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<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/kc-delivers-in-columbus>

***KC delivers in Columbus
Kyle Connor scored his 35th and 36th of the season in 2-1 win***

By Jamie Thomas

Kyle Connor scored twice to lead the Winnipeg Jets to a 2-1 victory over the Columbus Blue Jackets at Nationwide Arena. Mark Scheifele had two assists for the Jets who closed out their four-game road trip with a 3-1 record. It marked the 59th and 60th occasions this season that Scheifele and Connor combined on a goal, no other duo in the NHL has factored in on more goals together this season. Winnipeg will return home and will host the Seattle Kraken on Monday night.

LOCKING IT DOWN

Despite the fact the Jets gave up the game's first goal on the first shot of the game to Ivan Provorov at 1:17 of the opening frame, they defended well afterwards. The Jets didn't allow a shot on goal by the Blue Jackets for over 25 minutes during a stretch from the first period until the near the end of the second. In the end the Jets held Columbus to just 16 shots on the night.

"They were coming hard (in the first), and they were really aggressive, and I just it felt like we really kind of got back to playing fast. We got out of our zone quick, and really, in the second period, did a fantastic job of moving it north in a hurry," said head coach Scott Arniel.

"Then obviously holding on to pucks once we got in the zone. Just, that was a real solid game."

KC WONT BE DENIED

After five scoring chances Thursday in Dallas, Kyle Connor made sure he wouldn't be shut down for a second straight game with 1:46 left in the second period. Connor went to the front of the net and received a perfect pass from Mark Scheifele and beat Jet Greaves for his 35th of the season.

Connor didn't stop there as once again he and Scheifele went to work again in the third. After Greaves made two big stops on the Jets, Scheifele forced a turnover and quickly found Connor who scored his second of the night and 36th of the season.

"Yeah, that's all you can do is just kind of get chances, and try to look at them, see if there's a way that you can correct if you need be," said Connor.

"And just keep going forward, keep trying to play good hockey. And got a couple chances. And, yeah, we were able to make the most of it tonight."

For Scheifele, it was his 31st multipoint game this campaign and is only one shy of tying Marian Hossa (32) for the most multi-point games in a season in franchise history.

HELLE OWNS THE BLUE JACKETS

Connor Hellebuyck has been dominant when playing Columbus in his career. He has posted a career 7-1-0 record against the Blue Jackets and his .939 career save percentage in the matchup is the highest of any opponent he has faced. Hellebuyck's best save came at the end

of the game, with the Jackets pushing to tie, Adam Fantilli was all alone at the side of the net and Hellebuyck came over to deny the Columbus forward and preserve the two points. Arniel was happy with the fact the Jets kept the shot volume down for their number one goaltender.

"Yeah, we don't want to get him one of those games where he gets bombarded, especially with us traveling home," said Arniel.

"Obviously off tomorrow but then turning around and playing again Monday. It's nice that he doesn't have to get too much work. But at the end of the day he loves it. I think he'd rather have 45 shots."

NHL.com

<https://www.nhl.com/news/winnipeg-jets-columbus-blue-jackets-game-recap-april-4-2026>

Connor, Jets defeat Blue Jackets to gain ground in wild-card race in West Forward scores twice, Scheifele has 2 assists for Winnipeg; Columbus is 1-6-1 in past 8 games

By Craig Merz

COLUMBUS -- Kyle Connor's second goal of the game was the go-ahead score in the third period to help the Winnipeg Jets to a 2-1 win against the Columbus Blue Jackets at Nationwide Arena on Saturday.

He made it 2-1 at 10:58 with a wrist shot from the slot after a Mark Scheifele takeaway.

"It's awfully fun playing with 81 (Connor). He's an amazing shooter," Scheifele said. "He knows where to go. He's an absolute treat to play with."

Scheifele assisted both Connor goals, and Connor Hellebuyck made 15 saves for the Jets (33-31-12), who have won five of seven and are 7-3-2 in the past 12 games.

Winnipeg has moved three points out of the second wild-card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Western Conference.

"It just speaks to a bit of the maturity of the group, and focusing on us and how we need to play, and not really worrying about too much outside noise," Connor said. "Obviously, looking at the standings, we're going to need some help, but that's something that we can't be praying on. We've got to do our job here and we take care of points."

Ivan Provorov scored and Jet Greaves made 23 saves for the Blue Jackets (38-27-12), who have lost six straight games (0-5-1) and are 1-6-1 in their past eight. Columbus is tied with the Detroit Red Wings, Ottawa Senators, and Philadelphia Flyers for the second wild-card spot out of the Eastern Conference.

The Blue Jackets held a players meeting following the game and kept the locker room closed for 24 minutes.

"I'll just keep our conversation in here because we're a better team than what we've shown and just talked about it," Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski said. "We're not eliminated. We're

still in it and I believe in this group. I believe we can get it done and it's just doing it. I mean, we did it for two months.

"The last two weeks obviously haven't gone our way, but it's in the room and it's on us to just pull it out and get it done. But, it starts with one game at a time. We can't worry about what other teams do or whoever we have after Detroit (at the Red Wings on Tuesday). Our focus just has to be on Detroit, and after that we'll figure it out."

Provorov made it 1-0 at 1:17 of the first period on the Blue Jackets' first shot of the game when Mason Marchment pushed Winnipeg defenseman Dylan Samberg off the puck and fed Provorov from below the goal line as the defenseman was coming down the slot.

Connor tied it 1-1 at 18:14 of the second period. He was in the right circle when he passed down to Scheifele, then skated toward the net and took the return pass before shooting to the far side.

The Blue Jackets went 25:32 without a shot on goal from 9:48 of the first period to 15:44 of the second when Denton Mateychuk had their fifth of the game. Columbus was outshot 9-3 in the second period.

Columbus had 10 shots on goal in a 5-1 loss at the Carolina Hurricanes on Thursday and has scored 13 goals in its past eight games.

"We create the second most chances on the forecheck in the entire League," Blue Jackets coach Rick Bowness said. "Yet we want to get inside the blue line and make cute little plays against good teams that aren't working. And they're not working."

"So, I have to get after them. They've got to change their mindset. We're a north, hard-skating pressure team."

The Blue Jackets had a 6-on-4 with nine seconds left with Greaves off and Scheifele in the penalty box for tripping on the Jets' lone penalty of the game.

