

***THREE THINGS: Jets lose 5-1 to Canadiens
Connor hits 25 goals for ninth consecutive season, Jets play next on Feb 25***

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG - The Winnipeg Jets dropped their final game before the Olympic break with a 5-1 loss to the Montreal Canadiens at Canada Life Centre. Kyle Connor scored the only goal for the Jets who go into the break with a 22-26-8 record, Connor Hellebuyck made 22 saves. The Jets will be sending four players to the Olympics, Josh Morrissey (Canada), Kyle Connor (USA), Connor Hellebuyck (USA) and Nino Niederreiter (Switzerland). Winnipeg will return to action on February 25 when they visit the Vancouver Canucks.

ANOTHER ONE...

For the ninth consecutive season, Kyle Connor has reached the 25-goal milestone. The Jets were ready right from the drop of the puck, and it was Connor who opened the scoring at 6:07 of the first period. Winnipeg was on the power play, Gabe Vilardi sent a cross-ice pass that Connor snapped past Samuel Montembeault. Connor now has the second-longest active 25-goal seasons in the NHL sitting behind the Leafs Auston Matthews (10). With 29 career points in 24 games against Montreal, they are one of 15 opponents that he is at or above a point per game pace.

SMALL MISTAKES

With the game tied at one in the second period, Montreal opened up a two-goal lead in a 1:16 span. First at 5:28, Josh Anderson showed off his hand-eye coordination redirecting a Jayden Struble point shot past Connor Hellebuyck. Then at 6:44 Lane Hutson beat his check up the ice and made it 3-1 after taking a pass from Anderson and beating Hellebuyck short side.

"We talked about Montreal's D being in the rush and gave up the one, there was a couple there where we got on the wrong side of people and they got in there with their speed game, which they do well," said Scott Arniel.

"We did a good job of containing that but in the second period we allowed them to do that a few times. Like I said, a 1:30 it was a 3-1 hockey game."

CREATED PLENTY OF CHANCES

In the end, the Jets created plenty of chances to beat the Canadiens. Kyle Connor and Logan Stanley hit goal posts, Cole Perfetti had a couple glorious scoring chances as did Vladislav Namestnikov but Samuel Montembeault played one of his best games of the season making 36 saves.

"I do think it was one of our better games offensively I would say," said Niederreiter.

"I mean we had definitely a lot of good looks, just couldn't find a way to put them in."

***Gallagher, Anderson each has 3 points, Canadiens defeat Jets
Montembeault makes 36 saves for Montreal, which is 4-0-1 in past 5 games***

By Darrin Bauming

WINNIPEG -- Brendan Gallagher and Josh Anderson each had a goal and two assists, and the Montreal Canadiens won 5-1 against the Winnipeg Jets at Canada Life Centre on Wednesday.

"It was nice to get rewarded tonight," Anderson said. "I thought we've been playing some pretty good hockey lately as a line (with Gallagher and Phillip Danault), so getting on the forecheck and trying to create energy for our group -- tonight, they just went in for us. It was nice."

Sam Montembeault made 36 saves for the Canadiens (32-17-8), who have points in five straight (4-0-1). Noah Dobson had two assists.

"[Montembeault] had a great game," Montreal coach Martin St. Louis said. "I think he was a big part of why we were able to get the result tonight, because early on it could have been worse. We could have dug ourselves in a bigger hole, but I think he allowed us to get going, and once we got going and separated, [it] allowed us to keep it that way. I thought as a team we played an excellent third [period], but I think it starts with some of the stuff that 'Monty' was doing, so I'm really happy for him."

Kyle Connor scored and Connor Hellebuyck made 22 saves for the Jets (22-26-8), who have lost five of seven (2-3-2).

"Montembeault was good. He played well," Winnipeg coach Scott Arniel said. "He made some big stops. The chances ended up being 14-10 for us at 5-on-5. That's not counting the 6-on-5 stuff at the end. We had a lot of chances and we should-have-could-have. It would have been nice to get out of that first period up 1-0. But at the end of the day, we had enough offense to win that game. Our couple of mistakes went the other way and they capitalized on their [scoring chances]."

Connor made it 1-0 Jets at 6:07 of the first period, scoring on the power play when Gabriel Vilardi set him up with a cross-slot pass for a one-timer from the right circle.

"We obviously jumped out to a lead, and it was a good start," Connor said. "We didn't take care of our forecheck well enough to cover their D coming up the ice. ... Just smarter reads getting pucks through and quickly out of our defensive zone, and just simplifying a bit and almost turned into, hey, we had a lot of great chances too. Their goalie made some good saves, and they capitalize on theirs."

Oliver Kapanen tied it 1-1 at 16:26, collecting the rebound from Dobson's point shot and putting it behind Hellebuyck.

"It was kind of a little bit of a slow start for us," Anderson said. "Bad penalty by me, they score, and then I think we started to turn around at the end of the first period and then kind of took over from there. We had a lot of good chances tonight, and obviously Monty made some

unbelievable saves. He played really solid for us. So it was a huge game for us knowing that it was the last one before the break.”

Anderson made it 2-1 Canadiens at 5:28 of the second period, with a net-front tip on Jayden Struble’s point shot.

“It felt like a little bit of a slow start, but we kind of found our legs, found our game,” Canadiens captain Nick Suzuki said. “And probably late in the first [period], we kind of controlled the rest of the game. And that was good, I think from everybody.

“We would be in a big hole to start (without Montembeault). He was sharp right away, saved ourselves from getting a big hole.”

Lane Hutson made it 3-1 at 6:44, taking Anderson’s cross-ice backhand pass and lifting it off the post and over Hellebuyck’s shoulder.

“Some of the guys were saying it was a nice pass by me, but I was like, what a pick-up by him,” Anderson said. “And then for him to go short side like that was sweet. So it was a really nice goal by him.”

Gallagher pushed it to 4-1 on the power play at 10:57 of the third period. Zachary Bolduc’s backhand saucer pass down low found Kirby Dach, who went skate-to-stick to set Gallagher up for a chip-in at the edge of the crease.

“I mean, the good news is we’ve got a lot to work on and we’re still finding ways to win,” Hutson said. “So it’s encouraging for sure.”

Danault scored short-handed into an empty net at 19:46 for the 5-1 final.

“We knew they’re a fast team,” Jets forward Nino Niederreiter said. “So we were focused on playing fast, make sure we get the pucks behind them and make their D turn. I think we did a good job overall, but we couldn’t win. We had enough chances to win this game.”

NOTES: Connor’s goal was his 25th of the season, giving him nine consecutive 25-goal seasons. It is the second-longest active streak of 25-goal seasons in the NHL, trailing Auston Matthews (10) of the Toronto Maple Leafs. ... The Canadiens are 16-6-7 on the road this season. The only teams with more road wins are the Tampa Bay Lightning (19) and Dallas Stars (18). ... Kapanen’s 18th goal of the season ties Anaheim Ducks forward Beckett Sennecke for the NHL lead among rookies.

