

***THREE THINGS: Jets get a point in Montreal
Eric Comrie made 29 saves in a 3-2 shootout loss to the Canadiens***

By Jamie Thomas

Cole Caufield scored the only goal in the shootout to give the Montreal Canadiens a 3-2 win over the Winnipeg Jets at the Bell Centre. Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor scored for the Jets whose record drops to 13-12-1. Eric Comrie was a big reason the Jets got a point on Wednesday night with 29 saves, five of those coming in overtime. The Jets will come home for one game on Friday night when they host the Buffalo Sabres.

BIG NIGHT FOR COMMS

Winnipeg did Eric Comrie no favours the other night in Buffalo as the Jets came out slow and were down 3-0 after 20 minutes which led to Scott Arniel pulling Comrie. The 30-year-old was back in the net against the Canadiens and was brilliant in the opening frame making four grade A stops including two in the sequence.

With the game tied 2-2 in the third period, Comrie came up huge again with under seven minutes remaining as he denied Cole Caufield from the go-ahead goal. In overtime, Ivan Demidov looked to give the Habs the win, but Comrie's glove made sure that didn't happen, the Jets goaltender finished with 29 saves.

"I mean, we got a pretty skilled team, and they got a pretty skilled team, so you're gonna expect some chances both ways," said Comrie about the back-and-forth overtime.

"And hats off to their guy. Their guy was awesome as well. I mean, if I was a fun goalie duel in overtime there a lot of fun battling back and forth with Dobes there. It was a lot of fun."

BIG BOY LINE

The line of Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Gabriel Vilardi came into Wednesday night having scored 37 of the team's 77 goals (48.1%) this season. That trend continued against Montreal when the top line opened the scoring at 18:35 of the first period. Kyle Connor chipped the puck past Noah Dobson in the neutral zone and then out raced the Canadiens defenceman for the puck, threw it into the slot and Mark Scheifele threw in his 14th of the season.

In the second period, almost two minutes after the Canadiens had tied the game at one, the Scheifele line went to work again. This time dominating an entire shift after Juraj Slafkovsky lost his stick in the Canadians zone, Vilardi spotted Connor off to the side and Connor snapped in the go-ahead goal for his 14th of the campaign. Per NHL Stats, Connor and Scheifele combined on the same goal for the 253rd and 254th time of their

careers. The only duo in Jets/Thrashers history to factor on the same goal more are Scheifele and Blake Wheeler (258).

OTHER LINES WERE GOOD

While the Jets were lacking in the secondary scoring department, Scott Arniel felt his other three lines did a great job with o-zone time and other factors.

"Sometimes it's just wearing the opposition down and it's building it up for the next line," said Arniel.

"But I really liked JT's (Jonathan Toews) line, I thought that line had some really good looks. I thought that line had some really good looks and then Low's line and Bear's line (were) heavy. They played that heavy game that kind of wears them down."

NHL.com

<https://www.nhl.com/news/winnipeg-jets-montreal-canadiens-game-recap-december-3-2025>

Caufield extends point streak to 9, lifts Canadiens past Jets in shootout Forward gets assist, scores deciding goal; Winnipeg has lost 6 of 7

By Sean Farrell

MONTREAL -- Cole Caufield had an assist to extend his point streak to nine games, and scored the lone goal in the shootout for the Montreal Canadiens in a 3-2 win against the Winnipeg Jets at Bell Centre on Wednesday.

Caufield, who has the longest active point streak in the NHL, snapped a shot inside the right post on Montreal's first shot attempt, and Jakub Dobes stopped all three Winnipeg shooters.

Juraj Slafkovsky and Oliver Kapanen scored, and Dobes made 29 saves for the Canadiens (14-9-3), who had lost consecutive games following a three-game winning streak, including a 5-2 loss to the Ottawa Senators on Tuesday,

"It was a momentum-filled game, and I think last night we didn't really handle that well," Montreal forward Jake Evans said. "And tonight was one of our most complete 60-minute games, or 65-, I guess, minute game. Every line contributed and that's a good team over there that we fought to the very end with."

Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor each had a goal and an assist, and Eric Comrie made 29 saves for the Jets (13-12-1), who are 1-5-1 in their past seven games.

"That's the blueprint that we need to look at, and if we do that, we'll get wins," Scheifele said. "Hopefully we can build on that game."

Winnipeg coach Scott Arniel was pleased with the team's response following a 5-1 loss at the Buffalo Sabres on Monday.

"I don't think we gave up any odd-man situations, but if we did they were very limited compared to last game," Arniel said. "We did a great job of not only our forwards getting over top of people, tracking back, but our 'D' did a great job with their gaps.

"That was a battle of two good goaltenders. Dobes and Comrie, both goaltenders made some big stops and there was a lot of different looks for each team. And at the end of the day, I would have liked the two points but I'm happy with our effort."

Scheifele gave the Jets a 1-0 lead at 18:35 of the first period. He took Connor's backhand pass as he drove the slot and put a wrist shot past Dobes' glove from the hash marks.

Slafkovsky tied it 1-1 at 9:59 of the second period with his second power-play goal in as many nights. Caufield fed a pass from behind the net to Slafkovsky, who snapped a one-timer past Comrie from low in the left face-off circle to finish off a passing play started by Nick Suzuki.

Caufield has 11 points (two goals, nine assists) during the streak, including assists in eight straight games.

"I think he is an underrated playmaker, honestly," Slafkovsky said of Caufield. "Like obviously he has a good shot, but he can make all the little plays, all the slips and stuff. So he's a perfect goal-scorer, but he's also a great playmaker."

Suzuki has 10 points (four goals, six assists) during a seven-game point streak, including assists in six straight games.

Connor scored in his third straight game to put Winnipeg back ahead 2-1 at 11:53. He snapped a one-timer past Dobes glove side from low in the left circle on Gabriel Vilardi's pass from behind the net.

Kapanen then tied it 2-2 at 14:03. Ivan Demidov won a puck battle in the right corner with Winnipeg defenseman Josh Morrissey before passing to Kapanen, who escaped coverage to score on a snap shot from the right hash mark.

NOTES: Scheifele has six points (three goals, three assists) during a five-game streak. It was his 30th career point streak of at least five games, passing Blake Wheeler for the most such streaks in Jets/Atlanta Thrashers franchise history. ... Demidov has 20 points (six goals, 14 assists) in 26 games. He is the second-fastest teenager in Canadiens history to reach 20 points in season, behind only Stephane Richer, who accomplished the feat in his first 19 games in 1985-86. ... Caufield pulled within one game of tying his career-long point streak of 11 games (2023-24). ... Montreal assigned forward Florian

Xhekaj and defenseman Adam Engstrom to Laval of the American Hockey League after the game.

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/12/03/comrie-cant-do-it-all>

Comrie can't do it all

Goalie outstanding, but lack of secondary scoring curses Jets in shootout loss to Habs

By: Mike McIntyre

MONTREAL — Scott Arniel didn't have to stand in front of the dressing room and publicly shred his squad. Nor did captain Adam Lowry have to peel paint off the walls during a closed door meeting with his teammates.

Although the post-game reaction may have been different from recent outings, the end result of Wednesday's 3-2 loss to the Montreal Canadiens was painfully familiar for a struggling Winnipeg Jets team: Another defeat.

This one, at least, was in a shootout so the Jets come away with their first "loser point" of the season, falling to 13-12-1 overall, 1-3-1 on this five-game road trip and just 4-9-1 in the past 14 games overall.

"The compete was there. Obviously it sucks we got beat and didn't get the win. But that was a better blueprint for how our team has got to play," said Jets centre Mark Scheifele. "If we play like that, we'll get some wins."