Boone Jenner won the draw to Werenski. He passed to Adam Fantilli in the right circle for a one-timer that Hellebuyck saved with six seconds left.

"We did a lot of great things and deserved the two points," Jets coach Scott Arniel said. "When you go more than 25 minutes without allowing a shot at this time of year, it says a lot about the way your structure was. Yeah, it's tough for your goalie when he's standing there not getting anything for that long, but at the end of the day, we needed him at the end."

Associated Press

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/connor-scores-twice-as-jets-beat-blue-jackets-to-stay-in-playoff-hunt/>

Connor scores twice as Jets beat Blue Jackets to stay in playoff hunt

By Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Kyle Connor scored twice and the Winnipeg Jets overcame an early deficit to beat the Columbus 2-1 on Saturday night, keeping their playoff hopes alive and sending the Blue Jackets to their sixth straight loss.

Winnipeg moved to 78 points, a point out of the final wild-card spot in the crowded Western Conference.

Connor tied it with 1:46 left in the second period, and scored the winner with 9:02 left in the third. He has 36 goals this season. Mark Scheifele had his 59th and 60th assists, and Connor Hellebuyck made 15 saves.

Ivan Provorov scored for Columbus, which has lost four straight at home and remains outside the Eastern Conference wild-card picture. Jet Greaves stopped 23 shots.

Provorov scored on Columbus' first shot 1:17 into the game. It was the Blue Jackets' 57th goal by a defenceman this season, a franchise record.

Columbus then went more than 25 minutes without another shot as Winnipeg took control.

Up next

Jets: Host Seattle on Monday night.

Blue Jackets: At Detroit on Tuesday night.

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/connor-credits-defensive-effort-for-jets-close-win-over-blue-jackets/>

Connor credits defensive effort for Jets' close win over Blue Jackets (VIDEO)

Kyle Connor joins Sean Reynolds to discuss the Jets' close win against the Blue Jackets, how he and Mark Scheifele took over in the second period, the Jets' defence after only allowing 15 shots on the night, and the team's mindset moving forward.

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/scott-oake-announces-decision-to-stop-broadcasting-after-2025-26-season/>

Scott Oake announces 2025-26 will be his final season of broadcasting

By Sportsnet Staff

Hockey Night in Canada broadcaster Scott Oake announces he will retire at the end of the 2025-26 Stanley Cup Playoffs, with next week's After Hours segment set to be his last. Hockey Night in Canada will look a bit different going forward.

Longtime Sportsnet personality Scott Oake announced on Saturday's After Hours that this will be his final season broadcasting and he will step away following the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Oake has enjoyed a long and storied career in broadcasting, getting his start by volunteering at his campus radio station at the Memorial University of Newfoundland before parlaying that into a job with CBC St. Johns.

Oake relocated to Winnipeg in 1979 to pursue sports broadcasting, and was then tapped by CBC to join Hockey Night in Canada in 1989 — a position he has held since.

A mainstay on the Hockey Night in Canada broadcasts, Oake began hosting the second game in the 2003-04 season alongside notable co-hosts such as Louie DeBrusk, Kelly Hrudey and Kevin Weekes.

Throughout his career, Oake has been honoured for his exceptional work in the industry, including capturing an Order of Manitoba, Order of Canada, and in 2003 won a Gemini Award for his interview with Brett Hull.

As much as his interviewing prowess, Oake is also well known for his sense of humour. His post-game interviews on Hockey Night in Canada have produced plenty of viral moments — including cheeky exchanges with veteran NHLer Ryan Reaves, whose friendship with the Oake family long predates his NHL career, having grown up with Scott's sons, Bruce and Darcy.

Oake was foundational in building After Hours — the nightcap wherein Oake and his co-host conduct a lengthy interview, including viewer questions, with a player, coach or team executive — which ran initially from the 2000-01 season until 2013-14. It was revived ahead of the 2016-17 season, airing on Sportsnet and CBC.

Oake also founded the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre in Winnipeg following his son's overdose death in 2011.

April 11 will mark his final Hockey Night in Canada and After Hours appearance.

"Congratulations Scott, on an extraordinary career," Sportsnet PR said in a statement.

"Scott has been a trusted voice and steady presence on Hockey Night in Canada for more than three decades, earning the respect of viewers, colleagues and athletes alike. Through his thoughtful reporting, genuine compassion, and unwavering professionalism, he has helped tell the stories that define hockey.

"Thank you, Scott, for your remarkable contributions to Canadian broadcasting — you will be missed. We look forward to celebrating your career through one last Stanley Cup Playoffs!"

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7168243/2026/04/04/winnipeg-jets-reimagining-10-important-moves/>

What if the Winnipeg Jets were ruthless? Reimagining 10 of the team's most important moves

By Murat Ates

The Winnipeg Jets are not the sort of team that fires a head coach after one bad season. Other teams do that.

Fifteen years into their existence, the Jets aren't the sort of team to fire a general manager at all. They're renowned for being patient, criticized for being too loyal, and they wear the strengths and weaknesses that come with their approach. The Jets would never take the Vegas Golden Knights' ruthless approach to asset management, firing Jack Adams Trophy and Stanley Cup winners despite their winning records.

But what if they did act that ruthlessly?

What if the Jets believed head coaches have a shelf life? What if it took at least one Stanley Cup win to justify making a GM the second-longest tenured person at his position in the NHL? What if the Jets took a ruthless approach with their players, too?

Today, we're going to look back at 10 of Winnipeg's biggest decisions from the past 10 years, wave our ruthless wand and compare the path Winnipeg took to what may have happened if it had been willing to step outside its existing paradigms. Not every game-breaking decision changes for the better. Read on to see how Winnipeg's history unfolds in our alternate universe.

1. Paul Maurice's resignation: 2021-22

The backstory: Paul Maurice approached Jets management with misgivings about returning for the 2021-22 season. GM Kevin Cheveldayoff and chairman Mark Chipman ultimately convinced him to stay, but Maurice resigned in December 2021 anyway. He said at the time that Winnipeg would be better without him — and eventually, when Rick Bowness was hired, he was proven right — but the Jets missed the 2022 Stanley Cup playoffs.

Dave Lowry was unable to guide a team with Mark Scheifele, Pierre-Luc Dubois, Blake Wheeler, Kyle Connor and Josh Morrissey, supplemented by Neal Pionk, Brenden Dillon and Nate Schmidt on defence and Nikolaj Ehlers, Paul Stastny, Adam Lowry and Andrew Copp up front.

