

## **Winnipeg Free Press**

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/01/26/its-a-grind-right-now-and-every-point-matters>

### ***'It's a grind right now, and every point matters'***

#### ***Margin for error razor thin for struggling Jets***

By: Ken Wiebe

NEWARK, N.J. — Scott Arniel was in no mood to back track, nor was the head coach of the Winnipeg Jets interested in diving into any doom-and-gloom scenarios that are being bandied about.

As Arniel met with reporters before the team departed for a four-game road trip that begins on Tuesday against the New Jersey Devils, he fielded several queries about his rather direct post-game commentary that lasted roughly 68 seconds after Saturday's 5-1 loss to the Detroit Red Wings.

The Coles Notes version was that the Jets weren't good enough and that was apparent in both the tone of the delivery and the look of disappointment on his face when he stood at the podium on Saturday.

"The stuff we did against other teams, that nose-to-nose compete, execution, just the details of our game was the opposite. It was like we were looking for a real easy game against Detroit, and Detroit's one of the top teams in the East," Arniel told reporters on Monday.

"They don't play the same style as maybe Florida does. But, at the end of the day, that wasn't good enough. And that was pretty much the message. The message after the game was the message this morning. They understood it."

Arniel didn't leave a whole lot of room for interpretation in either meeting with the media.

But when pressed about the differences in the low-event victory over the St. Louis Blues and the similar shootout loss to the Florida Panthers, Arniel was quick to find several that contributed to his high level of disappointment when comparing the effort on Saturday.

"We didn't hit a soul. We were circling," said Arniel. "If we had odd-man rushes or opportunities, we were taking the long way around to the net. Playing on the outside and playing on the perimeter, there (were) a lot of things. And maybe I'm more critical as I look at it. In those other games you mentioned, the Florida game we got inside, St. Louis we got there, we won our battles. And that's a big thing for me. It's those net-front battles."

"Really, it's the willingness to do those hard things."

"We didn't hit a soul. We were circling."

The clock isn't about to strike midnight for the Jets, but the margin for error is razor thin.

That's part of the reason Arniel's asking his team to stand at attention and dig into the details. Without a determined effort, this will be a lost season and one that's filled with regret.

"That was more the message, that we can't take any nights off. Shifts off, nights off — we're not in that luxury," said Arniel, noting that he delivered the message to his players before venting during Saturday's post-game address to the media. "We're not sitting 20 points ahead of the next playoff team. It's a grind right now, and every point matters."

With 31 games left in the regular season, the Jets went into Monday's action eight points behind the San Jose Sharks (who hold a game in hand) and they've got six teams to leapfrog in order to sneak into the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Given the magnitude of the challenge, it was natural for Arniel to be asked if there was some added urgency attached to the five-game block leading into the Olympic break that includes a home game against the Montreal Canadiens on Feb. 4.

"We've got to keep pushing, that's our job, that's our responsibility."

But Arniel can't worry about the macro, he's hyper focused on the day-to-day and he's been around long enough that he can only coach the players available to him, whether that's before the NHL trade deadline or after.

"Yeah, that's not my department. I'm looking at us obviously needing wins. The thing about it, (what) is so crazy, is that we play five games before the break and we won't play again until almost March," said Arniel, whose team meets the Vancouver Canucks on Feb. 25 and will play five games coming out of the Olympic break before the arrival of the NHL trade deadline on Mar. 6.

"It's crazy. But then March is extremely crazy, in the sense of the schedule and how many games we got to play. You know what, this isn't over until there's some kind of mark beside our team that says we're out. We've got to keep pushing, that's our job, that's our responsibility."

It's a responsibility the Jets are taking seriously, as they realize the status quo hasn't been good enough and, if that doesn't change, more moves will be made.

Might Arniel's pointed message provide some additional motivation as the road trip gets going?

"Sure," Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck told reporters. "Honestly, I think we're just focused on playing our game, playing Jets hockey, making sure our confidence is there, and feeling good."

Asking Hellebuyck if he's feeling good about his game is akin to checking if the sky is blue, so it surprised no one that he's encouraged by his recent outings.

"Very confident with the way I've been playing, and I've been making some good tweaks," said Hellebuyck. "And just like typical season stuff, just building the game, (to) make it stronger as the season goes along, and learning from the little mistakes."

