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Math isn't kind to road-trip bound Jets Club needs to feast on the East to head home with playoff pulse

By: Mike McIntyre

BOSTON — Scott Arniel chose to focus on the silver lining.

Rather than dwell late Tuesday night on the fact his club squandered a golden opportunity by not grabbing a pair of valuable points in the standings, the Winnipeg Jets head coach was selling the fact that they at least salvaged something with a game-tying goal as the clock ticked down in regulation.

“That should have been a two-pointer but we got the one,” Arniel said following the 4-3 shootout loss to the Nashville Predators to close out an eight-game homestand with a 5-2-1 record.

“We’ll see what happens around the league and then we got a real tough road trip here. We’ve got to take care of business.”

Which brings us to Boston, where Winnipeg’s margin for error is gone as it opens a critical three-games-in-four-days stretch Thursday night against the Bruins.

The 28-28-11 Jets did get some help on the out-of-town scoreboard shortly after their game ended, with both the San Jose Sharks and Seattle Kraken losing in regulation. It nudged Winnipeg a little closer — now four points back of the final Western Conference wild-card spot with 15 games to play.

But the math isn’t kind.

Ten of those remaining games will come on the road, starting with the next three. And the Jets aren’t chasing a single team. They’re trying to climb over four — Nashville, San Jose, Los Angeles and Seattle — just to get in the door.

Time isn’t just ticking. It’s working against them.

“We’ve got to take care of business.”

There can be no prolonged losing streaks. Wins must be stacked, and quickly. And they’ll have to come against quality opponents, starting with a Bruins team that has 15 more points than Winnipeg — but only a one-point cushion on a playoff spot in the jam-packed Eastern Conference.

How tight is it?

The surging Columbus Blue Jackets, led by old friend Rick Bowness, currently have the 10th-best point percentage in the entire league. They would be running away with the Pacific Division

and sitting fourth overall in the Western Conference. But heading into action Thursday, they are one point out of a playoff spot in the East.

That's the reality Winnipeg is walking into. The Jets need to feast on the East over the next four days if they want to head home with a playoff pulse.

After facing the Bruins — who came to Winnipeg Dec. 11 and won 6-3 — the Jets face Pittsburgh on Saturday. The Penguins are in a playoff spot, just got Evgeni Malkin back from suspension, put up a converted touchdown against the No. 1-overall Colorado Avalanche, and, on Wednesday night in Carolina, welcomed the injured Sidney Crosby back.

Winnipeg then heads to Broadway for a Sunday matinee against a New York Rangers team that is playing much better lately and just handed them one of their two regulation losses on this lengthy recent homestand — a 6-3 decision last Thursday.

At the risk of looking too far ahead, the degree of difficulty only increases next week: home dates with Vegas and Colorado, followed by a four-game trip through Denver (to complete a home-and-home), Chicago, Dallas and Columbus.

But, to be perfectly frank, none of that will matter if the Jets don't make this a productive business trip.

Still, in the spirit of Arniel's post-game optimism, there were encouraging signs Tuesday.

Winnipeg turned in one of its most complete efforts in recent memory, firing 39 shots and generating 22 high-danger scoring chances. Nashville goaltender Juuse Saros was the primary reason they didn't come away with the win.

Several other positives stood out:

The power play showed signs of life, moving the puck with more pace and purpose while capitalizing on a key opportunity. It had been sputtering — just 1-for-14 through the first seven games of the homestand — so any momentum there would be significant down the stretch.

Captain Adam Lowry played with noticeable edge and physicality, something that has been inconsistent this season, perhaps due to his recovery from off-season hip surgery. If that version of Lowry reappears, it could help pull the group into the fight.

It was also another productive night for Winnipeg's offensive stars, who continue to shine bright on a near-nightly basis: Kyle Connor registered three assists, Josh Morrissey found the back of the net, Mark Scheifele had another helper and Gabe Vilardi scored on the power play.

Rookie defenceman Elias Salomonsson continues to impress, handling increased minutes and responsibility while passing just about every test. With Neal Pionk nearing a return from injury after missing more than two months, Arniel will soon face decisions about how to keep Salomonsson in a meaningful role.

Does that mean keeping him alongside Dylan Samberg and easing Pionk back on a third pair? Or perhaps elevating Salomonsson to play with Morrissey, with Dylan DeMelo sliding down? Those are questions that may need answers sooner rather than later.

Connor Hellebuyck didn't have his best night in net against Nashville, but he usually follows up a mediocre outing with an outstanding one. Expect him to get the call against the Bruins, with Hellebuyck and backup Eric Comrie (riding a personal five-game winning streak) splitting the weekend dates.

