

***THREE THINGS: Connor scores twice in loss to Mammoth
Connor scores career goals 300 and 301 in 4-3 overtime loss to Utah***

By Jamie Thomas

The Winnipeg Jets overcame a three-goal deficit but fell in overtime 4-3 to the Utah Mammoth to close out the pre-Christmas schedule with a 15-17-3 record. Kyle Connor scored twice and Morgan Barron added the other goal for the Jets who will now have five days off for the Christmas break and return to action on December 27 against the Minnesota Wild at Canada Life Centre.

FALLING BEHIND

The Jets were hoping to avoid falling behind like they did in Denver on Friday night when they trailed 2-0 after 20 minutes to the Avalanche. Unfortunately, the Mammoth scored two goals 4:11 apart with goals from Lawson Crouse and JJ Peterka in the opening period and added to their lead at the 3:01 mark of the second period with Alexander Kerfoot beating Connor Hellebuyck.

"There's not much to be said. We were soft kind of all over the ice," said Adam Lowry on TSN after the first period.

"it's a lack of execution. There's a lot of things, I think that first period it was a pretty disappointing effort."

KC REACHES 300 CAREER GOALS

Things got better for the Jets after the Kerfoot goal as they turned things around in the middle frame and leaned on the power play to get their first goal of the night. Mark Scheifele spotted Kyle Connor open on the far side and Connor blasted home his 300th career goal to make it 3-1. Connor is the third player in franchise history to reach 300 goals, joining Mark Scheifele and Ilya Kovalchuk. Connor becomes the second-fastest active American player to hit the mark, trailing only Auston Matthews of the Toronto Maple Leafs (482 games).

LATE COMEBACK FOR A POINT

Winnipeg dominated the early part of the third period and that allowed them to eventually tie the game. First it was Connor with his second of the night, thanks to a seeing eye pass from Josh Morrissey.

The Jets got the tying goal on some nice board work from Tanner Pearson who got the puck along the wall and sent a pass through two Mammoth players to Morgan Barron, and he tied the game at three.

As great as it was to see the Jets fight back from three goals down, head coach Scott Arniel was upset with another game of inconsistent play.

"We got better in the second, certainly dominated in the third. But at the end of the day, you can't play two periods in this league and look to have success," said Arniel.

"That's 35 games, for me, of inconsistency throughout the games themselves or that might be individual players. In the remaining 47, that has to change."

NHL.com

<https://www.nhl.com/news/winnipeg-jets-utah-mammoth-game-recap-december-21-2025>

Keller wins it in OT, Mammoth recover from Jets' late rally Utah has won 4 of 6; Connor scores twice for Winnipeg, which drops 4th straight game

By Matt Komma

SALT LAKE CITY -- Clayton Keller scored 13 seconds into overtime, and the Utah Mammoth recovered after giving up two goals 25 seconds apart late in the third period to defeat the Winnipeg Jets 4-3 at Delta Center on Sunday.

Keller took a pass from Dylan Guenther on a 2-on-1 and roofed a shot blocker side on Connor Hellebuyck from the left circle.

"I think me and Guenther actually chatted before overtime started, and he was like, let's come with a lot of speed," Keller said. "He kind of just demands it right away from (Mikhail) Sergachev and makes an unbelievable play in the neutral zone and slides it over to me. I had a lot of time and space to get the shot off, and it's good to see it go in, for sure."

JJ Peterka, Lawson Crouse, and Alex Kerfoot scored, and Guenther and Sergachev each had two assists for the Mammoth (18-17-3), who have won four of their past six games. Karel Vejmelka made 23 saves.

"That was a huge and important game against a division rival. They found a way to win and get the two points," Utah coach Andre Tourigny said. "There are many teaching moments in that game and many things we can do better, but there are things we can build on."

Kyle Connor had two goals, Morgan Barron scored, and Mark Scheifele had two assists for the Jets (15-17-3), who have lost four straight games (0-2-2). Hellebuyck made 18 saves.

The Jets began their rally at 11:18 of the second period with a power-play goal from Connor, who buried a one-timer past Vejmelka off a pass from Scheifele to make it 3-1.

The goal was Connor's 300th in the NHL. He is the third player in Jets/Atlanta Thrashers history to hit the mark, behind Scheifele (353) and Ilya Kovalchuk (328).

"Just a pretty cool milestone," Connor said. "Once you look back on your career, that's kind of the stuff you'll remember. But right now it's focusing on winning, trying to be the best player I can, and helping out."

Connor scored his second goal at 15:23 of the third period, beating Vejmelka blocker side with a one-timer to cut the lead to 3-2.

"I think we just knew that we needed to be better," Connor said of the comeback. "I think we were on our toes more, jumping and making plays and hemming them in."

Barron scored just 25 seconds later, beating Vejmelka glove side with a snap shot tie it 3-3.

"That first period was ugly. It was really ugly," Winnipeg coach Scott Arniel said. "We got better in the second, certainly dominated in the third, but at the end of the day, you can't play two periods in this league and look to have success."

Crouse gave the Mammoth a 1-0 lead at 5:20 of the first period. Guenther skated in from the blue line and shot through the legs of Jets defenseman Logan Stanley to put the puck on Hellebuyck. The rebound of his shot then found Crouse in front, where he scored blocker side with a slap shot.

"We made it interesting on ourselves," Crouse said. "Definitely not the way we wanted the third period to go, but credit to our group, that's not easy. They scored two right away and then we went right into OT pretty much, so credit to the group for having the right mindset and being able to get the win."

