

**WinnipegJets.com**

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/three-things-jets-give-nino-extra-reason-to-celebrate>

***THREE THINGS: Jets give Nino extra reason to celebrate  
Jets beat Capitals 5-1 as Niederreiter celebrates his 1000th game***

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG – Connor Hellebuyck made 24 saves to lead the Winnipeg Jets past the Washington Capitals 5-1 at Canada Life Centre. Gabe Vilardi had two goals, Mark Scheifele (2A), Kyle Connor (2A), Adam Lowry (2A), Alex Iafallo (1G, 1A) and Josh Morrissey (2A) had multi-point nights for the Jets who are back to .500 (15-15-1). Morrissey reached 400 career points as well; the Jets will close out the homestand Monday against the Ottawa Senators.

***CELEBRATING NINO 1000***

Nino Niederreiter became the first Swiss born NHLer to play 1000 games. Nino was drafted fifth overall by the New York Islanders in 2010 and has spent time with five NHL franchises. He has played 212 games with Winnipeg, 434 games with the Minnesota Wild, 234 games with the Carolina Hurricanes, 64 with the New York Islanders, and 56 with the Nashville Predators. Before the game, Niederreiter was presented with a silver stick and this video filled with Swiss stars was played.

Niederreiter played 15:45 and finished +1 and had two hits and has a ton of memories to take home with him on a special night and talked about the video tribute.

“I mean, it was amazing. It was something I will never forget,” said Niederreiter.

“Always, like I said, as a little boy, you dream about moments like this, and top it off as a win like that. It was amazing.”

***HELLE'S BACK***

On top of the Niederreiter 1000 game celebration, the Jets were pleased to welcome back their MVP, Connor Hellebuyck back after his recovery from knee surgery. Winnipeg went 3-8-1 without Hellebuyck in the lineup and his impact was felt on the penalty kill in the opening period as the Jets took two penalties and both Capital power plays were shut down. The Capitals broke Hellebuyck's shutout bid with 3:28 left in the third period when Jakob Chychrun scored during a 5-on-3 man advantage. Hellebuyck finished with 24 saves and reached 331 career wins and passed Harry Lumley and into 30th spot on the all-time list.

“I mean, it's hard for me to put that into words because I'm just doing my job back there. This core has just been together for so long and I've been very grateful to play a lot of games,” said Hellebuyck.

“You just have a way of playing with this core. We just meshed a certain way. Getting back in there feels great and I just felt like I hadn't missed any time.”

***SO MUCH BETTER***

On Thursday, the Jets lost for the first time in regulation when scoring the game's first goal. Tonight, they jumped out to an early lead thanks to Logan Stanley using hand-eye coordination

to bat in his fifth goal of the season. Stanley has the same number of goals (5) in 31 games in 2025-26 that he did in his previous 202 games.

Morgan Barron (18:43 of 1st) and Alex Iafallo (3:39 of 2nd) each scored the second straight game to make it 3-0 Winnipeg and as the second period wound down a beautiful three-way passing play finished off by Gabe Vilardi on the power play gave the Jets a four-goal lead heading into the third. The Jets and Caps would each score a goal in the third and Winnipeg got the much needed two points thanks to a solid effort from everyone.

"Yeah, for sure it was. It was 20 guys. That was complete, throughout the lineup, all four lines looking a lot alike. D were real solid," said Scott Arniel.

"Obviously Helle was good when he had to be, but you're right. That was one of the best, most complete games of the year."

### **NHL.com**

<https://www.nhl.com/news/washington-capitals-winnipeg-jets-game-recap-december-13-2025>

### ***Hellebuyck makes 24 saves in return from knee injury, Jets top Capitals Vilardi scores 2 for Winnipeg; Washington's point streak ends at 9***

By Darrin Bauming

WINNIPEG -- Connor Hellebuyck made 24 saves in his return, and the Winnipeg Jets won 5-1 against the Washington Capitals at Canada Life Centre on Saturday.

"The guys really brought it tonight," Hellebuyck said. "They did everything and more tonight. They blocked shots, they let me see pucks, they really controlled the pace of the game. Our execution was real good tonight. So top to bottom, everyone just worked so hard.

"Getting back in there feels great and I just felt like I hadn't missed any time."

It was Hellebuyck's first game since Nov. 15, a 4-3 shootout win against the Calgary Flames. He was placed on injured reserve Nov. 21 and had arthroscopic knee surgery Nov. 22.

Hellebuyck was expected to miss 4-6 weeks but returned to practice Wednesday.

"This is the very first time all year long that we had everybody back. It was the first game," Winnipeg coach Scott Arniel said. "I like to think that had something to do with it. But at the end of the day, like I said to you yesterday, when you've got a Hart Trophy, Vezina guy back there (Hellebuyck), there's a difference."

Gabriel Vilardi scored two goals, and Alex Iafallo had a goal and an assist for the Jets (15-15-1), who had lost three straight. Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor, Josh Morrissey and Adam Lowry each had two assists.

"We knew getting Hellebuyck back for their group was going to be a jolt of energy," Washington coach Spencer Carbery said. "And then you bring into the desperate group that you're going to face because you know how things have been going for them. So I'm sure everything coming out of their camp is, you know, our season's on the line, desperation, all those types of (things) -

- so you knew you were going to get their absolute best effort tonight. So, not good enough from us."

Jakob Chychrun scored and Logan Thompson made 30 saves for the Capitals (18-10-4), who lost in regulation for the first time in 10 games (7-1-2).

"Not much went well tonight," Chychrun said. "All areas of our game, I think. Just lack of execution with the puck. For some reason it just seemed like there were plays to be made and we were either late making a play or just making the wrong one. And it just led to a lot of time in the D-zone. It just wasn't our best night."

Winnipeg forward Nino Niederreiter skated in his 1,000th NHL game, becoming the first Switzerland-born player to achieve that milestone. He was plus-1 in 15:45 of ice time.

"I think everybody had a maybe a little extra step for me and wanted to win that game also for me, to make it a special night. And they sure did," he said. "They played unbelievable right from the get-go. I think we came out and want to make sure we put on a good show tonight."

Logan Stanley gave the Jets a 1-0 lead at 9:13 of the first period when he batted a puck out of midair after Morrissey's shot bounced off the end boards.

"I think it was a slow start, not good enough," Capitals forward Tom Wilson said. "And then they jumped on us, and it was uphill battle the whole night."