This was a battle between the oldest team in the league — that would be the Jets — and the youngest, which might explain why the Canadiens still have plenty of jump despite playing a night earlier. They lost that game on home ice to the Ottawa Senators, which was their second consecutive defeat, and came out of the gates strong.

Winnipeg held tough all night long and never trailed until Cole Caufield scored the only goal in the breakaway contest. It came after a heart-thumping three-on-three overtime session which included end-to-end chances and each team having a golden scoring chance interrupted by an exploding stick.

"That was night-and-day different from the other night. Our compete level, our execution, just the way I don't think we gave up any odd-man situations," said Arniel.

"If we did, they were very limited compared to last game. We did a great job of not only our forwards getting over top of people, tracking back, our D did a great job with their gaps. That was a battle of two good goaltenders. There was a lot of different looks for

each team. At the end of the day, I would like the two points but I'm happy with our effort."

Montreal, which would be one of only two Canadian teams in the playoffs if they started today (Ottawa would be the other team), improves to 14-9-3.

HUMAN HIGHLIGHT REEL: The final numbers may not jump off the page — 31 shots, 29 saves — but make no mistake: Eric Comrie was sensational in this game.

The 30-year-old netminder repeatedly had Montreal shooters shaking their heads in disbelief, with stone-cold robberies of Caufield, Nick Suzuki and Jake Evans all standing out.

He can't be blamed on the second-period snipes by Canadiens forwards Juraj Slafkovsky and Oliver Kapanen, which wiped out 1-0 and 2-1 leads by the visitors.

"He played absolutely fantastic," said Scheifele. "We haven't done a good enough job in front of him. Even in that first (period), he made a lot of 10-bell saves to keep us in it, like he's been doing.

Comrie, who's been pressed into No. 1 duties with Connor Hellebuyck sidelined, was coming off a rough outing in Buffalo in which he got pulled after 20 minutes, giving up three goals on 14 shots. Unlike being backup where he might have to sit on that for a week or so, he was able to get right back in the crease.

"I'm a competitive guy. I'm never going to sulk on a loss. I'm going to get back up and work as hard as I can the next day," said Comrie.

"It's not going our way right now, but we're gonna find it. I think there's enough positivity, there's enough good game in our game right now that we can start getting some points here."

A LITTLE HELP HERE? The Jets scored a grand total of 12 goals on this road trip, which isn't nearly good enough to win in a league where three or four a night are typically required — especially when you don't have the reigning Hart and Vezina Trophy occupying your net.

The challenge becomes even greater when so much is concentrated to one line. Here are Winnipeg's recent scorers, in order:

Gabe Vilardi. Vilardi again. Scheifele. Scheifele again. Vilardi. Nino Niederreiter. Cole Perfetti. Kyle Connor. Niederreiter (into an empty net). Connor. Scheifele. Connor.

See a pattern? Of the 11 pucks that beat a goaltender, nine were off the sticks of Winnipeg's top trio including both that went in Wednesday. We should also note that

Vilardi had Winnipeg's last two goals at home prior to the charter, so that's actually 11 of the last 13.

This wouldn't be a problem if Scheifele, Connor and Vilardi could play more than 20ish minutes a night. But they can't, which means for the Jets are posing absolutely zero threat the other 40 or so minutes every game.

Arniel thought the bottom nine had some extended zone time and better looks in this one, even though the end result was the same.

"It isn't always necessarily the goals or getting shots. Sometimes it's just wearing the opposition down and it's building it up for the next line," said Arniel, who signalled out the line of Jonathan Toews, Vlad Namestnikov and Cole Perfetti for praise.

"I thought that line had some really good looks and then (Lowry's) line and (Morgan Barron's) line heavy. They played that heavy game that kind of wears them down. Hopefully we continue with that recipe, that it builds, and we get some of these pucks to go into the net and score some goals and build some confidence off of that."

If not, Arniel may have no choice but to break up his top trio in the hopes they can spread the wealth and maybe rub off on some of their ice-cold teammates.

FOLLOW THE LEADER: Lowry let his play do the talking in this one, throwing a thunderous hit in the first period which led to Montreal tough guy Arber Xhekaj challenging him to a fight.

Lowry accepted.

"That's what he does. He's got the utmost of respect, not only with his teammates and coaching staff, but around the league too," said Arniel.

"He's a leader and he does it, whether he's doing it with his hockey skillset or sometimes, with his heaviness or his toughness. That's just part of what you love about Adam."

KEY PLAY: Caufield's shootout snipe was the difference

THREE STARS:

1. Habs G Jakub Dobes, 29 saves (32 if you count the shootout stops)
2. Jets G Eric Comrie, 29 saves (31 if you count the shootout stops)
3. Jets LW Kyle Connor: 1G, 1A

EXTRA, EXTRA: The Jets made three lineup changes, with defenceman Neal Pionk returning after a four-game injury absence and defenceman Elias Salomonsson and forward Cole Koepke re-entering after being healthy scratches in recent games. Blue-

liners Luke Schenn and Colin Miller and forward Gustav Nyquist were relegated to press-box duty.

The Jets went zero-for-one on the power play, generating little zone time and no chances. They went one-for-11 on the road trip and are stuck in a two-for-18 rut — which includes surrendering a pair of shorthanded goals in that span. The penalty kill has also gotten a bit leaky lately, with Montreal scoring on their only opportunity.

Winnipeg would normally fly home at the end of a road trip in the eastern time zone, but opted to spend an extra night in Montreal. That's because they play Friday night at home against Buffalo, then jump right back on a plane to fly to Edmonton and face the Oilers Saturday night.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/12/03/jets-nearing-return-to-full-strength>

***Jets nearing return to full strength
Pionk back in lineup, Hellebuyck raring to hit the ice***

By: Mike McIntyre

MONTREAL — Neal Pionk has thrown that hit hundreds of times in his hockey career. But what happened next was anything but routine.

“Something felt off. Something felt like it had never felt before,” the veteran Winnipeg Jets defenceman told the Free Press on Wednesday, a few hours before he'd make his return to the lineup after a four-game hiatus.

“Went and got some scans later. Found out what it was. Thankfully it wasn't anything major. Just a little thing we had to make sure was fully good to go before I got back in.”

The strange play occurred on Pionk's first shift in the Nov. 23 game against the Minnesota Wild. He clearly tweaked something in his lower body as he ran Danila Yurov into the boards with a clean check. Pionk laboured over to the bench, then tested it out on a couple more shifts before pulling the plug.

It was a big loss for a Jets team that had just learned a few days earlier reigning league MVP Connor Hellebuyck was going to be sidelined four-to-six weeks after undergoing arthroscopic knee surgery — which came on the cusp of a near-full return to health after Dylan Samberg, Adam Lowry and Cole Perfetti were back in the lineup from lengthy injury absences.

Pionk was off to a slow start by his standards, with just five points (1G, 5A) in 21 games. But most of those were played without Samberg, his usual partner. Rookie Elias Salomonsson and depth defender Luke Schenn each had a pair of games filling in for Pionk, with the Jets losing three of the four.

“A lot of alone time,” Pionk said of what it’s been like to be sidelined during this road trip. “Just slowly grinding through it, make sure it’s alright. Take it step-by-step and listen to what the trainers and doctors say, make sure you’re ready to go.”

Although he didn’t play in the game, Pionk (and the healthy scratches) took part in Monday’s closed-door players’ meeting following a 5-1 beatdown to the Buffalo Sabres. He said the session — led by Lowry, the captain — was productive.

“We had a quick chat. Just to talk about expectations of ourselves and what we need to do better as a team and as individuals,” said Pionk. “We need to start piecing things together here.”

CAUTIONARY TALE

It’s a development that is surely going to have plenty of fans excited — the sight of Hellebuyck returning to the ice after going under the knife.