A more ruthless approach: Have Maurice resign in summer 2021.

The theoretical outcome: The most idealistic outcome is that Bowness is hired and Winnipeg's leadership group is shaken up early, thereby allowing a quality 2021-22 Jets roster to make the playoffs. Bowness wasn't available, though. He was still coaching Dallas.

Top coaches available in 2021 include Gerard Gallant, Bruce Boudreau and Jay Woodcroft — none of whom still occupy a head coaching role in the NHL. Would any of those men have had the courage that Bowness did to remove Wheeler's captiancy?

I believe the most probable outcome is that Winnipeg's 2021-22 season would have been saved, sparing Lowry the awkward and untenable situation of coaching his son's team. That said, Bowness turned out to be exactly the right coach for the Jets, making changes that outlasted him when he left.

2. Dustin Byfuglien's sudden retirement: 2019-20

The backstory: Dustin Byfuglien was a once-in-a-generation combination of heavy hits, offensive ability and defensive strength. His on-ice abilities were paired with an off-ice personality that couldn't have been less interested in the spotlight. Byfuglien walked away from the NHL before camp in 2019, had ankle surgery and never returned.

The outcome: Winnipeg hoped Byfuglien would decide he wanted to return. The Jets waited until April to terminate his contract, leaving \$7.6 million in cap space unavailable for use. Cheveldayoff used the limited space Winnipeg had left to acquire Dylan DeMelo and Cody Eakin. Winnipeg went on to lose to Calgary in the 2020 playoff qualification round.

A more ruthless approach: Suspend Byfuglien without pay. Alternately: Convince him to accept mutual termination earlier in the process. Anything that cleared Byfuglien's cap hit early enough for Winnipeg to upgrade upon Anthony Bitetto, Luca Sbisa, Nathan Beaulieu, Carl Dahlstrom and Sami Niku on defence would have been a win.

The autumn trade market was likely quite a bit different than the one from which Cheveldayoff plucked DeMelo. Still, here's a partial list of defencemen who moved during the 2019-20 season:

Justin Faulk
Joel Edmundson
Erik Gudbranson
Brenden Dillon
Alec Martinez
Brady Skjei

Would Winnipeg have qualified for the 2020 playoffs had it taken the ruthless route? It wouldn't have taken an all-star upgrade; such was the lack of quality on the team's blue line that season. But there's no paradigm shift wherein Byfuglien was ever going to return to the NHL — and that's the biggest loss.

3. The Seattle expansion draft: 2021

The backstory: Winnipeg got fooled by Logan Stanley's on-ice save percentage in the 2021 season and playoffs, despite sheltered minutes, and protected Stanley from Seattle expansion. This left DeMelo exposed from the defence, despite signs that he could become a good partner for Morrissey.

The outcome: Seattle took Mason Appleton.

A more ruthless approach: There isn't one. Protecting DeMelo over Stanley wouldn't have been more or less ruthless. If the Kraken selected Stanley, then there's a chance Johnathan

Kovacevic, Declan Chisholm or Ville Heinola would have found a role on Winnipeg's blue line. It seems likely Winnipeg would have signed a veteran for its third pair the following season.

4. The Vegas expansion draft: 2017

The backstory: Toby Enstrom waived his no-movement clause such that Winnipeg could protect Byfuglien, Jacob Trouba and Tyler Myers. Winnipeg then sent Vegas the 13th pick in the 2017 draft for the 24th pick and the assurance that Vegas would select Chris Thorburn.

The outcome: Vegas selected Nick Suzuki with the 13th pick and Winnipeg chose Kristian Vesalainen at No. 24. Enstrom went on and was hurt during the 2018 playoffs and then retired. Marko Dano remained with the Jets but did not grow into a feature role.

A more ruthless approach: Let the Golden Knights take who they will and keep pick No. 13.

Winnipeg might not have selected Suzuki, but hindsight dramatically favours giving Winnipeg a swing at Suzuki (or Josh Norris or Robert Thomas, who went later in the first round.) It's interesting to contemplate Suzuki or Thomas as Winnipeg's second-line centre, while acknowledging that Vegas exploited a lot of teams at that draft.

5. The Patrik Laine trade to Columbus: 2021

The backstory: Winnipeg drafted Patrik Laine second in 2016 and enjoyed his 140 goals and 110 assists in 306 games for the Jets. He wasn't as obsessed with self-improvement, fitness and diet as Wheeler or Scheifele was, nor was he as mature as they were. Friction developed, so Laine asked for a trade and was sent to Columbus along with Jack Roslovic for Dubois and the pick that became Danil Zhilkin.

The outcome: Dubois was a short-term solution who didn't want to stay in Winnipeg. He did the team a favour, however, by requesting a trade that Cheveldayoff went out and won.

A more ruthless approach: The alternate reality here is Winnipeg waiting out Laine's trade demands, trying to bully him into a decision between playing or holding out. Dubois' desire to leave Columbus was fortuitous, though, and it's hard to imagine Laine gaining value by sitting out. The approach Winnipeg took probably maximized its assets.

6. The Pierre-Luc Dubois trade to Los Angeles: 2023

The backstory: Dubois never wanted to be in Winnipeg, orchestrating his way to the Kings after 2 1/2 seasons with the Jets.

The outcome: Gabriel Vilardi is a key piece of Winnipeg's current success, scoring more often than Dubois has done for Los Angeles or Washington since the deal was made. Alex Lafallo has been a diligent worker for Winnipeg, moving up and down the lineup as needed. Rasmus Kupari left Winnipeg to play in Switzerland, while the Jets drafted defenceman Alfons Freij with the Canadiens' second-round pick. The Kings moved Dubois to Washington after one season.

A more ruthless approach: There wasn't one. Winnipeg was backed into a corner and Cheveldayoff did brilliantly to get out of it.

7. Adding veterans Brenden Dillon and Nate Schmidt: 2021

The backstory: Winnipeg swept the Edmonton Oilers in the 2021 playoffs, despite getting outshot and outchanced. Then the Jets were swept by a Canadiens team that didn't let Winnipeg get close enough to Carey Price to overcome Scheifele's Game 1 suspension.

