

## **Winnipeg Free Press**

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/2025/10/17/jets-off-to-hot-start-despite-dropping-season-opener>

### ***Jets off to hot start despite dropping season opener Total team effort with 14 skaters recording at least one point through four games***

By: Ken Wiebe

In its simplest form, Scott Arniel is seeing progress.

And when you consider all of the factors that have gone into a 3-1 start for the Winnipeg Jets — which includes three consecutive victories after dropping the opener 5-4 to the Dallas Stars — it's easy to understand why Arniel would feel that way.

As the Jets get set to welcome the Nashville Predators to Canada Life Centre on Saturday, the Jets are putting together stretches that remind you why they got off to such an amazing start last season.

No, the Jets aren't going to go 8-0-0 to start the campaign and it's going to be difficult to match the 15-1 mark they came out of the gate with, but when the Jets show the commitment to team defence that was on display in Thursday's 5-2 victory over the Philadelphia Flyers, they're still incredibly tough to beat.

Asked for his thoughts on how the Jets responded to dropping the opener, Arniel reiterated his belief that the game with the Stars had an exhibition-type of feel to it.

"That was a pretty loose game," said Arniel. "Maybe it was the hype of the home game, the first game of the season, but we have gotten better and better.

"I don't think we have put together a full 60 minutes, but there are a lot of good things that I like, or I have seen lately."

Arniel isn't the only one recognizing that important strides have been taken.

"The first game we didn't play our game, but we've definitely played better," said Jets centre Mark Scheifele. "It's encouraging. It's still early in the season so we still have a lot to fix. A lot of new faces are still trying to figure it all out. We've just got to keep getting better."

Scheifele is off to a torrid start, as is linemate Kyle Connor.

The offensive production is impossible to ignore, with Scheifele already up to five goals and eight points and Connor producing three goals and seven points through four games.

The dynamic duo has been incredibly dangerous at even strength, with the man advantage and are also taking regular reps on a penalty-killing unit that has erased 16 of 17 opportunities while playing shorthanded.

That 94.4 per cent efficiency has Dean Chynoweth's unit sitting atop the NHL.

Obviously it's a small sample size, but this achievement is not an easy task, especially when you consider the Jets are without two of their most important penalty killers in defenceman Dylan Samberg and captain Adam Lowry.

The only goal the Jets have allowed on the PK came moments after a two-man disadvantage expired in the season opener against the Stars.

Otherwise, the Jets have been perfect, thanks in part to excellent work from goalies Connor Hellebuyck and Eric Comrie, combined with a keen attention to detail for the players sent over the boards.

The Jets have been more aggressive in attacking the pressure points, while doing a good job clearing the zone when they get possession of loose pucks.

"When you have no hesitation, you're just kind of on your toes. You're playing with instincts," said Jets defenceman Luke Schenn. "And you see a lot of the PK's, guys doing a great job of sacrificing, blocking shots. Obviously, goaltending is a huge part of it."

Goaltending is a significant storyline in the early-season success, both for the penalty kill and the overall play.

Although the Jets gave up more Grade-A opportunities than they would have liked during the first three games, Hellebuyck and Comrie have done a great job of standing tall.

For anyone that just looked at the game sheet from the opener and were concerned that Hellebuyck would be ready for some regression after his Hart Trophy season, they weren't paying close enough attention.

Hellebuyck was the reason that game wasn't a one-sided blowout and his strong play allowed the Jets to launch a comeback that ended one goal short.

In the two games since, Hellebuyck has turned aside 45 of the 49 shots he faced and it shouldn't be long before his numbers get back to the levels we're used to seeing from the three-time Vezina Trophy winner.

One of the most impressive things we've seen from the Jets was the stellar play of backup goalie Comrie in Monday's game against the New York Islanders.

Comrie was tested early and made 33 saves in his season debut, which was precisely what Arniel and company wanted to see in a season where they play to increase his workload to help keep Hellebuyck fresh.

While there's no doubt the Jets have been led offensively by the top line, which includes four assists from Gabe Vilardi, the secondary scoring came to the forefront on this road trip as well.

And it needed to, since the Jets pride themselves on their depth and need contributions from the other three lines — and the defence corps — throughout the course of the campaign to compete for another Central Division crown.

Morgan Barron has been a force for the Jets on the fourth line and has been leading the charge here, with three goals and five points so far.