“I think he’s getting close to that,” Arniel said Wednesday. “But won’t take anything... I’m going to make sure he has like four yellow (non-contact) jerseys on.”

Translation: The timeline hasn’t changed, although the internal hope is Hellebuyck could be closer to the four week prognosis (which is now about two-and-a-half weeks) than the six-week window. The Jets desperately miss the reigning Hart and Vezina Trophy winner.

“We’re making sure on this one,” Arniel continued. “He’ll run into you and tell you, ‘Oh, I’m feeling really good, I want to play next week.’ But with this one, we have to obviously be ultra careful with. But I do believe he’ll actually be on the ice very soon. Whether that’s shots or movements, we’ll see.”

There’s some potential good news when it comes to defenceman Haydn Fleury, who has been sidelined with a concussion since Nov. 11 and recently had a setback. Arniel said he skated earlier this week in Winnipeg and will chat with team doctors on Friday.

COLE’S NOTES

Cole Koepke loves throwing his weight around, but the 27-year-old winger hasn’t had much opportunity to do it lately. He’s been a frequent healthy scratch, playing just 16 of the first 25 games

Koepke is back in the lineup Wednesday against Montreal, with Arniel looking for a jolt of energy to a forward group that is struggling mightily these days.

“I try to make a positive impact whenever I’m out there. Try to bring some speed and physicality,” he said after the morning skate.

Koepke leads the Jets in hits with 52 despite spending plenty of time in the press box. Defenceman Logan Stanley is second with 43, while Vlad Namestnikov is the next top forward with 37. Both of them have dressed for every game.

“You obviously never want to be out of the lineup or expect to be out of the lineup. But that’s the nature of the business and there’s a lot of good players on this team,” said Koepke, who signed a one-year, US\$1 million free agent deal with the Jets last summer.

“I’m just trying to work hard. Come in, try to put my best foot forward and help the team any way I can.”

Koepke led the Boston Bruins in bodychecks last year as a rookie while also putting up 17 points (10 goals, 7 assists) in 73 games. He’s still trying to make any kind of offensive impact with the Jets, with no goals and just two assists so far prior to facing the Canadiens.

“I know I haven’t chipped in, but that’s something I’ve been working on the side with (coaches) this last week or so, just trying to gain some more confidence with the puck,” he said.

Koepke replaced Gustav Nyquist, who was signed by the Jets to a one-year, US\$3.25 million deal with the idea of providing some secondary scoring. The 35-year-old has yet to find the back of the net through 20 games, with just six assists, and now is a healthy scratch for the first time this year.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/12/02/the-jets-team-at-35000-feet>

The Jets’ team at 35,000 feet

A peek behind the charter curtain with the club’s dedicated flight crew

By: Mike McIntyre

MONTREAL — The Winnipeg Jets have hit plenty of rough air lately, nose-diving in the NHL standings after a turbulent month that’s produced just four wins in their past 13 games.

Most of that stretch has been spent far from home — with stops in 11 cities across four time zones — the Jets have landed in Montreal, where their latest lengthy road trip wraps up Wednesday night.

As bumpy as their play has been, one thing has remained constant as they criss-cross the continent: they’re in good hands thanks to a small but mighty team tasked with keeping their travel running smoothly and efficiently.

The Free Press sat down with the organization's dedicated flight crew this week for a unique peek behind the curtain — talking tricks of the trade, the chaotic post-game race from rink to airport, loading 2,500 kilograms of hockey gear in the blink of an eye, charter cuisine, card games at 35,000 feet, and the family atmosphere that develops over time.

The plane can be a place of raucous celebration. Or of quiet reflection. Truth be told, there's been far more of the latter this season given what's happened on the ice.

Regardless of the result, the aircraft often becomes a sanctuary for a pro athlete — a space to bond with teammates, binge a Netflix series, or escape a scoring slump for a few hours.

"You talk about safe places where you can kind of hang out and be yourself. The dressing room is one, but the plane is another," said Jets captain Adam Lowry.

"You talk about safe places where you can kind of hang out and be yourself. The dressing room is one, but the plane is another."

That's where Air Canada and its JETZ program — a coincidence in name, given it launched a decade before the Jets 2.0 were born — comes in.

All seven Canadian teams use the service, as do four American clubs: Buffalo, Colorado, Dallas and Seattle. They share four modified A320s that have had all economy seating removed, leaving just 70 business-class seats, and even a pair of card tables at the very back.

The aircraft are shuffled around North America like puzzle pieces, lining up with each team's schedule. Occasionally, planes from the main fleet are pulled into emergency service to lighten the load, such as a wild day last week when all 11 client teams were on the road simultaneously.

The pilots change constantly. The cabin crew does not. Three Air Canada flight attendants who undergo a rigorous screening and qualification process are assigned to each hockey team for the entire season.

In that sense, they become an extension of the team, spending 90 to 120 days together from September through April — and potentially into May or June if they can get hot at playoff time. Many come back every second year as part of a contracted rotation to avoid burnout.

"To be able to build a relationship with the staff on the plane and to have them every trip, it's great," said Lowry.

"They do such a good job of taking care of us. Just making sure you're comfortable and making sure you have everything you need. They've always got big smiles on their face.

There's a lot of things that go on behind the scenes that make an NHL operation. I think they're one of the pieces that goes unnoticed or unrecognized."

It was love at first flight for David and Sandy Herfst. The married couple met in 1998 while working for a now-defunct airline and have been travelling the world together ever since.

David joined JETZ when it launched in 2001, first working with the Toronto Maple Leafs and then the Montreal Canadiens. But when the NHL returned to Winnipeg in 2011, the hometown boy jumped at the chance to watch the new team spread its wings.

Sandy joined him in 2013, and they've now spent every second season ensuring Jets players, coaches, management, broadcasters and support staff are buckled in and aware of the emergency exits.

In reality, their role entails far more than safety demonstrations.

They arrive at the plane three hours before departure, preparing roughly 70 meals — they always order extras for the travelling party of about 50. They often pick up the food themselves, though some restaurants deliver.

They have three or four reliable spots in all 32 NHL cities, usually consulting with the Jets ahead of time

"In general they want a beef, a chicken and a fish option. And a salad," said Sandy.

They have a set budget, which means lobster and caviar is not on the menu. But the food is high-quality, with extra-large protein portions to reflect the needs of athletes.

Getting the food right requires finesse.

"There's a lot of tricks we employ when we're ordering food," said David. Under-cooking pasta so it can be finished in the galley. Blanching vegetables. Getting steaks cooked only rare, then bringing them up to medium using the convection oven.

"We've had restaurants flat-out say we're not interested, and that's simply because we're taking their product and moving it off-site, so now they have no quality control," he added.

Food poisoning is the worst fear. Montreal went through it once — not on a JETZ flight — and now everything is plastic-wrapped, checked, double-checked.

Forget bags of tiny pretzels — dessert often includes fresh-baked cookies and ice cream, and every player's birthday is marked with a cupcake waiting at their seat.

Despite their unique vantage point, the couple were never huge hockey fans.

“But I have learned to appreciate what it takes to become an NHL player,” said Sandy. “The sacrifices they make for their career. And what goes into it. It’s special. Those guys are all special.”

Their relationships extend beyond players to their families, especially during the annual mom and dad trips. They felt the loss last spring when Mark Scheifele’s dad, Brad, passed away from cancer.

“He was a beautiful man,” said Sandy.

She’s enjoyed watching players like Lowry and Scheifele grow from fresh-faced kids into grizzled veterans, particularly on a Jets team that’s kept so much of its core intact.

One of their favourite memories involves Dustin Byfuglien, who thought he’d cracked a mystery years ago. They hadn’t advertised their relationship but were clearly giving off subtle signs.

One day, Byfuglien confronted them, revealing a theory the players had developed.