"For the most part, I feel like I've seen the puck really well."

Hellebuyck is someone who values the process, but the lack of success for both the team and himself since coming back from arthroscopic knee surgery provides some challenges to sort through.

"I think I came right back in and got my game right to where it was where I left off, and we continue to build it," said Hellebuyck.

"... the thing with hockey, it's a team game. We do it all together. We get out of the streak together."

"That being said, I came in and we hit on a huge losing streak. So that's not great for the mentals, and everyone's going to look worse when you're on a losing streak. But the thing with hockey, it's a team game. We do it all together. We get out of the streak together. When we build winning streaks together, and no one man is going to steal the show. Once the team starts succeeding, then those individuals will start succeeding."

Hellebuyck understands that his numbers have dropped considerably since winning his third Vezina Trophy and first Hart Trophy last season, but he believes that's only part of the equation.

"I know it's easy just to say you've got to stop more and then you win more games, but you know that's not necessarily the case," said Hellebuyck, who is 12-14-6 with a 2.69 goals-against average and .902 save percentage in 32 games this season.

"Sometimes, overtime kills your stats. And little moments in a game where your team ends up losing, while you give up an extra goal, comparative to the league. So, I've got to put the stats behind me and just make every save that I possibly can and make sure I'm not making any big mistakes and costing us games."

#### *D-MEN STILL DOWN:*

Asked for an injury update, Arniel said it was unlikely that none of defencemen Neal Pionk (lower body), Colin Miller (knee) or Haydn Fleury (nose, back) would return to game action before the Olympic break. That's part of the reason, blue-liner Isaak Phillips was recalled from the Manitoba Moose of the American Hockey League. Phillips appeared in two games for the Jets last week before suiting up in a pair of games with the Moose on the weekend.

<https://www.nhl.com/news/detroit-red-wings-winnipeg-jets-game-recap-january-24-2026>

#### ***Jets mailbag: wild card talk, trade interest and breaking up the dream team***

By: Mike McIntyre and Ken Wiebe

What the heck is going on with the Winnipeg Jets?

The questions were flying in fast and furious this month — emphasis on the furious part — as Free Press hockey writers Mike McIntyre and Ken Wiebe opened up the monthly mailbag.

Group therapy is now in session.

*1. Assuming the Jets can somehow get into a position to be wildcard competitor, I would think the odds of them getting out of the first round would be stacked heavily against them. In other words, do you think Kevin Cheveldayoff should be an aggressive seller and start a rebuild for the future. Standing pat is the same as doing nothing (something he has become quite adept at), and being a buyer at this stage is just a waste of whatever assets he has left. SHELDON*

MCINTYRE: Sell! Sell! Sell!

The website Money Puck currently gives Winnipeg about five per cent odds to make the dance. Honestly, that seems too high to me. I say they are toast.

It's not just the eight point deficit currently staring them in the face, but the fact there are two other non-playoff teams right now that are also eight points ahead of them.

A team likely needs at LEAST 90 points to sneak into the second wild-card spot this season, which would actually be considerably lower than previous years. If that's the case, Winnipeg will need 43 points in its final 31 games. That would mean a record of like 21-9-1.

I just don't see it happening.

Being any type of buyer right now would be negligent, and standing pat wouldn't be a wise example of asset management. The best course of action is to see what any and all of your eight pending unrestricted free agents might fetch on the market and judge accordingly, especially if you are not planning on bringing them back.

In my eyes, defenceman Logan Stanley and Luke Schenn, centre Jonathan Toews, wingers Tanner Pearson and Cole Koepke and backup goaltender Eric Comrie should all drum up interest.

Even if the return is draft capital, this is the time to pounce. Winnipeg has traded plenty of picks away in recent years, so this is a chance to replenish that pool. Plus, it would open up some spots down the final stretch for younger players on the Manitoba Moose to get a chance to show their stuff.

*“Even if the return is draft capital, this is the time to pounce”*

To be clear, this will not be a rebuild. As long as the core remains in place, the Jets will always view themselves as contenders. But this is a chance to reset and ultimately retool and reload.

## *2. Is it time for a coaching change? JOE*

WIEBE: Although it's true that all coaches have a shelf life, making a move behind the bench isn't the way the Jets should go here.