On the two-game road swing, Tanner Pearson, Nino Niederreiter, Vladislav Namestnikov and Logan Stanley recorded their first goals of the campaign and Jonathan Toews, Gustav Nyquist and Cole Koepke chipped in their first assists.

Through four games, 14 skaters on the roster have recorded at least one point, so spreading the wealth is a subject that will continue to be monitored in the seven games to follow before the calendar turns to November.

The Jets are a team that prides itself from getting regular contributions from the defence corps as well, though that is taking a back seat right now.

With the absence of Samberg, the Jets are working to play a sound defensive game and find cohesion with the rotating pairings that have been of necessity — especially after Haydn Fleury left a game against the Los Angeles Kings after taking a shot off the kneecap.

“I’d like to go a bunch of games where it’s consistent with partners, but it just hasn’t been able to happen,” said Arniel. “So, that’s when you lean on your veteran guys to do what they do best.”

When the Jets as a group are doing what they do best, they’ve consistently shown that they’re a legitimate contender and the early signs suggest it’s going to be the case once again as the building blocks are put in place and the foundation of their structure is reinforced.

“The biggest thing with us is just continuing to grow and improve — and I thought we definitely did that in certain areas,” said Connor. “We have some new pieces here that are still learning, and even the old guys, it’s a refresher on how we play. It’s going to take a long time to build that identity and it’s just like part of any team. You’ve got to build that every single year.”

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/2025/10/17/plenty-of-pinch-me-moments-for-wiesblatt>

***Plenty of ‘pinch me’ moments for Wiesblatt  
Nashville forward made emotional season debut Tuesday***

By: Mike McIntyre and Ken Wiebe

You may have a hard time rooting for the Nashville Predators — we’re looking at you, Winnipeg Jets fans — but how can you not cheer for Ozzy Wiesblatt?

His story is something else — a tale of triumph and tragedy.

It begins in Calgary, where his mother, Kim White, raised five children on her own while working multiple jobs to support their athletic pursuits. Every one of them played multiple sports. There were no silver spoons in this family.

“She gave up everything,” Wiesblatt said Friday following the Predators’ practice at Canada Life Centre as they prepared to face the Jets tonight.

“She did everything she could to let us follow our dreams. We are all so grateful for that and truly appreciate it.”

White's sacrifices are even more remarkable considering she is deaf, a challenge that only added to the struggle of everyday life. American Sign Language became the primary way Ozzy and his siblings — brothers Ocean, Orca and Oasiz, and sister Oceania — communicated with her.

"We all see how hard Mom has worked and we don't want to put it to waste," said Wiesblatt. "A lot of tough days and things like that."

When the San Jose Sharks selected him 31st overall in the 2020 NHL draft, they announced the pick in ASL to honour the feisty forward and his family.

After spending his first three years grinding it out in the minors, Wiesblatt finally got the call he'd been hoping for last January from the Predators, who had traded for him the previous summer. Fittingly, he introduced himself to fans prior to his NHL debut using ASL.

"I'm used to just being a regular kid. But you get to the NHL and now people look up to you. It's a bit weird in a sense, but it's also really cool," said Wiesblatt, who played four seasons in the Western Hockey League with the Prince Albert Raiders prior to turning pro in 2022.

"Now I'm seeing kids who can relate to our story, can relate to our upbringing. I will do my best to be the best role model I can."

Wiesblatt, 23, recorded his first NHL assist in his fourth game against Seattle, appearing in one more contest before heading back to the AHL. More determined than ever to return, he trained hard this past summer and made the Predators out of a training camp that was filled with a flood of extreme emotions.

His youngest brother, Oasiz, signed an AHL deal with Nashville's affiliate in Milwaukee and was invited to Predators' camp. The 21-year-old had gone undrafted after five years in the WHL with the Medicine Hat Tigers.

"Just super cool. I see the work he's put in, so to get an opportunity to play in a pre-season game was really special," said Wiesblatt. "It's small steps, and the first of many for him. I know he's going to be working his butt off."

What seemed like a dream scenario turned into a nightmare, however, when news came that their brother, Orca, died following a single-vehicle crash in British Columbia last month. The 25-year-old lost control and struck a light standard.

Orca had a connection to Manitoba, having helped the Portage Terriers of the MJHL capture the Turnbull Cup in 2019 alongside brother Ocean, who now plays in the Federal Prospects Hockey League. Orca also spent parts of four seasons with the Calgary Hitmen of the WHL and was slated to play in the ECHL this season.

"It's all been very surreal. I just try to compete as hard as I can every night, try to do the best I can to help this team get wins."