“They all thought we were having an affair,” Sandy said, laughing. “They knew we were married — just not to each other.”

A career highlight remains the night the Jets beat Nashville in Game 7 of the 2018 second round — a dramatic road win that led to quite the flight home.

“That was incredible. It was so much fun,” she said.

Still, boundaries matter. No photos. No videos.

“I respect their privacy and their quiet time. And, of course, we want them to feel comfortable around us,” said Sandy.

According to Lowry, they pass with flying colours.

“I’ve had Dave and Sandy now, I think this is my sixth time out of 12 years. You get to know them and you’re always excited to see them,” he said.

“We’re super lucky to have both crews. I still talk to the crew we had last year. You develop those relationships, those jokes and that banter. They become part of the team.”

Joanne Prescott jokingly refers to herself as Dave and Sandy’s daughter — even though she’s close to the same age. Given how close they work together, they truly have become family.

A 30-year Air Canada employee, the Winnipegger is now in her third tour with the Jets. She admits she's a lifelong sports nut, watching Jets 1.0 games as a kid and playing ringette growing up.

Does she ever get starstruck?

"It's a cool experience. But a professional line is drawn," she said. "Even though you get to see behind-the-scenes, my role and responsibility is as a crew member. And what happens on the plane stays there. It has to stay there."

With her kids now in university, she has more flexibility to embrace the chaotic lifestyle. She estimates she spent just four nights in her own bed in November.

"It's been a bit like Groundhog Day," she said of the relentless schedule.

One of the perks is getting a bit of downtime on the road to play tourist in cities they might not otherwise visit, especially on off days when there's no flight to prepare for. Whether it's going to a Madonna concert in Pittsburgh or a Dodgers game in Los Angeles, Prescott is always up for an adventure.

"We chose this life, and you have to have fun doing it," she said.

Prescott said she gets a kick out of how superstitious some players are. Whether it's eating the same type of food or wearing the same clothing when things are going well, she's seen it all.

There's a usual pecking order when it comes to the seating chart: Coaches and management sit at the front. Broadcasters behind them. Trainers in the middle. Younger players further back. Veterans in their familiar perches at the rear.

Some wear the result of a particular game on their faces, while others show no visible signs.

"You can never look at a game the same way once you get to know the players," said Prescott.

The crew can't do anything about what happens between the whistles, but they'd like to think they play at least a tiny role.

And when they can beat the clock and land ahead of schedule — as they did this past Friday night going from Raleigh to Nashville — they can jokingly take credit when good things happen such as the Jets win over the Predators in Music City.

"We did it!" said Prescott. "It's because we got them there 10 minutes early!"

Last — but far from least — is Kevin Polonuk.

He is the operations rep for the Jets–JETZ partnership and an Air Canada aircraft maintenance engineer since 1993. Unlike the flight attendants, he doesn't rotate out, and this is now his seventh season with his hometown team.

Polonuk ensures the entire operation runs smoothly, working closely with Jets director of team operations Chris Kreviazuk to map out every detail.

What nights are they flying out immediately after a game? When do they stay over — such as Wednesday in Montreal, with the Jets choosing to maximize rest during a stretch of six games in nine nights?

What hotels are booked? How does equipment move from A to B? And what happens when an emergency hits, such as earlier this month in Los Angeles, when the Jets took off for San Jose, reached the Pacific Ocean, and had to turn back due to a mechanical issue? Polonuk scrambled to secure another aircraft and transfer everything over.

Polonuk also does the literal heavy lifting, stacking 2,500 kilograms of team equipment into the belly of the plane before every flight with help from a handful of airport employees and Jets equipment personnel. Personal bags and staff luggage get loaded into the forward cargo.

"On a good day, we can get it all loaded in 12 minutes. Maybe 10."

"It's kind of like Tetris. If you don't get it right, it won't all fit," said Polonuk. "So we've got an order everything goes in. On a good day, we can get it all loaded in 12 minutes. Maybe 10."

The Jets always aim to be wheels up exactly four hours after puck drop, which is quite remarkable given all that is involved. That leaves a window of about 90 minutes from final buzzer at the rink to rolling down the runway at the airport with everything — and everyone — on board.

Every second matters, especially when dealing with creatures-of-habit such as pro athletes.

Polonuk is a huge fan of the Jets and hockey in general. He is doing what he loves — and loves what he's doing.

"Not many people have an opportunity to do something like this for a living," he said. "We are very, very fortunate."

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/better-than-nothing-jets-escape-montreal-with-a-loser-point>

Better than nothing: Jets escape Montreal with a loser point

By Paul Friesen

Given how they've played of late, finishing a five-game trip with one point tucked into their pockets is better than nothing for the Winnipeg Jets.

Backed by the sparkling goaltending of Eric Comrie, the Jets survived a so-so first period and some wild, back-and-forth moments in overtime before losing, 3-2, in a shootout in Montreal on Wednesday.

It was the same old story offensively for Winnipeg, with the only goals coming from the top line.

Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor notched their 14th of the season, but the rest of the well was dry once again.

Comrie gave them a chance, though, playing his best game of the season, starring early and late as Winnipeg was out-shot 5-1 in overtime.

"He played absolutely fantastic," Scheifele told reporters in Montreal. "He's been playing amazing for us. We haven't played well enough in front of him to get him some wins. He's been making a lot of big saves that he doesn't need to make. He's been keeping us in games."

Final shots were 31 apiece, as the Jets earned their first loser point of the season, falling to 13-12-1.

It was a far cry from their surrender in Buffalo two nights earlier, even if there were still too many shaky moments in their own zone.

"The compete was there," Scheifele said. "Obviously it sucks we got beat and didn't get the win. But that was a better blueprint for how our team has got to play. If we play like that, we'll get some wins."

His head coach agreed.

"Night and day different from the other night," is how Scott Arniel put it. "Our compete level, our execution... I don't think we gave up any odd-man situations. If we did, they were very limited compared to last game."

“I would like the two points but I’m happy with our effort.”

In the shootout, Cole Caufield scored for Montreal, while Connor and Scheifele were stopped by Jakub Dobes and Gabe Vilardi hit the crossbar.

“It was a fun goalie duel in overtime, a lot of fun battling back and forth with Dobes,” Comrie said. “It’s not going our way right now, but we’re going to find it.”

Coming off one of their worst games of the season, a 5-1 loss that sparked a players-only meeting in Buffalo, the Jets didn’t come out with the fire you might have expected.

The Habs, playing on back-to-back nights no less, had by far the best of the chances in the opening 20 minutes and would have led if it weren’t for the spectacular play of Comrie.

The 30-year-old career backup all but stood on his head after a giveaway by Logan Stanley in his own zone sparked a flurry of chances.

An Elias Salomonsson turnover forced Comrie to fend off a couple more Grade A’s.

After a slow start, the hitting picked up eventually, too.

When Adam Lowry belted defenceman Alexandre Carrier behind the Montreal net, the Winnipeg captain was challenged to a fight by heavyweight Arber Xhekaj, taking more than he gave.

Nobody hit the scoreboard, though, until Scheifele shook off the constant booing he gets in Montreal (a remnant of his hit on Jake Evans in the playoffs a few years back) to fire one home with 1:26 left in the first.

Connor’s dogged work chasing down a loose puck was the catalyst for Scheifele’s 14th of the year, and the Jets had an unlikely lead after one.

The Jets came out stronger in the second, spending more time in the Canadiens’ end and a little less time causing problems for Comrie – although they still did some of that, too, Dylan Samberg the culprit on a couple of occasions.

Winnipeg’s Tanner Pearson took the game’s first penalty midway through the second and the Habs’ solid power play made him pay, Juraj Slafkovsky snapping it past Comrie to tie it.