Morgan Barron made it 2-0 at 18:43 when Lowry set him up on an odd-man rush for a backhand redirect at the net front.

"[Lowry] makes a great saucer pass," Arniel said. "We talk about double driving and trying to be aggressive and hold the line, and I thought that line did a really good job of pushing them back. That was a big goal in that moment."

Iafallo pushed it to 3-0 at 3:39 of the second period when Washington forward Justin Sourdif deflected his centering pass over Thompson's right pad.

"We lost our momentum a little bit," Wilson said. "I think maybe on nights like tonight you just got to keep it a little more simple and get pucks in and just work at it. Little plays and stuff just aren't there, and we got to know when it's a different type of style and adjust our play a little bit."

Vilardi made it 4-0 Jets at 19:53, scoring at the post by finishing a three-way passing play from Morrissey and Connor on the power play.

Vilardi then extended it to 5-0 at 11:55 of the third period, scoring to cap another three-way passing play, but with Connor and Scheifele.

Chychrun scored on a 5-on-3 power play at 16:32 for the 5-1 final.

"There were... opportunities to kind of shift the momentum and we just never were able to take advantage," Chychrun said. "And not only that, but it just always seemed to come back our way. So, yeah, just wasn't a good one."

*NOTES:* Morrissey's assist on Stanley's goal was his 400th NHL point (85 goals, 315 assists) in 693 games. ... Connor has 12 points (four goals, eight assists) on an eight-game point streak. ... Scheifele and Connor each factored on the same goal for the 259th time, passing Scheifele and Blake Wheeler for the most by a duo in Jets/Thrashers history. ... Washington forward Bogdan Trineev had a blocked shot in 11:45 of ice time in his NHL debut.

### **Canadian Press**

<https://www.chrisd.ca/2025/12/12/winnipeg-jets-boston-bruins-game-story-recap/>

### ***Hellebuyck All Smiles in Winning Return from Knee Surgery***

By Judy Owen, The Canadian Press

Connor Hellebuyck was flashing some smiles after his return from injury helped the Winnipeg Jets take down the Washington Capitals 5-1 on Saturday.

The reigning Hart and Vezina Trophy winner had arthroscopic knee surgery exactly three weeks earlier on Nov. 22. The timeline for his return had been estimated at four to six weeks.

The team went 2-8-1 during his absence, including a three-game losing skid that ended with the win over the Capitals.

"I can tell you it's more fun playing," said Hellebuyck, who made 24 saves. "I had a blast tonight and they played great for me tonight, so very grateful they really stepped on the gas and made my arrival a lot easier."

Gabriel Vilardi scored twice and Alex Lafallo had a goal and assist for the Jets (15-15-1). Logan Stanley and Morgan Barron also scored. Adam Lowry, Josh Morrissey, Kyle Connor and Mark Scheifele each chipped in a pair of assists.

Jakob Chychrun nixed Winnipeg's shutout bid when he scored on a two-man advantage with 3:28 left in the third.

Logan Thompson stopped 30 shots for Washington (18-10-4), which had its nine-game points streak snapped (7-1-2).

"Like I said to you (Friday), when you've got a Hart Trophy, Vezina guy back there, there's a difference," Jets head coach Scott Arniel said.

Yet it was more than just Hellebuyck who produced the win.

"That was complete, throughout the lineup, all four lines looking a lot alike. (Defence) were real solid," Arniel said.

"Obviously, Helle was good when he had to be, but ... that was one of the best, most-complete games of the year."

Hellebuyck's last game was Nov. 15. After that, the team said he was going to get arthroscopic surgery for something that was bothering him back in training camp.

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it. That's kind of where I was for a bit," he said. "And then it finally broke, so I had to fix it."

"You know, just a little pain, a little management. Really nothing that doesn't go into every single day as a hockey player. You manage your days, you manage your body, you manage your recovery. It was just one of those things that was on the list of things to manage."

The three-week timeline was something he believed was achievable from the start.

"I know I've got a great team around me and I know how hard I was going to work," Hellebuyck said. "It was a lot of hours and a lot of dialing some things in and making sure I didn't take any steps back."

"Every day I was taking big steps forward. I felt like I started ahead of schedule already, so like I said it was just a great job from everyone involved and I am very grateful to have them in my bubble."

Even Washington head coach Spencer Carbery thought the star goalie's return might spark the Jets.

"We knew getting Hellebuyck back for their group was going to be a jolt of energy, and then you bring in the (Nino) Niederreiter 1,000 games, and then you bring into the desperate group that you're going to face because you know how things have been going for them," Carbery said.

"So I'm sure everything coming out of their camp is, you know, our season's on the line, desperation, all those types of (things) — so you knew you were going to get their absolute best effort tonight. So not good enough from us."

#### **MAJOR MILESTONE**

Niederreiter played his 1,000th NHL career game on Saturday, becoming the first Swiss-born player to reach that lofty milestone.

Family and friends travelled to watch his special achievement that included a video tribute. His teammates wore jerseys with his name and number on the back and the club presented him with a silver stick. Winnipeg is the 33-year-old's fifth NHL club.

"It was amazing," Niederreiter said of the video, which included well wishes from his friends such as Swiss tennis great Roger Federer.

"It was something I will never forget. Always like I said, as a little boy you dream about moments like this, and top it off as a win like that. It was amazing."

## **Winnipeg Free Press**

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/12/13/jets-offence-comes-back-to-life-in-hellebuycks-return>

### ***Jets offence comes back to life in Hellebuyck's return***

By: Ken Wiebe

You could say that Connor Hellebuyck took matters into his own hands and the power of healing allowed him to do so.

A cursory glance at the scoring summary suggests all the Winnipeg Jets needed was for their All-World goalie to return to action after missing three weeks with a knee injury that required arthroscopic surgery.

The reality was that while Hellebuyck's presence was most definitely welcome, the No. 1 netminder wasn't exactly forced to put the team on his back in what turned out to be a 5-1 victory over the Washington Capitals on Saturday night at Canada Life Centre that snapped a three-game losing streak.

The Jets were sound defensively — limiting the number of dangerous scoring chances against — and had ample secondary scoring while also getting a power play goal.

Hellebuyck took care of the rest, making 24 saves in his first game action since Nov. 16 against the Calgary Flames.