"It's tough. Still is tough. You go through everything as brothers and my brothers are my best friends," said Wiesblatt.

"I can't thank the Predators enough, all the way from the top to the guys in the locker room, for the unbelievable support. They've done everything they can to help me and be there for me."

To that extent, there are still plenty of "pinch me" moments as he looks around the Nashville locker room, now sharing space with the likes of future Hall of Famers Steven Stamkos and Roman Josi.

After being a healthy scratch for the first three games, Wiesblatt made his season debut in Toronto on Tuesday and recorded a pair of assists.

"It's all been very surreal. I just try to compete as hard as I can every night, try to do the best I can to help this team get wins," said Wiesblatt, who is currently skating on the fourth line along with Cole Smith and Michael McCarron.

"It's just one day at a time with me. I'm really just trying to enjoy this. You know, it's an honour to be in the NHL. Every kid's dream."

## *AROUND THE GLASS*

### *Sibling rivalry*

Plenty of folks might be surprised by the sizzling start from Jets centre Morgan Barron, who has three goals and two assists through his first four games.

His younger brother, Justin, is not one of them.

"I see all the work he puts in during the summer and he really wants to take his game to the next level," the 23-year-old Predators defenceman said Friday.

"Nice to see him to get rewarded on the scoresheet. He's looked good, he's looked confident. That's nice to see. Hopefully he'll cool off a bit (tonight) and then he can get hot again after that."

Indeed, Justin will be trying to keep Morgan in check as the brothers face each other with their parents — who flew in Friday from their home in Nova Scotia — in the stands.

"The first time we played each other was really cool. Now it's starting to feel a bit more normal, especially now that we're in the same division. But it's always special," said Justin, who began his career with the Colorado Avalanche, played parts of four seasons in Montreal and is now in his second year with Nashville.

"He's definitely got the size and weight advantage over me. I just have to try to keep my feet moving and try to stay in front of him."

### *Growing pains*

The Carolina Hurricanes have scored 19 goals in their first four games — all victories — yet their prized free-agent signing, former Jets forward Nikolaj Ehlers, is still searching for his first point.

What gives?

It's likely just a matter of time before the dam breaks for the dashing Dane who signed a six-year, US\$51-million deal with Carolina in the off-season.

There's no shortage of positive signs. Ehlers has already fired 13 shots on goal — third most on the team — and he's been on the ice for six of Carolina's goals. He's averaging 16:50 of ice time per game, which is more than a minute higher than his average last season in Winnipeg.

Translation: The guy called "Fly" may soon be ready to take off.

#### *Old friends*

There's been no adjustment period for Mason Appleton in the Motor City.

After signing a two-year, US\$5.8-million deal with the Detroit Red Wings, Appleton has already chipped in three goals in his first four games — including a highlight-reel game-winner against the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Appleton is no stranger to quick starts, but he's been incredibly precise so far, converting three of his seven shots on goal for a shooting percentage of 42.9 that will be impossible to maintain but is impressive nonetheless.

Detroit makes its lone visit to Winnipeg on Jan. 24.

Brandon Tanev, meanwhile, has yet to register a point in his first four games with Utah. The energy winger, who signed a three-year, US\$7.5-million deal makes his return to Winnipeg on Oct. 26 when the Mammoth visit the Jets.

#### *Local flavour*

Although it's taking Ehlers some time to get going offensively, teammate and proud Winnipegger Seth Jarvis has picked up where he left off last season.

Jarvis, who knows he needs a strong start to ensure his inclusion on the Canadian Olympic team, already has five goals and seven points through four games with the Hurricanes. He's been a high-volume shooter with 16 shots on goal and could threaten his career-high for goals (33), which was set during the 2023-24 campaign.

Jarvis isn't the lone Manitoban that is off to a blazing start offensively, as Winnipegger and Vegas Golden Knights captain Mark Stone has accumulated nine assists through five games and currently sits second in NHL scoring.

Five of those nine helpers have come on the power play — where the Golden Knights are clicking at 28.6 per cent to sit fourth in the NHL — one was shorthanded and the three assists have come at even strength.

The only guy with more points than Stone is frequent linemate Jack Eichel, whose five goals and 11 points have paced the offensive attack. Much like Jets left-winger Kyle Connor, Eichel is thrilled to have the negotiation behind him and an eight-year contract extension that kicks in next season, carries an AAV of US\$13.5 million and takes him through 2034.

