

'Life is good right now'

Towering Jets defenceman Tyler Myers steps up, takes on heavy load in absence of key blue-liners

By: Jason Bell | Posted: 03/19/2019 7:00 PM | | Last Modified: 03/20/2019 6:16 AM |

ANAHEIM, Calif. — There's plenty of joy in Tyler Myers' life these days.

The Winnipeg Jets defenceman is logging heavy minutes on a winning NHL squad with a legitimate shot at a protracted post-season, his numbers are good and he's got the adulation of his teammates and the Jets coaching staff.

The 29-year-old who was born in Houston but raised in Calgary has embraced the challenge of an elevated role with a Stanley Cup contender.

"Very high (contentment level). Life is good right now," Myers said recently. "We have such a great group of guys, and the last few years we've really built something special in the dressing room. That's one of those intangibles that's so important, and it's very exciting as a player for me to be a part of this."

"Growing up in Western Canada, not that far from home, my wife (Michela) did, too, so she feels right at home here in Winnipeg. It's a great community for our family to be a part of an atmosphere like this. The thought of having a chance to win here is something that's extremely special."



Tyler Myers, right, controls the puck in front of Los Angeles Kings' Alex Iafallo during the second period. (Marcio Jose Sanchez / The Associated Press)

He's also dad to a happy two-year-old son.

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Tristan was delivered five weeks early in January 2017 by emergency C-section, and the infant endured very serious complications. Now, the toddler has some health challenges and the Myers family works closely with the Movement Centre of Manitoba, an organization that helps improve the physical health of kids and adults with physical disabilities.
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"We're very fortunate and very excited that he's doing as well as he is. There's things we have to deal with, but on the grand scheme of things it's nothing that we think about too often. And for as happy a little boy as he is, it makes us happy," said Myers.

"It seems like we have somebody out from either side of the family at least once a month throughout the season. It's a big help for my wife. It's always nice to have family in town and they get a chance to see their grandson and spend time with him and enjoy him."

Back at work, Myers is deeply rooted in a comfort zone late in his 10th NHL campaign. He was the most conspicuous player Monday night at Staples Center in downtown Los Angeles, and his towering 6-8, 230-pound presence had little to do with it.

He scored the game-winning goal, a seeing-eye shot that found the far top corner behind Los Angeles goalie Jack Campbell late in the second period to spark the Jets to a 3-2 victory over the Kings. The laser was one of four drives he directed at Campbell. He moved the puck fluidly out of harm's way and flattened forward Alex Lafallo early in the period with bodycheck near the wall.

There's an argument to be made Myers is at his most complete since his arrival in Winnipeg in early 2014 — just when the Jets, without the services of Dustin Byfuglien and Josh Morrissey, need it most.

Neither player is on the team's current three-game southern road trip, although Jets head coach Paul Maurice said late last week Byfuglien (lower body) and Morrissey (upper body) could return before the regular season ends during the first week of April.

Myers has been invaluable as the Jets (43-25-4) push toward a Central Division title and home-ice advantage in the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs. The strong and sensible play he and his blue-line partner Dmitry Kulikov have provided has been a crucial storyline in recent weeks as Winnipeg shores up its defensive game despite missing two key pieces.

"Tyler, on a minutes basis, has taken over the role of shutting down the other team when he's out with Kulikov. Tyler has been so critical all year in that he does all things well, kills



He is the most conspicuous player Monday night at the arena in downtown Los Angeles. (John Woods / AP Photo)

penalties, works the power-play unit and plays against the other teams' best. That's a big job to ask of anybody. But he's shown he's clearly capable of doing it," said Maurice. "He's an elite defenceman in the NHL, but quietly so.

"He does all the small things but is capable of expanding his role. If you need offence he gets up the ice and creates it. He's an incredibly effective penalty killer just on size and reach alone. He wants more minutes, and his game doesn't drop off if they go up."

The Jets gun for their third straight win tonight when they face the Anaheim Ducks (9 p.m.) at Honda Center. Just 24 hours later, they take on the Vegas Golden Knights before returning home to begin a four-game stretch at Bell MTS Place.

A decade ago Myers took the NHL by storm, capturing the Calder Trophy as the

league's top rookie after a tremendous season with the Buffalo Sabres. Those early days in his career, he was the Sabres' main man and the pressure to guide a struggling franchise was intense.

Dealt to Winnipeg as part of a mega-deal that sent Evander Kane and Zach Bogosian to the Sabres, Myers has experienced adversity with the Jets over parts of the past five seasons, including injuries and some erratic defensive play. The turbulent life of a pro athlete has taught him many lessons that are paying off during the 2018-19 season, he said.



"I think there's a potential for extreme highs and extreme lows in this business. If you lived and died with every moment, it's a tough job. And it happens, don't get me wrong. It's easy for a player to kind of swing with that pendulum," he said.

Myers poses with the Calder Memorial Trophy
(Isaac Brekken / Associated Press files)

"But I think this group does such a good job of talking out what mindset we need going into each day, each game. Our approach every day when we come to the rink gives guys the best opportunity to be even-keel, no matter what's going on.

"We're not worried about where our wins or our points are stacking up (compared) to last year at all. Right now, it's about getting our team game to a point where we know we can be successful again, playing at the high level that we need on a consistent basis to win, it's a mindset that we're trying to build and trying to sustain with the playoffs coming up."

It might be difficult for fans to envision the Jets without big, mobile Myers on the back end, yet his departure at season's end remains a distinct possibility. He's playing out the final season of a seven-year, US\$38.5-million contract with an average annual value of US\$5.5 million.

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Myers, second from left, celebrates his goal with teammates Adam Lowry, left, Patric Aho, centre, and Brandon Tanev during the game against the Los Angeles Kings Monday. (Jose Sanchez / The Associated Press)

Unless the two sides agree on an extension, it will be Myers' first time on the NHL's open market and it's a safe bet he'll look for a pay hike on his next deal.

Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff has a busy off-season ahead. Highly skilled, young cornerstone forwards Patric Aho and Kyle Connor both come off entry-level contracts and will be looking to cash in, while defenceman Jacob Trouba, awarded US\$5.5 million this summer in arbitration, will once again be a restricted free agent and will demand a pay raise.

For now, Myers is focusing on the now, not the future.

"This is my first time in this position. I've always said I really enjoy it here. Right now, we're focusing on a playoff push and we'll see what happens after the season. The main focus is what we can do right now, heading into the playoffs," he said.

"(Contract talks are) something for a different time... that can come up at a different time once this year passes. We'll see where we are in a few months.

Maurice refrained from weighing in on Myers' future employment situation, but noted the player and parent he interacts closely with daily with appears to be in a very good place right now.



It might be difficult for fans to envision the Jets without big, mobile Myers on the back end, yet his departure at season's end remains a distinct possibility. (Trevor Hagan / Canadian Press files)

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"He's had a challenge and it's put life completely in perspective. And I think because of that, his time at the rink there's almost more joy in it. Hockey's everything, right? And then it's not. When your biggest challenge is now your biggest joy at home, it puts everything else into perspective," said the veteran bench boss.

"Tyler Myers is such an important part of how we play. His game fits the way we play. I just feel he feels like he's found a really good home for his game here."

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Assistant sports editor

Jason Bell wanted to be a lawyer when he was a kid. The movie *The Paper Chase* got him hooked on the idea of law school and, possibly, falling in love with someone exactly like Lindsay Wagner (before she went all bionic).

[Read full biography](#)

HISTORY

Updated on Tuesday, March 19, 2019 at 7:55 PM CDT: Changes headline as per request

March 20, 2019 at 6:16 AM: Fixes wording in final quote

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