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11653182/winnipeg-jets-finish-pre-olympic-schedule-with-5-1-loss-to-montreal/>

Winnipeg Jets finish pre-Olympic schedule with 5-1 loss to Montreal

By Christian Aumell & Russ Hobson Global News

The Winnipeg Jets went into their matchup with Montreal Wednesday night hoping to enter the Olympic break on a high note.

Instead, the thousands of Canadiens fans in attendance at the Canada Life Centre had plenty more to cheer about as Montreal knocked off the Jets 5-1.

Winnipeg opened the scoring, but the Canadiens scored five unanswered goals, including a pair just 76 seconds apart in the second as the Jets playoff chances took another hit.

It certainly wasn't for a lack of scoring chances as the Jets peppered Sam Montembeault with 37 shots in the loss.

"I do think it was one of their better games offensively I would say," said Jets forward Nino Niederreiter. "I mean, we definitely had a lot of good looks, just couldn't find a way to put them in."

The Jets recorded the first seven shots on goal of the game and outshot the Habs in all three periods, but they still fell four goals short.

"We had enough offence to win that game and just our couple mistakes, obviously went the other way and they capitalized on theirs," said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. "There was a couple there where we got on the wrong side of people and they got into their speed game which they do well.

"We did a good job in the first of containing that. Second period, we allowed them to do that a few times and like I said, a minute and 30 seconds it's a 3-1 hockey game.

Kyle Connor scored the only goal for the Jets as he hit the 25-goal plateau for the ninth straight season.

Brendan Gallagher and Josh Anderson both had three-point nights for the Canadiens with a goal and two helpers, while Oliver Kapanen, Lane Hutson, and Phillip Danault had the other Montreal markers.

"There was O-zone plays where we had possession, we had possession, shot the puck and then two of our guys are below the goal line, and they had five above and they were coming," Arniel said. "So, like I said, there was a couple mistakes that were made that kinda shot ourselves in the foot."

It was Montreal's only visit of the season, but at times it felt like a road game as there was a very heavy presence of Canadiens' fans cheering and chanting, even singing OI?, OI?, OI? with the Canadiens comfortably in front.

"That's pretty disappointing," said Arniel. "That's probably the worst I've seen in my four years back here. Tonight, that was really disappointing."

The win gives the Canadiens a sweep of the season series after a shootout victory in Montreal.

Jets forward Tanner Pearson was a healthy scratch for the third straight game.

The loss leaves the Jets nine points out of a playoff position but that will grow pending the outcome of a late game between the Seattle Kraken and the Los Angeles Kings.

Before puck drop, the Jets honoured their four players who will be suiting up in the upcoming Olympic games, with Connor Hellebuyck, Kyle Connor and Nino Niederreiter earning solid applause but the building roared for Canada's Josh Morrissey.

Fittingly, it was one of the Jets' Olympians who broke the ice just over six minutes in.

After Anderson took a high-sticking penalty, Montreal won the draw and cleared the puck, but after Winnipeg regained the zone, they poured pressure on Montembeault.

The dam eventually burst when Gabriel Vilardi got the puck by the side of the net and fed Connor for a quick release shot that deflected off Danault and through Montembeault for his 25th of the season.

Curiously it was only his third power play goal of the season and also just his third since Christmas 2024.

A couple of minutes later, Vilardi had to go to the locker room after blocking a shot and hobbling off the ice. He returned to the bench shortly thereafter and didn't miss a shift.

Connor nearly scored his second of the night just past the midway point of the first when he rang a shot off the post, but it careened to safety.

Niederreiter also had a fantastic chance to get on the board when he got loose in transition but after taking a great pass from Vlad Namestnikov, he was denied by the blocker of Montembeault from point-blank range.

That all proved consequential as Montreal leveled the score with 3:34 to go in the first. As the Habs moved the puck around the Winnipeg end, they lost their defensive structure, so when Hellebuyck stopped a point shot from Noah Dobson, Cole Perfetti was left to try and tie up Kapanen at the side of the net, but he lost position on him and Kapanen was able to put the rebound into a yawning net.

The Canadiens got their first power play chance with 2:12 to go but didn't get to play out the full two minutes before they took a penalty of their own, meaning Winnipeg would start the second with 1:25 of power play time, though they didn't manage to do anything with it.

It was a high-event first period with Winnipeg getting 13 shots on goal to Montreal's 11.

The Canadiens got a couple of decent chances after killing off the Winnipeg power play. The first came when Hellebuyck mishandled a dump-in, but he was able to deny the follow-up chance; the second was a 2-on-1 with Hellebuyck denying Jake Evans in close.

But off the ensuing faceoff, Montreal won the puck back to the point where Jayden Struble threw a shot on goal that went off Anderson and past Hellebuyck to give the Habs a 2-1 lead at the 5:28 mark.

Just over a minute later, the Habs doubled their lead and gave the thousands of Montreal fans in attendance more to cheer about. Montreal broke the puck up the ice as Gallagher banked the puck off the boards to Anderson near the Winnipeg blue line.

As Anderson collected the puck, Hutson booked it up the ice and skated into the Winnipeg zone completely unguarded. He skated into the slot, took a pass from Anderson and beat Hellebuyck short side to make it 3-1.

Winnipeg managed to outshoot the Habs 12-9 in the period as they got a few decent looks later in the period, mainly from the Vilardi-Adam Lowry-Cole Perfetti trio but the score remained 3-1 after 40 minutes.

The Jets earned a power play just over two minutes into the third, giving them a great opportunity to cut into Montreal's lead. Perfetti nearly did but was denied in close by Montembeault while a shot from Scheifele squeezed through the Montreal goalie, trickling into the crease before a defender cleared it to safety.

After Montreal got the kill, the teams took turns skating up and down the ice with the puck but not generating much in terms of good scoring chances.

The Habs got their second power play of the night with 11 minutes to go and with Morrissey three seconds away from exiting the box, Montreal scored to put the game on ice.

Winnipeg cleared the puck and went for a line change as the Canadiens regrouped. Dobson sent a pass to Zack Bolduc at the Jets' blue line, and he carried it in before sliding a pass down low to Kirby Dach. He then sent it cross-crease to Gallagher, who roofed it past Hellebuyck to make it 4-1.

Winnipeg pulled Hellebuyck for an extra attacker with more than five minutes to go in the third. Montreal tried unsuccessfully to score into the empty net from their own end, icing the puck five times as Winnipeg tried to cut into the lead.

It became a 6-on-4 with 1:48 left when Gallagher tripped Logan Stanley but it didn't help Winnipeg as Danault finally scored an empty netter with 13 seconds left.

The Jets enter the Olympic break with a 22-26-8 record with 26 games remaining.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11652912/call-of-the-wilde-montreal-canadiens-winnipeg-jets-feb-4-2026/>

Call of the Wilde: Canadiens head into Olympic break with 5-1 win over Winnipeg

By Brian Wilde Global News

The final game before the Olympics break for the Montreal Canadiens was in Winnipeg, 21 days before the next contest, so the Canadiens wanted to finish on a high.