Peterka made it 2-0 at 9:31 of the first, tapping in a pass from Keller, who was to the right of the net.

Kerfoot extended it to 3-0 at 3:01 of the second period, scoring on a one-timer from the right dot off a pass from Sean Durzi.

"I think all lines are playing well right now," Keller said. "We're getting scoring up and down the lineup. I think something we have to continue to do moving forward if we want to be successful and we want to play in the end is our depth of scoring. It's great to see that, and we've got to keep it going."

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/2025/12/22/sawyer-quick-speedy-mammoth-had-their-way-in-overtime-win-vs-jets/>

Sawyer: 'Quick, speedy' Mammoth 'had their way' in overtime win vs. Jets (VIDEO)

TSN's Kevin Sawyer and Dan Robertson breakdown the Jets' overtime loss to the Utah Mammoth on Sunday, how Winnipeg's slow start impacted the game, and the Jets forcing overtime with a third period comeback.

Associated Press

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/clayton-keller-scores-in-ot-to-give-mammoth-win-over-jets/>

Clayton Keller scores in OT to give Mammoth win over Jets

By Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Clayton Keller scored 13 seconds into overtime and the Utah Mammoth beat the Winnipeg Jets 4-3 on Sunday.

Lawson Crouse, JJ Peterka and Alexander Kerfoot also scored for Utah, and Karel Vejmelka stopped 22 shots. The Mammoth won for the second time in three games.

Kyle Connor had two goals and Morgan Barron also scored for Winnipeg, which lost its fourth straight (0-2-2) and has just three wins in their last 16 games (3-10-3). Connor Hellebuyck had 18 saves.

Keller's blast down the middle in overtime helped the Mammoth win after allowing two late third-period goals.

Crouse got the Mammoth on the board at 5:20 of the first after slapping the puck over Hellebuyck's shoulder. Peterka's 14th goal of the season extended Utah's lead at 9:31 when he tipped in the puck off Keller's pass into the post.

Kerfoot put the Mammoth up 3-0 at 3:01 of the second on a one-timer past Hellebuyck's outstretched glove. It was his first of the season in just his second game back on the ice after missing Utah's first 35 games with an injury.

Winnipeg finally got on board when Connor scored a power-play goal with 8:42 remaining in the second. He then blasted a one-timer with 4:37 left in the third to cut the deficit to one.

Barron came up with the equalizer 25 seconds later when he snuck behind Utah's defence and beat Vejmelka glove side.

Up next

Jets: host Minnesota on Saturday.

Mammoth: at Colorado on Tuesday.

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/12/21/jets-lose-in-ot-to-mammoth>

Jets lose in OT to Mammoth

By: Mike McIntyre

SALT LAKE CITY — Adam Lowry stood in front of the Winnipeg Jets media backdrop, a grim look on his face, and immediately put on a display of public accountability by pointing the finger of blame at himself.

"That's on me," the captain told the Free Press. He was referring to Sunday's 4-3 overtime loss to the Utah Mammoth inside Delta Center — a game in which his team essentially didn't show up for the first half, mounted a frantic late rally and then gave away a valuable point just 13 seconds into the three-on-three session.

Lowry was a surprising choice to start the fourth period, given that head coach Scott Arniel typically sends out top-scoring centre Mark Scheifele, along with linemate Kyle Connor and No. 1 defenceman Josh Morrissey. But the bench boss opted to go with a more defensive posture off the hop, hoping Lowry could win the faceoff and gain possession.

"It was a case of hopefully you go out and do the right things and get a chance to get the next group out there," Arniel explained afterwards of using Lowry, along with Gabe Vilardi and Neal Pionk.

“It didn’t happen.”

Lowry lost the draw to Clayton Keller, left his feet to try and pokecheck the puck away but missed, then watched the younger, speedier Dylan Guenther blow by him — an attempted bodycheck missed badly — and feed Keller for the winner on the ensuing 2-on-1.

“It just starts leaving my feet, you know, trying to whack that puck and just get a better angle,” Lowry said of the sequence of doom.

“He kind of victimized me in the first period. A little different, five-on-five, but he comes with a head of steam, you get caught flat-footed, and you kind of guess. I know they’re highly skilled players. You know, that one sucks.”

It’s been a struggle for Lowry to get back up to speed, figuratively and literally, following offseason hip surgery. The 32-year-old hasn’t produced much offence, with just one goal and four assists in 23 games, but you know it really stings when his normally stellar defensive work comes into question.

Winnipeg has now lost 17 of its past 23 games (6-14-3) and sits at a woeful 15-17-3 overall. They are just one point out of the NHL basement and six points out of the final Western Conference wildcard spot — currently held by 18-17-3 Utah — just a season removed from having the best regular-season record in the league. They are in a world of hurt.

IT’S NOT JUST HOW YOU FINISH, BUT ALSO HOW YOU START: Sure, the final painful play by Lowry will be discussed and dissected by fans for days. But a valid argument could be made that the Jets actually lost the game a lot earlier in the night.

Once again, this was a team that says one thing — get off to a strong start, stay out of the penalty box, play good defence, find ways to score — and then comes out and does the polar opposite.

They looked disorganized. Disinterested, even. And they were on the verge of disaster as Utah grabbed a 1-0 lead barely five minutes into the game, added a second goal before the midway mark and then grabbed what looked like a commanding three-goal lead just 3:01 into the second stanza.

Arniel was struggling to hide his anger.

“That was, again, another real... What’s the right adjective here? That first period was ugly. It was really ugly,” he said.

