with B.C. holding a narrow 2-1 advantage.

From there, Manitoba took over.

Cali Lavallee scored the lone goal of the second period to even the contest before Braya Kapusta and Kennedy Simpson struck in the third period to secure a dramatic 4-2 victory and a trip to the gold-medal game.

Bear believed the difference was preparation, urgency and belief.

"Today the girls were ready," he said. "The first period was a little slow, but as the game went on they just picked it up more and more."

Like the men's squad, the women succeeded because of balance throughout the lineup.

Bear praised his veteran leadership while singling out several key contributors.

"Attica Sobering was on another level," he said. "Braya Kapusta, Reese Schutte, Rio Pierre and Cheyenne Scott Cooke were phenomenal. Our first-year players were outstanding all week and everyone contributed to this championship. We had girls who can score, girls who can kill penalties and everybody contributed."

Goaltender Isabelle Labossiere provided steady play in net as Manitoba peaked at exactly the right moment.

"Things were clicking on all cylinders," Bear said. "We were all clicking at the right time."

And when the dust settled in Regina, Manitoba once again stood alone at the top.

The women's program now owns seven gold medals, two silvers and five bronze medals at the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships while the men's side has captured six golds, three silvers and seven bronze medals.

Those numbers speak to more than just hockey success.

The NAHC, established by the Aboriginal Sport Circle in 2002, has become one of the most important showcases of elite Indigenous hockey talent in Canada, bringing together First Nation, Inuit and Métis athletes from coast to coast.

For Manitoba, the championships have become something even bigger — a tradition of excellence built on pride, culture, development and community.

"We send good teams every year," Monkman said. "I wouldn't say dynasty quite yet, but Manitoba always has a good chance of winning."

After back-to-back double-gold performances, the rest of the country might already be using that word.

2026 MALE TEAM MANITOBA

2.	Drayden Champagne	D
4.	Max Dawson	D
7.	Carter Haney	F
8.	Sam Grunewald	F
9.	Athens Shingoose	F
10.	Ryden Duchon	F
11.	Liam Flett	F
12.	Wyatt Dyck	F
14.	Nolan Kozak	F
15.	Hank Thompson	F
16.	Alex Campbell	F
17.	Chantyn Michell-Thompson	F
18.	Peyton Thiessen	F
20.	Brett Buors	D
21.	Graydon Taylor	D
22.	Kaden Sutherland	D
23.	Trace Langan	F
25.	Lawson O'Ray	D
31.	Eddy Person	G
35.	Urijah Moosetail	G

GENERAL MANAGER
Kevin Monkman

HEAD COACH
Josh Tripp

ASSISTANT COACHES
Ryan Haney
Ryan Person

TRAINER
Kierra Spence

SUPPORT STAFF
Skyler Bear

NOW THAT'S A LINE!

BY CARTER BROOKS
Photos by Dylan Asmundson

Three linemates. Three top-five finishes in regular season league scoring. Three more in the playoffs.

For RINK Hockey Academy's U17 Prep team, the production of Colton Ross, Brady Filmon and Markus Knaub wasn't just impressive, it was extremely rare.

But for head coach Ian Duval, the numbers only scratched the surface of what made the trio so effective.

"They really played well together and shared the puck," Duval told *Game On*. "Their ability and consistency just took over in the second half. I think they were arguably the best line within our league this year. Early on, you're trying to learn your linemates and understand their tendencies, but once that chemistry came, they really took off."

That level of success didn't come overnight. Early in the season, the trio was still adjusting to the pace of the U17 Prep division, to one another and to the demands of a highly competitive league.

Duval and his staff rotated combinations through the first half, managing injuries and searching for the right fit. But even then, there were signs.

"Early in the season, I kind of had an idea that they would be together," Duval shared. "We mixed lines a bit and they weren't always together, but by the end of the first half and into the second half, we solidified that group. From there, they just took off and were pretty dynamic as a line."

Each player brought a distinct element to the group.



COLTON ROSS



Filmon, a six-foot-two, 155-pound playmaker, blended high-end skill with creativity, capable of beating defenders one-on-one and making plays in tight spaces. Knaub, a five-foot-11, 175-pound centre, entered the season as a reliable 200-foot player and quickly expanded his offensive game, building confidence as the year progressed. Ross, a six-foot, 160-pound goal scorer, rounded out the line as a natural finisher, with a knack for scoring in a variety of ways and capitalizing on chances around the net.