It's been a grind. It's been tough. Just top to bottom, everyone worked so hard, so that's why we got back early," said Hellebuyck. "I mean, it's hard for me to put that into words because I'm just doing my job back there. This core has just been together for so long and I've been very grateful to play a lot of games. You just have a way of playing with this core. We just meshed a certain way. Getting back in there feels great and I just felt like I hadn't missed any time."

The Jets were highly secretive when it came to whether or not Hellebuyck would actually return to action on Saturday night against the Capitals, but the fact he'd ramped up his workload during the previous three days was a pretty good indicator he was ahead of schedule in his recovery.

There's no way the Jets would have rushed him back if he wasn't fully healthy.

As it turns out, Hellebuyck is simply a quick healer and that's why he went out of his way to thank everyone who helped him get back right on his schedule — even if the timeline provided was between four-to-six weeks.

"I said on Day one that it was going to take me three weeks," said Hellebuyck. "I know I've got a great team around me and I know how hard I was going to work. It was a lot of hours and a lot of dialling some things in and making sure I didn't take any steps back.

"Every day I was taking big steps forward."

You can't deny the impact of Hellebuyck, but he wasn't the sole reason the Jets got back to their winning ways.

The Jets had been pretty leaky defensively during Hellebuyck's absence, allowing 16 goals during the three-game losing skid that preceded Saturday's win.

The attention to detail that had been lacking was on full display in this one.

"It was 20 guys. That was complete, throughout the lineup, all four lines looking a lot alike," said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. "The D were real solid. Obviously, (Hellebuyck) was good when it had to be, but that was one of the best, most complete games of the year."

The Jets close out a four-game homestand on Monday against Brady Tkachuk and the Ottawa Senators.

Let's take a closer look at what transpired:

#### *The tribute*

The Jets honoured forward Nino Niederreiter for playing his 1,000th NHL games with a tribute that featured messages from current and former teammates, family members, dignitaries that included the president of Switzerland, a Michelin Star chef and tennis legend Roger Federer.

Niederreiter was emotional when discussing the words that were spoken.

"It was something I will never forget," said Niederreiter, who was originally chosen fifth overall by the New York Islanders in the 2010 NHL Draft and also spent time with the Minnesota Wild, Carolina Hurricanes and Nashville Predators. "As a little boy, you dream about moments like this and to top it off with a win like that was amazing."

Niederreiter was surrounded by his parents when he was presented with the silver stick.

"I mean, they're the reason why I'm here. Obviously, the whole support they gave me right in the beginning, coming from a hard working class family," said Niederreiter. "It's tough to play hockey in Switzerland. It's an expensive sport. So I mean, the commitment they (made), they sacrificed a lot of their free time to make sure I can play hockey. So it's definitely a big thanks to them."

You get a goal, you get a goal, you get a goal

Both Morgan Barron and Alex Iafallo have scored in consecutive games after enduring extended slumps and Logan Stanley has as many goals this season as he had in his previous five seasons in the NHL.

Barron is up to five goals for the season after his backhand redirection in the first period, while Iafallo caught a break when his pass in front for Barron caromed into the net off the stick of Capitals centre Justin Sourdif.

Meanwhile, Stanley showed off his hand-eye co-ordination by batting a puck out of the air after Josh Morrissey's point shot bounced off the end boards.

After scoring once in each of the past five seasons, Stanley has clearly taken his offensive game to a new level.

Gabe Vilardi chipped in a pair of goals — one on the power play and one at even strength — to round out the scoring after he was reunited on the top line with Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor.

Vilardi is up to 16 goals on the season, which leaves him tied with Scheifele for the team lead, one ahead of Connor.

#### *The key play*

When Connor Hellebuyck led the Jets out of the tunnel for the pre-game warmup, a sense of calm seemed to be restored and the Jets responded by playing their best defensive game of the season.

#### *The three stars*

Gabe Vilardi, Scored two goals

Connor Hellebuyck, Jets, Made 24 saves.

Josh Morrissey, Jets, Chipped in two assists.

#### *The interested observer*

Team Canada assistant general manager Don Sweeney was among those in attendance that was paying close attention, given the number of potential Olympians in the lineup for both teams.

The Jets' candidates, Morrissey and Scheifele, both showed well and chipped in a pair of assists.

Capitals defenceman Jakob Chychrun broke up the shutout bid, blasting home a one-timer with 17 seconds to go in a two-man advantage.

Capitals forward Tom Wilson wasn't as noticeable as normal, but did drive to the net to draw a penalty that helped lead to the power play goal and finished with two shots on goal, one hit and two blocked shots.

#### *Extra, extra*

By chipping in an assist on a goal during the first period, Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey hit 400 points in his 693rd NHL game. Morrissey added another assist to give him five goals and 28 points in 31 games this season.

The Jets healthy scratches were goalie Domenic DiVincentiis, defenceman Colin Miller and forward Tanner Pearson.

The Capitals scratches included Winnipegger Dylan McIlrath and former Jets blue-liner Declan Chisholm.



<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/12/13/jets-get-hellebump-from-return-of-mvp-goaltender>

## ***Jets get Hellebump from return of MVP goaltender***

By: Mike McIntyre

Connor Hellebuyck could feel the nagging discomfort in his knee as early as training camp. But the reigning Hart and Vezina Trophy figured he could keep playing through it.

No pain, no gain, right?

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it. That's kind of where I was for a bit," the Winnipeg Jets goaltender shared on Saturday night. "And then it finally broke, so I had to fix it."

Hellebuyck went under the knife on Nov. 22, officially sidelined with the first injury of his 11-year career. Doctors told him to expect a four-to-six-week recovery, but the fiercely competitive goaltender with 331 career NHL victories figured he'd be able to beat that.

Sure enough, he was back in the crease exactly three weeks to the day he underwent arthroscopic knee surgery and not a moment too soon for a Jets team that went 2-8-1 in his absence.

A solid 24-save performance on Saturday night in a 5-1 win against the Washington Capitals was just what the doctor ordered for a group that seemed to breathe a collective sigh of relief.

"There was a lot of excitement around the room and the guys really brought it tonight," said Hellebuyck. "They did everything and more tonight. They blocked shots, they let me see pucks, they really controlled the pace of the game. Our execution was real good tonight. So, top to bottom, everyone just worked so hard."

Hellebuyck looked like he might be on the verge of his first shutout of the year, but penalties to Gabe Vilardi (tripping) and Luke Schenn (holding) 41 seconds apart but the Jets at a prolonged 5-on-3 disadvantage late in the third period. Defenceman Jakob Chychrun finally got a puck past him with just more than three minutes remaining.