## **Sportsnet.ca**

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/players-share-love-for-toews-as-he-makes-nhl-return-with-hometown-jets/>

### ***Players share love for Toews as he makes NHL return with hometown Jets (VIDEO)***

Watch as players around the NHL share some love for Jonathan Toews, who makes his long-anticipated return to the ice with his hometown Winnipeg Jets.

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/why-scheifele-should-be-a-no-brainer-to-make-canadas-olympic-roster/>

### ***Why Scheifele should be a no-brainer to make Canada's Olympic roster (VIDEO)***

Real Kyper and Bourne discussion on why Mark Scheifele is a perfect fit as a guy that wasn't on Canada's 4-Nations team that is "very likely" to make the 2026 Olympic roster.

## **The Athletic**

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6712128/2025/10/18/5-way-too-early-winnipeg-jets-trends-and-what-they-actually-mean/>

### ***Five way-too-early Winnipeg Jets trends and what they actually mean***

By Murat Ates

The Winnipeg Jets were at risk of becoming a one-line team. Now they're a threat to recreate the red-hot start that saw last year's team finish atop the NHL standings.

Is any of it real?

Digging through early-season trends can be tricky. Some small sample events can't be counted on to repeat themselves, like Connor Hellebuyck's early-season .895 save percentage or Morgan Barron's game-winning bank shot off of Noah Cates' back. Other small samples go on to predict the future, like Winnipeg's power play success early last season or — maybe — Barron's excellent overall play to start this season.

Today, we look at five of Winnipeg's most striking early-season trends. Which trends should we look at as signs of the future? And where should we pump the brakes?

Here are five way-too-early Jets trends and what they could mean.

#### ***1. Morgan Barron is on an absolute heater***

The last time Barron was a point-per-game player, he was an AHL rookie playing in the New York Rangers' system after a three-year college career at Cornell. He's a quarter of the way to his career high in points (21) and has already given the Jets two highlight reel goals and a highly endearing argument with Parker Ford ("You scored it!" "No, you scored it!") about the third.

Can it last?

That depends on what your definition of it is. Forget about Barron's point-per-game pace. There's no world in which Barron keeps scoring on 60 percent of his shots, no matter how much confidence he's playing with right now. His shorthanded breakaway may have been a thing of beauty (and he may score more of them before season's end) but Barron's current pace is unsustainable.

Without a change in role, it is more likely that Barron scores at his typical 20-point-per-82-game pace for the rest of the season than it is he keeps scoring like he is right now. Barron is playing 8:37 per game at five-on-five — the fewest minutes of his Jets career. He may be playing excellent two-way hockey, but Barron is shooting less frequently in those limited minutes than he has at any point in his career.

Put aside the point projections and Barron's start gets more exciting. He's having a strong impact on puck possession. He's playing strong defensive hockey, implying that the Jets could trust him in a bigger role if they want more size and speed up the middle on their shutdown line. (Barron's 42.5 percent faceoff win rate might stop him from getting that opportunity, but Vladislav Namestnikov's 26.9 percent is even worse.)

Maybe Scott Arniel keeps his lines as they are. Maybe what we see is what we get until Adam Lowry takes his old job back. But Barron looks worthy of a longer look.

Verdict: Believe in the player, pump the brakes on the points.

## *2. The Jets "power kill" is No. 1 in the NHL*

The Jets' penalty kill ranked 13th in the league last season. It struggled in the playoffs. Now the Jets' 94.4 percent PK is the most effective unit in the league and the only one in the NHL that has actually managed to outscore the power plays it lines up against.

What's happening?

Winnipeg's success is not about what it's doing in the faceoff circle. The Jets' 37.5 percent faceoff win rate while shorthanded is 24th best in the league. It's not about keeping teams out of their end: Winnipeg has spent the fourth-highest percentage of its shorthanded time in its own zone, according to NHL Edge. The Jets have also given up the 10th-most shot attempts and eighth-most shots on goal per minute of PK time.

Maybe they're keeping teams at a distance? Not quite, according to Hockey Viz.

From this analytical perspective, Winnipeg's league-leading penalty kill is the result of superlative goaltending. Hellebuyck and Eric Comrie have given the Jets the second-best shorthanded save percentage in the league.

The Jets have been brilliant in one facet of their PK, though — they've turned it into a "power kill." No team has turned shorthanded defence into offence more effectively than the Jets have so far this season. They're turning turnovers into goals, outscoring power plays 2-1 thanks to Kyle Connor's and Barron's rush goals, finding energy to push up ice when other teams are getting tired.