Last, but not least, is the fact that Jonathan Toews broke a 20-game scoring drought by tying the game with one minute left in regulation. It's been a streaky season for Toews, which shouldn't be a surprise for a 37-year-old coming off a two-year health-related hiatus.

But if he can get going again — as he did in January when he scored in four straight games — that would be a welcome development for a Jets team that can use all the secondary scoring it can get.

HOW SWEDE IT IS

It's been quite a season for Alfons Freij, who was Winnipeg's second-round pick in the 2024 draft. The 20-year-old defenceman helped lead Sweden to World Junior gold, producing seven assists in seven games, and had a productive campaign with Timra IK of the top Swedish men's league with 11 points (6 goals, 5 assists) in 42 games.

Now, the next step in his hockey journey: Freij is joining the Manitoba Moose for the rest of the campaign, getting his first taste of North American pro hockey. With the American Hockey League club currently in a playoff position, there's a good chance Freij will be given an opportunity to try and make an immediate impact.

Salomonsson is also eligible to be sent back to the Moose for the post-season, so the team could be getting quite the blue-line boost.

Freij is a smooth-skating, puck-moving player who is one of the organization's top prospects, along with fellow Swedish gold-medal winning defenceman Sascha Boumedienne (2025 first-round pick), who is currently playing college hockey at Boston University.

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7126472/2026/03/18/winnipeg-jets-playoffs-chase-draft-tanking/?redirected=1>

Should the Jets try to make playoffs or embrace the draft? A debate with myself

By Murat Ates

The Winnipeg Jets have climbed within 4 points of a playoff spot, with the same number of games played as the Seattle Kraken and the Los Angeles Kings. They just wrapped up a 5-2-1 homestand, gaining ground on the second wild-card spot, while none of Seattle, Los Angeles or the San Jose Sharks is an obvious juggernaut.

Of course the Jets should be all in on their postseason push. In fact, it would be embarrassing not to be.

Unless the point is to win the Stanley Cup, you twit.

Oh geez, you again? Didn't I put this whole argument to rest back in December by telling you the Jets had 61 percent playoff odds? And isn't qualifying for the playoffs a literal prerequisite for winning the Stanley Cup?

It's the literal prerequisite for getting destroyed by the Colorado Avalanche, twit.

It seems that annoying italics guy hasn't mastered the "attack the argument, not the person" classiness demonstrated by the majority of our commenters. It also seems he knows one and only one insult, which is limiting.

Citing playoff odds from four months ago is limiting, you shortsighted Squidward. Winnipeg's big homestand increased its odds of making the playoffs all of the way to ... less than 20 percent! If I gave you 1-in-5 odds of me not slapping you, would you take them?

Pardon my exaggerated eye roll. If we're going to do this, let's actually do this. Make your best arguments, and I'll do the same. The subscribers will be the judges. I'll start.

Tanking is bad: Losing on purpose is ridiculous.

Let's start by recognizing that hockey is a game played by people — competitive people — and not by draft guidebooks, spreadsheets or analytics. The concept of players "tanking" games is embarrassing and ridiculous. Mark Scheifele is the sort of person who's more likely to flip a table being too competitive while playing Settlers of Catan than casually sit back and let someone else have a go at the Stanley Cup playoffs.

And you think other NHL athletes are wired differently? Morgan Barron didn't drop to block Jimmy Snuggerud's slot shot against the St. Louis Blues on Sunday only to come back, post two assists and set a career high in points (22) because he's trying to boost Winnipeg's odds in the draft lottery.

If you think anyone whose livelihood depends on NHL hockey is capable of phoning it in — especially now, just 4 points out of the playoffs — you don't understand competitive sport.

Tanking is good: How else is Winnipeg supposed to acquire top-end talent?

You're making an intellectually incomplete argument, you twit. Nobody needs Scheifele or Kyle Connor or Connor Hellebuyck to stop trying to ensure Winnipeg gets a good draft pick. Executives get paid a lot of money to make measured, unemotional assessments of their teams, and Kevin Cheveldayoff can't afford to let his feelings get in the way.

So forget about Catan. Winnipeg plays the game of "talent acquisition in NHL" with both hands tied behind its back. Unrestricted free agency is harder for the Jets than any other NHL team — and is going to be tough for every NHL team this summer — while other teams' executives give out no-trade clauses like that one guy at the Catan table builds roads.

There aren't many high-impact players headed for the free-agent market, and especially not many under age 33.