“We’ve done it in this building before. Certainly, Utah brings out the worst in us. That’s a bad start by everybody and it just got us behind the eight ball and then we’re chasing the game.”

The same questions keep getting asked of players — why do you guys keep starting games so slowly? — and, to date, nobody has come up with a reasonable answer.

“It’s about finding that consistently, finding that compete every night. Start to finish, not when we get down 3-0 or 3-1 in games,” said Lowry. “But, from the get-go. And that starts with me.”

Added Connor: "We'll look for a solution over the break. That's obviously a focal point for us coming into the second half."

DON'T CALL IT A COMEBACK: Did Utah just get a little too comfortable with its big lead, especially against a team that isn't exactly scaring anyone these days, and take the foot off the gas? Or did the Jets start to play the way they say they are capable of?

Perhaps a bit of both.

Connor cut the deficit to 3-1 at 11:18 of the second period when he ripped a perfect one-timer past Karel Vejmelka with his team on the power play. Scheifele and Vilardi had the assists.

It was a magical marker for Connor — the 300th of his career.

"Pretty cool milestone," he said. "Once you look back on your career that's the kind of stuff you'll remember. But right now it's focus on winning and trying to be the best player I can and help out. So it doesn't really mean much right now."

Connor struck again with just under five minutes left in regulation, this time wiring a feed from Morrissey. Just like that, the Jets had a pulse. Connor is now tied with Scheifele for the team lead with 17 goals.

Hearts really got racing 25 seconds later when Morgan Barron used his speed to get in behind the Mammoth defence, taking a pass from Tanner Pearson and beating Vejmelka with a snap shot to tie it up.

"We got better in the second, certainly dominated in the third. But at the end of the day, you can't play two periods in this league and look to have success," said Arniel.

"That's 35 games, for me, of inconsistency throughout the games themselves or that might be individual players. In the remaining 47, that has to change."

Arniel said a significant factor in his overtime deployment was trying to give Scheifele, Connor and Morrissey an extra minute or two to catch their breath.

"I rode them pretty hard right down to the last shift (of the third period)," he said. "It was more of a case of Low, start with the puck, win the draw. Hopefully that was the scenario."

KEY PLAY: The lost faceoff by Lowry and the series of events that followed proved to be the difference.

THREE STARS:

1. UTAH RW Clayton Keller: 1 goal, 1 assist
2. WPG LW Kyle Connor: 2 goals
3. UTAH RW Dylan Guenther: 2 assists

EXTRA, EXTRA: Connor Hellebuyck made his fifth straight start, all over the past nine days, since returning from arthroscopic knee surgery. Although his numbers in this one don't look too pretty — 22 shots, 18 saves — it's hard to fault him on any. Vejmelka, who always seems to give the Jets fits, stopped 23 of 26 shots he faced.

Winnipeg went 1-for-3 on the power play and killed off all three penalties they took.

The Jets made one lineup change, with defenceman Colin Miller replacing Haydn Fleury. Forward Cole Koepke and blue-liner Luke Schenn were the other healthy scratches.

Arniel started the game with Gustav Nyquist on the top line with Scheifele and Connor, but abandoned that plan after just one unsuccessful period. Nyquist still has yet to score a goal, with just seven assists in 26 games.

Several other Jets forwards are ice cold as well including Jonathan Toews (one assist in 19 games), Vlad Namestnikov (one assist in 23 games), Nino Niederreiter (no points in 11 games) and Cole Perfetti (2 goals in 21 games).

The Jets return to action on Saturday when they host the Minnesota Wild.

“Go do what you have to do with family,” Arniel said when asked what his holiday message is to his players.

“Enjoy your time and do some inner soul searching here and recognize that we’re not going to be successful and we’re not going to get ourselves back in the race unless each and every individual there takes this up another notch. Clear your mind, clear your head and get yourself ready to go for the second half.”

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/12/21/jets-mailbag-chemistry-second-line-centre-point-structure-and-looking-to-the-future>

Jets mailbag: chemistry, second line centre, point structure, and looking to the future

By: Mike McIntyre and Ken Wiebe

We didn’t get any lumps of coal, thankfully, but there wasn’t a ton of joy to be found when we opened the holiday edition of the Winnipeg Jets mailbag.

Not surprisingly, a Scrooge-like run of play from the local hockey club has plenty of fans saying “Bah, humbug” lately. And so this latest batch of questions tackled by Jets beat writers Mike McIntyre and Ken Wiebe felt a bit like Festivus.

Without further ado, let’s get to the airing of grievances.

1. With sports fans seemingly always wanting to focus on the negatives, give us reasons to believe this Jets team, as it is currently, is playoff worthy. I realize it only matters nowadays to just get into the post season, as positioning isn’t nearly all it’s cracked up to be. Outside of the obvious (Helly), why should fans believe this team will make the playoffs? BRIAN

MCINTYRE: Three words: One goal games.

Consider this: The Jets have played 14 games so far this year that have been decided by a single goal. They won four of the first seven — and now have dropped seven in a row including all three this past week against Ottawa, St. Louis and Colorado. That overall record of 4-8-2 stinks and is a major reason they’re currently on the outside looking in when it comes to a

playoff spot. Think of it this way: They've only collected 10 out of a possible 28 points in games which essentially could have gone either way.

Even if they were just .500, that would be an additional four points that Winnipeg sure could use right now.

At some point, you'd think the tide might turn, especially since the Jets were outstanding just a year ago in these tight-knit affairs, going 19-4-4.