Together, their skillsets meshed. But it was what they did away from the puck that elevated them.

"The biggest thing for all three of them was their habits without the puck," Duval said. "Pushing them to compete as hard as they can, getting them more puck touches, that's when they can make plays. You've got to give them the freedom to do that, but they also have to play the game the right way. I think that was the biggest area of growth for all three of them this year."

And for the players themselves, the chemistry was immediate.

"The three of us were put together a month or two into the season and we instantly clicked," said Ross. "We all move the puck well, create space and find each other. We had similar roles - we could all score and make plays - and we used our speed to create chances. Brady and Markus were unbelievable playmakers, and Markus won a lot of key draws to get us possession."

That connection seemed to only strengthen as the season carried on.

"I think we were so successful because of our work ethic and practice habits, especially in the second half," said Filmon. "Once we clicked, we never really lost that groove. We all brought different attributes that worked well together, and we wanted the best for each other as teammates."

The trio's ability to support one another proved just as important as each of the players' individual offensive instincts.



IAN DUVAL

> "I THINK THEY WERE ARGUABLY THE BEST LINE WITHIN OUR LEAGUE THIS YEAR."
>
> – HEAD COACH IAN DUVAL

"We stayed positive and lifted each other up," said Knaub. "We trusted each other and worked to play to each other's strengths. That's what helped us succeed as a line."

While the results were undeniable, Duval emphasized that production was never the primary focus within the program.

"We stress to our players that points isn't the only important thing," he said. "It's your work habits, competing on a consistent basis and playing within structure. Those are the habits and details you need to get to the next level. When you move up, you might not be in a top-six role right away, so having those habits, competing for pucks, working hard and being reliable defensively, that's what helps in that transition."

In that sense, the trio's success was less about numbers and more about how they played. Their ability to compete, make quick decisions and trust one another created the foundation for everything that followed.

The offence was quite simply the byproduct. That approach also helped the players navigate a season that included growing attention at the next level. Ross was listed by the Edmonton Oil Kings, while Knaub earned recognition from the Penticton Vees. Filmon had previously been selected by Prince Albert in the WHL Bantam Draft.

Despite the added spotlight, their focus remained steady.

"I think all three of them want to get better on a day-to-day basis," said Duval. "That's the biggest thing for development - just showing up, putting in the work and being consistent. From the start of the season to the end, they showed a lot of growth."

That growth extended beyond individual improvement.

From the opening weeks through the playoffs, the trio evolved into one of the most productive and reliable lines in the league. And it wasn't because of a single stretch of games, but rather from the habits they had built over time.