Less than two minutes later, the Jets re-grabbed the lead on a wild shift in the Habs zone that featured a broken Montreal stick, constant pressure by Winnipeg, some big hits and a finish by Connor, set up by Vilardi.

The lead didn’t last.

Barely two more minutes had gone by when Josh Morrissey was out-muscled on a Montreal dump-in, Oliver Kapanen the beneficiary.

By this time the teams were trading chances and dominant shifts, keeping both goalies on their toes in a game that went into the third tied, 2-2.

A Jets power play early in the third came up empty, after which it began to feel like they were simply hanging on instead of taking the play to the Habs.

But Comrie stopped Caufield at close range twice, allowing his team to get to overtime, where he continued to do his thing.

The Jets finish their five-game road trip with a 1-3-1 mark. They return home to face Buffalo on Friday.

<https://winnipegson.com/sports/jets-make-changes-hope-for-turnaround-starting-tonight>

Jets make changes, hope for turnaround 'starting tonight'

By Paul Friesen

Head coach Scott Arniel had as many as three lineup changes he could make for tonight's game in Montreal, and he's making every one of them.

The memory of Monday's embarrassing, 5-1 loss in Buffalo still fresh, the Winnipeg Jets bench boss is activating two players who were healthy scratches two days ago and one who's back to full health.

Defenceman Neal Pionk has recovered from an injury that kept him out of the last four games.

He'll skate next to Dylan Samberg on Winnipeg's second defence pair.

Young Elias Salomonsson returns to the blue line after being scratched for two games. He'll play with Logan Stanley.

The two defencemen who'll sit this one out: veterans Luke Schenn and Colin Miller.

Up front, Cole Koepke takes a spot on the fourth line, bumping Gustav Nyquist up to the press box.

The changes should give the Jets more speed.

"Our whole group needs to play quick," Arniel told reporters in Montreal. "When you defend fast and close quick and take away time and space, it helps you get the puck

quicker and then you're on transition. We chased that game the other night because we never closed things off fast enough. There's veteran teams in this league that do things by stifling the opposition and not giving them room to work.

"Hopefully that so-called speed shows."

The Jets have looked slow in losing four of their last five games, nine of their last 13.

The young, last-place Sabres exploited it, as the Jets, 13-12 on the season, reached a new low.

"It probably ruined my day yesterday," Arniel said. "But you've got to move on. This league is too much going on, too fast, too many games in a short period of time. We looked at some things this morning, talked about some things. You're not going to win hockey games doing what we did."

"So there needs to be big improvement."

The Jets were so perturbed with Monday's game they held a player-only meeting after it.

"Expect some high energy," Pionk said of the hoped-for result. "Just talked about expectations... and what we need to do better as a team and as individuals. Start to piece things together here. Starting tonight."

Like Buffalo, Montreal (13-9-3) is a team loaded with youth and speed.

The 27-year-old Koepke hopes to bring some of his own high-paced energy to a team that needs it.

"Try and make a positive impact on the game whenever I'm out there," he said. "Try and bring some speed and physicality to it. Hopefully we can right the ship here and get a win."

This will be Koepke's 17th game with the Jets. He has yet to chip in a goal.

He'll be replacing the 36-year-old Nyquist, who's gone 20 games without one. Both were signed as free agents last summer.

"I actually had some good games against them," Koepke said of facing Montreal.

While with Boston last season, Koepke scored two goals and three assists in three games against the rival Habs.

Despite their struggles, the Jets are just three points from being alone in a wildcard playoff spot in the NHL West.

The Canadiens are three points from one in the East.

As franchises, though, these two are in very different place.

"We've been building from our core," Arniel said. "Our core being Scheifele, Connor, Lowry, Hellebuyck, Morrissey – those guys are our young draft picks that have blossomed to become our core. Montreal is working on that, and that's obviously why they're young, and they have some really good pieces. So we're in two different spots right now as organizations.

"We're not off to the best start, but we still feel like we're a strong playoff team. We've just got to make sure that we get going and get ourselves in."

Hellebuyck on track

Arniel says goalie Connor Hellebuyck is getting close to stepping onto the ice again, but that doesn't mean he's ahead of schedule in his rehab from knee surgery.

"I'm going to make sure he has like four yellow jerseys on him," Arniel said, referring to the colour that screams don't touch me in practice.

"We're making sure on this one," the coach continued. "He'll run into you and tell you, 'Feeling really good, I want to play next week.' But this one we've got to be obviously ultra careful with."

Hellebuyck underwent knee surgery Nov. 22, with a timeline of four to six weeks for his return.

<https://winnipegsun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/drowning-jets-look-for-something-to-grab-onto>

Drowning Jets look for something to grab onto

By Paul Friesen

There were questions swirling around this team going into the NHL season, as there always are.

But I don't know if anyone was expecting to ask one as fundamental as this: Exactly who are the Winnipeg Jets?

A lack of identity didn't figure to be this group's issue, not after two straight seasons of being the stingiest team in the league.

But that's what the Jets are searching for 25 games in, as they continue to sink in the standings.

For veterans who rode this team's wave to the Presidents' Trophy last year, it's a bit like being thrown into deep water without a life preserver.

"It's been a struggle at times this year to come up with that identity," forward Kyle Connor said after Monday's 5-1 flop in Buffalo sent another wave crashing over them. "It's got to be us to figure it out and turn this thing around, grab that identity and grab a hold of something that makes us tick. It seems like we're still trying to find that."

It's pretty deep into the season to still be looking.

You have to go down 16 spots to find this team's defensive ranking. They're giving up exactly three goals per game, half a goal more than they gave up in each of the last two seasons.

So clearly they're not rubbing shoulders with William Jennings anymore.

They're not making up for it by scoring, either.

Scroll down the NHL rankings and you'll find them tied for 15th in that department, at a fraction over three goals per game. That's down about a quarter of a goal from each of the last two years.

Being in that mushy middle for those two key stats somehow fits. The 13-12 Jets aren't air-tight and they're not explosive. Half the teams are better at scoring, half are worse. Ditto defending.

"I'd love to give you all the answers," defenceman Dylan DeMelo told reporters in Buffalo, Monday. "If I had them all, we wouldn't be in this position that we're in. We're trying to figure it out. Obviously time is of the essence."

The odds were already against this team at American Turkey Day, recent history giving them just a 25 percent chance to carve their way back into the Stanley Cup playoff picture.

Every week that goes by pecks away another percentage point or two, until eventually the stuffing is right out of the bird.

"We can't hang our heads," DeMelo said. "We can't feel sorry for ourselves. No one is going to be throwing us a lifesaver here and helping us out. We've got to figure it out."

I'm not sure the people who can throw out a lifeline know where they even are.

Head coach Scott Arniel seems as flabbergasted as anyone by the change in the personality of his team.

Going into Monday's game, he and his staff showed plenty of video on how the Sabres attack, often with their defence.

It was like nobody watched.

"And we're getting beat up the ice, shift after shift," Arniel lamented.

Three nights earlier, in Carolina, Arniel had torn a strip off his players for not being ready to start the game.

That message lasted one game, and then they were right back to not showing up.

We've heard of coaches being tuned out after a while, but this is just Arniel's second season as the head man. Surely the man has more staying power than that.

Moving up the chain, GM Kevin Cheveldayoff's fingerprints are on this, too.

In trying to build a team more sturdy for playoff hockey, he seems to have forgotten the part about getting there, first.

Over the course of a single summer, Cheveldayoff has managed to make the Jets older and slower.

It was impossible to argue the sentimental side of bringing Jonathan Toews home, but shouldn't there have been somebody in the room suggesting a backup plan, should Toews' comeback fall a bit short of the No. 2 centre role?

Speaking of the second line, when Nik Ehlers took his wheels to Carolina, it left a hole Cheveldayoff didn't fill. Instead, he stepped in it.