The Jets are at the bottom of the standings, but playing better recently. After a weak first 10 minutes, the Canadiens rolled to a 5-1 win.

Wilde Horses

It's truly hard to believe that Lane Hutson did not make the USA Olympic team. The statistics in his favour could not be more convincing. When Hutson took a pass from Josh Anderson, streaked toward the goal and roofed it from inside three feet, it was his 10th goal of the season.

Goals are far from his specialty, but he's top 15 in the league in that category. Assists are where he shines, and in that discipline, Hutson is second behind only Quinn Hughes with 48 on the season.

In points, Hutson is at a sparkling 58 points in 57 games. He's blowing away his rookie season of 66 points. Hutson is third in the league among defenders in points.

The counterargument to his inclusion for the Olympics is that there are two sides to the ice, and it's imperative that a defender can also take care around his own goalie.

Hutson is a plus-21 on the season. He is 12th in the entire league. It's easy to doubt that the man who made the choices Bill Guerin is not an analytics lover, but if he were, Hutson is 19th in the NHL in Corsi. There simply is not a single metric where Hutson is not elite. That is, except his height where he is listed as five-feet-nine-inches tall.

If Hutson could practice being taller, he would be seven feet by the morning.

The Canadiens got off to a horrible start. They were dominated by the Jets, but Samuel Montembeault was strong in the first period. Impressive from Montembeault, considering he hadn't played in 11 days.

If not for Montembeault being strong early, it could have been a vastly different night. Montembeault stopped 36 of 37 on the night.

His excellence allowed the Canadiens to find their game eventually. Oliver Kapanen had a goal-scorer's touch for his 18th of the year. If Kapanen would have panicked, he would have simply whacked it in the goalie's pads. However, he calmly curled the puck away from Connor Hellebuyck, backed out of the melee, and then flipped it upstairs for what looked like an easy marker, but wasn't.

The Phillip Danault, Josh Anderson and Brendan Gallagher line had a strong contest. Anderson set up Hutson, and he scored himself on a deflection for his 12th of the year.

Gallagher had two helpers early, and then he wrapped up the game midway through the third with a tap in tally on a gorgeous pass from Kirby Dach.

Dach certainly has his patterns. Every time it starts to feel like he is done, he rises up, and then when he looks like he could find stardom after all, he breaks something. There's an outstanding player in there somewhere, if he could only stay healthy enough to keep his momentum going.

Wilde Goats

For the first time this season, the Canadiens are 15 games over NHL .500. They have played 57 times and have lost in regulation only 17 games. That's a lot of entertainment for the long-suffering best fans in hockey.

Before last season, oddsmakers in Las Vegas set the Canadiens over/under for 75 points. They finished with 91. This season, the oddsmakers set the line at 91 points. They are on pace for 104 points. Montreal is eighth in the entire league.

No goats for this level of excellence heading into the break.

Wilde Cards

As expected, the trading deadline in the NHL passed with no trades for the Canadiens. The Olympics trade embargo will be in effect until Feb. 22.

There was only one trade on the final day. Rumour was the New York Rangers were asking the San Jose Sharks for Will Smith, or the Washington Capitals for Ryan Leonard in order to release Artemi Panarin.

What the Rangers got was considerably less, quite naturally. Asking for one of the great young players in the league in return for a 34-year-old making over \$11 million is laughably inept. The Rangers are in for a long rebuild, if GM Chris Drury thought that was gonna fly.

The Rangers acquired Liam Greentree instead. He is a mid-level prospect who is in his fourth season at the Windsor Spitfires.

The Canadiens were not in the running for Panarin. An aging player, on the clock, isn't what a club early in their rebuild needs, unless that player is Sidney Crosby.

The only Montreal rumour taking flight, and it makes sense as logical, is Patrik Laine could be on the move with the Canadiens keeping salary to facilitate the trade. Laine has been wearing a contact jersey at practice for the last two weeks. He is ready to play as soon as the Canadiens want him to.

Apparently, they don't want him to.

The Canadiens rebuild has gone so well they didn't envision that they would already want some salary cap space to add more talent to a winning hockey team.

One factor that isn't being considered is that Laine was not healthy for his entire time in Montreal, playing on a bad knee that he hurt at his first training camp. Laine is now healthy, and he does look faster as he continues to skate with the club. However, now Laine can't win a chance to prove himself that, if healthy, he can be better.

It doesn't seem illogical to give Laine another look to see if he can provide more. There's no downside to playing him, considering the Canadiens are attempting to unload him with no return, and paying half of his salary.

The worst that can happen is he plays poorly. That's great news for the club that picks him up trying to lose more games for a higher draft pick.

To be continued. But not until after the Olympics when trades will be allowed until March 6.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11655778/analysis-winnipeg-jets-fans-olympic-break-season-to-forget/>

ANALYSIS: Winnipeg Jets — and their fans — need Olympic break from season to forget

By John Shannon CJOB

The Winnipeg Jets' loss to the Montreal Canadiens on Wednesday was emblematic of so much of this season for Scott Arniel's team.

Solid in spurts. Defensive lapses. Slower than the opposition. Not enough resilience.

Just not good enough.

At 22-26-8 and 11 points away from the playoffs, maybe the best thing that can happen to this group is to take time away from the rink and reset for the final 26 games of the season. The intensity, pressure and disappointment of this season have to weigh on these proud men. After all, many have made long-term commitments to this team and this city. They want to be Winnipeg Jets.

With the losses building, you can hear the disappointment and frustration in all of their voices. Players don't want to lose. And it's even tougher when the losing becomes pervasive.

So with the playoffs a distant hope now, maybe getting away from the game will help on so many levels. By this time of year, every player is playing with bumps and bruises. They can heal. And maybe, some of the mental anguish will disappear and we see a fresh start, and a better mindset, on Feb. 25 after the Olympics. The players can surely use the break.

And you know what? Maybe it will help the fans, too. With the passion for hockey always at a premium in Winnipeg and across the province, cheering for the team in blue has been nothing short of a roller-coaster since October.

So for the next 16 days, it will be a welcome relief to watch and support the men and women wearing the red leaf in their quest for gold. The Jets' championship hopes are done. But Canada's drive for excellence will be thrilling to watch.

After all, even the great fans in this city need a break.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/article/really-disappointing-jets-coach-arniel-vents-on-habs-fans-taking-over-in-winnipeg/>

'Really disappointing': Jets coach Arniel vents on Habs fans taking over in Winnipeg

By TSN.ca Staff

Winnipeg Jets head coach Scott Arniel was not pleased with the number of Montreal Canadiens fans at the Canada Life Centre Wednesday as his team suffered a 5-1 blowout loss.

"Yeah, that's pretty disappointing," Arniel told reporters post game. "That's probably the worst that I've seen it in my four years back here tonight. That was really disappointing."

Wednesday's game represented the last for the Jets before the Olympic break, leaving the team with a 22-26-8 record at the pause, 11 points back of the Anaheim Ducks for the final playoff spot in the Western Conference.

The Jets have a 12-11-5 record on home ice this season after going 30-7-4 in Winnipeg last year en route to winning the Presidents' Trophy.