Did Scott Arniel suddenly forget how to coach less than 12 months after leading the Jets to the best record in franchise history? Of course not. The coaching staff certainly takes its share of the responsibility for the dramatic drop off, but the plan set out has proven to be a winning plan.

It helped the Jets advance past the first round for the first time since 2021. And it allowed them to push the Dallas Stars to double overtime in Game 6 of the second round. That wasn't the end goal, nobody is arguing there.

The biggest change this season is with personnel. The Jets aren't playing nearly as fast as they did last season, they're not defending as well and their special teams haven't been as good. Goals against are up and goals scored are down. That's not a winning formula.

Arniel should have brokered some goodwill during the previous three seasons behind the bench (the first two as an associate coach on Rick Bowness' staff). This core group is on its fourth head coach already, including interim bench boss Dave Lowry.

One of those coaches left and eventually came back to win consecutive Stanley Cup titles, another temporarily retired but is back behind the bench of the Columbus Blue Jackets and he's been getting positive results since taking over.

So, it's simply my opinion that a coaching change wouldn't magically turn the Jets into a playoff team immediately. It says here that Arniel deserves some additional runway as it pertains to his future with the organization.

*3. Does this organization need a President of Hockey Ops as a buffer between ownership & GM? CHUCK*

MCINTYRE: It's a great question, one I've previously wondered about myself.

The Jets have one of the smaller front offices in the NHL, and it is filled with people who have been here seemingly forever. Loyalty runs deep in the organization, which can be a very good thing. But it also can create some blind spots, in my opinion.

Bringing in an outside voice with a fresh set of eyes wouldn't be the worst idea, but I honestly just don't see it happening any time soon. Doing so would require a big change in philosophy from ownership.

Mark Chipman and Kevin Cheveldayoff clearly have a deep bond and strong relationship — Chipman has previously joked that Cheveldayoff will outlast him — which tells me they feel all their bases are covered.

"Chipman has previously joked that Cheveldayoff will outlast him."

Yet I go back to when Cheveldayoff was initially in the interview stage following the departure of head coach Paul Maurice (and the decision not to bring back interim bench boss Dave Lowry), and the GM spoke openly about how refreshing and rewarding it was to pick the brains of all these external candidates to hear what they thought of the Jets.

Rick Bowness was ultimately brought in and clearly ushered some long overdue changes. To me, the organization could use more of that, not less.

*4. Do you think the Jets will actually end up with a decent draft pick spot? Or will they win enough to mess it up and end up with a mushy middle spot? RIYANA*

WIEBE: The crystal ball is a bit cloudy when it comes to this answer and it will depend on which version of the Jets shows up for the final 30 games.

If they have another couple of runs like the 5-1-2 stretch that preceded the 5-1 loss to the Detroit Red Wings, the mushy middle is certainly a possibility. But the Jets also face one of the more difficult schedules down the stretch, so it's possible that their winning percentage is closer to the .500 mark that they're currently below.

The interesting part of the playoff chase in the Western Conference is that some of the teams ahead of the Jets haven't been in the post-season for a significant stretch of time, so how are those teams going to react when the intensity is cranked up? Although the Jets can't worry about anything other than trying to pick off those teams ahead of them, how teams like the San

Jose Sharks, Los Angeles Kings, Seattle Kraken, Nashville Predators, Chicago Blackhawks and Calgary Flames play will also play a significant role in where the Jets ultimately finish in the standings.

Barring a couple of lengthy winning streaks, it seems more likely the Jets will have a Top-10 pick in the 2026 NHL draft. A Top-3 to 5 pick is something the Jets would probably benefit from in the long run but it would take a lot of losing in the second half for that to become a reality — unless the Jets take a big jump in the NHL Draft Lottery.

*5. Do you believe there will be any trade interest for Nino Niederreiter, Vlad Namestnikov and/or Gustav Nyquist? MARK*

MCINTYRE: While Niederreiter and Namestnikov have struggled through large stretches this season — Niederreiter has 18 points (7 goals, 11 assists) and Namestnikov has only 12 points (7G, 5A) — I believe there could be some value in the pair of 33-year-old skaters, who are both signed for one more season.