Still, the Jets helped ensure his return went as smoothly as possible, putting on one of their best defensive performances of the year. Washington was limited to just three high-danger chances at even strength, and six overall.

"I had a blast tonight and they played great for me tonight, so very grateful they really stepped on the gas and made my arrival a lot easier," said Hellebuyck.

Did he bring a sense of calmness to a group that had been plagued by plenty of chaos lately? A Hellebump, if you will?

"It's hard for me to put that into words because I'm just doing my job back there," said Hellebuyck. "This core has just been together for so long and I've been very grateful to play a lot of games. You just have a way of playing with this core. We just meshed a certain way. Getting back in there feels great and I just felt like I hadn't missed any time."

Hellebuyck admitted the mental battle might have been as difficult as the physical one as he quickly tried to work his way back into game shape. It's not like he has any history of recovering from injuries to lean on.

"It stinks," he said. "Any time you're watching your team play and just want to be back in there and do everything you can, and you just can't. So, you just feel for the guys over the years who have had those injuries and those long injuries. It's so much more fun playing."

There may be some who felt a desperate Jets team was "rushing" Hellebuyck back, but that's simply not the case. The team has far too much invested in their franchise goaltender, who is in the second year of a seven-year contract, to take such a risk.

Also, there's no chance Hellebuyck, his agent, his trainer or any other members of his inner-circle would have signed off on that — especially with the Olympics just around the corner.

"I know, as soon as he was injured he flipped that script like this is the next challenge," said teammate and fellow Michigan product Kyle Connor, who will be suiting up with him in Milan for the American squad in February.

"He (was) getting great treatment along with his great habits and doing everything he can to get back as quick as possible. Not a shock that it is on the early side of it."

Now that he's back, what kind of workload might he be looking at for a Jets team that will need to go on a run to get back in the playoff picture? The original plan at the start of the year was to try to get Hellebuyck fewer than 60 starts, with backup Eric Comrie making more than 20.

Hellebuyck is now 9-6-0 through 15 starts this year, with a 2.41 goals-against-average and .916 save-percentage. Comrie has also made 15 starts, going 6-8-1 with a 3.30 GAA and .886 SV%.

"No, it's the same thing. We manage it the same way," Hellebuyck said. "Just because I'm back doesn't mean we're going to change our system. We have a good mesh and we have a good system and good management and we're going to take it day by day just like we were before I left."

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/2025/12/14/jets-prospects-update-two-defencemen-set-for-world-juniors>

### ***Jets prospects update: two defencemen set for World Juniors***

By: Mike McIntyre

It's among the most wonderful times of the hockey year — and the Winnipeg Jets will have a pair of prospects participating in the upcoming World Juniors over the Christmas holidays.

Defencemen Alfons Freij and Sascha Boumedienne will represent their native Sweden at the tournament, which gets underway on Boxing Day down in St. Paul.

They lead off our latest monthly look at Winnipeg's talent pipeline, which involves 25 young drafted and developing players currently skating in various leagues and levels.

Freij, 19, is playing full-time in the top Swedish men's league after tearing up the junior ranks a year ago. The second-round pick from 2024 has two assists through 25 games. He signed a three-year entry-level contract with the Jets last summer and is expected to join the organization once this season is complete.

Boumedienne, 18, has already put up six points (2G, 4A) through 17 games with Boston University in the NCAA after recording 13 (3G, 10A) in 40 games last year as the youngest player in college hockey. Winnipeg selected him in the first round, 28th-overall, last summer.

No doubt Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff and other members of the organization will be keeping a close eye on how the duo fare in the high-profile holiday event.

Turning to the American Hockey League, where the Jets have 13 prospects on a Manitoba Moose team that has been climbing the standings lately, now at 14-10-2.

Here's a look at their season so far, in order of draft selection:

*F DAVID GUSTAFSSON* (2nd round, 2018): He missed Sunday's game — a 6-0 loss to Iowa — with illness. The 25-year-old is making a compelling case for a call-up back to the Jets. His 16 points in 24 games (4G, 12A) is tops on the team in terms of points-per-game, and he leads the Moose with a plus-11 rating.

*D VILLE HEINOLA* (1st round, 2019): Heinola got off to a terrible start following his training camp demotion but has really picked it up as of late. He now leads Moose defencemen with 12 points (1G, 11A) in 26 games. His name has been mentioned in trade rumours lately.

*D TYREL BAUER* (6th round, 2020): As tough as they come, Bauer is one of the true heavyweights in hockey. He has one assist in 18 games, along with 29 penalty minutes, while his plus-nine rating is second-best on the team.

*F NIKITA CHIBRIKOV* (2nd round, 2021): Not a great first month on the farm for Chibrikov, who began the year with the big club. Just one goal and one assist and a minus-seven rating through 11 games with the Moose. Much more is expected from a guy who had 65 points (24G, 41A) in 100 previous AHL games over the past two years.

*F BRAD LAMBERT* (1st round, 2022): He publicly expressed disappointment at being demoted by the Jets, but he hasn't exactly shredded the competition at a level below. Lambert has five points (2G, 3A) through 13 games with the Moose while going minus-six.

*D ELIAS SALOMONSSON* (2nd round, 2022): Fresh off his first NHL call-up, Salomonsson remains Winnipeg's top blue-line prospect. He now has six assists in 19 AHL games, and we'd expect to see him back up with the Jets at some point this season.

*F DANNY ZHILKIN* (3rd round, 2022): Moose coach Mark Morrison recently called Zhilkin a "true No. 1 centre" at the AHL level. He has 10 points (5G, 5A) in 26 games — the same amount he had through 53 contests a year ago. A bit of a late bloomer, one whose NHL debut could be just around the corner.

*F FABIAN WAGNER* (6th round, 2022): Wagner is still looking for the type of hot streak that saw him scoring six of his eight goals last year in a five-game span. To date, he's dressed for just 11 games and has only a single goal to show for it.

*G DOM DIVINCENTIIS* (7th round, 2022): It sure looked like he was on the verge of his NHL debut, but Connor Hellebuyck's quick return from injury has put that on hold — at least for now. DiVincentiis is having a strong season with the Moose, with a 2.59 goals against average and .912 save percentage in 14 appearances.

*F COLBY BARLOW* (1st round, 2023): The rookie is starting to find his stride, now with five points (2G, 3A) through 24 games. He went down with injury last week but isn't expected to miss significant time.