Taking over opposing rinks has become a trend for the Canadiens, with Buffalo Sabres captain Rasmus Dahlin and Ottawa Senators defencemen Jake Sanderson recently echoing similar frustrations to Arniel's.

"I really, really appreciate the fans that came out, but I don't want to see that many red in the future," Dahlin said after a 4-2 loss to the Canadiens on Saturday.

"Yeah, we're used to it," Sanderson said after a 6-5 loss to Montreal on Jan. 17. "Playing an away game at home, it happens quite often. It is what it is."

The Canadiens have found no shortage of success on the road this season, going 16-6-7 while travelling compared to a 16-11-1 record on home ice.

Montreal sits second in the Atlantic Division, four points back of the Tampa Bay Lightning with three more games played.

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/>

Gaunce: Montembeault 'goalied' the Jets

It's been a rollercoaster season for Canadiens netminder Sam Montembeault but he stopped 36 of 37 shots Wednesday night in Montreal's 5-1 victory over the Jets.

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/02/04/jets-get-humbled-by-habs>

Jets get humbled by Habs

Strong start with no finish gives way to five unanswered goals

By: Ken Wiebe

A strong start gave way to a sloppy second.

In a scene that was all too familiar — even if it had mostly been cleaned up of late — the Winnipeg Jets let an opponent hang around when they could have pulled away and were eventually left in the dust.

An inability to extend the lead after scoring the first goal, despite a shot clanging off the iron and several other Grade-A chances that were thwarted by Samuel Montembeault, saw the Jets were beaten 5-1 by the Montreal Canadiens on Wednesday night at Canada Life Centre.

"There have been so many ups and downs this year," said Jets head coach Scott Arniel.

"Moments where it looked like we had got our game going. I've liked what we've been doing for the last two or three weeks here, but this is now a stretch where you should take whatever it is, a week or whatever, and get away.

"Get your mind away from the game, reset, refocus."

The Jets go into the Olympic break with a record of 22-26-8 and aren't back in action until Feb. 25 when they open a three-game road trip against the Vancouver Canucks.

Once the games resume, the Jets will have a stretch of 26 games in 51 days as they try to keep their flickering playoff hopes in the Western Conference alive.

"It's coming every other night," said Arniel. "We start out on the road and we see a lot of the teams that are above us in the standings, especially early on in the first two weeks. So that's the time for us to make hay. We've got to win hockey games."

Let's take a look at what else transpired in this one:

The chance

With the Jets up 1-0, Nino Niederreiter had a glorious chance to make it a two-goal cushion on a two-on-one rush with Vladislav Namestnikov.

Niederreiter got a good shot away, but Montembeault found a way to keep the puck out of the net, much to the chagrin of the Swiss winger.

"I mean I wish I could have gone upstairs a little better, but he did make a great save, and I wasn't expecting he had that reach, like the way he had. But I kind of wanted to go where I (put) it," said Niederreiter, who thought his team generated enough quality looks in the 37 shots on goal they generated. "Yeah, I do think it was one of their better games offensively, I would say, I mean we had definitely a lot of good looks, just couldn't find a way to put them in."

The inability to extend the lead proved costly as Oliver Kapanen scored at 16:26 of the first period, igniting an offensive eruption that included five unanswered goals by the time Phillip Danault scored into the empty net with 13.2 seconds to go in regulation time.

"It would have been nice to get out of that first period up 1-0," said Arniel. "But at the end of the day, we had enough offence to win that game. Our couple of mistakes went the other way and they capitalized on their (scoring) chances."

The key play

The Canadiens got goals from Josh Anderson and Lane Hutson 76 seconds apart in the second period to turn a tie game into an eventual rout.

THE THREE STARS

Samuel Montembeault, Canadiens. Made 36 saves, including 12 in the first period.

Brendan Gallagher, Canadiens. Scored a power play, chipped in two helpers.

Josh Anderson, Canadiens. Scored a goal, added an assist.

Powerful stuff

The Jets struck first in this contest, thanks to some crisp puck movement and inspired puck retrievals that allowed the power play to strike.

Ultimately, Gabe Vilardi got the puck down low and found Kyle Connor with a cross-ice pass for a one-timer at 6:07 of the first period.

It was Connor's 25th goal of the campaign, but just his third on the power play.

The Jets have now scored with the man-advantage in consecutive games, which is an important development for a team that needs to improve in this area during the stretch run.

After being the most efficient power play in the NHL last season, the Jets are tied for 19th overall with the Chicago Blackhawks (at 19.1 per cent).

"It was one of those times where we were able to get some movement," said Connor. "We were able to get some motion, creating havoc, trying to create switches, we were coming around the top and it's tough to read as a defender when there are a lot of moving parts on the power play. Gabe was able to find a seam and make a great play to me."

Connor has hit the 25-goal mark in nine consecutive seasons, though he's treating this one the same as the first eight.

"I'm just focusing on being the best player that I can. I've never been one to focus on numbers per se," he said.

That doesn't mean the numbers aren't impressive as Connor is up to 309 goals and 646 points in 669 games with the Jets.

Admiration shown

Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey is someone who takes pride in watching fellow blue-liners during some of his down time, so he was happy to share a few thoughts on Canadiens D-man Lane Hutson.

Hutson, in his second NHL season, has taken another important step in his development this season and was tied for seventh in the league in assists with 48 going into Wednesday's action.

"Really since he came into the league, he's been a lot of fun to watch. Super dynamic," said Morrissey. "Obviously, his feet are incredible. His vision is incredible. You see some of the numbers that he's putting up, in terms of assists and points, it's pretty special."

"He makes a big impact on the game. Like with any good defenceman, you can't take a breath or he'll find a seam or he'll cut back on you when you don't think (he will). He's fun to watch and definitely a great player."

Hutson chipped in a goal on Wednesday to move to 58 points in 57 games this season, which leaves him third in the NHL among D-men behind Zach Werenski and Cale Makar.

Extra, extra

The Jets healthy scratches were defenceman Isaak Phillips and forward Tanner Pearson.

Following the game, the Jets planned to make a final decision about whether they were going to assign defencemen Elias Salomonsson and Phillips to the Manitoba Moose of the American Hockey League.

The expectation was they were going to be assigned so that they could continue to participate in game action, since the Jets aren't back on the ice until Feb. 17.

"We'll talk about it after. Obviously we don't want those two kids sitting," said Arniel. "That's probably what we're going to do. There's no need for those two to sit for three weeks."

Former Jets sniper Patrik Laine participated in the morning skate, but didn't suit up for the Canadiens, as he's been limited to five games this season due to an abdominal injury.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/02/05/a-huge-honour>

'A huge honour'

Jets' Niederreiter officially a Swiss flag bearer for Milan Cortina opening ceremonies

By: Ken Wiebe

Nino Niederreiter has ample experience leading the Swiss national hockey program. But on Friday, the Winnipeg Jets winger will be leading an entire nation on the world's largest stage.