Niederreiter, who recently played his 1,000th game and will be representing Switzerland at the Olympics, is making US\$4 million. Namestnikov is paid US\$3 million. They have been good soldiers for this organization, signing extensions following their initial acquisition at the 2023 trade deadline, but perhaps a fresh start would be prudent for all parties.

The price would have to be right for Cheveldayoff to pull the trigger, but in a seller's market and given the current state of his squad, it should at least be considered.

As for Nyquist....

Thirty-two games. Zero goals. Just eight assists. It's been a nightmare season for the 36-year-old, who signed a one-year, US\$3.25 million contract with the Jets in the hopes he'd help provide some secondary scoring after the departure of Nikolaj Ehlers in free agency.

At this point, I can't imagine there's any type of market for him.

*6. Does Mark Chipman truly believe fans wouldn't tolerate a rebuild or does he not want to and he's justifying it? @mennoknight427*

WIEBE: The governor and co-owner of the Jets made it crystal clear when signing Connor Hellebuyck and Mark Scheifele to matching seven-year contract extensions on October of 2023 that the organization was committed to winning and he hasn't changed his mind on that front.

There is also evidence in the Manitoba market and around the league that a full-blown rebuild has substantial consequences when it comes to attendance and other revenue generators. A scorched earth rebuild also doesn't align with the commitments made — and likely coming — from a core group of players ranging from 29 to 33 years old.

The results from this season don't align with a win-now franchise, but the strong individual performances from the core players — including defenceman Josh Morrissey — suggests that with a few moves and potentially a high draft pick, the Jets shouldn't be entering an extended period of lean years.

A full-on rebuild, like the one you are suggesting, would have to mean moving on from the majority of the core group — and would also make re-signing guys like Morrissey and Dylan Samberg far more difficult.

To me, it's not about Chipman not wanting to and justifying it. Rebuilds take an extended period of time and don't guarantee of success. They require plenty of good fortune and an abundance of patience.

Do I think the Jets and the fan base would benefit from a highly skilled teenager to bolster the lineup like in 2016 when Patrik Laine burst onto the scene after he was the second overall pick? Absolutely. But the Jets were in a much different place as an organization to make that pivot after making the playoffs in 2015 than they are today when it comes to roster construction.

“It’s impossible not to see an impact at the gate.”

As for the first part of your question about fans tolerating a rebuild, seeing crowds shrink in places like San Jose and Chicago that were full for a long time showed that it’s impossible not to see an impact at the gate. Those cities are rebounding, but still have a long way to go to get back to their glory days.

*7. The Jets have had success jamming/screening the front of the net. They go away from that lousy results. Why stop? TIM*

MCINTYRE: I suspect, Tim, you've hit on one of the many things keeping head coach Scott Arniel tossing and turning at night and likely driving the entire coaching staff mad when they do video review with players.

Far too often, the Jets have gotten away from the hard-nosed style of play you need to compete at this level. And just when you think they've perhaps turned the corner and figured it out, they go and take two steps back.

Net-front traffic and scoring the so-called greasy goals was a staple during that recent four-game winning streak, when the team lit the lamp 20 times. And yet, it's pretty much vanished again during this latest stretch of just one win in five games and goals have once again become painfully difficult.

I'll say this: It looks easy to us — just go to the net, right? — but obviously it's not that simple or else everybody would do it and have success. Niederreiter recently spoke about how it's more mental than physical, especially when things start going downhill and a team is fragile and lacking confidence.

The old saying, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink” seems apt here. At some point, you have to wonder if the Jets just don't have enough players willing to pay the proverbial price.

*8. I see the debates about Logan Stanley. To me it shouldn't even be a debate. Stanley is a unicorn. You sign Stanley all day long. You ever hear the song with the lyrics ‘You don't know what you got till it's gone’ (Ehlers! Marner!)? That's what I think about Stanley. You won't find another Stanley. Anyone you get for Stanley, you will have to spend time developing. What's the point in that unless you're gonna rebuild? NISH*

WIEBE: Don't get caught in the weeds in the spirit of this debate. This has less to do about a desire to keep Stanley than it does with what the details of the next contract are going to look like.

After trading up to 18th overall to choose Stanley in the 2016 NHL draft, the Jets have invested a decade in his development, that much is true. But this isn't about sunk cost fallacy either, it's about trying to figure out if this season is going to be close to the new normal or if there's further room for growth.