The resulting sprain has his team falling so far back that even a wildcard playoff spot looks good right now.

All this, of course, is easy to point out with the benefit of hindsight.

We might be singing a different tune, too, if Connor Hellebuyck was bailing his team out instead of rehabbing from knee surgery.

But not even a three-time, Vezina Trophy winning goalie would mask everything that's wrong.

In the past, Hellebuyck was always there when the Jets struggled to find themselves. They eventually would.

At this rate, he'll get back and barely recognize them.

The coach sounds ready to make some changes, and the GM should be, too.

“Everything is in play here,” Arniel said of his potential lineup for Wednesday’s game in Montreal.

When you’ve lost your ID, it should be.

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11558815/winnipeg-jets-end-road-trip-with-3-2-shootout-loss-in-montreal/>

Winnipeg Jets end road trip with 3-2 shootout loss in Montreal

By Christian Aumell & Russ Hobson Global News

The good news for the Winnipeg Jets is that they got a point in Montreal Wednesday night.

But it was another game without a victory for the struggling team, who fell to the Canadiens 3-2 in a shootout, dropping their record to 1-5-1 since Connor Hellebuyck went on injured reserve.

This one was certainly not on the goaltending though. After getting pulled after just one period in their last game, Eric Comrie was spectacular and stood on his head, giving his team every chance to get the two points.

It was a thrilling end-to-end, back and forth contest as they traded goals in the first two periods. There was no scoring in the third and both teams had chances to win in an exciting overtime period before the Habs scored the only goal of the shootout to end a short two-game losing streak.

“That was night-and-day different than the other night,” said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. “Our compete level, our execution. I don’t think we gave up any odd-man situations. If we did, they were very limited compared to last game. We did a great job, not only our forwards getting overtop of people, tracking back. Our ‘D’ did a great job with their gaps and that was a battle of two good goaltenders. (Jakub) Dobes and Comrie – both goaltenders made some big stops and there was a lot of different looks for each team.

“At the end of the day, I’m happy. I would like the two points but I’m happy with our effort.”

Turnovers continue to be a problem for the Jets as they committed 26 giveaways. It was just the fourth time this season the Jets lost a game when scoring first.

Comrie made a number of magnificent saves in the first period and finished the game with 29 stops.

"Felt good to get those saves," said Comrie. "Sucks not to get the two points. I thought our team played well enough to get the two points."

Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor both scored their 14th goals of the season in the defeat. Connor has scored a goal in each of the last three games, while Scheifele is now riding a five-game point streak. But once again their bottom three forward lines couldn't find the back of the net.

"It isn't always necessarily goals or getting shots," said Arniel. "Sometimes it's just wearing the opposition down. And it's building it up for the next line to go out. But I really liked JT's (Jonathan Toews) line. I thought that line had some really good looks and then Lows' (Adam Lowry) line, and Bears (Morgan Barron) was heavy, and they played that heavy game that kinda wears them down. Hopefully we continue with that kind of recipe."

The Jets made three lineup changes from their embarrassing loss to the Buffalo Sabres two nights earlier. Neal Pionk returned after missing four games with a lower-body injury, while Elias Salomonsson also checked in on the blueline with Luke Schenn and Colin Miller both coming out. Cole Koepke came into the lineup on forward as Gustav Nyquist was a healthy scratch.

Goaltending has been an issue (but certainly not the only issue) in Hellebuyck's absence, but that was not the case in this one. Coming off a terrible performance in Buffalo on Monday, the Jets once again got off to a shaky start but were bailed out time and again in the first period by Comrie.

He made a couple big saves after an egregious turnover by Logan Stanley deep in Winnipeg territory, one of a handful of mistakes in the Jets' end that led to great Montreal chances that Comrie turned aside.

It all led to Winnipeg opening the scoring late in the frame, thanks once again to their top line.

Connor caught up to a 50/50 puck in the neutral zone, poking it into the Montreal end before trying to get around Noah Dobson. Mike Matheson also came back to help as Connor was pushed to the faceoff dot, but he won the puck and saw that Scheifele was wide open in the slot. Scheifele took a pass from Connor and wired it past Dobes for his 14th of the season at the 18:35 mark.

The Jets maintained that lead until the midway point of the second period as Montreal cashed in on their first power play look of the night. With Tanner Pearson in the box for slashing, Cole Caufield got the puck below the goal line and fed Juraj Slafkovsky in front for a one-timer that beat Comrie high to tie the game.

Less than two minutes later, the Jets were back in front thanks to a chaotic sequence of events. It began with one of the longest net-mouth scrambles that you'll see, with no whistle blowing as almost every player on the ice dug around the crease of Dobes.

The puck eventually came free and Winnipeg kept possession, trying to take advantage of the fact that Slafkovsky was playing without a stick. The former number one overall pick was able to deliver a crushing hit on Josh Morrissey as he took a hit to make a play at the point, eventually leading to Gabriel Vilardi getting the puck behind the net. He then fed Connor by the faceoff dot and he ripped a shot off the post and in for his 14th of the season.

But the Jets' couldn't hold the lead as Montreal got even again just over two minutes later. Ivan Demidov beat Morrissey in a battle for the puck in the corner of Winnipeg's end before feeding a streaking Oliver Kapanen, left alone in the slot, who made no mistake to make it 2-2.

It stayed that way into the third where Winnipeg earned their first power play look of the night but were not able to cash in.

Neither team could muster a goal in the third so the game required overtime, and what ensued was a high-octane reminder of how fun 3-on-3 hockey can be.

Each side had several decent chances to score but Montreal had the bulk of them, outshooting the Jets 5-1 in the five-minute session. Comrie once again had to make some stellar saves but on the Canadiens' best opportunity, they had a 3-on-1 but overpassing led to a low-quality shot on net.

Dobes also had to make a great save late in OT when Toews fed Vladislav Namestnikov on an odd-man rush. Dobes made a sprawling pad save to keep the game tied, sending it to a shootout.

Caufield was the first shooter for Montreal and he beat Comrie five-hole, the only player to light the lamp in the shootout. Comrie stopped the next two shooters for the Canadiens but all three of Winnipeg's shooters failed, with Connor, Scheifele and Vilardi coming up empty, the game ending when Vilardi's attempt rang off the bar.

Comrie did all he could to give his team a chance to win, making 29 saves while Dobes also turned aside 29 shots.

The shootout loss is Winnipeg's first loss after regulation this season, leaving the Boston Bruins as the lone team yet to suffer an extra-time defeat.

Winnipeg will now head home after a 1-3-1 road trip, hosting the Sabres on Friday. Pregame coverage on 680 CJOB begins at 4 p.m. with the puck dropping just after 6 p.m.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11557362/analysis-edmonds-winnipeg-jets-losses-continue/>

ANALYSIS: Jets' game heading out-of-bounds with string of losses

By Paul Edmonds CJOB

For the Winnipeg Jets' coaching staff right now, it must feel like they're standing over a golf shot and wondering what club to play.

For so much of last season, it was routine: driver, iron, putter — easy birdie. This year, however, it's been more like driver, iron, two chips, two putts — double bogey.

Of course, navigating the hazards in the NHL has never been easy, given the ever-changing topography of the course, which includes travel, injuries, opponent and roster composition.

And for head coach Scott Arniel — with his team teetering at one game above NHL .500 and staring upward at five others in the Central Division standings — the search for that rescue club in his bag has begun in earnest.

Based on where the Jets are on the schedule, there's still plenty of holes to play and the opportunity for the entire group — players and coaches — to turn their game around definitely lies in front of them.

But given their current placing, it truly comes down to one game at a time since hockey, as we know, only provides two points for a win, unlike a golf round with buddies where a solid hole of bingo-bango-bongo can erase a significant deficit.