The outcome: Derek Forbort, Tucker Poolman, DeMelo, Stanley and Jordie Benn were Winnipeg's Nos. 3 through No. 7 defencemen. Winnipeg needed an upgrade and acquired Brenden Dillon and Nate Schmidt for two second-round picks and a third-round pick. The veteran defencemen helped get Winnipeg into the playoffs in 2023, but not without taking minutes that could have gone to Dylan Samberg, Stanley or a prospect of choice. They were also leaders in the dressing room.

A more ruthless approach: This was the ruthless approach. They bought Schmidt out in 2024, freeing him up to win the 2025 Stanley Cup with Maurice in Florida. Had the Jets been obsessed with loyalty, they would have played the defencemen they'd drafted or tried to extend Dillon midseason instead of waiting it out and letting him walk.

8. Hiring Rick Bowness (and Scott Arniel): 2022

The backstory: We covered it in the Maurice section. The Jets carried out a league-wide search for honest critiques about their team. They then chose loyalty-informed hires in Bowness and Arniel to take the reins. Bowness had coached the original Jets franchise in the 1980s, while True North had hired Arniel for the Moose twice.

The outcome: Bowness worked out spectacularly, establishing a team-first culture and creating a greater sense of accountability than previous editions of the Jets. Then, when Bowness retired and Arniel replaced him, Winnipeg won the Presidents' Trophy while giving up the fewest goals for the second straight season. This year, they haven't been nearly that good.

A more ruthless approach: Loyalty won this round. A ruthless team such as Vegas would fire Arniel after missing the playoffs, but I think Arniel's first season as head coach earned him another look beyond this year.

9. Extending Connor Hellebuyck, Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor: 2023, 2025

The backstory: Winnipeg's franchise goaltender and No. 1 centre were essential signings for a Jets team that sought to avoid a rebuild. Connor is a 90-point scorer who wanted to re-sign in Winnipeg, so the Jets re-signed him.

The outcome: Winnipeg is a threat to make the playoffs for as long as Hellebuyck, Scheifele, Connor and Morrissey deliver star performances. Signing them extended whatever Cup window Winnipeg was ever going to have, and the Jets have avoided a rebuild as a result.

A more ruthless approach: Trade Connor while his offensive powers are at an all-time high. An analytical look at his game reveals an outsized association with scoring chances against the Jets. The most ruthless move is to sell high, before Connor ages into his 30s, he loses his explosiveness and his offence deteriorates. Would that help Winnipeg win? Maybe, but you'd need the Jets to get an outstanding return.

Would it get Winnipeg out of a buyout-proof, bonus-laden \$12.0 million average annual value contract that could be an anchor before it's over? Yes.

10. Keeping Nikolaj Ehlers: 2025

The backstory: Nikolaj Ehlers was a dynamic winger whose relative lack of ice time diminished his ability to turn first-line talent into point-per-game seasons. Faced with Ehlers' expiring contract and the knowledge his time in Winnipeg had likely come to an end, the Jets held on to him at the 2025 trade deadline.

We praised them for the self-rental, reasoning that acquiring a similar player for Winnipeg's playoff run would cost a pile of assets. He played a key role in the "Manitoba Miracle" goal that propelled Winnipeg into the second round but then signed an \$8.5 million AAV contract in Carolina in the summer. Winnipeg misses his offence.

A more ruthless approach: Walking a valuable trade asset to unrestricted free-agent status is ruthless, through a certain lens. It would have been better asset management to move him when the Jets had a chance — or extend him, if he were more open to it. There may even be an alternate reality wherein Martin Necas became a Jet for one season, via a trade with Carolina, but I don't think Necas would have extended in Winnipeg as he did in Colorado.

Are the alternate-reality Winnipeg Jets a stronger team than the one that plays tonight? Did we miss key moves or important ramifications? Make sure to have your say in the comments.

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7169458/2026/04/04/nhl-top-prospect-pipeline-season/>

Which NHL prospect in each team's pipeline had the most promising season?

By The Athletic NHL Staff

It's what every NHL organization wants to see in its prospect pipeline: the player who shows promise that they could one day be ready for the next step and more responsibility at a higher level.

As the 2025-26 hockey season winds down, these prospects have emerged and shown what they could have to offer — enough to possibly change the way their organization perceives them or solidify their future star status.

Which prospect in each NHL team's pipeline had the most promising season?

The Athletic posed that question to its NHL staff, stipulating that while short-term call-ups this season are eligible, the prospects should not have spent most of the season in the NHL.

In response, we heard about top prospects who showed they could make the leap, hidden gems who could earn bigger opportunities and players who showed they are on the precipice of making an NHL impact. Here are the picks.

Winnipeg Jets

Kieron Walton, LW/C

Walton is a 6-foot-6, 227-pound forward with soft hands who's played some center and a lot of left wing and who led the OHL with 364 shots this season — a ridiculous margin over No. 2 Adam Novotný, who had 278. The difference is a testament to Walton's ability to control the play, his deft stickhandling and playmaking ability to create a pile of scoring chances for himself and his teammates. The Tage Thompson admirer finished eighth in OHL scoring and has four points in five playoff games. — Murat Ates

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/04/04/big-guns-on-target-for-jets-in-columbus>

Big guns on target for Jets in Columbus Scheifele, Connor create all the offence Winnipeg needs against Blue Jackets

By: Ken Wiebe

COLUMBUS – The top guns took over and simply would not be denied.

Kyle Connor scored a pair of goals, both of which were set up by Mark Scheifele, to propel the Winnipeg Jets to a 2-1 victory over the Columbus Blue Jackets in a must-have game on Saturday night before a sold-out crowd at Nationwide Arena.

Connor is up to 36 goals on the season, while Scheifele took another step towards recording the first 100 point output in his career, moving to 94 points in 76 games.

Most importantly, the offensive exploits allowed the Jets to ensure they would remain three points out in the chase for the final playoff spot in the Western Conference standings.

“Yeah. It is awfully fun playing with 81,” said Scheifele. “He is an amazing shooter. He knows where to go. He is an absolute treat to play with.”

“He does so many little things so well. Even before the goal, he dances a pretty good defenceman and then makes a good pass to me, and I get a pretty good chance. And then he just knows where to go from there. He is phenomenal to play with.”

About the only thing the dynamic duo didn’t do on this night was find a way for Connor to complete the hat trick, though Scheifele tried to find him on two separate occasions with the Blue Jackets net empty.

“We’ve talked this whole stretch since the break, your best players have to be your best players,” said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. “They had some great looks in Dallas, especially KC, so it was nice to see them finish them off. When they can make those plays and do those things, it’s fun to watch.”