*F BRAYDEN YAGER* (1st round, 2023): The only player on this list not actually drafted by the Jets, but we include him because of the high-profile trade with Pittsburgh for 2022 first-rounder Rutger McGroarty. Yager is tied for fourth in scoring on the Moose with 13 points (4G, 9A) in 26 games so far.

*G THOMAS MILIC* (5th round, 2023): It was a great opportunity to see Milic at the NHL level recently, and he didn't disappoint. Now back with the Moose, Milic has put up outstanding numbers in 11 games with a 2.25 GAA and .923 save percentage.

*F JACOB JULIEN* (5th round, 2023): Unfortunately he has yet to get his pro career going. The 21-year-old suffered a lower-body injury during Moose training camp and recently had a setback as he was training for a return. He had 54 points (11G, 43A) in 65 games last year with the London Knights, then another 19 points (16G, 13A) in 17 playoff games as he helped lead his team to the Memorial Cup.

Off to the Ontario Hockey League we go, where the Jets have four prospects currently piling up the points.

*F KEVIN HE* (4th round, 2024): The heart-and-soul of the Niagara IceDogs has 29 points (14G, 15A) in 25 games, which has him right on pace with his career-best 75 points (36G, 39A) in 62 games last year.

*F KIERON WALTON* (6th round, 2024): Chosen two rounds after He, the towering Walton is among the OHL's scoring leaders. The six-foot-six power forward with the Sudbury Wolves has 43 points (20G, 23A) in 26 games. A bit of a surprise he wasn't given stronger consideration for the Canadian World Junior squad.

*D EDISON ENGLE* (6th round, 2025): The Illinois teen has cooled off a bit following a sizzling start to his OHL career — he spent last year in the USHL — but still has 17 points (2G, 15A) in 28 games for the the Brantford Bulldogs. He's expected to head to college next year to play with Dubuque.

*F JACOB CLOUTIER* (7th round, 2025): He's having a solid sophomore season with the Saginaw Spirit and is up to 17 points (7G, 10A) in 28 games after putting up 47 points (23G, 24A) in 67 games last year.

Over in the Western Hockey League, the Jets currently have just one player.

*F OWEN MARTIN* (3rd round, 2025): The Oakbank product had a slow start but has started to produce more offence with the Spokane Chiefs. He now has 13 points (8G, 5A) in 28 games after recording 34 points (13G, 21A) in 39 games last year.

Heading south, Winnipeg has three other prospects in the college ranks besides Boumedienne.

*D GARRETT BROWN* (4th round, 2022): He's a big part of a terrific program in Denver and has produced eight points (1G, 7A) through 19 games so far this year. That matches the eight points (2G, 6A) he had in 42 games last year.

*F ZACH NEHRING* (3rd round, 2023): A key contributor for a Western Michigan squad which won the Frozen Four a year ago. The North Dakotan has nine points (3G, 6A) in 16 games so far this year after putting up 30 points (13G, 17A) in 42 games a year ago.

*F CONNOR LEVIS* (7th round, 2023): Levis had a great 2024-25 season in the WHL, with 56 points (23G, 33A) in 64 games with his hometown Vancouver Giants. The 21-year-old is now skating with Bowling Green State University and has five points (4G, 1A) through 14 games.

Finally, we go overseas where there are two other players skating right now in addition to Freij.

*F MARKUS LOPONEN* (5th round, 2024): The 19-year-old Finn left home last year to play in the WHL with the Victoria Royals, putting up a solid 44 points (19G, 25A) in 65 games. He's now gone back to Finland, suiting up with HPK Hameenlinna of SM-liiga where he has one goal and three assists through 23 games.

*F VIKTOR KLINGSELL* (5th round, 2025): He would appear to be too good for the Swedish junior league, with 34 points (13G, 21A) in 17 games after putting up 39 (17G, 22A) in 43 contests last year. He's now been promoted to the top men's league, with one goal so far through seven games.

### **Winnipeg Sun**

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/connor-hellebuyck-backstops-the-jets-to-a-5-1-win-ove-the-washington-capitals>

### ***Connor Hellebuyck backstops the Jets to a 5-1 win over the Washington Capitals***

By Gordon Anderson

Talk about a soft landing for Jets netminder Connor Hellebuyck.

Playing in his first game since Nov. 15 in Calgary, Hellebuyck stopped 24 shots as the Jets beat the Capitals 5-1 on Saturday night.

"That was one of the best, most complete games of the year," head coach Scott Arniel said.

Hellebuyck's first shot came at 7:11 of the first period when Jakob Chychrun's attempt from blue line was easily snagged with the Jets while on the penalty kill. The Jets PK allowed one goal on five chances.

The pillowy soft touchdown was made easier by the concerted defensive effort that limited, according to Natural Stat Trick, the visitors to a pair of scoring chances and zero high danger chances in the first. The all-star netminder faced three shots in the first period and a dozen shots through 40 minutes. The Caps generated three high-dangers chances in the game.

The Capitals broke Hellebuyck's shutout bid with a five-on-three power-play goal at 16:32 when Chychrun's shot from near the face-off circle to the left of the net managed to squeeze through the netminder. Hellebuyck was named the game's second star.

Vilardi and Luke Schenn were assessed penalties 41 seconds apart, causing the 5-on-3 situation.

Hellebuyck underwent surgery on Nov. 22. The Jets placed him on IR two days later. His original projection was four to six weeks. His start on Saturday was exactly three weeks after the procedure.

The Jets limped to a 2-8-1 record with Hellebuyck on the sidelines. Eric Comrie started all but one of those games. Thomas Milic allowed four goals in a 5-1 loss to the Carolina Hurricanes on Nov. 28.

Gabe Vilardi scored twice for the Jets (15-15-1). Logan Stanley, Morgan Barron and Alex Iafallo also scored for the Jets. Vilardi has scored two goals in a game four times this season. Josh Morrissey was credited with point No. 400 in his NHL career when he earned the primary assist on Stanley's goal. Winnipeg has outscored the opponent 30-28 in first periods this season. The four-goal win was the largest margin of victory this season. The win snapped a three-game losing streak.

After going 20 games without a goal, Barron has goals in back-to-back games. He scored his fourth in a 6-3 loss to the Boston Bruins on Thursday.