Why might it turn? Connor Hellebuyck, as you noted, should theoretically give them a goaltending advantage just about every night, and he's back now after an 11-game injury absence. But it goes beyond the crease. Getting the power play heated up, as it was at the start of this year and finding some secondary scoring could make a world of difference considering how many contests are being decided by such a slim margin.

There are simply too many good players who produced in those very situations a year ago. Surely they haven't all collectively forgotten what it takes, have they?

If and when that happens, some of these agonizing losses – like 3-2 in overtime to Ottawa last Monday, 1-0 to St. Louis on Wednesday and 3-2 in regulation to Colorado on Friday – could turn into narrow victories and the Jets might be able to go on a bit of a run.

2. The team this year seems to lack the chemistry of the previous year. Could it be attributed to adding players that are not part of the Jets' mindset of not having been a part of the organization? JAY

WIEBE: I agree that something is off with the mix this year, but I don't believe it's on the personal side of things.

We've talked a lot about the Jets choosing to add experience to become the oldest club in the league, but they didn't bring in guys who lack character or are selfish players.

They brought in a couple of guys that won Stanley Cups in Jonathan Toews and Tanner Pearson, plus a pair of others who spent time in organizations with strong cultures in Cole Koepke and Gustav Nyquist. To this point, the reduction of speed in the Jets' lineup has more to do with where they sit in the standings than adding players from outside the organization.

Gabe Vilardi and Alex Iafallo came in from outside of the organization and had no trouble fitting in and the same goes for the likes of Neal Pionk, Dylan DeMelo, Luke Schenn, Colin Miller, Haydn Fleury, Morgan Barron, Nino Niederreiter or Vladislav Namestnikov — all of whom were brought in via trade at one point or another.

With the midway point not far away, it seems like some personnel changes are going to need to be made to the roster, which is one of the reasons the Jets were linked to Mason Marchment before he was acquired by the Columbus Blue Jackets right before the holiday roster freeze kicked in.

3. Given the unfortunate fact that if the Jets make the playoffs, they will have to face either Colorado or Dallas in the first or second round, should they become sellers at the trade deadline and plan for the future? SHELDON

MCINTYRE: A valid question. As I wrote earlier this week, I think general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff has to be extremely careful about any moves he makes.

I would not advocate doing anything reckless – such as trading the upcoming first-round pick in a deep draft or a top prospect such as Elias Salomonsson or Brayden Yager – for any type of quick fix. As you point out, the juice may not be worth the squeeze considering a top three spot in the Central is likely out of the picture and it's wildcard or bust at this point.

I will say, there's a scenario where you could avoid the Central entirely if you can get into the first wildcard position, which would mean facing whoever happens to win the Pacific. That wouldn't necessarily be any easier, of course, but just worth noting.

In terms of selling, I'm just not sure the Jets have a ton right now that would be of much value. Do pending UFAs such as Gus Nyquist, Tanner Pearson, Jonathan Toews, Cole Koepke, Colin Miller or Luke Schenn really move the needle or fetch you anything of value?

If they do, sure, go ahead and sell. Logan Stanley might be the one exception, as his current deal also expires on July 1. Given his unique player profile, along with the strong offensive season he's having so far, I could see there being a potential market for him. And yes, I would advocate cashing in that chip if you could.

4. What is wrong with Cole Perfetti and how can the Jets get him going? MARK

WIEBE: This is a complex question, but a timely one after Perfetti was limited to nine seconds of ice time in the third period after his minor penalty for tripping expired.

In his post-game comments, Arniel didn't have any interest in expanding on his reasoning for the benching when asked about it. But Perfetti was on the ice for each of the first two goals against on Friday night — and he was beaten in the race up the ice by Martin Necas for the second goal, despite starting the play in the proper defensive position above the puck.

It certainly wasn't a lack of hustle by Perfetti, he lost the race to a faster skater. But Perfetti hasn't been able to get back up to speed after returning from the high ankle sprain he suffered in the exhibition game against the Calgary Flames. While he's technically healthy, the nature of the injury means that he's not back at the level he's used to performing.

Perfetti had a stretch of games where he produced three assists in four games, but he's stuck on two goals and seven points in 20 games. Aside from not producing offence at the level that was expected, Perfetti has been on the ice for far too many even-strength goals against.

Perfetti should benefit from some time off during the Christmas break, but there's no doubt that he needs to elevate his name quickly.

Going into the season, he was going to be counted on as a primary scorer and right now, he needs to increase his point totals just to be a secondary scorer. I've pondered if a few games with Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor might provide an opportunity for Perfetti to get himself going offensively, but he hasn't done enough to earn a promotion like that.

Perfetti knows that he needs to be better and will be doing everything in his power to get things turned around coming out of the break. Let's not forget that he's barely eight months removed from scoring one of the most important goals in Jets 2.0 history.

5. How do you think fans feel about breaking up the first line trying to jump start some of the other struggling forwards? Personally, I like them left intact as other teams have not found a way to stop them. And their skill level together is such that they're fun to watch driving the team offensively. RICK

MCINTYRE: I'm not sure what the majority of fans think, but I have time for arguments on both sides of the issue. There's no question the trio of Kyle Connor, Mark Scheifele and Gabe Vilardi have been elite this season with 48 combined goals between them. Every other player on the team have combined for 51.

As the losses have started to pile up and secondary scoring has all but dried up, I've been leaning much more towards the "split them up" camp.

What have you got to lose at this point? Why not see if Scheifele and Connor might be able to each drive their own line and maybe get some other struggling scorers going. Coach Scott Arniel has occasionally dropped Vilardi down with other skaters, but I think it's worth going a step further.