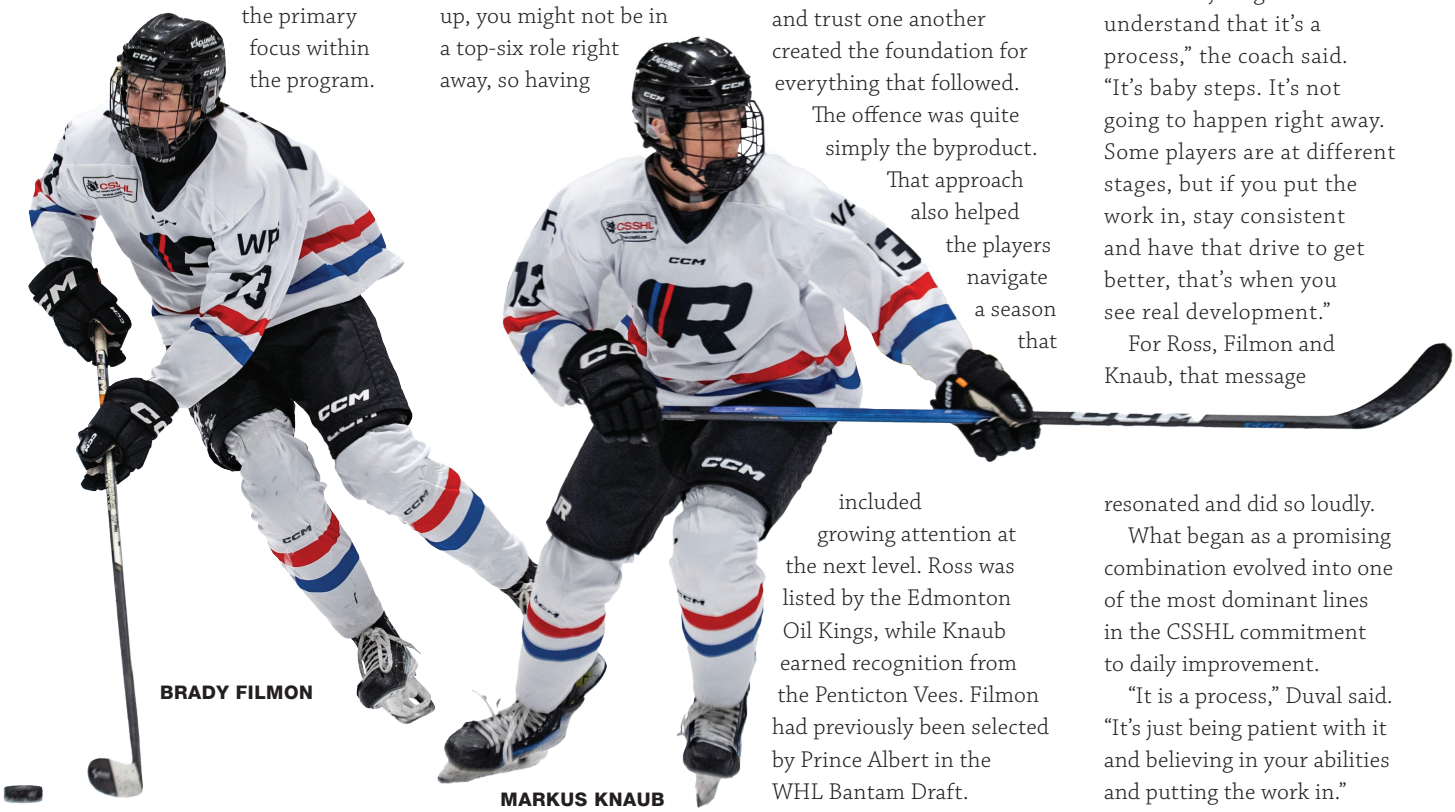
It's a reflection of the broader philosophy within the RINK program, where development is measured over the long term.

"You've just got to understand that it's a process," the coach said. "It's baby steps. It's not going to happen right away. Some players are at different stages, but if you put the work in, stay consistent and have that drive to get better, that's when you see real development."

For Ross, Filmon and Knaub, that message resonated and did so loudly.

What began as a promising combination evolved into one of the most dominant lines in the CSSHL commitment to daily improvement.

"It is a process," Duval said. "It's just being patient with it and believing in your abilities and putting the work in."



BRADY FILMON

MARKUS KNAUB


RINK
SUMMER HOCKEY CAMPS
Limited Spots Available.
WWW.THERINK.CA/CAMP



THE GRADUATES FROM LEFT SASHA COUTU, REIKA IWAMI (2027), KATE CHUBACK, MATYLDA STEPIEN, HUDSON BRADLEY, PAYTON HENWOOD, SARA MILLER, LILY SPURRELL AND MIMI FERREIRA

THE GRADUATES

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by Darryl Gershman and Tammy Stewner

At Balmoral Hall, the wins matter, but not in the way most programs measure them.

There are no banners for time management. No trophies for resilience. No medals handed out for learning how to balance a 7 a.m. skate with a demanding academic workload and still finding a way to thrive.

And yet, for 2025-26 Head Coach Aaron Kaatz and his graduating class, those are the victories that matter most.

Because long after the final buzzer sounds on their prep careers, the eight Balmoral Hall graduates moving on to post-secondary hockey in 2026 - and life beyond - carry something more valuable than championships: they carry a standard.

"It was really great having a mature team this year," Kaatz said. "They've had different experiences, different programs, and they all came in wanting to leave their mark. And they did."

LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP

This wasn't a one-dimensional Grade 12 leadership group. After all, some led with their voices. Others led through their play. Some set the tone in the classroom, while others quietly defined the culture behind the scenes.

"They helped create a standard," Kaatz said. "And



now they're handing that torch off to the next group."

That torch burns brightest in the details - in the way a puck is battled for along the wall, in the expectation of accountability, and in the understanding that success at Balmoral Hall is measured in growth, not just goals.

And make no mistake, there were plenty of goals.

According to Kaatz, Kate Chuback and Payton Henwood powered the offence, consistently pushing the pace and delivering when it mattered most. On the back end, Hudson Bradley anchored the blueline with a booming shot and physical presence, while Sara Miller evolved into one of the league's most reliable defenders, earning recognition as the program's most improved player and Lily Spurrell added both speed and skill to the Blazers' defence.