Although the Jets, who improved to 33-31-12, temporarily moved within one point, they will finish the evening three back with six games left in the regular season, since the San Jose Sharks and Nashville Predators are facing off against one another in one of the late games on Saturday night.

“At this time of year, everybody is fighting for their lives. And (even if) you’re not, you’re either one of those teams that may be eliminated, you fight for jobs,” said Connor. “There’s always something on the line. It’s the NHL. And there’s no easy games in this league. And obviously, (the Kraken) are a team that needs every point as well, and they’re right there in that fight.”

Let’s take a closer look at what transpired:

Surviving the slow start

The Jets had been hoping to come out of the gate better than they did in Dallas in the 3-0 loss to the Stars on Thursday, but that plan got derailed when Mason Marchment got Jets defenceman Dylan Samberg off balance and found former Brandon Wheat Kings blue-liner Ivan Provorov for a goal that came 77 seconds into the contest.

“We thought that was a little bit of a hook on that play. It wasn’t (called), but that gets you on your heels,” said Arniel. “I thought after that, they were coming hard and were really aggressive, and it felt like we really got back to playing fast, we got out of our zone quick and really in the second period did a fantastic job of moving it north in a hurry. And then obviously holding on to pucks once we got in the zone. That was a real solid game. We just wipe away that one goal and we did a lot of great things and deserved the two points.”

Staying sharp

Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck went more than a full period between seeing shots, but he managed to stone Conor Garland on a rebound opportunity late in the second period that ensured the game would stay tied.

“Sometimes those games can be tough. I know he always talks about it, especially the second, (when) we’re all over them. You may get one grade A and you’ve got to be ready,” said Connor. “He did a great job of just staying in the moment.”

After a tripping minor to Scheifele with 8.3 seconds remaining in regulation, Hellebuyck stoned Adam Fantilli on a point-blank chance to prevent the game from going to overtime.

“Yeah, we don’t want to get him one of those games where he gets bombarded, especially with us travelling home,” said Arniel. “It’s nice that he doesn’t have to get too much work. But at the end of the day he loves it. I think he’d rather have 45 shots. Coaches wouldn’t, but he would. That’s a tough part of the game, too, is when you don’t get any action and all of a sudden somebody comes down there and you haven’t seen a shot in a while. That’s just part of being a goalie, staying mentally focused and into it.”

Hellebuyck, who made his sixth consecutive start and 53rd of the campaign, finished with 15 saves.

Since the Jets won’t play on consecutive days until Tuesday, April 14, there’s a good chance Arniel will continue to ride Hellebuyck for the foreseeable future.

The key play

Scheifele found Connor in the slot for a one-timer at 10:55 of the third period that proved to be the game-winner.

The three stars:

Kyle Connor, Jets, Two goals.

Mark Scheifele, Jets, Two assists.

Neal Pionk, Jets, One assist, two hits.

The compliment

Blue Jackets head coach Rick Bowness offered up praise for Dominion City product Denton Mateychuk when asked about the smooth-skating defenceman following the morning skate.

“He’s highly skilled, highly competitive,” said Bowness. “He’s not the biggest guy out there, but he’s fearless. He’ll take out anybody. He’s a great skater, (with) great vision. You’ve got to remember, this is his first full year (in the NHL). For a young D, there’s a lot we’re throwing at him, but he’s handling it really well. He’s a great kid, a great teammate and a wonderful guy to work with.

“He’s fun to watch play because he puts his heart and soul into every shift and I love that.”

Mateychuk was promoted to the top D pairing with Norris Trophy candidate Zach Werenski and has taken another important step in his development during his second NHL season.

He’s up to 13 goals and 30 points in 70 games this season.

Extra! Extra!

It’s the fourth time in his career that Connor has hit 35 goals.

After suffering a sixth consecutive loss, the Blue Jackets held a closed door meeting that lasted nearly half an hour. They remain tied with the Ottawa Senators and Detroit Red Wings for points in the Eastern Conference standings (but percentage points back due to playing one more game) and one point behind the New York Islanders in the chase for third spot in the Metropolitan Division.

Following the morning skate, Arniel provided a quick update on the status of Jets defenceman Elias Salomonsson, who remains in concussion protocol after taking the reverse hit from Dallas Stars forward Jason Robertson.

“Yeah, still a little off,” said Arniel. “So he’s still in protocol.”

With Salomonsson out indefinitely, the Jets made one lineup change, inserting Jacob Bryson on the third pairing with Haydn Fleury. Bryson had one shot on goal and three shot attempts in just more than 12 minutes of ice time.

The Jets returned centre Danny Zhilkin to the Manitoba Moose of the American Hockey League during the weekend since they are no longer in double emergency conditions. Zhilkin has one assist in six NHL games this season.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/04/03/reunion-with-former-bench-boss-bones-in-the-cards>

Reunion with former bench boss Bones in the cards Jets look forward to playing old head coach as club lands in Ohio

By: Ken Wiebe and Mike McIntyre

There will be a steady stream of smiles, hugs and handshakes when the Winnipeg Jets walk into Nationwide Arena on Saturday.

That’s standard operating procedure when Rick Bowness is in the building, thanks to the bond so many members of the Jets formed with him during his two seasons behind the bench in Winnipeg before he stepped away from coaching to focus on his health and the health of his wife Judy.

“He is an incredible human being. It’s great to see him back behind the bench doing what he loves and excelling,” said Jets captain Adam Lowry.

“You just see the motivation, and you see how hard the guys play for him. He is a great coach and demands a lot but it comes from respect. He loves you as a player and a person and those are the coaches you love to play for.”

Bowness returned to the NHL in late January after receiving a call from Blue Jackets general manager Don Waddell to ask if he was interested in taking over from Dean Evason. In typical Bowness fashion, he was on his fishing boat in Florida enjoying a nice day on the water when he received the job offer and it didn’t take him long to agree to terms.

“The next game is going to be a huge one for us, and we need it. And, yeah, it’ll be good to see Bones,” said Jets defenceman Dylan Samberg, whose team faces the Blue Jackets on Saturday to close out a four-game road trip. “We haven’t seen him in a while, and he loves the game. And I knew he wouldn’t be able to stay away from it for very long.”

The Blue Jackets responded incredibly well to Bowness, who immediately connected with the group and encouraged them to play a more stifling defensive style while quickly becoming tougher to play against.