If it doesn't work, fine. You can always go back to them. But I believe the Jets have become far too easy to defend against most nights, with opponents really loading up against that No. 1 line knowing that if they can mostly keep them in check, it's probably going to be a relatively easy night at the office.

Desperate times often call for desperate measures, and it feels like we've hit that stage of the season.

6. I'm a big Kevin Cheveldayoff fan who recognizes that he has one of the hardest GM jobs in the league. With so many players refusing to play in Winnipeg, it has forced the Jets to draft and develop. The one glaring hole that he has been unable to fill is a second line centre. He has had years to develop (Cole Perfetti), retain a rental (Paul Stastny), resurrect a career (Jonathan Toews), fill internally (Vladislav Namestnikov) and yet the search continues. Does the GM get a pass on this still unfilled position? RICK

WIEBE: The Jets have had pockets where the second-line centre position was in good hands, like before Bryan Little suffered a career-ending injury, when Stastny was brought in via trade from the St. Louis Blues and then brought back from the Vegas Golden Knights.

Bringing in Kevin Hayes was a good idea that didn't work out, though another trade addition, Pierre Luc Dubois had two 60-plus point seasons after his tough start after the trade for Patrik Laine and before he was moved to the Los Angeles Kings.

But the inability to find an upgrade for Vladislav Namestnikov at the 2025 NHL trade deadline proved costly. The Jets looked into a number of different scenarios, but were unable to close any of those deals. Undoubtedly trade protection played a role in some of those pursuits.

Namestnikov had a great start to this season on the wing and has since moved back to centre, but he's now gone 22 games without a goal and has only one assist during that span. Toews is currently going through a rough offensive patch of his own and is mostly playing fourth-line minutes these days. So, yes, the search continues.

The hope is that Brayden Yager, who is playing his first pro season with the Manitoba Moose in the American Hockey League, can eventually fill that role but he's unlikely to be ready for that job until next fall at the earliest.

Cheveldayoff doesn't get a pass, but he already recognizes the need to upgrade the position. It's up to him to continue to work on finding the long-range solution, whether that's via trade or in the 2026 NHL Draft, depending on where the Jets will be picking in the first round.

7. At what point do we call the Gustav Nyquist signing an absolute bust? Seriously. Why is he still in the lineup? JACK

MCINTYRE: I was all but ready to write Nyquist off as well. But then along came Friday's contest in Colorado, which I thought was his best of the year.

Nyquist earned himself a promotion to the top power play unit and immediately showed off his play-making ability, with a beautiful slap pass to Mark Scheifele to cut the Avalanche lead to 3-2 in the third period.

Jets coach Scott Arniel clearly liked what he saw, throwing Nyquist on the ice as the sixth attacker with Connor Hellebuyck pulled as the Jets pressed for the equalizer.

Fast forward to Saturday's practice in Salt Lake City, and Nyquist was now taking a regular line rotation with Scheifele and Kyle Connor. He's going to start Sunday's game against Utah in that spot and it's clearly a huge chance for him.

Again, none of this erases the disappointing play to date and he hasn't scored in 25 games. But there is some offensive creativity there. I'm curious to see if playing beside strong finishers like Connor and Scheifele could lead to something fruitful.

Bottom line: I'm willing to give him a bit more runway before declaring this a complete disaster. But the clock is definitely ticking.

8. I've watched the decline of the Jets in November and always I'm asking: Why is Morgan Barron not playing centre on the third line? He was doing so well... strength, skating, defensive responsibility, checking, face-off prowess etc. SHANE

WIEBE: Barron added another item to his highlight-reel on Friday night, showing off his explosive skating ability after recognizing Alex Lafallo had control of the puck in the defensive zone while shorthanded.

Barron made a nifty move to the backhand to score on his partial breakaway, staving off the chasing Cale Makar — which is not an easy task in itself. Barron earned the promotion, as you suggest, and while there is merit to consider moving him back to the middle, he's looked great alongside captain Adam Lowry on what is essentially the second line right now.

For me, being able to use the Lowry line (with Barron) as a shutdown line that can also chip in secondary scoring is more important than having Barron centre his own line, at least for the time being. He can still take some draws, depending on how the game is going. This doesn't rule out Barron moving back to the middle at some point, but I foresee some additional time on the wing as the Jets continue the search for the optimal combinations.

9. What are your thoughts on if the NHL should (or will) adopt a points structure like the PWHL? (regulation win = 3; overtime win = 2; overtime loss = 1; regulation loss = 0) That way, every game is worth the same number of points. Seems like that could make a big difference for the Jets this year, who are looking up at teams with fewer wins simply because some teams have a surprising number of OTL points. ADAM

MCINTYRE: Yes!

I love the idea – always have, always will – as I think it's ridiculous to have a league where games are often worth a different amount of points. In a season such as this one, where more games are going to overtime than ever before, it's really brought the issue to light.

You're right about the Jets, who would benefit greatly if this were the case. Winnipeg is languishing near the bottom of the NHL standings, but you may be surprised to know that heading into Saturday's slate of games, only nine teams had more than the 13 regulation wins posted by the Jets. They would be in much better shape if every game was worth three points and a 3-2-1 system was in place.

Here's the thing, however: I don't expect this to ever happen, certainly not under Gary Bettman's watch. The commissioner loves the current system, which creates what some would argue is a false sense of parity and keeps virtually everyone in the race as long as possible. Unfortunately, that means teams will likely continue to be rewarded for going beyond regulation.