Up front, Matylda Stepien brought a power-forward mentality, thriving in key defensive roles while still contributing offensively. And in goal, the tandem of Sasha Coutu and Mimi Ferreira provided stability - a true luxury for any coach.

"There was never a moment where we questioned who to play," Kaatz said. "They both gave us a chance to win every night."

CROSSING THE CONTINENT

Now, that group is heading in different directions - geographically and academically - but all along a similar trajectory: Forward.

For **Sara Miller,** that path leads to Arcadia University in Pennsylvania, where she'll suit up at the NCAA Division III level while pursuing a degree in Health Sciences.

Her decision came down to fit - both on the ice and in the classroom.

"It seemed like a really fun program but also serious," she said. "And I already knew someone there, so that made it easier."

Like many BH graduates, Miller credits the program for elevating her game and her expectations.

"The hockey side was really important. I improved a lot here," she said. "And academically, it pushed me to stay on top of things."



SARA MILLER

For **Lily Spurrell,** the next step is Elmira College in New York - a program coming off a conference championship and a top-10 national ranking.

It checked every box.

"Academics were a big part of it, because I want to go to med school," Spurrell said. "And the hockey program is really strong too."

Her journey wasn't without adversity. Injuries disrupted her season, but her response became part of her legacy.

"For her to battle through that in her senior year, that's something younger players will remember," Kaatz noted.



LILY SPURRELL



MATYLDA STEPIEN

Her story is a reminder that success isn't one-size-fits-all.

"I came to Canada for hockey, but I realized I want to grow the game back home, especially for girls," she said.

Even without continuing as a player, hockey – and especially coaching - remains central to her future.

THE RIGHT FIT

For goaltender **Sasha Coutu,** the decision to attend Albertus Magnus College in Connecticut was about more than hockey. It was about trust.

"When I visited, it just felt right," she said. "The coaches were honest, the players were welcoming. It was everything I was looking for."

It also represents a leap, geographically and personally.

"I've always wanted to go out east," she said. "And being close to cities like New York and Boston is great for what I want to do in business."



SASHA COUTU

Her time at Balmoral Hall helped prepare her for that transition.

"Balancing hockey and school was challenging at times, but it got me ready for what's next," she said.

A DIFFERENT PATH

Not every graduate is chasing hockey at the next level.

For **Matylda Stepien,** who arrived at BH from Warsaw, Poland, the decision to attend the University of Toronto - without continuing her playing career - reflects a long-term vision shaped by her international background.

"Academics became more important for my future," said Stepien, who plans to study commerce before eventually returning to Europe.

WESTWARD BOUND

For **Kate Chuback** and **Payton Henwood,** the next chapter unfolds on the West Coast at the University of British Columbia - one of Canada's premier programs.

For Chuback, the decision was as much personal as it was practical.

"My brother goes there and loves it,"



KATE CHUBACK

she said. "And the business program is excellent."

Her journey to this point has been unconventional, including time spent playing with a travel program in Florida - a move that took her outside the Hockey Canada system.

Still, her production spoke for itself.

"She was our offensive threat," Kaatz said. "We relied on her a ton."

Henwood, meanwhile, is heading to UBC with a focus on kinesiology, confident that Balmoral Hall has prepared her for the demands ahead.

"It helped me manage my workload, especially with hockey and travel," she said. "That's going to be huge in university."



HUDSON BRADLEY

FROM THE BLAZERS' BLUE LINE

Hudson Bradley's game is built on presence - physical, vocal and offensive.

Next season, she'll bring that presence to the University of Alberta, where she plans to study communications.

"I chose it because of the coaching staff and the team environment," she said. "It just felt like the right place."

At Balmoral Hall, Bradley developed into a complete defenceman - one capable of impacting the game in multiple ways.

"No one had a harder shot," Kaatz said. "She was a difference-maker on the power play and a leader defensively."

But her growth extended beyond the rink.

"It showed me how important post-secondary education is," Bradley said. "And how to set goals and work toward them."

BACKBONE IN GOAL

For **Mimi Ferreira,** Adrian College offered the perfect blend of athletics and academics.

"They have a great nutrition program, and they really support their student-athletes," she said.

Her development at Balmoral Hall centered on discipline, particularly in managing a demanding schedule.

"It taught me how to stay organized and balance everything," she said.