Those were the two clear points of emphasis in his opening press conference to reporters in Ohio after he took the job.

“He is an incredible human being. It’s great to see him back behind the bench doing what he loves and excelling.”

When he took over, the Blue Jackets were near the bottom of the standings, dead last in the Eastern Conference, but they’ve gone 19-7-5 since and, entering Friday’s action, they were tied in points with the Ottawa Senators and Detroit Red Wings in the chase for the second wild-card spot and just one point behind the New York Islanders for third place in the Metropolitan Division.

“I knew it was going to happen. I wouldn’t say I knew it was going to be that successful, but I knew he’d certainly change the style of play,” said Jets head coach Scott Arniel, who was an associate coach for two seasons on Bowness’ staff before he was promoted to the top job. “The defending part first, the buy-in from everybody. That’s what he’s done wherever he’s been. It’s defend first. You can see it. They’re getting rewarded.”

As impressive as the run has been, the Blue Jackets have encountered some adversity recently, dropping four of the past five outings, coughing up a late lead in several of those losses.

“That’s a team that has their own battle, so they’re going to be pretty ornery in their own building,” said Arniel. “We want to go in and finish this road trip 3-1.”

AROUND THE GLASS EHLERS EXCELLING

Former Jets winger Nikolaj Ehlers tied his high-water mark for points earlier this week.

Ehlers, who signed a six-year deal with the Carolina Hurricanes last July, is up to 24 goals and 64 points in 75 games — which is one more than he had in 69 games with the Jets last season.

The dynamic Dane also had 64 points in 82 games during his second season in the NHL back in 2016-17.

After an adjustment period that he documented in a one-on-one interview in Toronto back in November, Ehlers has settled in nicely and while the bulk of his minutes have come in a second-line role, he's been a great fit for a franchise.

Ehlers is also on the top power-play unit for a Hurricanes team that is tied for third overall in the league.

LAINE IN LIMBO

Speaking of former Jets, reports have surfaced speculating that Patrik Laine has played his last game with the Montreal Canadiens.

If that's the case, it will be a disappointing closing chapter with the fabled Original Six franchise.

Laine, who turns 28 later this month, looked like he'd found a great fit after a rocky departure from the Blue Jackets organization and quickly became a fan favourite with his rocket of a shot and power-play propensity, finishing last season with 20 goals and 33 points in 52 games.

But Laine has been limited to one assist in five games this season and he is scheduled to become an unrestricted free agent for the first time in his career on July 1.

It will be interesting to see what the next chapter looks like for Laine, who never quite found the form that made him an elite sniper during his time with the Jets, who chose him second overall in the 2016 draft.

Will that next opportunity come in the NHL or might Laine head back to Finland to continue his career?

Stay tuned.

MAKING THEIR MARK

With the sweeping reaction (or was it an overreaction?) to the winners and losers of the NHL trade deadline firmly in the rearview mirror, let's take a moment to highlight some of the players having the biggest impact with their new teams.

Quinn Hughes

The most impactful addition was a pre-emptive strike by Minnesota Wild GM Bill Guerin to bring in Quinn Hughes in a blockbuster with the Vancouver Canucks.

Hughes, who faced the Canucks this week, has 50 points (four goals, 46 assists) in 43 games with the Wild.

Bobby McMann

The move to acquire forward Bobby McMann by Jason Botterill and the Seattle Kraken was a stroke of genius.

McMann is up to eight goals and 12 points in 10 games with Seattle and he's done a good job of helping the Kraken hang around the playoff race despite their late-season stumble.

McMann, who is a pending UFA, is up to a career-best 27 goals and 44 points in 70 games this season.

If McMann, who turns 30 in June, hits the open market, there will be a long lineup to secure his services and the Jets should be one of the teams with interest.

Projections for his next deal are in the five year, US\$25 million range, which is certainly affordable for that level of production in a middle-six role.

McMann and the Kraken will visit Winnipeg on Monday in a game that could end up being the equivalent of an elimination game for both teams.

Nazem Kadri

The reunion between Nazem Kadri is off to a steady start and his value will only be enhanced once the playoffs begin, given his championship pedigree and willingness to go to the hard areas.

Kadri has four goals and nine points in 13 games since the move, bouncing between centre and the wing.

Forward Brayden Schenn has fit in seamlessly with the New York Islanders, chipping in five goals and 10 points in 13 games since coming over in a trade with the St. Louis Blues.

The Jets saw first hand last spring just how physical Schenn can be. Once the playoffs begin, you can expect the former Blues captain to announce his arrival quickly, no matter who the opponent is (provided the Islanders withstand the push from the Blue Jackets, Philadelphia Flyers and Washington Capitals).

John Carlson

Sticking with the aforementioned theme, the Ducks hit a home run with the acquisition of right-handed shooting D-man John Carlson, who helped the Capitals win the Cup in 2018.

Carlson, who spent the first 1,141 games of his career with Washington, has brought his ample experience to a team on the rise and has a goal and nine points in nine games.

Warren Foegele

Warren Foegele went from being an extra forward with the Los Angeles Kings to an important role player with the Senators.

Foegele, who plays with speed and sandpaper, has also provided some important secondary scoring during their push for a playoff spot, chipping in five goals and seven points in 14 games.

Ryan Strome

While the Calgary Flames are more in the mix for the first overall pick than they are for a playoff spot, adding centre Ryan Strome has paid dividends.

Strome found himself as a healthy scratch far too often for the Ducks, but he's producing at close to a point per game clip after sliding into a second-line centre role, chipping in four goals and 10 points in 14 games while averaging nearly 16 minutes of ice time.

Strome, who turns 33 in July, has one more season on his contract, which includes an average annual value of US\$5 million.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/2026/04/03/moose-in-playoff-hunt>

Moose in playoff hunt

Club sits fourth in standings with eight games left in regular season

By: Mike McIntyre

Not unlike the parent club, time is of the essence these days for the Manitoba Moose.

But in contrast to the Winnipeg Jets, the American Hockey League squad is currently on the right side of the playoff line. However, their perch got a bit more perilous on Friday afternoon following a 6-3 loss to the Grand Rapids Griffins at Canada Life Centre to kick off a crucial, six-game homestand.

It was a roller-coaster game that saw the Moose go down 3-0 after 20 minutes, claw back to tie it in the second period, then give up three straight late goals (including an empty-netter) to the No. 1 team in the Central Division.