10. Do you think that the Jets' draft and develop strategy has fallen down over the past several seasons? Where are the Scheifele's, Connor's and Morrissey's of the next generation? Several 'top' prospects had auditions with the big club this year and none of them showed very much. Perfetti is supposed to be an up and comer but he seems to have regressed. Who is going to replace the top guys as they age out? JOE

WIEBE: There's little doubt the Jets haven't been graduating nearly as many homegrown players during the past seven seasons, compared to the first seven.

Some of that is related to opportunity and it's important to point out that there are two goalies (although Eric Comrie left the organization before coming back), three defencemen and four forwards that remain on the roster that were drafted and developed by the Jets. That number was higher when Nikita Chibrikov and Brad Lambert opened the season on the roster and defenceman Elias Salomonsson got his chance when Pionk was out with an injury.

But your point remains, since the 2017 NHL Draft, the only regulars in the Jets' lineup are Samberg (second round, 2017) and Perfetti (first round, 2020). By next season, the numbers should be on the rise, since neither Chibrikov, Lambert or Salomonsson are exempt from waivers. They will either be in the Jets' lineup, traded or with another NHL organization.

Chibrikov didn't generate much offensively but was coming back from a serious knee injury that cost him nearly half an American Hockey League season of development, so he needs a bit more time before making a judgement on his NHL future. I think he can still be an NHL player.

I don't see a future Morrissey in the system right now, but 2025 first-rounder Sascha Boumedienne will be suiting up for Sweden at the upcoming World Juniors in the Twin Cities and has high-end potential as a puck-moving D-man with offensive upside.

Salomonsson figures to be a Samberg-type on the back end and he might force his way into the discussion before this season is over.

First-year pro Brayden Yager, who came over in the deal for Rutger McGroarty, could eventually fill that second-line centre role. Then it will be up to the likes of Colby Barlow, Kevin He, Kieron Walton, Zach Nehring, Owen Martin and others from the past four or five drafts to try and get those numbers back up.

There are players in the system that should be important contributors during the next couple of seasons. The other factor is when the Jets have been in a competitive window, they haven't had as many high picks or picks in general.

They currently don't have a second-rounder in 2026 or 2027 and they don't have a fourth-rounder in 2026 either, so there may be some deals to boost draft capital that are on the horizon if the Jets aren't able to move back above the playoff line in the coming weeks and months before the NHL trade deadline.

11. We can all see that it is a different Logan Stanley this season. What I've noticed is that he's been activating into the offence far more than ever. Is this something the coaches have gotten him to do or is he doing it on his own? BOB

MCINTYRE: Call it the Rick Bowness effect.

When "Bones" went behind the bench at the start of the 2022-23 campaign, he made it a top priority to get his blue line more involved in the play.

"Our D are coming!" he proclaimed.

And they sure did, with Josh Morrissey being the biggest benefactor as he became a super-sized version of himself. He wasn't the only one, however – guys like Dylan DeMelo, Brenden Dillon and Dylan Samberg all started to chip in more, with everyone on the back-end essentially having the green light to go.

Bowness may now be gone, but Scott Arniel served as an assistant under him for his two seasons and worked directly with the defencemen. It's not a surprise that Arniel has continued with a similar philosophy, since he had an up-close look at how well it worked.

We are now seeing that with Stanley, where a little bit of confidence can go a long way. But this is a situation I would definitely chalk up to good coaching, and then the player obviously doing well to live up to his end of the bargain.

12. Are Neal Pionk's offensive struggles tied to the lack of secondary scoring, his play or perhaps an injury? He is on pace for a career low in points. CRAIG

WIEBE: Might I suggest option D on this multiple choice quiz?

It's definitely all of the above, rather than a single and solitary answer here for Pionk so far. As usual, Pionk's uneven play has nothing to do with effort level or a willingness to hold himself to a high standard. He's been his harshest critic since his arrival and there's little doubt he's been looking in the mirror in an effort to get back to the level of play he's shown previously.

With two goals and six points through 30 games going into Sunday, Pionk is going to need to go on an incredible heater to get anywhere close to the career-high 10 goals and 39 points he recorded last season.

Pionk's timing was perfect as a pending UFA and he cashed in with a lucrative contract extension. But this hasn't been a matter of complacency for Pionk — he's as driven as ever. However, he hasn't been getting as many shots through from the point, either at even strength or on the second power play unit.

He hasn't been activating as often on the rush and the lack of secondary scoring has contributed to his slow offensive start as well. Although he only missed four games with a lower-body injury, there are times when it looks like either that injury or something unrelated has impacted his skating.

This is not a new development and is related to how hard he plays and his willingness to sacrifice his body. When both Pionk and regular partner Dylan Samberg have been healthy at the same time, they've shown stretches of being that highly effective second pairing that can limit the opposition's top scorers.

It's also fair to say that Pionk in particular will need to further improve his play — both in terms of his offensive contributions and his defending — for the Jets to dig themselves out of this hole.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/12/20/nyquist-looks-to-impress-on-top-line>

Nyquist looks to impress on top line Jets face Utah Mammoth Sunday

By: Mike McIntyre

SALT LAKE CITY — The latest spin of the Winnipeg Jets' line blender produced a surprising concoction on Saturday.

Step right up, Gustav Nyquist. You're up next to take a twirl alongside top scorers Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor.

"Hopefully lightning in a bottle here and we get something to build off," Jets coach Scott Arniel told the Free Press following his team's practice.