That foundation will be critical as she transitions to the next level - both in the classroom and between the pipes.

MORE THAN HOCKEY

If there's a common thread among the graduates, it's this: Balmoral Hall wasn't just a stop along the way. It was a turning point.

"It helped shape me as both a student and an athlete," Ferreira said. "I'm very grateful for the experiences I had here."

At programs across the country, success is often measured in championships. At Balmoral Hall, it's measured in what comes next.

And by that standard, this class is already a winner: Eight graduates. Multiple NCAA commitments. Top Canadian universities. Diverse academic pursuits ranging from business and health sciences to communications and nutrition.

More importantly, eight young women prepared to compete - not just at the next level of hockey, but in life.

"That was my job," said Kaatz. "To get them to the next level and make sure they're ready for it."

Mission accomplished. Because while the scoreboard at hockey for all centre may fade, the impact of this group won't.

The next generation at Balmoral Hall will feel it - in the expectations they inherit, the culture they step into, and the standard they're asked to uphold. The torch has been passed.



PAYTON HENWOOD



MIMI FERREIRA

NOTES FROM PILOT MOUND

MANITOBA'S HOCKEY COMMUNITY - GAMEONHOCKEY.COM



1 FORMER BUFFALOES STAR CARSON CARELS HAS MOVED UP TO NO. 2 ON THE BUTTON LIST

1. Former Pilot Mound star **Carson Carels** from Cypress River, Man., has moved up to the No. 2 position on both TSN Draft expert Craig Button's 2026 Draft Rankings and the final NHL Central Scouting Bureau 2026 Draft Rankings. The 6-foot-2, 195-pound defenceman played for the Buffaloes from the start of the 2021-22 season to the end of the 2023-24 campaign. That year, he left to join the WHL's Prince George Cougars and has been a star with the Cougars ever since. The first round of the 2026 NHL Entry Draft will be held Friday evening, June 26 in Buffalo, NY.

2. St. Claude's **Cole Landreville,** who played U15 Prep with the Buffaloes in 2023-24 and 2024-25 and then scored 10 goals and 34 points as a 16-year-old with the Buffaloes U18 Prep team this season, scored his first Western Hockey League goal on March 22, as he helped the Edmonton Oil Kings whip Calgary 7-1 in front of a home crowd of 11,480 at Rexall Place. Landreville was the Oil Kings' second round (25th overall) selection in the 2025 WHL Prospects Draft.



2 COLE LANDREVILLE WITH THE BUFFALOES

BY SCOTT TAYLOR

Photos by James Carey Lauder, Darryl Gershman, Robert Lefebvre/OHL, Art for Athletes/ Pilot Mound Hockey Academy, Western Hockey League, Images on Ice/Hockey Hall of Fame



3 NEW U18 FEMALE COACH OONA PARVIAINEN IN HER PLAYING DAYS WITH FINNISH MAJOR LEAGUE TEAM ROKI



4 BRETT BUORS, TEAM MANITOBA AND THE BUFFALOES

3. The Buffaloes have a new Female U18 Prep coach for the 2026-27 season. Arriving in Western Manitoba from Finland, **Oona Parviainen** was a former elite forward, who played more than two decades at the highest levels of women's hockey. She competed with top Finnish clubs—including KalPa, Espoo Blues, and RoKi—and earned an incredible nine Finnish League championships, along with multiple silver and bronze medals. Oona also represented Finland on the international stage, skating in the 2002 Salt Lake City and 2006 Torino Olympic Games, as well as the 2005 IIHF World Championship in Norrköping. As a coach, she's led teams in Finland's female major league, guided RoKi from the lowest division to the top tier and contributed internationally as a guest coach at IIHF development camps and the USA Girls National 16/17 Player Development Camp. She's an outstanding addition to the Buffaloes' staff.

4. U17 Prep Buffaloes' 16-year-old defenceman **Brett Buors** from Niverville, Man., represented Manitoba at the 2026 National Aboriginal Hockey Championship in Regina. Buors, who is 6-foot-3, 185 pounds, left Ontario's BioSteel Sports Academy at mid-season and returned to the Buffaloes where he'd played in 2024-25. He finished the 2025-26 season in the CSSHL with a goal and six points in 14 games.

5. **Benson Hirst,** 17, from Lac du Bonnet, Man., has committed to play the 2026-27 season with the Northern Michigan University Wildcats (NCAA D-1). Hirst, who played for the Buffaloes in 2022-23 and 2023-24, won an MJHL championship with the Northern Manitoba Blizzard in 2024-25. This past season, the 6-foot, 195-pound defenceman had a point in 38 games with the WHL's Moose Jaw Warriors.