No team has managed to finish a full season anywhere close to Winnipeg's .968 shorthanded save percentage. Give it time and the extra shots the Jets give up while spending extra time in



their own zone will turn into goals. The exciting thing is the green light they've been given to push up ice and the goals they've scored because of it.

Verdict: It's way too soon to trust this.

### *3. Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor are brilliant; Gabriel Vilardi is improving*

Mark Scheifele and Connor scored Winnipeg's first five goals this season — 100 percent of the team's even-strength offence through two games. Connor's Game 1 hat trick and both players' continued tears put Winnipeg's best offensive players on pace to set new personal bests.

Gabriel Vilardi hasn't been on the finishing end of as many plays as Scheifele and Connor have been but he's winning pucks that turn into Jets goals.

It's also noteworthy that Vilardi's top recorded speed — a 21.3 mile per hour first period rush against the Kings last week — is the fastest mark he's hit in a Jets uniform. He's not as fast or as shifty as his linemates but Vilardi is skating well in open ice to start the season.

Connor, Scheifele, and Vilardi are outscoring their possession numbers to start the year. There have been some long defensive zone shifts and the Jets' top line has earned only 30 percent of expected goals at five-on-five, according to Evolving Hockey.

We've also seen Scheifele and Connor connect on such a high rate of passes into dangerous space (as tracked by StatHletes) for so many seasons that their superlative offence is bankable. It's clear to the eyes that they're still capable of elite performance; they've been Winnipeg's top players to start the season.

Verdict: It's not a defensive lock but Winnipeg's top line is on its way to something special

### *4. Connor Hellebuyck is a sub-.900 goaltender*

Scour the record books. Dig through his college and junior numbers. You can find some miserable playoff runs but you won't find a regular-season save percentage from Hellebuyck as low as the .895 he's sporting to start the season.

Do I like how far out of his net Hellebuyck was (after getting hit in the mask by a shot) on Mikko Rantanen's season-opening goal? No, but the breakdown beforehand was problematic, with Haydn Fleury losing his stick and his impact along with it. Josh Morrissey lost his stick later that same game, leading in part to a goal against, while Tyler Seguin scored a highlight reel goal after Matt Duchene spun away from Fleury on a Stars rush.

Both of Philadelphia's goals on Thursday were rush goals, too, including this snipe by Owen Tippett.

It may be that the Jets continue to give up Grade A scoring chances off the rush and Hellebuyck's career-high .925 save percentage from last season falls off a cliff this year. The Jets' defence corps is exposed right now with Dylan Samberg hurt and one of Fleury or Logan Stanley partnered with Neal Pionk on a makeshift second pairing. While it's important to note that offence and defence include contributions from forwards, too, it seems sensible to connect Winnipeg's depleted D-corps to its middling expected goals numbers to start the season.

In a large sample size, Winnipeg's three-time Vezina Trophy winner is as dependable as any goaltender on the planet. His workload has been more difficult to start the year — and Winnipeg may not ultimately defend as well this season as it has for the past two.

Still, Hellebuyck's poor early-season save percentage is on its way up. There's too much track record to bet against him.

Verdict: Forget about it

*5. The defence is troubling, outside of Josh Morrissey*

Logan Stanley has been a lot of fun to watch this season. He's scored his annual goal, leveled Alex Turcotte and Trevor Zegras with well-timed hits, and made three critical blocks as the Jets held on to their 3-2 win against Los Angeles last week.

He and Pionk have been outshot 14-6 in 32 minutes of five-on-five hockey. Fleury and Pionk have been outshot 11-3 playing in the same role, the same count by which Stanley and Luke Schenn have been outshot while playing on the third pair.

This is a problem that will lead to more goals against if it's left unchecked — and its solution is hard to find. Winnipeg believes in its top pair of Josh Morrissey and Dylan DeMelo. It has reason to: Despite DeMelo's struggles last season, the duo won its minutes 51-36 while playing against other teams' best lines. Pionk is a fixture on the team's second pair but has only tended to excel in that role with Samberg as his partner.

Fleury and Stanley are not ideally suited for the top competition that they face with Pionk as a partner and, despite their best efforts, those troubling shot numbers will turn into goals against. Winnipeg needs Samberg back and then it needs to identify which of its two remaining D make the best combination on the third pair.

It may also need to find an upgrade on the trade market before the season's end.

Verdict: Don't underestimate the importance of Dylan Samberg to the Winnipeg Jets