Help is likely on the way tonight when the Jets conclude this five-game road trip in Montreal, as defenceman Neal Pionk is expected to return to the lineup after missing four games and forward Cole Koepke — the team's hits leader — is a safe bet to dress tonight, too.

Both players give the Jets a little more grip-it-and-rip-it type of personality, something Winnipeg desperately needs right now after dropping five of their last six games, many of them finishing like they were sliced to the right and landed out of bounds.

But for the Jets' coaching staff, standing over that next shot and choosing the right club always provides the chance that your team's game will turn around, although given the current situation, it's not likely to be a tap-in.

Canadian Press

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11559151/jets-comrie-winnipeg-bounce-back-shootout/>

Jets' Comrie bounces back in shootout loss to Canadiens: 'Absolutely fantastic'

By Daniel Rainbird The Canadian Press

Eric Comrie wasn't happy to be pulled during Monday's 5-1 loss to the Buffalo Sabres, but he also didn't sulk.

The Winnipeg Jets goalie — filling the starter's role with MVP netminder Connor Hellebuyck injured — quickly moved on to his next challenge Wednesday night in Montreal, giving his team every chance to win an eventual 3-2 shootout loss to the Canadiens.

"He did all of that and then some," coach Scott Arniel said. "I told him when I pulled him there in Buffalo that we're getting ready for Montreal, and at the end of the day, you know what, he (has) a lot of pride."

Comrie stopped 29 shots, including several desperation saves, after giving up three goals on 14 shots in the Buffalo loss that prompted a players-only meeting following the game.

"I'm a competitive guy," Comrie said. "I'm just gonna get back up and work as hard as I can the next day. I think for myself, I've just been trying to work as hard as I can every single day and give the best for this team."

"It's not going our way right now, but I think we're gonna find it."

The Jets (13-12-1) lost for the sixth time in seven games — all without Hellebuyck — to end a five-game road trip.

Comrie has a .888 save percentage and a 3.36 goals-against average in six starts since the Jets announced Hellebuyck would miss four to six weeks from a minor knee surgery on Nov. 21, numbers boosted by his performance Wednesday.

The 30-year-old career backup from Edmonton helped Winnipeg take a 1-0 lead into the first intermission, stretching his left pad out to deny sharpshooter Cole Caufield a surefire goal.

Comrie then robbed Jake Evans with the right pad off a rebound from Brendan Gallagher, making his best impression of Winnipeg's Vezina and Hart Trophy winner.

"He played absolutely fantastic," said centre Mark Scheifele, who had a goal and an assist. "He's been playing amazing for us. We haven't played well enough in front of him to get him some wins, but he's been making a lot of big saves that he doesn't need to make and he's been keeping us in games."

Montreal's Juraj Slafkovsky broke through on a tick-tack-toe play with the man-advantage, before Ivan Demidov set up Oliver Kapanen for a Grade A opportunity that Comrie had little chance of stopping.

Caufield later scored the shootout winner to end an evenly-matched, back-and-forth game.

"Felt good to get those saves, sucked not to get the two points," Comrie said. "I thought our team played well enough to get the two points."

A frantic overtime featured ten-bell saves from both netminders, as Comrie and Canadiens counterpart Jakub Dobes took turns thwarting odd-man rushes and extending the extra period.

"They got a pretty skilled team, so you're going to expect some chances both ways and hats off to their guy," Comrie said. "Their guy was awesome as well. I mean, I thought it was a little fun goalie duel in overtime there and had a lot of fun battling back and forth with Dobes."

"That was a battle of two good goaltenders," Arniel added. "Both goaltenders made some big stops and there was a lot of different looks for each team."

"We played better in front of Comrie, which was also part of it, which we need to do, we need to continue to do. So nice to see him bounce back."

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/temperature-check-are-the-canadian-nhl-teams-in-trouble/>

Temperature check: Are the Canadian NHL teams in trouble?

By Justin Bourne

On Sportsnet's Hockey Central we do panel predictions each Friday for the Saturday night games that involve Canadian teams. Heading into last season I did not particularly believe in our beloved Canadian squads, and it buried me. Five Canadian teams finished with at least 96 points, five made the playoffs, two won their regular season division titles and the Jets earned the Presidents' Trophy.

The country was happy, but at least in the panel standings, I got killed.

Heading into this season I expected some correction to all that Canadian success – surely they weren't all that good – but I had tweaked my expectations. The Oilers had established themselves as being among the league's elite, the Leafs lost Mitch Marner but added depth, and it seemed Montreal and Ottawa had arrived post-rebuild. I couldn't

see much reason for the Jets to take some huge step back, and so yeah, one would think these teams would mostly be pretty good again.

But again, one thought wrong.

Don't look now Canada, but it's ugly out there. League-wide, we currently have one team inside the playoff cut line – the Ottawa Senators – and even they're not all that secure in a bizarrely tight Atlantic Division.

So let's assess the situation and talk about what's to come.

Goal differential

When the NHL schedule comes to a close each year and you sort the standings by goal differential, you'll notice a remarkably basic thing: Teams that are in the black -- as in they have a positive goal differential -- tend to make the playoffs, while the opposite is also true (with the odd exception). Seven playoff teams in each conference had positive goal differentials last season, and only two teams in the league that finished with a positive goal differential missed the post-season.

So, here are what the goal differentials are for the Canadian teams as of Dec. 3:

Winnipeg: +2
Toronto: -1
Ottawa: -2
Montreal: -8
Edmonton: -15
Vancouver: -18
Calgary: -21

These tend to be decent indicators of what teams really are, and more than a quarter of the way into the season, it ain't pretty.

Now, there are plenty of excuses, and a few that are legit.

The Justifiable Excuses

The Oilers are off back-to-back Cup Final runs, and they've been badly hurt by injuries to key forwards (they also have the league's worst team save percentage, though that's not a justifiable excuse, as those goalies happen to play for your team and aren't separate from it). But still, their underlying numbers haven't been good for long stretches of play, so it's not just been goaltending. Fully healthy now, everyone looks to be slotted in their right spot and so you'd expect the Oilers to take a series of steps from "openly bad" to "outright good." We know that group can do it.

Edmonton has to be the favourite of all the Canadian teams that are outside the playoffs looking in to get things sorted out. A heavy road schedule to start the season wouldn't have helped either, so again, things should improve here. They'll need some saves for

that to happen (little help here, Mr. Bowman?), but anything better than “dead last” in save percentage would be a step up at this point.

Injuries have hurt the Leafs for long stretches of action, the Canucks too, and Connor Hellebuyck being out isn’t going great for the Jets.

I don’t like watching people hand-wave away reasonable excuses like injuries, particularly when the Leafs were without Auston Matthews, Matthew Knies, Chris Tanev, Brandon Carlo, Anthony Stolarz, Scott Laughton, and more. You’d hear people say “Well other teams have injuries too.” Sure, but who your injured players are matters, and the Leafs went from a janky start with four new forwards right into the emergency room. Healthier now (but still without their top two right-handed defencemen), the time for those excuses are done.

The Canucks were the league’s number one “If they stay healthy, they could be a playoff team” team, as in, they had talent but their margin for error was tracing-paper thin, and the injury bug just destroyed them down the middle right out of the gate.

Those Jets lost their two best defensive performers in Dylan Samberg and Adam Lowry early, and now sit without Hellebuyck.

So yes, teams get injured, but they are differently affected by those things.

Now, our other Canadian teams are not the same as the ones we’ve just discussed.

Fringe teams on the fringe

Last year Ottawa and Montreal finished in the East’s two wild card spots, which is to say, they were more fringe playoff teams than great ones. Now in fairness, Ottawa was just a point shy of Florida for third in the division, finishing with 97 points, six better than the Canadiens, who were two points better than Columbus.