Niederreiter was unveiled as one of the flag bearers for Switzerland on Thursday, which is an incredible honour for the 33-year-old forward who is set to participate in his second Olympic games.

Niederreiter, who also played for Switzerland's men's hockey team in 2014, will be joined as a flag bearer by ski cross veteran and two-time Olympic bronze medallist Fanny Smith.

Following Wednesday's 5-1 loss to the Montreal Canadiens (and before the official announcement had been made), Niederreiter shared his enthusiasm about what was on the horizon.

"Super excited about it," said Niederreiter. "Obviously, it's a huge honour having a chance to play for your country, and obviously we have a good team and looking forward to playing a good tournament."

Niederreiter has represented Switzerland in six men's world championships — serving as co-captain in 2023 and alternate twice (2018, 2024) — and two world junior championships (captaining the team in 2011). He also suited up for Team Europe at the World Cup of Hockey in 2016.

"He's an awesome guy and a great leader. He creates a great atmosphere in the locker room," Tampa Bay Lightning defenceman and Niederreiter's fellow Milan Cortina Games teammate JJ Moser said last week when the Jets were in Florida for a road trip. "He's demanding and hard working, the exact teammate that you would want to have by your side if you are trying to create something memorable."

"He's a hard guy to play against and he never gives his opponents any room to breathe or any time off. He's always on you. He has a good sense of where to go and being in the right place at the right time to be open, to get a pass or to get the rebounds or the tips. He can put pucks in (the net) and do what matters."

Niederreiter, who has 1,024 NHL games on his resum?, is a six-time 20-goal scorer (including playoffs) and his willingness to go to the blue paint should serve him well during the Olympics.

"His consistency is very impressive," said Moser. "He's been doing that for a decade, consistently at a high level. He's got great experience and that's very important to have on a

team to show the way. To calm guys down when you need to and to hype guys up if they need that.”

Switzerland is in Group A and opens up the men’s tournament against France on Feb. 12 (5:10 a.m. CT). Their remaining round-robin games are Feb. 13 (2:10 p.m. CT) against Canada and Feb. 15 (5:10 a.m. CT) against Czechia.

They enter the event as an underdog, though the national program has improved steadily since Niederreiter first competed at the world championship in 2010 as a teenager.

“I think the biggest thing is probably the commitment of going each and every year,” said Niederreiter.

“Every single NHL player wants to go play in the world’s, as soon as they’re out (of Stanley Cup playoff contention). I think that’s something players in Switzerland see, the commitment from us, not just going for vacation when the season is over. (We) go back and play for our country, and I think that’s something which we take a lot of pride in.”

The Swiss team has another connection to Manitoba as their head coach is Patrick Fischer, who was an exchange student in 1991 and played one season of high school hockey with the Carman Cougars.

Fischer returned to Switzerland in 1992 and eventually had a solid professional career, playing mostly in his home country, but he also appeared in 27 NHL games with the Phoenix Coyotes in 2006-07, recording four goals and 10 points.

Fischer also represented Switzerland at the 2006 Turin Olympics.

Niederreiter, who has eight goals and 19 points in 55 games so far this season, is one of four Jets competing in these Olympics, with defenceman Josh Morrissey representing Canada and goalie Connor Hellebuyck and winger Kyle Connor representing the United States.

Hellebuyck, the reigning Hart and Vezina Trophy winner, remains a strong candidate to open the tournament as the starting goalie for Team USA after his strong performance at the 4 Nations Face-Off, though Dallas Stars goalie Jake Oettinger and Boston Bruins netminder Jeremy Swayman could also see action.

Connor went into Thursday’s action — the last night before the official league-wide Olympic break — 13th in NHL scoring with 25 goals and 64 points and he’s highly motivated to make an impact for the United States this time around.

“Can’t wait for the experience,” said Connor. “It’s going to be some great hockey. We’ve got a little revenge to us as a team, going back to the 4 Nations (Face-Off) and I know it’s not just us against Canada. There’s a lot of other teams in this tournament as well.

“The anticipation is there and the eagerness, and it’s been a building process since 4 Nations. Being American, I’m extremely, extremely proud and obviously very gracious to be able to wear that sweater. It means a lot to me. And there’s a rich history of U.S. hockey players before me that have gone through it and it’s a great honour.”

Rounding out the Jets' Olympic contingent, Morrissey — who has 10 goals and 42 points in 56 games this season — joins Elkhorn product Travis Sanheim and Winnipeggers Mark Stone and Seth Jarvis (who was added to the team Thursday to replace an injured Brayden Point) on Team Canada.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/02/04/i-just-cant-wait-to-get-over-there>

'I just can't wait to get over there'
Jets' Morrissey fired up to be on Olympic roster

By: Ken Wiebe

Scott Arniel has provided himself — and his coaching staff — with an important assignment.

Although the head coach of the Winnipeg Jets plans to work in a little rest and relaxation during the Olympic break, he understands what is on the horizon when the bulk of his team returns to on-ice workouts on Feb. 17.

With 26 games in 51 days to close out the regular season beginning Feb. 25 against the Vancouver Canucks, the Jets will be subjected to a frenetic pace (including 16 games in March) as the stretch drive arrives.

So in some ways, they're fortunate to be able to hold what amounts to a miniature training camp before the regular-season resumes.

"I've got some work to do here," Arniel said before the Jets faced the Montreal Canadiens on Wednesday. "This is our push. I mean, we've been doing it. We're 7-4-3 since we ended our losing streak. We've got ourselves back in (the playoff race). Now, the work coming is going to be heavy. That month of March is going to be really, obviously crazy important. But it's going to be a lot of work, too.

"The staff has some things that we've got planned (for) when we do come back for that week of practice."

The Jets have four players heading to Italy to suit up for their respective countries in the Olympics — defenceman Josh Morrissey for Team Canada, goalie Connor Hellebuyck and left-winger Kyle Connor for Team USA and forward Nino Niederreiter for Switzerland.

With NHL players back at the Olympics for the first time since 2014, there's definitely a keen sense of anticipation building for when the men's tournament gets underway.

"I've got some work to do here."

"You can tell they're excited, as it's getting closer," said Arniel. "Everybody's done a good job of keeping it to the side. But I know they're excited. It's a spotlight (in) that the whole world is watching and for the NHL to be back in, it's been a long time.

"We saw that with the 4 Nations (Face-Off), with how exciting that was. And we're hoping the Olympics will be the same thing. And for those guys to be a part of it, to have that experience, to be in that atmosphere, to have that pressure, those are all good things for those guys to help us after the break is over."

Morrissey spoke to reporters prior to the game and he wasn't holding back his enthusiasm for what is on the horizon.

"As a hockey player in our sport, you grow up dreaming of playing in the NHL, and subsequently, it would be pretty darn cool to play in the Olympics," said Morrissey.

"But, unlike other sports, where that's the ultimate goal, I never thought I'd have the chance to be an Olympian. It's hard to put into words. Just having the chance to represent Canada on any level, let alone the Olympics, it's a dream come true."

Morrissey had the chance to represent Canada at the aforementioned 4 Nations Face-Off last February, though a nasty flu virus kept him out of the gold medal game against the United States.