While at first blush this may seem like a curious move — Nyquist has yet to score a single goal in 25 games this year — what do the Jets have to lose at this point? Winnipeg has now dropped 16 of its last 22 games, including the first two stops on this three-game road trip which ends Sunday against the Utah Mammoth.

"We brought Gus in for offence, to help pick up the offensive side of the game for us. Where he was playing I don't think he was getting enough opportunity," Arniel said of the switch.

"He's a guy that has great vision, can make plays. Playing with those two, hopefully that's a spark for him and a little bit of a spark for those guys as well. It helps me maybe get some offence off some other lines, with Gabe (Vilardi) dropping down one."

Nyquist has been a healthy scratch for several games this year and began Friday night's game in Colorado on the fourth line. But he showed some early signs of life and, by the third period, was bumped up to the top power play unit. He quickly found Scheifele for a tap-in goal that cut the deficit to 3-2, which would be the final score.

"Super excited to play with those guys. Two of the best players in the league," said Nyquist, who signed a one-year free agent deal with the Jets last summer that pays him US\$3.25 million.

So far, he has seven assists to show for the investment. That's a stark contrast to Scheifele and Connor, who are tied for the team lead in points with 41.

"Obviously I want to produce more offence here, so this will be a great chance for me," said Nyquist. "At the end of the day I'm just worried about winning right now. We have to win games. That's all I'm focused on. Obviously it helps if other guys can score, too."

The Jets will face a Mammoth club that is five points ahead of them, adding an extra sense of urgency.

"We've got one big game here before Christmas to go in and kind of feel good about what we've been doing here the last few games, although we haven't got all the results we've wanted," said Nyquist.

"We feel like as a group we've done a lot of good things. Big game here, then reset for Christmas and come back with a good push."

As Arniel noted, Vilardi has been moved down to skate on the second line beside the slumping Vlad Namestnikov (one assist in the last 22 games) and the struggling Cole Perfetti (two goals in 20 games this year, benched for the third period Friday against the Avalanche).

The third line of Morgan Barron, Adam Lowry and Alex Iafallo remains intact, while Nino Niederreiter (no points in 10 games) is knocked down to the fourth line along with Jonathan Toews (one assist in 18 games) and Tanner Pearson. Cole Koepke looks to be a healthy scratch for a second straight game.

On the blue line, it appears like the Jets will make one change. Colin Miller is expected to draw in on the third pair beside Logan Stanley, bumping Haydn Fleury to the press box along with Luke Schenn. The Stanley-Fleury duo struggled against Colorado and were on the ice for a pair of first period goals against.

"It's a frustrating time for everybody," Miller said of the club, which captured the Presidents' Trophy last season with a 56-22-4 record and are currently just 15-17-2.

"But there's parts of our game that are improving and definitely parts of our game that we like. We've gotta focus on that."

Perhaps Friday's loss can serve as a spark. Although it was the same tired old result, the Jets made the league-leading Avalanche earn it.

"There's no clear solution to this. We've got to just keep bearing down, working hard, winning our battles and keep improving," said Miller.

Although nobody was doing cartwheels during Saturday's skate, there was a noticeably lighter mood in the air as the team went through various drills. More chatter, and even a few smiles and laughs.

"Gloom and doom and hanging our heads here isn't going to help," said Arniel.

"We've been going through a tough spell. We've been getting the quiet anger-type days. There were some good things (Friday) night against a really good hockey team that we have to take into (Sunday). There's lots of things as a coach I didn't like, but there were also some positives."

Utah visited Winnipeg earlier this season and skated away with a 3-2 victory. Their most recent outing was a 2-1 loss on home ice Friday night to the New Jersey Devils.

"They've got some forwards that can go," said Arniel.

"A lot like the Colorado game, we've got to try and stay away from trading chances with them and getting people caught on the wrong side and allowing numbers to come. They're good at that. Like a lot of teams, everyone recognizes defending is huge in this league and they've done a better job with that as well."

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/sunday-overreactions-jets-need-to-make-big-splash-to-save-playoff-hopes/>

Sunday Overreactions: Jets need to make big splash to save playoff hopes

By Michael Amato

It's starting to get late early in Winnipeg.

Connor Hellebuyck's return has not provided the desired results for the Jets, who were floundering without their superstar goaltender and had lost nine of 11 games before his return. Hellebuyck has been solid since returning to the crease, but Winnipeg only has one win in four tries since getting him back. The club is now five points out of a wild-card spot with a bunch of teams in front of it and a galaxy away (17 points) from the Minnesota Wild for third in the Central.

Getting one of the top three spots in their division seems like a longshot at best at this point, but if last year's Presidents' Trophy winners don't want to miss out on the post-season, they need to get pointed in the right direction very quickly.

Jets need to make a trade to save their season

If there's an area where the Jets really need a boost, it's secondary scoring. The top line of Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Gabriel Vilardi all have more than 15 goals and 30 points, with Scheifele and Connor having 40-plus points. After that, though, things really fall off a cliff. Nobody else on the team has more than six goals and Cole Perfetti, Adam Lowry and Jonathan Toews have combined for just six total between the three of them. Not to mention that off-season acquisition Gus Nyquist, who had 34 goals over the past two seasons and 75 points in 2023-24, hasn't scored in 25 games this year.

It's clear the Jets really miss Nik Ehlers and haven't been able to replace the offence he provided. They now sit 20th in goals per game after finishing as a top-five team a year ago. Things are getting to a critical point where if Winnipeg doesn't do something soon, it's hard to imagine them making up enough ground to get into the playoffs.