5 FORMER BUFFALOES D-MAN BENSON HIRST WITH MJHL'S TURNBULL CUP IN 2025



6 COACH CHAD TAYLOR



7 FORMER BUFFALOES STAR CARRIGAN UMPHERVILLE IN DENMARK



8 ADAM KELLY, KINGSTON FRONTENACS

6. PMHA has named **Chad Taylor** its new Male U15 head coach. A former U18 AAA Winnipeg Hawks standout, Taylor went on to star with the MJHL's St. James Canadians, winning two league championships, earning MJHL all-star honours and helping lead the Canadians to the league final in his final season while finishing in the Top 10 in scoring. During the past two seasons, Chad served as an assistant coach with the Bonnyville Pontiacs of the Alberta Junior Hockey League, one of the country's most respected Junior A programs. At the same time, he led the U13 AAA Elite program as head coach. Chad is High Performance Certified and excited to return to Manitoba to take over a head coaching role at PMHA.

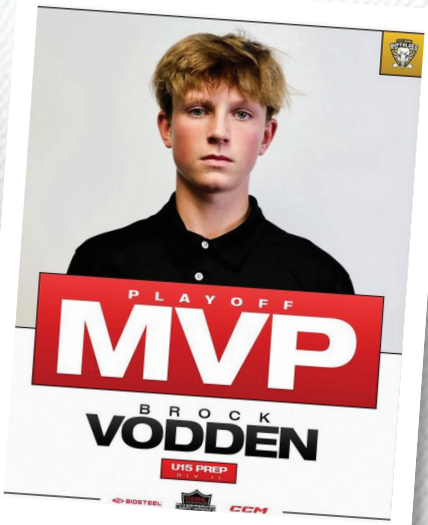
7. **Carrigan Umpherville,** 24, who played for the Buffaloes U17 Female Varsity team in 2018-19 (and had 14 goals and 29 points in 25 CSSVHL games that season), has just finished her first season of pro hockey. A graduate of the hockey program at NCAA D-1 Long Island University, Umpherville started her pro career with Odense in Denmark and then finished her first year with Sakhalin Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk in the Russian League. In Russia, she had two goals in three games at the end of the regular season and then had two goals in five games in the playoffs.

8. Back in 2021-22 **Adam Kelly** left Sioux Lookout, Ont., to play at Pilot Mound. Adam had a solid season with the Buffaloes, notching seven goals and 18 points in 29 CSSHL games. He went on to play with the Toronto Jr. Canadiens in the OJHL and then last season earned a spot with the Kingston Frontenacs of the Ontario Hockey League. This season, Kelly, 17, had two goals and 12 points in 50 games in Kingston and will return to the Frontenacs next season. Pilot Mound graduates go on to play anywhere and everywhere.

9. About eight months ago, Buffaloes general manager **Nichole Collins** said this about plans for new dorms at PMHA: "We are currently preparing for construction on the dorm expansion. We will break ground, ideally, on April 1, 2026, as soon as it thaws enough to start building a new wing on the dorms, which are designed for three wings and six total dorms. We hope to have everything ready for a Sept. 1, 2026, move-in date then we'll plan the third expansion thereafter." Well, as these photos indicate, construction on the new dorms is progressing nicely.



9 PMHA'S NEW DORM CONSTRUCTION IS UNDERWAY.



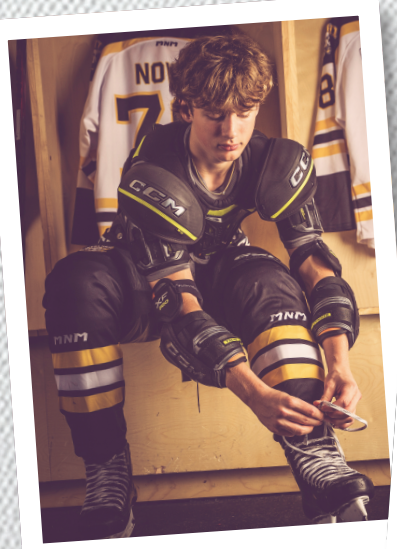
10 MVP BROCK VODDEN



11 CASEY SILVERMAN



12 MAX FAULKNER



13 JOSH NOWE



13 BROCK VODDEN

10. Buffaloes' **Brock Vodden,** a 5-foot-9, 130-pound forward from nearby Manitou, Man., was named the Canadian Sport School Hockey League's U15 Tier 2 Playoff MVP. During the 2025-26 season, Vodden had 20 goals and 44 points in just 30 games and then really turned it on during the playoffs, notching five goals and 13 points in just five games – a goal-a-game pace. After two years with the Buffaloes' U15 Prep team, Vodden, now just 15, has 33 goals and 76 points in 65 CSSHL games.