The smooth-skating defenceman is eager for another opportunity to wear the Maple Leaf at an even more prominent event, where the stakes are even higher.

"It's just so fun to be around some of the greatest players in the world," said Morrissey. "It's not a tough sell to get people to want to go to Italy for the Olympics, so lots of people are coming, which is awesome."

"I just can't wait to get over there."

INJURY UPDATE

Following the morning skate, Arniel provided a quick update on the status of defencemen Neal Pionk (lower body), Colin Miller (knee) and Haydn Fleury (neck, back) — all of whom have been out for an extended period of time.

Miller missed the past 12 games after injuring his knee in the first period of a game against the New Jersey Devils on Jan. 11 and Pionk has missed the past 11 games with a lower-body issue.

Meanwhile, Fleury has been sidelined since an awkward crash into the end boards against the Vegas Golden Knights on Jan. 6 (making it 15 games out of the lineup) and left him with multiple injuries to work through.

Pionk had skated with the Jets in a non-contact jersey at various points of the last road trip, but he wasn't on the ice with his teammates during the past several days.

So where do things stand with those currently in the infirmary?

"We'll see when we get back (from the Olympic break)," said Arniel. "I'm hoping that Miller and Pionk will be back skating (on Feb. 17). Fleury's getting a checkup today to see if he's able to get going on the ice. Obviously, he's going to have a little bit more work ahead of him."

"When we get back from the break, we're hoping two of them are ready to go. And three would be great. I don't know where it'll be 100 per cent, if they'll all be ready to go. They'll have to get some treatment while we're away."

Canadian Press

<https://www.chrisd.ca/2026/02/04/winnipeg-jets-montreal-canadiens-recap-loss/>

Canadiens Head into Olympic Break on High Note with 5-1 Win Over Jets

By Judy Owen, The Canadian Press

Brendan Gallagher and Josh Anderson each had a goal and two assists to help the Montreal Canadiens extend their point streak to five games with a 5-1 victory over the Winnipeg Jets on Wednesday.

Rookie Oliver Kapanen, Lane Hutson and Phillip Danault, with an empty-netter, also scored for the Canadiens (32-17-8), who are 4-0-1 during that stretch and 6-2-1 in their last nine games.

Samuel Montembeault stopped 36 shots for Montreal, picking up his first win since Jan. 17.

Kyle Connor scored for the Jets (22-26-8) and Connor Hellebuyck made 22 saves.

Connor scored his 25th goal of the season with a one-timer during the power play at 6:07 of the first period, extending his point streak to five games with two goals and four assists.

Kapanen, who's heading to the Olympics for Finland, notched his 18th goal of the season 10 minutes later when a rebound went off Jet Cole Perfetti's stick right to him. He then flipped the puck past a sprawled Hellebuyck.

Montreal went ahead 3-1 at 6:44 of the second period after goals 76 seconds apart by Anderson and Hutson.

Gallagher's goal came with three seconds left in a power play at 10:57 of the third and Danault put the puck into an empty net with 14 seconds remaining.

Takeaways

Jets: Connor's goal produced his ninth consecutive 25-goal season. It's the second-longest active streak of 25-goal seasons in the NHL, trailing only Toronto's Auston Matthews (10). Down 3-1 in the second, the Jets hit a post and also had Montembeault snag a close-in shot by Dylan DeMelo. They were also stymied on four shots on goal during a power play early in the third.

Canadiens: Montreal went into the game holding the first wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference. Kapanen's 18th goal tied him for third on the team with Nick Suzuki. The Canadiens missed six attempts to hit an empty net until Danault struck for good.

Key moment

Anderson and Hutson scored 76 seconds apart early in the second period and the Jets couldn't answer back.

Key stat

Montembeault, making his first start since Jan. 24, had given up three or more goals in five of his six previous starts.

Up next

Jets: Travel to Vancouver to face the Canucks on Feb. 25.
Canadiens: Host the New York Islanders on Feb. 26.

Winnipeg Sun

https://www.winnipegsun.com/sports/flaps-down-as-jets-lose-5-2-to-the-montreal-canadiens/article_0cff83cf-cc9e-4c26-95a7-b139bfb8c41c.html

Flaps down as Jets lose 5-1 to the Montreal Canadiens

By Gordon Anderson

The Jets surrendered five consecutive goals in a 5-1 loss to the Montreal Canadiens on Wednesday night at Canada Life Centre.

Even though the four-goal loss speaks to some level of dominance, the Jets had plenty of chances to build upon a Kyle Connor power-play goal at 6:07 of the first period, but wayward shooting and strong goaltending by Samuel Montembeault kept the game within reach until Oliver Kapanen evened the match at 16:26.

"Montembeault was good, and he played well," Jets head coach Scott Arniel said. "He made some big stops. Chances ended up being, preliminary, 14-10 for us at five-on-five, and that is not counting the six-on-five at the end (of the game). We had a lot of chances, and we should have could have, it would have been nice to get out to the first period up 1-0. At the end of the day, we had enough offence to win that game and just, our mistakes went the other way and they capitalized on theirs."

The Montreal netminder was named the first star for his 36 save performance. At the other end, Connor Hellebuyck stopped 22 of 26 shots in the loss.

The Jets recorded the first eight shots of the first period. Montreal's first shot came at 12:52 by Josh Anderson. The shots on goal were 13-11 for the Jets after one and 37-27 for Winnipeg at the game's end.

"We would (have been in) a big hole to start," Montreal captain Nick Suzuki said about the first-period heroics of his netminder. "He was sharp right away, saved us from getting (in to) a big hole. He had played a great game and it's great when both goalies are going like that."

Goals by Josh Anderson and Lane Hutson 1:16 apart before the seven-minute mark of the second period gave the visitors a 3-1 lead.

Coming into the game, the Jets were 2-18-2 when trailing after two periods of play. Montreal was 17-3-2 when holding a lead after 40 minutes.

Early in the third period the faint echoes of 'Ole, ole, ole, ole' could be heard reverberating around the building, mixed with boos and cheers of support from the Jets faithful in attendance.

Brendan Gallagher and Philip Danault scored for the Canadiens (32-17-8) in the final 20 minutes. Danault's was into an empty net.

The Canadiens won the previous meeting against the Jets, a 3-2 shootout win on Dec. 3 at the Bell Centre.

The Jets enter their Olympic break with a 22-26-8 record. Their next game is Feb. 25 in Vancouver. The team can return to practice on the afternoon of Feb. 17.

Ice Chips

Tanner Pearson and Isaac Phillips were scratched.

Injury updates

On Wednesday, Arniel updated the health status of Neal Pionk, Haydn Fleury and Colin Miller.

Pionk is considered week-to-week with a lower-body injury. Fleury sustained a broken nose and a bruised back after a hard check into the boards by Vegas Golden Knights forward Keegan Kolesar in early January. Miller is considered week-to-week. He had knee surgery last month after a Jan. 11 game against the New Jersey Devils. All three players are on the IR list.