The Capitals (18-10-4) came into the game with points in nine consecutive games. The last time Washington lost in regulation was Nov. 22 against the Tampa Bay Lightning. Logan Thompson turned aside 30 shots. The Caps drop to 8-5-2 on the road. Chychrun is third in goals scored with 12 and third in points with 26.

The Jets play host to the Ottawa Senators on Monday night to close out their four-game homestand.

"Saturday is definitely the way we need to play for 60 minutes, and for more than one game," Nino Niederreiter said. "That is something in which we gotta do, and Monday is another big day for us, and we have to make sure we play some great hockey until Christmas.

#### *Ice Chips*

Colin Miller and Tanner Pearson and Dom DiVincentiis were scratched.

#### *A milestone night*

Niederreiter reached the 1,000 games played milestone on Saturday night.

In a pre-game ceremony that lasted about nine minutes, various Swiss sports stars and dignitaries offered the Jets winger congratulations on the videoboard, including tennis ace Roger Federer and Nashville Predators defenceman Roman Yosi.

Ex-teammate Nikolaj Ehlers offered his best wishes, saying, "that is a lot of games."

The league gifted him a Tiffany crystal, presented by Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff. The organization presented him with a silver stick. He is the first Swiss born player to play 1,000 games in the NHL. Niederreiter's fiancé, nephew, mom and dad were on the ice during the ceremony. The celebration to endurance and longevity ended with a team picture in the corner near the Jets bench.

#### *Career year continues*

Stanley's unexpected, yet more than welcome career offensive year, continued Saturday night when he opened the scoring with his fifth goal at 10:47 of the first period.

Morrissey's slapper slammed off the end boards to the left of Thompson, but Stanley skated into the play and bunted the airborne puck over the right shoulder of the Capitals goalie. Entering the season, Stanley had five career goals spread over five seasons with the club. The rugged defenceman is tied for sixth with Morrissey in goals scored.

<https://www.winnipegssun.com/sports/moments-like-this-help-jets-winger-nino-niederreiter-to-1000-nhl-games-played/>

#### ***'Moments like this' help Jets winger Nino Niederreiter to 1,000 NHL games played***

By Gordon Anderson

Hockey has given Jets winger Nino Niederreiter plenty of memories and experiences to cherish, it just so happens his most recent experience was shared with thousands of others.

Niederreiter reached the 1,000 games played milestone on Saturday night as the Jets beat the Washington Capitals 5-1 before an announced crowd of 14,096.

"It was amazing," he said following the win. "It was something I will never forget. As a little boy, you dream about moments like this, and top it off as a win like that. It was amazing."

Jets defender Josh Morrissey says one thousand games is a big number in the lifecycle of a hockey player.

"I am happy for him and his family," Morrissey said prior to the game. "Everyone involved in the game knows the hours and the work it takes and commitment and sacrifice. It's the best league in the world. It's tough to get here and even tougher to stay. To be able to get here and excel for 1,000 is a special milestone for anybody."

"Being his teammate for a few years now, it's awesome to see him accomplish this, and we're really excited for him," defenceman Neal Pionk added.

Teammates happy from him

Prior to joining the Jets during the 2022-23 season, the Chur, Switz., native played for the New York Islanders, Nashville Predators, Carolina Hurricanes and Minnesota Wild. The Jets acquired Niederreiter from the Predators back in February of 2023. The cost was a second-round pick in the 2024 draft. The Predators went ahead and selected forward Teddy Siga in the second round (55th overall) of the 2024 draft from the U.S. National Development Team. Siga is currently in his second season with the Boston College Eagles.

The pre-game ceremony lasted nearly nine minutes. Various Swiss politicians and sports stars offered their congratulations on the videoboard, including tennis player Roger Federer, Nashville Predators defenceman Roman Yosi and Swiss politician Martin Pfister.

“When one of the presidents of Switzerland talks to you, it’s definitely very special,” Niederreiter said. “And, obviously, with Roger Federer and all my family members, friends, it’s definitely very special.”

Pfister is the head of the federal department of defence, civil protection and sport.

The celebration to endurance, ability and longevity ended with a team picture in the corner near the Jets bench. Niederreiter’s fiancé, nephew, mom and dad were on the ice during the ceremony.

“They’re the reason why I’m here,” Niederreiter said about his family. “The support they gave me right in the beginning, (as we come) from a working-class family. It’s tough to play hockey in Switzerland. It’s an expensive sport. They sacrificed a lot of their free time to make sure I could play hockey. It’s a big thanks to them.”

The league gifted Niederreiter a tiffany crystal, presented by Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff. The organization gave the 33-year-old a silver stick and a commemorative picture to mark the milestone.

#### *Consistency is key*

“Obviously, 1,000 games in this league is tough to do,” Morrissey said. “It shows a level of consistency, commitment, and work ethic. It’s pretty impressive. He’s not a very old guy, even in this league (which is a young man’s league). What he’s done and the level of consistency he’s brought to get there is special.”

Above and beyond the personal milestone was the importance of a victory against a team that was hot as a firecracker coming in with points in nine straight games. The win also snapped a three-game losing skid for the locals.

With the win, the Jets climbed back to the 500 mark at 15-15-1 with the Ottawa Senators in town on Monday night. It’s been nearly a month since the team won back-to-back games, those victories coming at the expense of the Flames and Blue Jackets.

“We need to play for 60 minutes, and for more than one game,” Niederreiter said.

Following the Ottawa game, the Jets will play three road games —St Louis, Colorado and Utah the opposition—before they receive a six-day holiday break.

“Monday is another big day for us,” Niederreiter said. “We have to make sure we play some great hockey until Christmas.”



## **The Athletic**

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6882598/2025/12/13/nino-niederreiter-1000-nhl-games/>

### ***Winnipeg's international man of mystery: Nino Niederreiter's route to 1,000 NHL games***

By Murat Ates

On Saturday night in Winnipeg, Nino Niederreiter will become the 416th player in NHL history — and first Swiss player ever — to play 1,000 regular-season games. That's rare air in a league that's seen 8,757 players play at least one game in the regular season or playoffs.

Niederreiter's path to the milestone is even more unique.

The 33-year-old, described by his teammates as “an international man of mystery,” has one of the most diverse sets of interests you'll find on any person — let alone a hockey player about to make history for his country.

“There was a video on Jets social media the other day and they were asking guys what they know the most about outside of hockey. Nino said something along the lines of, ‘I have a lot of different interests,’” Josh Morrissey told The Athletic. “I would corroborate that.”