By recently playing the off side and managing ice time north of 20 minutes per game, Stanley showed added value for someone who is usually viewed as being a third-pairing guy. He's also taking some spins on the second power-play unit with Neal Pionk sidelined.

Stanley's recent comments about his situation caught my attention. He showed great awareness, recognizing the growth in his game, but also being comfortable pointing out there were areas that require further attention.

As someone turning 28 in May, Stanley will be looking to cash in during his first shot at unrestricted free agency and he's earned a raise from the US\$1.25 million he earned the past two seasons. But if the Jets and Stanley can't find common ground on an extension, the organization would need to pivot to try and bring back an asset for him.

That wouldn't signal a rebuild, it would be an example of strong asset management. But they would also be missing some valuable elements Stanley provides to the lineup that are difficult to replace.

*9. The Jets are supposed to be a draft and develop franchise. Did they make a mistake drafting Cole Perfetti at #10 in 2020 when Seth Jarvis, Yaroslav Askarov and Anton Lundell were available? Did they make a mistake(s) in how they've developed Lambert? JOHN*

MCINTYRE: What's that old saying about hindsight?

It's a fun, but ultimately futile exercise to go back in time, pick any random draft and wonder what could have been. And it would be fascinating to find out how close the organization was to going in a different direction.

At the time Perfetti was picked, the Jets celebrated the fact he was still on the board. Askarov, who went with the very next pick to Nashville, was never an option. The Jets weren't about to use such a high pick on a goaltender given they already had, and still have, their franchise man. But Lundell and Jarvis going immediately after is cause for some debate.

Lundell already has two Stanley Cup rings and has grown into his role with Florida.

The Jarvis one really stings, given that he's a hometown kid and someone with a huge personality that would have fit in seamlessly around here. He's off to a tremendous start in his career with Carolina, having made the Canadian team for the 4 Nations and coming close to cracking the Olympic roster.

Perfetti sure looked like he had come into his own last season, and he'll always be remembered for the "Manitoba Miracle" goal. But there's no question his high ankle sprain really derailed this campaign.

"But there's no question his high ankle sprain really derailed this campaign."  
I'm not ready to give up on him just yet, although it's interesting to see his name now come up in some trade talks.

As for Lambert, he was always a bit of a wildcard. His stock had fallen in his draft year, with concerns about his eventual development, but the Jets opted to roll the dice on what they felt was a potentially high ceiling.

We have yet to see anything close to that, although maybe scoring a late-game winner on Sunday for the Manitoba Moose against the American Hockey League's top team — just his fifth goal of the season — will get him in gear for the rest of this year.

#### *10. Is Logan Stanley's shooting percentage sustainable? GARRET*

WIEBE: Stanley's career arc to this point would suggest that maintaining a career-high shooting percentage that has the towering defenceman on the verge of double digits in goals would be very difficult to sustain.

Going from five seasons of one goal to eight (and counting) is a meteoric rise. So, your skepticism is warranted. But, when you consider the volume of shots Stanley has been able to generate this season, there is certainly reason to believe that he won't automatically revert to one goal per season, even if this campaign goes down as an outlier.

He's got a big shot, he's shown an ability to get it through and he's jumping into the rush more often. So, rather than deal with the extremes, I would suggest there's been enough growth in Stanley's offensive game to predict he would be able to settle in as a five to seven goal scorer that occasionally threatens to hit double digits during the course of his next contract.

#### *11. How about you both tell us readers your "fantasy team lineup" for the Jets. And you have to split up 81 & 55. All lines and defence please from the current roster as of today. WARREN*

WIEBE: First of all, Warren, how can it be my fantasy lineup if you're the one setting out the ground rules? I personally don't think Scheifele and Connor need to be split up. The concept of driving their own lines is something the Jets may consider exploring at some point (maybe even later this season) — the trio with Gabe Vilardi was one of the most effective top lines in the entire NHL last season — so, to me, that's something worth keeping intact.

Unlike some folks, I think they're better together than apart. But for the sake of the exercise, I will give your idea a try.