"We'll see when we get back (from the Olympic break)," Arniel said on Wednesday morning after practice. "I'm hoping that Miller and Pionk will be back skating. Fleury's getting a checkup today to see if he's able to get going on the ice. Obviously, he's going to have a little bit more work ahead of him. When we get back from the break, we're hoping two of them are ready to go. Three would be great, but as of right now, that's just the plan. I don't know where it'll be 100 percent, if they'll all be ready to go."

By the numbers

The Canadiens took control of the game with two goals in the second period. Scoring-wise for Montreal, the second period has been their worst this season. Coming into this game, they had scored 61 goals and allowed 71. Consequently, the Jets had netted 64 goals and allowed 60 ... the Jets are now 19-9-4 when they scored the first goal of the game ... Hellebuyck has allowed at least three goals in 18 regulation or overtime losses this season. Last year, he allowed three or more goals in 14 regulation or overtime losses ... Josh Morrissey is top 10 in the NHL in kilometres skated. The lone Canadian on the Olympic team had skated 320.58 kilometres prior to the start of league action on Wednesday night. The most mileage he logged in a game this season was 6.82 km in the Dec. 3 loss to Montreal ... Winnipeg is 12-11-5 at home.

https://www.winnipegsun.com/sports/winnipeg_jets/defying-odds-jets-teammates-live-their-olympic-dream/article_ae5eb951-efed-4a4f-a150-e329c63ff818.html

They can't wait: Olympics the ultimate for Connor, Jets teammates

By Paul Friesen

One year ago this month, Kyle Connor was a healthy scratch and could only watch as Canada beat the U.S. in the final of the 4 Nations tournament

The Winnipeg Jets star and his country are on the doorstep of their shot at redemption.

On Friday, Connor hops a plane from Winnipeg to John F Kennedy Airport in New York. From there it's a Saturday Team USA charter flight to Italy for the Winter Olympics.

"I can't wait," Connor told me on Wednesday. "It's going to be awesome."

The 29-year-old from Michigan is one of four Jets players about to live the ultimate hockey dream, joining American goalie Connor Hellebuyck, defenceman Josh Morrissey of Team Canada and Nino Niederreiter suiting up for Switzerland.

“Hard to believe this won't be the top experience I've had with hockey,” Connor said. “It's given me so much, from friendships to lifestyle, monetarily – everything that you can think of. And to be able to have this opportunity doesn't go unnoticed for me. It's going to be special.”

Connor only has to look a few stalls over in the Jets dressing room to see how lucky he is.

As good as Mark Scheifele is, he didn't make the Canadian team.

A younger Morrissey wasn't sure this day would come, either, with the NHL not taking part in the last two Winter Games.

“I never thought I'd have the chance to be an Olympian,” Morrissey said. “It's hard to put into words. Having the chance to represent Canada on any level, let alone the Olympics – it's a dream come true. And I just can't wait to go.”

Morrissey was on Team Canada for the 4 Nations event, but got sick and missed the final. So he has some unfinished business, too.

The thing is, with rosters stacked with their country's best, there's no guarantee of what role he, Connor or Hellebuyck will have on their teams in Italy.

Connor learned that the hard way 12 months ago.

“Everybody's willing to accept roles... it's putting your ego aside,” he said. “The way 4 Nations ended, I wish I could have been more of an impact on the team. It's such a short term and guys are very interchangeable with skill-sets. So you've got to be ready when that time calls.”

It's natural for people to compare the 4 Nations tournament with the Olympics.

But the former was an NHL production that was basically an us-versus-them showdown between Americans and Canadians, with the backdrop of a trade war and increasing tensions between the North American neighbours.

In a way, it was over-hyped, right through to the early-game brawl the Yanks instigated against Canada the first time they played.

“The 4 Nations was something of its own,” Connor said. “It was right around the time (of) political tension of tariffs and booing of the national anthem. So it drew a lot of attention.

“As much as we like to draw from the experience of 4 Nations, I think it's going to be a completely different tournament.”

There will be so much more going on in Italy.

The hockey tournament alone will feature 12 countries separated into three pools, with Canada and the U.S. in different groups and with no chance of meeting until after the preliminary round.

It'll be a completely different experience off the ice, too.

For starters, the teams won't be staying in an Italian version of the Hotel Hilton.

"I don't think it'll be a five-star," Connor said.

A little earlier, he'd been joking about the potential accommodations with teammate Jonathan Toews, a Canadian Olympian in Vancouver in 2010 and Sochi, Russia, four years later, the last time the NHL took part.

"He was just saying it's all part of the experience," Connor said. "It brings you together. I'm open-minded and can't wait to see what it's all about."

In Italy to cheer Connor on will be his wife, his mom, his step-dad and some friends from Michigan.

Morrissey, too, said family and friends are making the trek.

"It's not a tough sell to get people to want to go to Italy for the Olympics," the defenceman said. "So lots of people are coming, which is awesome."

The chance to share their biggest on-ice moment with those closest to them isn't lost on either one.

"Hockey has taken me to places around the world and given me opportunities, and they're a big part of the story," is how Connor put it. "So to be able to share that experience with them is cool."

Planning all the logistics while still focusing on critical NHL games the last while has been a good warmup for the focus Connor and his Jets teammates will need at the Games. Because very little about the Olympics is routine.

"There's going to be so many distractions, so much buzz, so much noise, almost like a playoff atmosphere," Connor said. "Wherever I am, I'm going to be present."

In a perfect world, at least for fans of the North American teams, the tournament will have one thing in common with the 4 Nations event: a showdown between Uncle Sam and the Maple Leaf.

"I truly hope we see Canada," Connor said. "We want to avenge that 4 Nations loss."

https://www.winnipegssun.com/sports/jets-rookie-d-man-elias-salomonsson-cashing-in-on-his-chance/article_d1d7166a-04eb-48a8-84aa-ac0389153c4b.html

Jets rookie d-man Elias Salomonsson cashing in on his chance

By Gordon Anderson

With the Jets threadbare on the back end, Elias Salomonsson is making the most of his second opportunity with the big club.

At least, that is his assessment of the current situation when asked if he has taken the second chance to the best of his ability.

“Yeah, I think so,” he told the Winnipeg Sun before the game against the Montreal Canadians on Wednesday night. The Jets went on to lose 5-1 to the Habs.

The 21-year-old native of Skelleftea, Sweden has played 13 games. He played four games in his first call-up, elevated to nine games with the recent spate of injuries to the depleted d-core.

Neal Pionk is considered week-to-week with a lower-body injury. Haydn Fleury sustained a broken nose and a bruised back after a hard check into the boards by Vegas Golden Knights forward Keegan Kolesar in early January. Colin Miller is considered week-to-week. He had knee surgery last month after a Jan. 11 game against the New Jersey Devils.

All three players are currently on the IR list as the Jets head into the Olympic break.

“I feel way more comfortable in my second stint,” Salomonsson said. “I feel like the game has slowed down, and I feel like I have the extra time now (to make a play) that I didn't have the first couple of games. I was a little too nervous and pumped up in my first NHL game, so I am taking advantage of the situation with all the injuries. I am taking it day and by day and (I will try) keep it going.”