"We made some irresponsible plays with the puck and they pounced. That's who they are," said head coach Mark Morrison. "The way we've played the game as of late, we don't score a lot of goals. So when we score three, we've got to win the hockey game. To give up some Grade A chances against to that team, they're going to put them in."

Manitoba (31-27-6) sits fourth in the Central with eight regular-season games remaining. The top five teams qualify for the post-season, but No. 4 plays No. 5 in a best-of-three qualification round series, with the higher-seed hosting the duration. Milwaukee entered play Friday night in Cleveland just three points behind the Moose with a game in hand.

Manitoba will host Milwaukee next Tuesday and Wednesday, followed by Texas — who sit in third place in the division, just two points ahead of them — next Friday and Sunday.

"All the games are huge for us right now," said Morrison.

Highlights on Friday included rookie forward Jacob Julien, who missed nearly 40 games with a knee injury to start the season, scoring his first professional goal for the Moose. Chase Yoder also lit the lamp, his second in as many games, and veteran Phil di Giuseppe had the other marker.

"It stinks not being able to get a point there, or squeeze out two," said Yoder. "Obviously puck management is big there when the game is tied and there's under eight minutes to go. But we're trying to make plays out there. We're trying to win the game, too."

Top forward prospects Brayden Yager, Colby Barlow and Nikita Chibrikov all chipped in with assists.

The Moose roster has been thinned in recent weeks, with Parker Ford, Brad Lambert, Danny Zhilkin and Elias Salomonsson all earning call-ups to the Jets. Forward David Gustafsson (injury) and defenceman Alfons Freij (illness) — who recently arrived from Sweden — are also sidelined.

Zhilkin was returned to the Moose on Friday and should be in the lineup for Saturday's rematch against the Griffins. It's also possible one or more of the newest additions could make their debut, as Winnipeg becomes a hockey haven for college captains.

Lucas Wahlin, Davis Burnside and Lukas Gustafsson all wore letters for their respective NCAA programs this past season. Now, the undrafted trio will finish the year with the Moose.

Burnside and Gustafsson signed one-year American Hockey League deals for 2026-27 on Thursday, along with professional tryouts that allow them to join the Moose immediately. Wahlin inked a one-year, two-way contract with the Jets last week, along with an amateur tryout that also takes effect right away.

Winnipeg has gone this route before, signing players like Brandon Tanev (Providence), Jeff Malott (Cornell) and Ford (Providence) as undrafted free agents. All three worked their way through the Moose and are now NHL players. Malott and Ford were captains at the NCAA level, as was current Moose defenceman Dylan Anhorn (St. Cloud State).

It's a strategy that makes plenty of sense.

The Jets have moved out significant draft capital in recent years to acquire immediate help. Targeting undrafted college free agents offers a low-risk, potentially high-reward way to replenish the prospect pipeline — often with players who bring maturity, leadership and a proven competitive edge.

There's little doubt this latest group fits that mold.

Burnside, 22, recorded 32 points (12 goals, 20 assists) in 37 games with Ohio State this season. The six-foot, 185-pound right-shot forward from Illinois finished his NCAA career with 112 points (49 goals, 63 assists) in 155 games. He previously played in the USHL with the Tri-City Storm, Des Moines Buccaneers and Dubuque Fighting Saints.

Burnside described himself as a "high-energy player, playmaker, not afraid to get into the dirty areas. I'm not the biggest guy, but I like to use my speed and make plays off the rush."

Gustafsson, 23, had 22 points (6G, 16A) in 36 games with Boston College that had their championship dreams come to an unexpectedly early end. The five-foot-11, 194-pound left-shot defenceman from Georgia totalled 72 points (14G, 58A) in 147 NCAA games. He also won a USHL championship with the Chicago Steel in 2021.

Gustafsson described himself as "an offensive defenceman. I like to make plays, but also reliable on the defensive side. Not the tallest defenceman, but like to play hard, like to play physical. Just make simple plays, get up the ice, join the play. Hopefully score a few goals here and there."

Wahlin, 24, produced 39 points (21G, 18A) in 36 games with the University of St. Thomas. The five-foot-11, 160-pound right-shot forward from Minnesota finished with 131 points (56G, 75A) in 137 NCAA games. He was recently named the CCHA Student-Athlete of the Year and Defensive Forward of the Year.

“It was definitely a long process. Kind of waited, talked to a bunch of teams, talked to my family and kind of figured out what was the best opportunity and the best decision for my future. It ended up being Winnipeg,” Wahlin told reporters.

He described himself as “a hard-working, two-way forward that’s not afraid to provide some offence. Get gritty in the corners and get physical.”

Morrison said he plans to work all three into the lineup in the coming games.

“That’s up to us as coaches to fit them in — maybe not all at the same time — in spots where we feel safe with them,” he said.

“It’s always hard at this time of year because these guys are in here and management wants to take a look at them, so they have to play. I guess, really, it’s about making sure they know enough of the systems and putting them with the right guys.”

Winnipeg Sun

https://www.winnipeg.sun.com/sports/connor-s-brace-powers-the-jets-passed-the-blue-jackets/article_15d49851-b38f-43d6-8c1b-4910457bd3cd.html

Connor’s brace powers the Jets passed the Blue Jackets

By Gordon Anderson

Kyle Connor scored twice, and Mark Scheifele assisted twice as the Jets squeezed past the Columbus Blue Jackets 2-1 on Saturday night.

“It is awfully fun playing with Connor,” Mark Scheifele told reporters in Columbus. “He is an amazing shooter. He knows where to go. He is an absolute treat to play with.”

With the Jets trailing 1-0 late in the second period, Connor scored his 35th of the season at 18:14 to knot the game heading for the third period. Connor then buried the winner at 10:58 with Scheifele earning his second assist of the night and 60th of the campaign.

“We’ve talked about this whole stretch since the break,” Jets head coach Scott Arniel said about the team’s 11-5-4 record in the last 20 games. “Your best players have to be your best players.”

Connor’s winner was a delight to behold as he found a soft spot in the coverage to the right of the Columbus net. Scheifele feathered a pass, and Connor blistered a one-timer that from inside the face-off circle that beat Jet Greaves low to the glove side.

“He is incredible,” Scheifele said. “He does so many little things so well. He just knows where to go. He is phenomenal to play with.”