My point is that Cheveldayoff's long-term odds of winning a Stanley Cup are way higher if Winnipeg can acquire elite talent with a top-five pick in the draft than by trying to acquire that same level of talent via free agency or trade. Gabriel Vilardi was a great pull, but Winnipeg is fresh out of PLDs to peddle. Do you think Connor would have signed a max-term extension in Winnipeg if the Jets hadn't drafted him and developed him for so many years first?

Tanking is dumb: You can't control it, even if you try

Well, doesn't that just prove my point? Tanking is stupid, because you can't control what happens at the draft table. The New York Islanders had the 10th-best odds of winning last year's lottery, for one, and turned that 3.5 percent shot into Matthew Schaefer.

And Connor is one of the best draft picks in Jets history because he's one of Boston's worst misses. The Bruins passed on Connor three times to choose Jakub Zboril, Jake DeBrusk and Zachary Senyshyn. If Winnipeg's scouts are on their game, they can pull as much talent from a playoff team's first-round pick as from something in the top 10.

Now you're just abusing math. If the Jets are set to pick fifth and someone else wins a 3.5 percent lottery draw, they fall to ... sixth! Their draft pick doesn't just disappear. And Winnipeg has lottery odds of its own. Plus you know that taking players like Connor at No. 17 is the exception, not the rule. Twit.

Hey! This is my section.

Then make better points.

What I'm trying to say here is that, even in a world where Cheveldayoff uses his power to embrace the future, he can't control it. Let's say he goes all in on development, giving big minutes to Brad Lambert, Nikita Chibrikov, Brayden Yager, Danny Zhilkin or your prospect of choice (within the NHL's post-deadline recall limits). Let's say he implores Scott Arniel to sit pending UFA veterans such as Gustav Nyquist up front and Jacob Bryson on defence.

How much does that really improve Winnipeg's odds of losing? This isn't the NBA, none of those veterans are peak LeBron James, and all those roster moves do is embarrass veterans who are still within mathematical reach of the postseason.

Tanking is good: Remember that part about "feelings don't matter"?

Gustav Nyquist is a good teammate and an engaging interview. That doesn't mean he's scored more than 12 goals in his past 125 NHL games. He's a 36-year-old pending UFA, and his emotions shouldn't matter more to the Jets than their odds of a high draft pick.

Now you're the one who's abusing math.

You twit! Who taught you to interject like this?

It's my keyboard, isn't it? If Nyquist is so bad he should sit, doesn't playing a younger player ahead of him actually improve Winnipeg's odds of winning?

Tanking is bad: Seattle, Los Angeles and San Jose don't deserve WC2, either

I'm taking the microphone back. We can criticize the Jets' middling record or warn they're destined for the "mushy middle," but I'm not sure there's a compelling argument that the Sharks, Kings or Kraken are so wildly deserving of a playoff spot.

Macklin Celebrini is a phenom, but Celebrini has a 50-point lead on the Sharks' second-leading scorer. San Jose's time will come, but the Jets have better underlying numbers at five-on-five, a better goal differential and Hellebuyck in net. The Kings have the easiest schedule of the group,

they traded for Artemi Panarin, and Anze Kopitar makes for a wonderful story, but Winnipeg has five more regulation wins and a better goal differential than Los Angeles.

And the Kraken, who currently hold the second wild-card spot? They have the worst record in their last 10 games of the entire group. Meanwhile, the Edmonton Oilers aren't even a sure thing anymore despite their hold on a playoff spot in the Pacific. Their goaltending has been horrendous, and Leon Draisaitl is out for the regular season.

You're saying all this stuff about feelings not mattering, but if a team can't believe in its chances against a field playing so poorly, what's the point of competitive sports at all?

Tanking is good: This whole competition is about who gets to get destroyed by Colorado
You remember that Winnipeg gained its most recent point by losing to the Nashville Predators in a shootout, right? That the Jets have cobbled together their late-season points by beating the 32nd-place Vancouver Canucks twice — and that they needed overtime to do it both times?

Winnipeg could scratch and claw into the playoffs and get all of two home games' worth of revenue. Colorado is so much better and deeper than the Jets that Winnipeg's odds of making it to Game 6 look a little like their odds of winning the draft lottery and picking No. 1.

The Avalanche have an even better record than Winnipeg did when the Jets won the Presidents' Trophy last season. They're a deeper, better team than the one that destroyed the Jets in five games in 2024, and the only team that seems capable of stopping them is the Dallas Stars, who are also better than the team that beat Winnipeg in Round 2 last spring.