I've mentioned before that trying Cole Perfetti with Scheifele together is something to test out as well, whether that's with Vilardi or Connor. For the time being, putting Perfetti with Connor would reunite the duo that enjoyed some success together when Pierre-Luc Dubois was playing centre on that line. Based on what Danny Zhilkin did in a small sample size, I'd give him strong consideration for a spot among the 18 skaters as well.

Given where the Jets are in the standings, it's natural to believe there will be trades coming, which will also change the dynamics. It's also worth mentioning that looking for an optimal lineup is problematic because of injuries teams are dealing with when preparing for Game 52

and beyond. Based on the current players available (not including Neal Pionk, Haydn Fleury, Colin Miller), this is my projected lineup for a winner-take-all game:

**FORWARDS:**

Morgan Barron-Mark Scheifele-Gabe Vilardi  
Kyle Connor-Jonathan Toews-Cole Perfetti  
Cole Koepke-Adam Lowry-Alex Lafallo  
Nino Niederreiter-Vladislav Namestnikov-Tanner Pearson

**DEFENCE:**

Josh Morrissey-Elias Salomonsson  
Dylan Samberg-Dylan DeMelo  
Logan Stanley-Luke Schenn

**GOAL:**

Connor Hellebuyck  
Eric Comrie

MCINTYRE: I'm in favour of a more dramatic approach and seeing what Scheifele and Connor could do on separate lines. They can still work their magic together on the power play. Besides, even that top line has gone pretty cold in recent games when it comes to even strength scoring.

So, this is what my lineup would look like based on your criteria of who's currently on the roster and healthy:

**FORWARDS:**

Perfetti-Scheifele-Vilardi  
Connor-Toews-Lafallo  
Niederreiter-Lowry-Barron  
Koepke-Namestnikov-Pearson

**DEFENCE:**

Morrissey-Salomonsson  
Samberg-Stanley  
Phillips-DeMelo

**GOAL:**

Hellebuyck  
Comrie

One final caveat: With eight of the above players on expiring contracts, I suspect this is going to look a lot different after the March 6 deadline. Let's revisit it then.

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[https://www.winnipegsun.com/sports/jets-looking-for-a-greasy-approach-against-the-devils/article\\_280520b1-3631-4112-a11e-52dfe3371265.html](https://www.winnipegsun.com/sports/jets-looking-for-a-greasy-approach-against-the-devils/article_280520b1-3631-4112-a11e-52dfe3371265.html)

***Jets looking for a 'greasy' approach against the Devils***

By Gordon Anderson

The devil is in the tiny details for the Winnipeg Jets.

"Our job as defencemen is to beat that first layer and try to give (our forwards) a good shot to tip or create a rebound," Jets defenceman Logan Stanley told reporters in New Jersey on Tuesday morning. "We need to go there if we want to score goals and that is part of our identity is getting to that net-front and (scoring)some greasy goals. Hopefully, the forwards do a good job of that so the defence can get pucks through and hopefully bang few in."

The Jets (20-24-7) begin a four-game road trip on Tuesday night in New Jersey against the Devils (27-23-2).

The Devils are 5-5-0 in their last 10 games and are seventh in the Eastern Conference wildcard chase. They are seven points behind the Boston Bruins for the second wildcard, heading into league wide action on Tuesday night. The Jets are 5-3-2 in their previous 10 games.

The trip will make stops in Tampa Bay, Florida and Dallas before a Feb. 4 home game against the Montreal Canadiens sends the locals winging into the Olympic break.

Tanner Pearson scored the game-winning goal against the Devils at 6:17 of the final stanza on Jan. 9 at Canada Life Centre as the Jets beat New Jersey 4-3 to extend their winning streak to two games at the time. The club went on to win two more games, but have now gone 1-2-2 since then, Cole Koepke's goal against the Red Wings, the only five-on-five goal in their last four games.

Pearson was battling for position in the crease with Devils defenceman Luke Hughes when Josh Morrissey's pass from below the goal line near the right post found its intended target with Pearson stuffing the puck through Jake Allen and into the back of the net.

Alex Iafallo, Jonathan Toews and Gabe Vilardi also scored for the Jets that night. Every single goal was created from determination, crashing the crease with intent, and a net-front presence.

"In every game you want to do it as (only) good things happen when you go to the net, and we have to keep that in focus," Pearson said. "The more pucks you get there, sometimes stuff just happens when it hits a shin pad and goes in. Dirty stuff like that."