Overreaction? No

We've already seen the Wild bring in Quinn Hughes and you know the Dallas Stars are going to use the additional cap space they are getting because of Tyler Seguin's injury to add as well. Winnipeg is in arguably the toughest division in all of hockey and the West is not like the East where no one is pulling away from the pack. If you aren't keeping pace, you're digging yourself a hole that may be too deep to get out of.

There are also a handful of new teams making a push for the playoffs that haven't been relevant in a few years. The San Jose Sharks, who we'll talk about later, are much further ahead than anyone thought they'd be this season thanks to Macklin Celebrini. Chicago was also on a surge before Bedard got hurt and the Blackhawks are still right next to the Jets in the standings. Plus, there's Utah, who are no longer in a rebuild and committed to making the post-season. All this is to say there will be more competition for the two wild-card spots this time around.

If I'm the Jets and want to save this season, I'm perusing the trade market right now to see what impactful pieces are available before it's too late.

Winnipeg Sun

https://www.winnipegsun.com/sports/friesen-jets-a-mess-going-into-christmas/article_2c6f9bb9-7ac5-4d58-b7b7-5d2d32efbd9f.html

FRIESEN: Winnipeg Jets a mess going into Christmas

By Paul Friesen

A loser point to take home for Christmas – could there be a more appropriate stocking stuffer for the Winnipeg Jets?

Last year's Presidents' Trophy winner took another rung down to the NHL basement on Sunday, dropping a 4-3 overtime decision in Utah.

The point keeps the 15-17-3 Jets just one point out of the dank, dark hole of last place overall, something nobody saw coming going into a year that was all about chasing the Stanley Cup.

The smell that permeated the start of Sunday's game has become all too familiar.

Head coach Scott Arniel is running out of words to describe it.

"Another real... what's the right adjective here? That first period was ugly," Arniel told reporters in Utah. "It was really ugly. We've done it in this building before. Certainly, Utah brings out the worst in us."

Actually, you could insert any team into that sentence lately. It's like the Jets need their watches re-set. They're starting most games an hour late.

"That's a bad start by everybody," the coach continued. "And it just got us behind the eight-ball and then we're chasing the game. We got better in the second, certainly dominated in the third. But you can't play two periods in this league and look to have success."

Aniel then hit the nail on the head with this: "That's 35 games of inconsistency... in the remaining 47, that has to change."

How can it, with the same players?

That's three wins in their last 16 games now, a jaw-dropping 6-16-3 mark since Nov. 4.

If that doesn't scream Help! then I don't know what does. This 911 call has to go straight to GM Kevin Cheveldayoff's office.

Then again, that's where the mess started.

The summer signings that were supposed to pay off in the spring have been largely irrelevant. This is a one-line team that's lost the rest of its mojo.

"Yeah, we've dug ourselves a hole," captain Adam Lowry said. "But there's a belief in this group when we play the right way, when we execute, we have positive results."

They'll point to the last half of Sunday's game as evidence.

But the big-picture verdict is in: they're not good enough as they're currently built. Too slow, too disjointed and too often unwilling to pay the necessary price.

As has become a theme, the Jets took an early penalty on Sunday, Neal Pionk the culprit just 45 seconds in.

And while they killed it off, they still gave up the first goal a couple minutes later, Lawson Crouse left uncovered to blast a rebound off the end boards past Connor Hellebuyck 5:20 into the game.

It quickly got worse, the Jets floundering in their own zone long enough for an unchecked JJ Peterka to make it 2-0 some four minutes later.

Three shots against, two goals.

The Jets got two power plays of their own before the period was up, but they may as well have declined them, coming out of the first 20 minutes with just four shots on goal.

Lowry hit the nail on the head on TSN at the first intermission.

"There's not much to be said," he began. "We were soft all over the ice. They were beating us to pucks, out-muscling us... a pretty disappointing effort."

How that's even possible, given what's at stake, is about as damning as it gets.

Just three minutes into the second period, Alexander Kerfoot made it 3-zip after another shift of freewheeling in the Winnipeg zone.

That seemed to be the alarm bell the Jets needed.

Then again, Utah probably took its foot off the gas.

Midway through the second, Kyle Connor's one-timer on another Winnipeg power play, his 300th career goal and 16th of the season, got the Jets on the board.

"Once you look back on your career that's the kind of stuff you'll remember," Connor said. "But right now it's focus on winning and trying to be the best player I can and help out. So it doesn't really mean much right now."

By the end of the period the Jets were actually more than holding their own.

They started the third mostly in Utah's end, too.

It took a while, but Connor struck again, one-timing it from a ridiculous angle near the corner with less than five minutes to go.

On the very next shift, Morgan Barron got behind the Utah defence and beat Karel Vejmelka to tie it.

Overtime provided a swift and merciless end, Utah captain Clayton Keller capping a two-on-one just 13 seconds after the opening faceoff, a play that began with Lowry losing the draw then whiffing on a check in the neutral zone.

It was a bitter ending for a player who probably leads his team in character, if not in production.

"That's on me," Lowry said of the final dagger.

Sure, he liked the last 30 minutes. Like everyone else, he couldn't explain the first 30.

"It's about finding that consistently, finding that compete every night," he said. "Start to finish, not when we get down 3-0 or 3-1 in games. But from the get-go. And that starts with me."

Christmas comes early for this team, as they start a five-day break on Monday, a chance to do "some inner soul-searching," as Arniel put it.

"We're not going to get ourselves back in the race unless each and every individual there takes this up another notch," the coach said.

Make that five notches, the number of rungs up to a wildcard playoff spot.