Tanking is dumb: Didn't Winnipeg just beat the Avalanche this weekend?
You've seen hockey, right? You know what can happen when a goaltender gets hot or a team gets a few good bounces? You saw the St. Louis Blues take Winnipeg to seven games in the first round last season?

This whole argument seems to come down to: "Is it worth it to try, even when odds are stacked against you?"

There's a reason they play the games. Miracles happen. Teams get hot. If we can't believe in that in a hockey game, what's the point of any of this?

How charmingly nihilistic of you. Getting smoked by Colorado doesn't get you Keaton Verhoeff or any of these prospects. Don't make me call you a twit again.

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https://www.winnipegsun.com/sports/winnipeg_jets/flailing-frantic-finish-awaits-winnipeg-jets-in-playoff-race/article_4f8be007-b59f-4b15-81fb-c2aa19f51f71.html

Flailing, frantic finish awaits Winnipeg Jets in playoff race

By Paul Friesen

Ugly wins, even uglier losses – get used to it, Winnipeg Jets fans.

With the NHL in an absurdly condensed schedule, the “race” for playoff spots is more like a wobble, teams tripping over each other on their way to a flailing and frantic finish.

“It’s not always going to be pretty,” Jets centre Jonathan Toews said after Tuesday’s 4-3 shootout loss to Nashville. “Both teams (weren’t) flying, by any means. It’s a lot of hockey, but the same goes for everybody. So like I said, we know it’s not going to be pretty. We’ve just got to find ways. And we believe that we’ve got the guys to be able to do that.”

A season-long, eight-game home stand under their belts, with the 5-2-1 record that came along with it, the Jets hit the skies for Boston on Wednesday, where on Thursday they start the next phase of their mad climb up the steep staircase of the Western Conference.

With back-to-back weekend games again – Saturday in Pittsburgh at noon, Winnipeg time, in New York at 11 a.m. on Sunday – there’s little time to catch their breath.

Three games in three and a half days, is how head coach Scott Arniel described this next set.

As for the eight games in the rear view, the boss was encouraged to see his team didn’t simply call it a season and throw in their towels.

“This could have went the other way and we could have said we are done,” Arniel said. “This continues to give us hope and something to continue to build off. Now... we have a tough road trip in some tough buildings.”

The point that got away against the Predators moved Nashville two up on Winnipeg. Both teams have 15 games left.

Their target: the second wildcard playoff spot, held by Seattle, four points better than the Jets, going into Wednesday night’s action.

The San Jose Sharks and L.A. Kings are on those steps, too.

Four teams to pass, with 10 of those 15 games on the road. The potential potholes make Winnipeg’s streets look pristine.

“Every game’s playoff mode right now for us,” winger Gabe Vilardi said. “That’s the position we put ourselves in because of our earlier-in-the-season trouble.”

Vilardi could have been referring to a 5-8 November or a December that saw his team go 2-8-4, a doubled-whammy of months that all but sunk this team.

A 5-2-2 March has brought a sliver of hope just in time for spring.

It won’t take much to extinguish it, though.

The Jets’ struggling power play got a much-needed boost on Tuesday, Vilardi scoring his 26th of the season.

Toews ended a 20-game drought, too, providing some much needed depth scoring.

Next up on that list: captain Adam Lowry’s 22 games.

Arniel sees some hope in a recent increase in contributions from players other than Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Vilardi.

“Actually, since the break,” the coach said. “I’ve noticed that we’re getting contributions from everybody, and that’s what we need. We need it by a committee and can’t just rely on the one line.”

He’s actually broken up that one line, taking Vilardi off it.

“Just different roles,” Vilardi said. “Obviously with (Lowry) you’re expected to play in the D-zone with draws. You’re playing against the other team’s top line most of the time, versus playing with Scheif. Obviously more O-zone draws and you’re expected to produce.

“At the end of the day though it doesn’t matter who’s on my line. I have high expectations of myself and I think I can produce five-on-five.”

Five of Boston’s last six games have gone to overtime or a shootout, something the Jets, with a 6-14 record in extra time, should probably try to avoid.

Then again, it doesn’t matter if they let an eastern team get a loser point as much as it does one in their own conference.

At this point, it’s just about the points.

Boston has a full 15 more than the Jets, so far (82 to 67).

Yet they cling precariously to a wildcard spot in the East.

“We’ve proven that it doesn’t matter who our opponent is,” Toews said. “We can find ways to win games, especially when the points are big for both teams.”

This one definitely qualifies.