Niederreiter's extracurricular activities are legendary among his teammates. Social events with Roger Federer. Ski vacations in the Alps. Interest in wineries, visits with Formula 1 racing crews, and — yes — that time in 2015 when he took a flight, strapped to a chair on the wings of a 1940s open-cockpit Boeing Stearman biplane.

“Scared to death,” Niederreiter said to Michael Russo at the time.

The Niederreiter story — how he got from the Swiss mountain city of Chur to 1,000 games in the NHL — is one of the most unique routes a hockey player has taken to the milestone.

Describing his hometown of Chur, Switzerland to The Players Tribune in 2015, Niederreiter said, “Picture cobblestone roads, snow-covered rooftops, and two massive mountains on either side.”

It was an idyllic place from which to fall in love with hockey.

A group of Niederreiter's friends took him to a local EHC Chur game in the Swiss B league, where he was struck by the play of Latvian centre Harijs Vitolins. He was on the ice himself the next day, learning to skate, Vitolins as his idol. Niederreiter's father, Rene, was a steelworker, which meant a makeshift outdoor rink at the Niederreiter household — complete with a regulation net built out of iron piping.

“We came from a lower middle-class family, but nothing was missed in my childhood,” Niederreiter told The Athletic. “I remember my mom was always sad when my stick broke, so I never break a stick, even to this day, by being mad and frustrated. I know how much my mom had to suffer at home because she knew how expensive they were.”

Niederreiter's mom, Ruth, worked as a midwife. Her brother was a weightlifter who got Niederreiter onto strength training early in life. By the time he was a teenager, Niederreiter starred for the EHC Chur youth team, an unstoppable offensive force. At 15, he scored a point

per game for HC Davos in the Swiss elite Junior A program. It soon became clear the NHL was a possibility for Niederreiter, just like it had been for his idol, Vitolins, so he left his mom, dad, and two sisters to try playing WHL hockey for Portland.

Niederreiter was a great fit, scoring 77 goals over the course of 120 WHL games on a team that featured Ryan Johansen, Sven Baertschi, and Ty Rattie. But it was a World Juniors game in 2010 — Niederreiter's first full season in North America — where he announced himself to the whole world. Niederreiter propelled the Swiss past a heavily favoured Russian team, tying the game with 32.3 seconds left and the Swiss net empty, then scoring the game-winning goal with 14.2 seconds left in overtime.

Niederreiter was drafted fifth by the New York Islanders in 2010. He played 64 of his NHL games with that organization before getting traded to Minnesota. He played 434 of his 1,000 games for the Wild, covered by Michael Russo — first, for the Minneapolis Star Tribune, and then for The Athletic

It's the 25th anniversary of the Minnesota Wild, so back in September before an exhibition game in Saint Paul, I went down to the locker room to chat with Niederreiter about the most exciting game I've covered in 31 years as an NHL beat writer and the second-biggest goal in Wild history. That was Game 7 in Colorado of the 2014 Western Conference quarterfinals when the Wild rallied from a one-goal deficit four different times — the last being Niederreiter winning a board battle to set up Jared Spurgeon's overtime-forcing goal — before Niederreiter scored the series-clinching winner in OT with an incredible back-bar ringing wrister while streaking down the right wing at the Pepsi Center.

### *Top League Content*

But I first caught up with Niederreiter on so many other fun things in his life, like his love of tennis and Roger Federer and the Swiss watchmaker Breitling's "Transatlantic Flyers Club" — an exclusive group that Nino's long belonged to. Nino's done everything from sky diving to jumping on the front seat of a race plane to "Wing Walking."

In the summer of 2015, Niederreiter was strapped to the upper wing of a 1940s open-cockpit Boeing Stearman biplane with 450-horsepower engines. Seated on a chair attached to a pole, he soared down the runway, took off and was exposed to the cold air while flying over the Alps at roughly 130 miles per hour at what he said was a "very high" altitude.

While he told me it wasn't very comfortable, he swore to me it was "safe" in a 2015 profile I wrote on him in the Star Tribune. What Niederreiter and I laughed about in that September trip down memory lane is how my article actually got him in trouble.

"I still remember the phone call from (then-GM) Chuck Fletcher that said, 'I think it's better if you keep yourself on the ground, please!'" Niederreiter said, laughing.

In my many years covering this incredible sport, Niederreiter has long been one of my favorites. Besides being a great hockey player, he's a colorful figure, as nice as can be and one terrific human being.

Here's one story that will always touch me and speaks to Niederreiter's heart. In 2014, I watched on the news a sweet story about a 10-year-old named Nino Johnson from Maplewood, Minn., who saved the life of his grandfather, Pino, while he was drowning in a backyard pool. I thought it was cool that this kid was also named Nino, so I texted it to Niederreiter. Little did I

know that Niederreiter was going to have somebody track down the boy so he could send him a note.

Here's what Niederreiter wrote:

Dear Nino,

Though I am nearly 4,000 miles away in Switzerland, I saw a story on wcco.com last week about a 10-year old boy in Minnesota named Nino who rescued his grandfather in their backyard pool. I thought that was pretty cool, so I wanted to contact you directly to offer my congratulations. I'm sure your family is very proud of you.

I would like to congratulate you in person and am hoping you and your family will be my guest at training camp in September. I think it would be awesome to meet you after practice and give you an autographed jersey, from one Nino to another.

I'll be in touch later this summer. Until then, enjoy your summer and I look forward to meeting you at Xcel Energy Center in September.

All the best,

Nino Niederreiter

What a gem of a person. Congrats, Nino, on 1,000 games. It was an honor and pleasure to cover a small part of your incredible career.

—Michael Russo, The Athletic

In some ways, Niederreiter's 1,000th game is a full-circle moment. Before joining EHC Chur and inspiring Niederreiter to fall in love with hockey, Vitolins had made it all the way to the NHL, playing eight games for the 1993-94 Jets.

Vitolins, now the head coach of the Latvian men's hockey team headed to the Olympics, said it's a pleasant coincidence that Niederreiter plays for the only NHL team he played for.

"I feel truly honored that I was able to inspire Nino to play hockey, and I am very proud of him," Vitolins said. "I believe the entire nation of Switzerland ... is proud as well to see him reach the milestone."

When the Jets acquired Niederreiter from Nashville for a second-round pick in 2023, it was part of one of the best runs of Kevin Cheveldayoff's GM tenure. It also connected Niederreiter to the only NHL team his childhood idol played for.