The game got interesting late as Scheifele was sent to the box for tripping at 19:53, but the Jets held the fort to finish their four-game road trip with a 3-1-0 record. The Jets (33-31-12) improved their record to 15-17-6 away from home with three road games remaining in the regular season.

Connor Hellebuyck (21-21-11) stopped 15 shots to get the win. The Jets number one netminder has started six in a row and nine of the last 10. He is 4-3-2 in that span. Eric Comrie has one win in that span of double-digit games. He earned the victory in a 3-2 shootout triumph over the New York Rangers on March 22.

Arniel was pleased Hellebuyck was limited to so few shots as he will probably get the call on Monday night when the Jets host the Seattle Kraken.

"We don't want to get him one of those games where he gets bombarded, especially with us traveling home," Arniel said. "(We are) off tomorrow but then turning around and playing again on Monday. It's nice that he doesn't have to get too much work."

During the course of game play, Hellebuyck faced only three shots between Boone Jenner's attempt at 10:12 of the first period and Jenner's shot at 15:52 of the third period.

"It's tough for your goalie when he's standing there not getting anything for that long," Arniel said. "But at the end of the day, we needed him at the end."

Hellebuyck turned away Adam Fantilli with six seconds remaining in the game and the Jets on the penalty kill with Scheifele off for tripping. Hellebuyck also stopped a Charlie Coyle chance with 35 seconds left in the third.

"Sometimes those games can be tough," Connor said. "He did a great job of just staying in the moment."

Ivan Provorov scored for the Blue Jackets (38-27-12). The Jackets have lost six in a row, going 0-5-1 in that span. Greaves (24-16-9) was credited with 23 stops on 25 shots.

The Jets will remain three points behind the Los Angeles Kings (31-26-19) in the chase for the final wildcard spot in the Western Conference as they beat the Toronto Maple Leafs in overtime on Saturday. The Kings have 19 regulation wins this season.

The Nashville Predators and San Jose Sharks are in action on Saturday night. The winner of that Sharks vs. Predators game will tie the Kings in points with 81. If the game ends in regulation, the loser will remain one point ahead of the Jets. If the game goes to the extra session, the loser will move two points in front of Winnipeg.

Ice Chips

Elias Salomonsson, Gustav Nyquist, Vlad Namestnikov and Ville Heinola were scratched.

The fewest yet

The Jets allowed 16 shots on goal, the fewest allowed in a single game this season.

"That's just playing a good road game," Arniel said. "Everybody, throughout our lineup, their detail without the puck... Columbus can really transition fast, and I thought with a very mobile defence we did a good job of beating them back up the ice and limiting stuff to the outside."

The Jets were also credited with 13 blocked shots. Dylan Samberg and Haydn Fleury were credited with three each. In games where the Jets have allowed 19 shots or fewer, they are now 3-3-1. Natural Stat Trick credited both teams with 10 high danger chances in all situations and favoured the Jets 33-25 on overall chances in all situations.

https://www.winnipeg.sun.com/sports/winnipeg_jets/desperate-duo-arniel-s-jets-bowness-s-blue-jackets-clash-in-ohio/article_8174da34-ee81-44c2-8a0c-f762df119e06.html

Desperate duo: Arniel's Jets, Bowness's Blue Jackets, clash in Ohio

By Paul Friesen

Their teams are both in trouble, just below the playoff line with time running out.

Scott Arniel's Winnipeg Jets and Rick Bowness's Columbus Blue Jackets are supposed to be playing a level of hockey that reflects their desperate plight.

Instead, the head coaches who combined to turn the Jets into what appeared to be a Stanley Cup contender come into Saturday's head-to-head meeting in Ohio bewildered by their teams' latest showings.

Arniel's Jets didn't show up until the third period of a 3-0 Thursday loss in Dallas, while Bowness's Blue Jackets were complete no-shows in a 5-1 loss in Carolina.

"If we don't have 20 guys playing to their identity, it makes it very difficult for us," Arniel said after the dud in Dallas. "Tonight, it was loose. We were missing nine or 10 guys."

His old boss was even more cutting in Carolina.

"I saw some selfish play that I haven't seen until now," Bowness said. "We had some guys out there who poured their whole heart and soul into that game, and then we had some guys give us absolutely nothing. They can say all they want, 'Oh, we want to get in, we want to get in.'"

"I'd shut up and let my play do my talking for me."

Sound familiar?

Bowness never minced words when he was the Jets boss and he isn't going to start now.

His team had just set an NHL record nobody would be proud of: it got just two shots on goal from forwards, the lowest total since the league began tracking shots in 1959-60.

Eight more came from the defence, for a measly total of 10.

And to think the Blue Jackets were the NHL's hottest team just 10 days earlier.

Bowness, lured out of retirement in January to help right a sinking ship, had them full steam ahead for his first two-plus months on board.

Five straight losses, four in regulation, have sunk them just below the playoff line in the NHL East.

Jets captain Adam Lowry still speaks fondly of the coach who made him the team captain and built a philosophy that started with team defence. It was so effective it led to back-to-back William Jennings Trophies as the league's stingiest team in 2024 and '25.

"An incredible human being," Lowry said of Bowness. "To see him back behind the bench doing what he loves and excelling, you just see the motivation, you see how hard the guys will play for him. He's a great coach. He demands a lot, but he treats you with a ton of respect.

"He loves you as a player and as a person. And those are the coaches you love to play for."

The transition from Bowness to Arniel going into last season was seamless – for a year, anyway.

The early returns included a Presidents' Trophy and miraculous, Game 7 win in the first round of the playoffs.

The magic has worn off, though.

The Jets enter the weekend in the middle of the pack for goals against and 25th in scoring, a combination that doesn't usually lead to anything past mid-April.

They've been on a bit of a run lately, but they inexplicably weren't ready against the Stars.

"We dug ourselves a hole and couldn't dig out," is how defenceman Dylan Samberg put it.

That might just sum up their playoff predicament, too: still three points to make up, on three different teams, one of which (San Jose) has a game in hand.

"Recover and reset," Lowry said, calling his team's Thursday effort "a little stubborn" early on. "Clear the mind and get ready for Columbus. They are in a similar position as us, fighting for their playoff lives. They have been struggling and it is an important game for both teams. Whoever gets the jump on the other one comes out on top."

The Blue Jackets have six games left, the Jets seven.

How badly do they want it?

If either one comes sleepwalking out of the gate on Saturday, they'll deserve all the criticism they get from their head coach.