He made his NHL debut on the road against the Washington Capitals on Nov. 26. He was a call up to replace Pionk, who was injured in the first period against the Minnesota Wild on Nov. 23. Pionk logged 2:05 of ice time in the first period before his departure for good.

Arniel was cautious with the club's prized possession, dishing out ice time sparingly for the rookie, and for good reason.

The right-shot defenceman saw action against some of the better teams in the league in the Carolina Hurricanes, Nashville Predators and the Buffalo Sabres. And in those games, he displayed the common traits of a player unaccustomed to his surroundings.

He was both nervous and excited and wasn't able to fully harness the runaway emotions. In two of his first four games, Arniel limited his minutes early on, giving him 11:39 against Montreal on Dec. 3 and 11:41 against the Sabres. He played 16:18 in his debut.

“The big thing, when guys, especially young players get opportunity we want to see how they are in our environment and how they handle (it), especially when he first came and the some of the teams we were playing against and some of the size, speed and the different situations he was in and it was a good first step.”

But his second appearance is like night and day, or navy blue and white, if you like.

He logged a career-high of 20:28 against the Dallas Stars, 19:40 against the Tampa Bay Lightning and 17:49 against the New Jersey Devils.

“But to come back the second time you can see that he has the confidence, ‘OK, I have been here before and I have been in the situation’ and you see a player that isn't nervous and trying

to think the game and not mistakes and now he is playing on instinct and using all his skills, especially his feet,” Arniel said. “He is confident and playing with a lot of confidence.”

And this ‘confidence’ has resulted in not only more ice time but higher leverage minutes too.

During the recent four-game road trip, Salmonsson was on the ice with Dylan Samberg for the last 54 seconds of the third period with the club nursing a 2-1 lead over the Florida Panthers. Against the Stars, another tight game late on, his last shift ended with 21 seconds remaining in the third period with the game tied at three. He was also on the ice late in the third period of the one-goal win over the Devils. He also logged a total of 3:09 on the penalty kill in those games.

“I have played big minutes, and I have grown each game, and I played on the PK (and in late-game situations) and stuff like that is good for my development as it is early in my career,” Salomonsson said, admitting he is relishing the increased responsibility.

Based on the numbers, it is clear that Arniel isn’t hiding the 21-year-old under a bench. Part of his increased responsibility just 13 games into his career comes from necessity as someone must play the minutes with the back-end injuries plaguing the team, but it’s another thing altogether to throw him out there late when the team is in such a precarious position with respect to a post-season berth.

“We are trying to give him a lot of those looks and different things to see if he can handle that, and so far, he has been really good at that,” Arniel said.

https://www.winnipegssun.com/sports/winnipeg_jets/scott-arniel-voices-disappointment-after-habs-crowd-takeover/article_fa81623b-594e-46f6-9faf-5b8f2a819979.html

‘Worst I’ve seen’: Jets’ Arniel on Wednesday turnout of Habs fans

By Paul Friesen

Wednesday’s game against Montreal wasn’t the worst Scott Arniel has seen his team play this season.

But for the Winnipeg Jets head coach, one thing did stand out as the worst he’s seen as well as heard, not just this year but since he joined the coaching staff in 2022: the atmosphere inside the downtown arena.

It’s common to have fans of the visiting team in the crowd, especially for storied, original-six clubs like Toronto and Montreal.

But the sheer number and volume of the Canadiens fans in attendance on Wednesday erased any home-ice advantage the Jets were hoping to have.

“That’s pretty disappointing,” Arniel said, post-game. “That’s probably the worst I’ve seen in my four years back here. That was really disappointing.”

You could say it mirrors the Jets season.

If GM Kevin Cheveldayoff saw the last game before the Olympic break as a signal for which way his team is headed, he got a pretty clear one.

The same issues that have caused the Jets to plummet so far and so fast from their perch last season – lack of offensive punch and inconsistency at the top of the list – were there again in a 5-1 loss.

They'll have the sour taste of this one in their mouths for a long time – it's three weeks until their next game.

Or they can just forget about.

Arniel knows which route he recommends.

"I've liked what we've been doing for the last two or three weeks," he said. "But this is now a stretch where... get your mind away from the game. Reset, refocus."

That'll be easier for the four players going to the Olympics, including Switzerland's Nino Niederreiter.

"It's been a roller-coaster year so far," Niederreiter said. "There's times where we played good hockey and there's times where we didn't play as well as we wanted to. It's definitely a good break for everyone, mentally. And we know what's at stake coming back."

What they don't know is what this team will look like after the March 6 trade deadline.

The Olympic break forces GM's to sit tight until Feb. 23.

That leaves a 12-day free-for-all in which Cheveldayoff's job is to begin undoing some of the mistakes he's made with what looked like a Stanley Cup contender one short year ago.

It's time to begin planning for next year.

Olympic underdogs

Niederreiter joins a Swiss Olympic team that may not have the cache of Team Canada or the U.S., but that doesn't dampen his enthusiasm for going to Italy.

"Super excited about it," the 33-year-old said. "It's a huge honour having a chance to play for your country, and we have a good team and looking forward to playing a good tournament."

It'll be Niederreiter's second Winter Olympics, as he was with the Swiss team in 2014 in Sochi, the last time NHLers took part.

He's also represented his country in five World Championships, winning silver medals in 2018, '24 and '25, years that saw Canada miss the podium altogether.

At the Olympics, Switzerland is no longer a pushover, either, upsetting Canada at the 2006 Games in Turin and pushing the Canadians to a shootout four years later in Vancouver.

"The biggest thing is probably the commitment of going each and every year," Niederreiter said. "Every single NHL player wants to go play the Worlds as soon as they're out (of the playoffs). That's something which players in Switzerland see, the commitment from us, not just going for

vacation when the season's over. It's go back and play for our country, and that's something which we take a lot of pride in."

Hitting the not-so-big 2-5

Another player Olympics-bound is Kyle Connor, who clinched his ninth straight season of scoring at least 25 goals with his team's lone marker against the Canadiens.

As for what that means to him...

"Not a whole lot," Connor said. "Never been one to focus on the numbers. I just go out there and play and be the best I can."

Connor flies to New York on Friday, getting on a Team USA charter for Italy the next day.

After the loss to the Habs, he reiterated what he told The Sun a day earlier: that avenging the loss to Canada at last year's 4 Nations tournament is on the minds of the Americans.

"Going to be some great hockey," he said. "And we got a little revenge to us as Team USA, going back to the 4 Nations. And I know it's not just us against Canada. There's a lot of other teams in this tournament as well, but the anticipation is there and the eagerness. It's been a process building since 4 Nations. We've gotten together over the summer and talked about it.

"And being American, I'm extremely, extremely proud and obviously very gracious to be able to wear that sweater. It means a lot to me."

For Connor, Niederreiter, goalie Connor Hellebuyck of Team USA and defenceman Josh Morrissey of Canada, it'll easily be the most meaningful hockey they'll play this season.