You have to separate the two, as Ottawa was far more competitive, owning a plus-nine goal differential while the Habs were minus-20, which was the lowest goal differential to make the playoffs by a good distance.

Still, Montreal added legitimately good players this offseason in Noah Dobson and Zachary Bolduc, and expectations were higher. Combined with a great start, it looked like they were moving into the next tier of competitors, going from “playoff team” to “could win playoff rounds.”

But a run of brutal goaltending has been part of what’s got them right back to where they were last year, sniffing around a playoff spot (currently two points back), with a minus-eight goal differential. There’s talk of them adding a top-end centre, and that could legitimately make all the difference, allowing other good players to face softer competition. Sportlogiq’s expected goals data actually shows they defend just fine (the goalies need to be better), but they don’t produce enough going the other way.

As far as the Sens go, it doesn't seem like a mistake that they're the one Canadian team holding down a playoff spot (tied for second in the Atlantic Division at 30 points with Boston and Detroit, with Montreal one point behind). They started the season getting dicey goaltending, and hung on. They lost their captain Brady Tkachuk for a long stretch, and hung on. They endured a brutal road trip, and head back home as the only team in the Atlantic with more home games remaining than road games, all while having hung on.

Tkachuk is back, Linus Ullmark is playing well, and they seem like Canada's most sure thing to be a playoff team. Their defence corps is a great mix of good skaters and good defenders. But I mentioned how tight the standings are around them, and again, the margins look thin.

Heck, the Leafs have been a complete trainwreck so far this season, and they're just three points back of Ottawa. Anything can happen there.

And finally, the Flames.

Let it goo, let it gooooo

That 96-point season in 2024-25 was incredible. So much went right, they worked like dogs and grinded out every point. They're doing it again now, having earned points in seven of their last 10 games, which has them up to ... tied for 15th in the Western Conference.

It's admirable, and they're well-coached and proud and competitive. But the roster isn't there, the next draft is strong, and I think even Flames fans would say they'd be very content preparing their team to be competitive when the new arena opens in 2027.

Trades are looming, and it's just a matter of time.

Overall assessment

So, how many of these teams do we think will make playoffs?

The yes division:

Oilers: I'm sticking with yes. That roster is too good to be this bad.

Senators: Another yes. They've got good pieces at every position and they compete.

The maybe division:

Jets: I can't believe they're in here after they just won the Presidents' Trophy, but a lot has gone wrong. There were the early injuries, but also Jonathan Toews hasn't been quite who they'd hoped he'd be, and I'm sure he'd say the same about his own game. The pair of Luke Schenn and Logan Stanley has been truly awful for them, at least statistically. And they play in the Central, which is the Group of Death. They aren't far

out of it, but with Lowry and Samberg back they need to start playing better to buy time for Hellebuyck to return. I think they'll get a wild card spot in the West.

Leafs: I hate myself for this, but I do think they'll make it (barring another run of bad injury luck). There's too much talent there to not finish with a point total in the 90s even if they don't add anything, and I also think they'd rather add at the deadline than just sit quietly on their hands and finish with 90 points.

Canadiens: I think they'll make it. That defence corps skates as well as any in the league, and their goaltending isn't this bad. And if they add, as rumoured, they should get back into the mid-90s in points pretty easily. Their fans should aggressively be rooting against Boston and Detroit the rest of the way, to go with their usual Leafs hatred.

The nope division:

Canucks: They've got some talented players and can win any game they're in. But when you need everything to go right, and things start this bad, they snowball in the wrong direction. The outbound trades said to be looming will be the nail in the coffin here.

Flames: Nope, nor should they want to make the playoffs.

In the end, I've put the same five Canadian teams from last season back into this season's playoffs. It's a bold stance, I know. But I can't see any of them worth burying yet. Just given their potential, they should be able to make the climbs back up the standings.

Here's to hoping, because the worst-case assessment of the above information could look awfully grim with a more pessimistic eye.

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/what-would-jets-have-to-do-for-a-reunion-with-laurent-brossoit/>

What would Jets have to do for a reunion with Laurent Brossoit?

NHL insider Elliotte Friedman joins FAN Hockey Show to discuss whether Laurent Brossoit would be a good interim option for the Winnipeg Jets right now with Hellebuyck out, and what it might take for them to acquire him.

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6860057/2025/12/04/nhl-playoffs-panic-meter-western-conference/>

NHL panic meter: How close are 5 Western Conference teams to missing the playoffs?

By Harman Dayal and Murat Ates

In the Western Conference, time is ticking for the back-to-back Stanley Cup finalists in Edmonton and last year's Presidents' Trophy winners in Winnipeg. There are problems in Vancouver that J.T. Miller's departure hasn't fixed, while young teams and next-generation contenders alike find themselves outside of the playoffs.

Which of these underachieving Western Conference teams could legitimately miss the playoffs? Who's a good bet to make a strong push back into a playoff spot by season's end?

Today we're examining these teams purely by this season's performance in actual games, not preseason expectations. Let's break out the panic meter to analyze how concerned these organizations should be about their chances of making the postseason: 1 meaning not worried, 10 meaning full panic mode about their playoff hopes.

Winnipeg Jets

Record: 13-12-1

What's gone wrong: Winnipeg started its season by winning nine of its first 12 games, but signs of struggle were clear. The Jets' elite goaltending and top-tier power play were hiding even-strength woes.

Last season's wave-over-wave attack, with a deep forward group chaining handoff shifts together? Gone. Last season's forecheck — so quick and effective that the Jets' D could gap tightly, creating neutral-zone turnovers? Let's not belabour the format. The Jets' five-on-five game was once a strength and now their opponents break the puck out with ease, carve through the neutral zone at will and outchance Winnipeg on a consistent basis.

And did we mention Connor Hellebuyck had arthroscopic knee surgery?

Hellebuyck is not Winnipeg's only injury concern, with Adam Lowry, Dylan Samberg and Cole Perfetti all off their form after missing substantial periods of time to injury. Jonathan Toews may have a higher level available to him, but he's moving slowly enough to be ineffective despite past heights. Combine those problems with Nikolaj Ehlers' departure to the Carolina Hurricanes, and a team whose top-nine forward group outscored opponents by 33 goals last season has turned into a one-line team. Mark Scheifele,

Kyle Connor and Gabriel Vilardi are scoring — as is Norris Trophy candidate Josh Morrissey — and that's about it.

Winnipeg held a players-only meeting after Monday's 5-1 loss to Buffalo, with Lowry instigating a much-needed call-to-arms for a team that's falling well short of its standards.

Winnipeg's breakout problems are costing it shots, scoring chances and real goals this season.

Outlook: The Jets are only two points out of a playoff spot, with games in hand on most teams ahead of them. They are the oldest and slowest team in the NHL, but they also have more to give — and a playoff spot remains within their reach, despite the doom and gloom.

Hellebuyck will be healthy again — the knee injury that required the scope is being characterized as minor — and the Jets will have half a season to work with when he returns. Winnipeg's ability to fix its five-on-five game depends partly on the speed at which Lowry reclaims his two-way excellence, if Toews' production increases (or his minutes decrease), and whether the Jets' defence corps stays healthy for any stretch of time. Presently, they look disconnected, with large gaps between forwards a step behind on the forecheck and defencemen backing off and giving up zone entries for free.

Scott Arniel might try breaking up the top line in an effort to create more scoring throughout the lineup. It's the only one that's scoring, but we haven't seen the Jets try other options. Otherwise Winnipeg will rely on incremental improvements and the hope that Hellebuyck's return is enough to cover off the team's weaknesses.

Playoffs are within reach, but the Jets are a game-breaker or two away from being a legitimate threat.

Missing the playoffs panic meter: 6/10