And with the five-on-five offence as dry as a desert arroyo in July these days, it's that kind of effort that could pay dividends for Winnipeg.

With his now well-publicized 'pond hockey' postgame comments in the aftermath of Saturday's loss to Detroit in the rear-view mirror, Scott Arniel hopes his team swaps out a perimeter game devoid of any meaningful contact, for a no-nonsense approach, which has been known to work in the recent future.

As Pearson's goal aptly represents, hell, as every goal against the Devils aptly represents, a little physical pushback goes a long way.

"It's those net front battles, and it's the willingness to do those hard things," Arniel said on Monday prior to departure for New Jersey. "And that was more of the disappointment was that yeah, we got to score the goals."

Heading into league action on Tuesday night, a meaningful playoff push with a reward at the end seems awful daunting. The Jets are ninth in the Western Conference and eight points behind the San Jose Sharks for the second wildcard. There are five teams between the Jets and the Sharks.

"We've got to keep pushing, that's our job, that's our responsibility, but at the end of the day, just like you mentioned, (the players) moved off of that game," Arniel said. "Now, we got to focus on the next one, not Tampa, not Florida, not Dallas, not Montreal, let's focus on the Devils."

[https://www.winnipegssun.com/sports/winnipeg\\_jets/no-rebellion-this-time-jets-ok-with-arniel-s-rip-job/article\\_ffd2958c-b842-4049-bf25-1793cd4d38a0.html](https://www.winnipegssun.com/sports/winnipeg_jets/no-rebellion-this-time-jets-ok-with-arniel-s-rip-job/article_ffd2958c-b842-4049-bf25-1793cd4d38a0.html)

### ***No rebellion this time: Jets OK with Arniel's rip job***

By Paul Friesen

You have to go back a ways to find a Winnipeg Jets coach's post-game comments as cutting as what Scott Arniel served up on Saturday night.

In calling his team's play against Detroit an "embarrassing" and "soft" attempt to play "pond hockey," with no interesting in getting hit or hitting anybody, Arniel pretty much pulled a page from his predecessor's approach.

You may recall Rick Bowness spitting out similar words and themes following the Jets' meek playoff exit in Vegas back in the spring of 2023.

That dressing-down got plenty of backs up at players' exit interviews a day later, led by ex-captain Blake Wheeler.

Others joined in, including Adam Lowry and Kyle Connor. Their biggest beef: that Bowness went public with his comments instead of saying it to them privately.

Fast forward to the Jets' return to practice on Monday, our first chance to ask players about Arniel's biting critique two nights earlier.

Lowry, now the captain, hadn't seen Saturday's video or read the words, but he'd heard how short Arniel's media session was – about a minute, just like Bowness's burst three Aprils ago.

The big difference this time: it didn't seem to come as a surprise.

"Whatever he said out there, he lets us know," Lowry said of Arniel. "It's not like a guessing game. We know where he stood. He told us what he thought and it was fair criticism, for sure."

Told some of the words his coach used, Lowry says Arniel may even have used some harsher language, "maybe some more pointed words," in front of the team.

The bottom line: that wasn't the way you'd expect a team desperate for points to finish a home stand before heading out for four tough games on the road.

Arniel says he lets players know his feelings before stepping behind the microphones in the media room.

"Yup. I'm never coming in here without talking to them first," he said.

I reminded him of what can happen if he didn't.

"I'm not going down that road," he said. "I just like to make sure that they know what I'm talking about. So nobody gets confused what the message is."

That message: their effort wasn't even close to what you'd expect.

"That's all part of coaching," Arniel said. "You can't do it every night. And it has to be when it's warranted, too. I don't think the players were caught off guard by it. And I'm pretty sure they recognized that we let one slip."

Connor, who back in '23 said his coach's comments came "out of nowhere," confirmed Arniel was as hard on the players in the room on Saturday as he was in front of the cameras.

"For sure. He's a passionate coach," Connor said. "Emotional. And he wants to win just as bad as anybody. When he's mad, when he's frustrated, not seeing what he wants to see, he lets us know."

The Jets' loose, non-physical approach against Detroit was a stark contrast to the stop-and-start, grinding game they played against Florida just two nights earlier.