11. U18 Prep Buffaloes' forward **Casey Silverman** has just helped Team Denmark get back into the Division 1 Group A tournament at the IIHF World U18 championship with a 4-1 victory over Germany in Group B last month. Silverman played two seasons at Pilot Mound in both 2024-25 and 2025-26. Silverman is a 6-foot-2, 180-pound Dane from Calgary. In 2024, he played for Denmark's 3 X 3 U16 team at the Winter Youth Olympics. Silverman spent his minor hockey experience playing for U17- and U18-Gentofte in Denmark before playing 118 games at PMHA the last two seasons.

12. Big step for the Buffaloes' **Max Faulkner,** a member of the Buffaloes U15 Prep team. Faulkner was selected to attend the Hockey Alberta Cup from April 22-26 in Red Deer. The Alberta Cup aids in the identification and selection of potential players for Hockey Alberta's Team Alberta program, with hundreds of players annually trying out for 120 spots -- 20 positions on each of the six regional teams. Faulkner obviously used his first season at PMHA to improve his game. He has a very bright future.

13. Finally, congratulations are in order for Buffaloes' **Brock Vodden** and **Josh Nowe.** Vodden is the CSSHL's U15 Tier 2 Playoff MVP, while Nowe is a 6-foot, 170-pound, 14-year-old defenceman from Kenora, who played for the U15 Buffaloes this past season and even recorded an assist in one game with the U17 team. Both of these top prospects competed in early April's Male U16 POE tournament at the hockey for all centre in Winnipeg. It's a pre-Western Hockey League Draft showcase operated by Hockey Manitoba that features the best young players in Manitoba.



14 ACHA ALL-ROOKIE TEAM GRAPHIC



14 ADDISON SCOVILLE



14 ASHLYN KUFFLER

14. **Addison Scoville** and **Ashlyn Kuffler** were outstanding during their time at PMHA. Kuffler, a forward from Chilliwack, B.C., played two seasons (2023-24 and 2024-25) at Pilot Mound and had 19 goals and 47 points in 57 games and chose to play university hockey at ACHA D-1 Midland University in Fremont, Nebraska. This season she had 22 goals and 37 points in 35 games. Scoville, a defender from Red Deer, also spent 2023-24 and 2024-25 at Pilot Mound and had three goals and 29 points in 56 games. She decided to play university hockey at ACHA D-1 Adrian College in Adrian, Mich. This year she had three goals and 17 points in 32 games. Last month, both PMHA grads were named to the ACHA D-1 Women's All-Rookie Team. A remarkable achievement for both of them.

15. Pilot Mound Hockey Academy's U17 goaltender **Yuki Kido** has led Team Japan to the 2026 IIHF Division II Group A U18 Men's Championship. With Kido in goal for all four games at the tournament in Targu Secuiesc, Romania, Japan beat China 3-1, Croatia 7-1, Romania 8-0 and then edged Great Britain 4-3 in the gold medal final. Kido finished the tournament with a 4-0 record, an eye-popping .942 save percentage and a 1.33 goals against average. With the tournament victory, Japan has been promoted to IIHF Division 1 Group B. This past season with the Buffaloes, Kido went 6-7-1 with a 3.76 goals against average and a .902 save percentage.



15 GOALTENDER YUKI KIDO

GOALTENDER...ZZZZ

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They don't chase the spotlight, but without them, there is no spotlight. Here at *Game On,* our photographers are the first to arrive and the last to leave, hauling gear through cold rinks and dimly-lit arenas, while making late-night drives to small towns that rarely make the map. For a few dollars and a tonne of kilometres, they trade comfort for access, capturing moments most of us would never otherwise see.

They stand behind the foggy glass, crouch in corners and wait for that split second when a story reveals itself. A goal, a save, a glance on the bench, a celebration that says more than any quote ever could. Where words set the scene, their images bring it to life, turning black-and-white narratives into something vivid, immediate and lasting.