Perhaps it was a sign of a contract extension to come. Maybe it was a normal thing for someone raised in the Swiss mountains to say.

But Niederreiter's first impression of Winnipeg, speaking to Jets senior director of communications, Scott Brown, was that Winnipeg wasn't all that cold.

Niederreiter has been a great on-ice fit in Winnipeg, adding a net-driving presence to Adam Lowry's shutdown line. His commitment to backtracking, taking away lanes from teams who try

to attack the Jets in transition, is the sign of a veteran who knows that hard work wins hockey games.

“He was a great teammate,” said Sam Gagner, the last player to reach 1,000 game milestone wearing a Jets jersey. “Very hardworking and committed. (He) has a ton of respect around the league because he works and plays honest.”

“Everyone’s taught to box out,” Rick Bowness said of Niederreiter when he was head coach. “Don’t let guys get to the net. Well, Nino’s strong enough when there is opposition to fight his way through that ... Regardless of who he’s up against, he gets there.”

Off the ice, Niederreiter is appreciated by his teammates for his combination of worldliness and playfulness. He’s a noted prankster. Multiple teammates confided that they’ve found random avocados, airplane menus, or silverware in their gear as a result of Niederreiter’s silly streak.

But they always take the conversation back to his unique extracurricular life. He’s been a brand ambassador for Porsche cars and Breitling watches. He’s cooked with three star Michelin chef Andreas Caminada, and is now a part-owner of EHC Chur. In 2024, he even played in the “World’s Highest Hockey Game,” 3,454 metres above sea level.

“He’s kind of an international man of mystery,” Morrissey said. “It’s like ‘Hey bubs, what are you doing?’ ‘Well I’m hanging out with Roger Federer this weekend. I’m sorry if I’m not getting back to you that quickly.’ Or next thing you know, we’re ordering wine at dinner the one night and he’s like, ‘Oh yeah, I’ve got my own little winery going on.’”

The last word belongs to Niederreiter.

The fact that he’s going to play his 1,000th game in Winnipeg took more than the Jets trading for him. It also took a contract extension, Niederreiter signed a three year, \$4 million AAV contract extension on Dec. 4, 2023.

Well before he signed that contract, Niederreiter was getting involved in the community — first, as part of the Winnipeg Jets Hockey Academy, and then through the Winnipeg Humane Society.

The dog fostering comes from his partner Cecilia Schuler, who grew up with dogs at home. The couple understands that their lifestyle, full of travel as it is, doesn’t create a consistent home for dogs but they’ve connected with the Humane Society to promote fostering as a result.

Both are good initiatives, but the characterizing part is that Niederreiter committed to them as a pending free agent — before he had his contract finalized. It’s one more sign of a player who’s spent his life trying to make the most of every moment, from Game 1 through Game 1,000 — and ideally, beyond.

“I play for Winnipeg. I get paid by Winnipeg. That’s why it feels good to give something back.”

## **The Hockey News**

<https://thehockeynews.com/nhl/winnipeg-jets/latest-news/how-quinn-hughes-trade-impacts-winnipeg-jets>

### ***How Quinn Hughes Trade Impacts Winnipeg Jets***

By Jake Tye

The road to the postseason in the Central Division was already unforgiving. Now, it is downright treacherous for the Winnipeg Jets.

As they've stumbled in recent weeks, the Jets now sit at 15-15-1 and searching for consistency in the hopes of securing a playoff spot. The blockbuster trade that sent Quinn Hughes from Vancouver to Minnesota further complicates things as it feels like Winnipeg's path back to the postseason is closing. Carving out a top three divisional spot is hard enough in a division stacked with elite talent. Doing it after a Central rival adds one of the league's top three defensemen is something else entirely.

The Wild landed a former Norris Trophy winner in Hughes, a defenseman who can tilt the ice every time he steps over the boards. His debut comes Sunday against the Boston Bruins, and while it is too early to measure the full impact of the move, the implications are already reverberating throughout the Central.

The Wild were already one of the strongest defensive teams in the league before the trade and now they will likely jump to the league's best with the addition of Hughes. His ability to control tempo, quarterback the power play, and transition the puck cleanly out of danger gives the Wild a dimension few teams can match but the cost was significant.

Vancouver receives basically four first round picks as they added former first round selections by the Wild in forwards Marco Rossi and Liam Ohgren, defenseman Zeev Buium, as well as Minnesota's 2026 first round draft pick. The Wild's depth will be tested with the coming weeks as to if the move truly helped lift the team or not and as the Jets hope for the negative and not the positive of the Wild becoming another major threat in the West.

At 18-9-5, Minnesota sits just behind the Western Conference's two juggernauts in the nearly unbeaten Colorado Avalanche and the Dallas Stars. Both teams have created separation at the top of the standings, and barring major changes, they appear to be locks for divisional spots. That reality leaves the rest of the division fighting for scraps, likely one divisional playoff spot and two wild card berths.

Winnipeg's margin for error was already thin as a even record through 31 games leaves little room for prolonged slumps, and every divisional matchup carries amplified importance. The Jets have split their first two games against the Wild this season, making the remaining two meetings critical four point swings. In a tight race, those games can define the playoff race, two points gained and two points denied to a direct competitor.

Hughes' presence only raises the stakes as historically, the Jets have done a respectable job containing him. In 24 career games against Winnipeg, Hughes has yet to score a goal and has been held to 14 assists. However, Hughes has found another gear recently, collecting eight assists in his last six games versus the Jets.

Beyond Winnipeg, the rest of the Central is feeling the ripple effects. Minnesota's move creates a clearer hierarchy, Colorado and Dallas at the top, Minnesota pressing hard behind them, and everyone else scrambling to keep pace. For teams on the bubble, the path to the playoffs has narrowed considerably. Points against non conference opponents become must haves, and head to head games within the division turn into pressure cookers.

Connor Hellebuyck's return gives Winnipeg a fighting chance to stabilize and build momentum. Few goaltenders can steal games the way Hellebuyck can, and with him back in the lineup, the Jets have a fighting chance. The Quinn Hughes trade certainly doesn't end the Jets' playoff aspirations, but it severely complicates them.

It is another reminder that in the Central Division, standing still is the same as falling behind. As Minnesota loads up and the West's heavyweights keep rolling, Winnipeg's road grows narrower by the day.