It suited the Red Wings just fine, left the Jets on the business end of a 5-1 score and put yet another shovel full of dirt on their playoff chances.

"They open it up," Lowry said. "And we fed right into that game. And that's where the pond hockey narrative comes in. There's more swinging, you're not stopping and starting. You're trying to maintain speed."

"You think you can make a couple more plays than are necessarily there."

Lowry says anyone being honest with themselves will agree it wasn't acceptable.

It's just the latest example in a season littered with inconsistent efforts, as last season's top regular-season squad languishes well out of the playoff picture, at 20-24-7.

As for the comparison to Bowness's tongue-lashing, Lowry and Connor say the fact it comes mid-season makes it different.

"Completely different," Connor said. "It's a coach trying to use different ways to ignite his team. We understand that. There's no, as a team in here, rebelling. We're all in this together. Him calling us out like that just makes us want to prove him wrong and show that this team can have success."

Lowry had a similar take.

"The Bones one came at the conclusion of a series," the captain said. "You don't have a chance to correct it, to prove that it's not a one-off. The (current) criticism is fair. Not to say Bones's wasn't fair. I'm not saying that. The playoff one, it's just different. The season ends, there's so

many emotions. You don't have an opportunity to redeem yourself. Not prove him wrong, but prove him right in the sense that there is another level. The expectations are deserved."

The Jets' next chance to prove Arniel's expectations are deserved comes in New Jersey on Tuesday.

We'll also start finding out what effect his words still have.

[https://www.winnipegssun.com/sports/winnipeg\\_jets/bad-luck-bad-bounces-jets-hellebuyck-confident-as-ever/article\\_23dba060-a1d2-4a78-b4aa-46ae7ed30d42.html](https://www.winnipegssun.com/sports/winnipeg_jets/bad-luck-bad-bounces-jets-hellebuyck-confident-as-ever/article_23dba060-a1d2-4a78-b4aa-46ae7ed30d42.html)

### ***Bad luck, bad bounces: Jets' Hellebuyck confident as ever***

By Paul Friesen

He's won just four of 18 games since returning from his knee injury, but to Winnipeg Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck, that's just a statistic.

Coming off a 5-1 loss to Detroit, Hellebuyck says he's as confident as ever between the pipes.

"There's only so much I can control," the 32-year-old said as his team prepared to hit the road for New Jersey on Monday. "I know it's easy just to say you've got to stop more and then you win more games, but you know that's not necessarily the case. Sometimes overtimes kill your stats. And little moments in a game where your team ends up losing while you give up an extra goal, comparative to the league."

"Got to put the stats behind me and just make every save that I possibly can and make sure I'm not making any big mistakes and costing us games."

Six of Hellebuyck's 14 losses in his last 18 games have come in overtime or a shootout.

Coming off a year in which he won the Hart Trophy as NHL MVP and his third Vezina as the top goalie, his statistical drop-offs include a saves percentage of .902 this season, compared to marks of .920 or more the previous three years.

He's also giving up 2.69 goals per game, up from 2.00 last season and his highest number since 2021-22, when it was 2.97.

All this in a year when he'll join Team USA for the Winter Olympics.

"Very, very confident with the way I've been playing," Hellebuyck said. "I've been getting some pretty bad luck and some bad bounces this year... and just little things where you get a piece of it, usually that's enough and it's not. That being said, I do believe you create some of your own luck. That's not just an individual, that's a whole team thing."

The Jets were hoping their star goalie's return would spark a surge towards a playoff spot. Instead, they've continued to mire closer to the bottom of the Western Conference after last year's Presidents' Trophy season.

"I came right back in and got my game right to where it was, where I left off," he said. "And we continue to build it. That being said, I came in and we hit on a huge losing streak. So that's not great for the mentals, and everyone's going to look worse when you're on a losing streak.

"But... it's a team game. We do it all together."

After taking on the Devils on Tuesday, the Jets travel to Tampa Bay, Florida and Dallas, then return home to face Montreal in their last game before the Olympic break.

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***Face of the Franchise: Jets***

Every franchise has one player that embodies everything the team represents and is synonymous with its name. OverDrive host Bryan Hayes joins Craig Button and Mike Johnson to unveil the Face of the Franchise for the Winnipeg Jets