There's a quiet sacrifice in what they do: giving up evenings, weekends and time at home with their partners and families to freeze a moment in time for the rest of us. And while their names might sit in small print, their impact fills every page. The next time you flip through these stories, take a second look, because behind every great image is someone who made the journey to get it.

So, Carey, Rusty, Danny, Jonathan, Darryl, Dave, Duncan, Steve, Scott, Kelly, Rayme, Merlin, Ray, Darcy, Todd, Kalee, and so many more, we thank you for all you do to make *Game On* the best hockey magazine in Canada.



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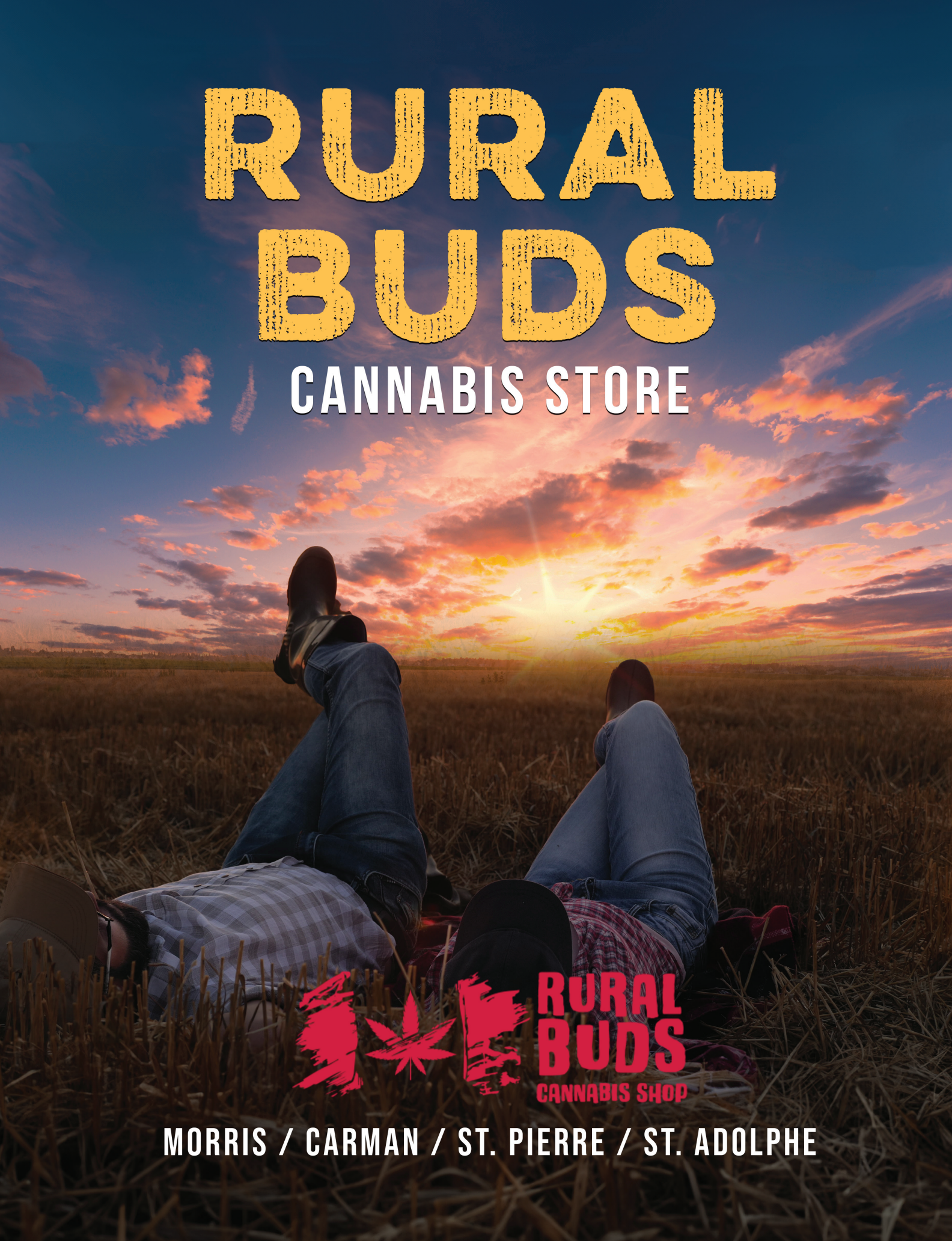
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