

## **Winnipeg Free Press**

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/04/05/every-game-is-a-big-one>

### ***'Every game is a big one'***

### ***Jets keep playoff hopes alive, but margin for error is gone***

By: Ken Wiebe

Scott Arniel has a pretty good idea of what it's going to take to leapfrog three teams and sneak into the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Six games remain in the regular season and his team is currently facing a three-point deficit in the chase for the second wild card in the Western Conference. So going into Monday's game with the Seattle Kraken, perfection – or something close to it – will basically be required.

"Just take care of our business," Arniel said after his team rallied for a 2-1 victory over the Columbus Blue Jackets on Saturday. "We can't do anything about what's happening with the other teams. It may have to be (that) we have to go 6-0, to win all six games."

This isn't an exaggeration from the head coach of the Jets, nor is it a scare tactic.

To call it a rallying cry isn't entirely accurate either, since the players already realize the grave nature of the situation they find themselves in.

Arniel wasn't trying to provide motivation, just give an honest assessment; he realizes that the four or five teams in this race are facing one another regularly during the final two weeks of games.

By going 3-1 on this recent road trip, the Jets did enough to stay in the conversation.

Finding a way to slip past the Los Angeles Kings, Nashville Predators and San Jose Sharks — who will be in town on Apr. 16 in the Jets' final game — won't be easy.

Neither has rallying back from 11 points out to get within striking distance, as the Jets have done by putting forth a faster and more structured game coming out of the Olympic break.

While the hiccup against the Dallas Stars on Thursday wasn't something the Jets could really afford, the response against the Blue Jackets told you everything you needed to know about the level of belief.

"Yeah, it was great. We needed it. Obviously, would have been great to be 4-0, but take what we can get," said Jets left-winger Kyle Connor, who scored both goals on Saturday to hit 35 for the fourth time in his career. "It just speaks to the maturity of the group. And focusing on us and how we need to play. And not really worrying about too much outside noise."

"Looking at the standings, we're going to need some help. But that's something that we can't be (counting) on. We've got to do our job here. So, that's kind of where we're at. The next game is the biggest (one) here — and focusing on being the best players we can and showing up."

There have certainly been a few missteps for the Jets, but they've also put together a lengthy stretch of mostly consistent play.

That's why the discussion surrounding the team has mostly shifted to the race, though a high draft pick remains a legitimate option, depending on how the regular season ends.

Even with the late push, the Jets go into Monday's action tied for 25th in the league in points with the Toronto Maple Leafs.

If they're able to continue to make up ground this week, the Jets could be trending towards a first round pick that ends up somewhere between 10th and 17th.

If they falter, a top-5 selection – and even the first overall pick – remains in play.

Therein lies the rub: in taking an arms-length approach, the appeal of getting a high-end forward or impactful defenceman with one of the top picks that could compete for a roster spot in the fall is undeniable.

Despite the character the Jets have shown in battling hard to the end, it remains apparent that this roster needs a talent infusion to move back to being a bona fide Stanley Cup contender by next season.

That's of little concern for a group of proud players focused solely on the present and not ready to think about the future.

The flip side of the argument is that all the Jets need to do is get in, ensuring themselves of a different kind of lottery ticket.

Much like members of Team Tankathon are dreaming of a top pick and a chance to bring Gavin McKenna, Ivar Stenberg, Keaton Verhoef or someone along those lines, professional athletes don't care about unlikely odds and aren't intimidated by the prospect of another first-round matchup with the league-leading Colorado Avalanche.

The Jets don't have to look far for evidence of what an eighth seed can do against the Presidents' Trophy winner, as they were pushed to the limit last April and needed a pair of six-on-five goals — plus a marker from captain Adam Lowry in double overtime — to survive by the skin of their teeth against the St. Louis Blues.

Both of the aforementioned scenarios are currently on the back burner for the individuals that will be responsible for where the Jets ultimately land.

For this edition of the Jets, it's all about the here and now.

"We've kind of been stressing all along that we can't dwell on what happened or just happened (in) the last game. Even the last period," said Arniel. "You have to move on and focus on what's coming, and the guys have done a fantastic job of staying focused that way."

That steely focus – coupled with the precision of executing at an extremely high level and playing their best hockey of the entire campaign — is what it will take to keep the Jets slim playoff chances alive.

“Every game is a big one,” said Jets centre Mark Scheifele, who is up to 94 points. “We’ve just got to get our rest and be ready for another big game.”

## **Winnipeg Sun**

[https://www.winnipeg.sun.com/sports/win-all-six-games-jets-host-the-seattle-kraken-on-monday/article\\_431c0227-9e31-4cda-844a-9fa42d4ca7b9.html](https://www.winnipeg.sun.com/sports/win-all-six-games-jets-host-the-seattle-kraken-on-monday/article_431c0227-9e31-4cda-844a-9fa42d4ca7b9.html)

### ***‘Win all six games’: Jets host the Seattle Kraken on Monday***

By Gordon Anderson

The Jets are at the mercy of whims and attitudes barreling down the stretch.

“We can’t do anything about what’s happening with the other teams,” Jets head coach Scott Arniel told reporters in Columbus on Saturday night. “It may be where we have to win all six games. But first, just focus on Seattle.”

The coach is butting up against the reality of the present-day situation, and it is certainly a daunting proposition. Winnipeg’s longest win streak this season is five games with the feat occurring between Oct. 11 and 20. It’s not for me to say they can’t win six, but inconsistency has been their inconsistency for the entire season.

“We are gonna need some help, but that’s something that we can’t be praying for,” Kyle Connor said. “We gotta do our job here and take care of the points. That is where we’re at. The next game is the biggest (one), focusing on being the best players we can and showing up.”

The Jets host Seattle on Monday night.

Connor notched both goals in the 2-1 victory over the Blue Jackets. He scored late in the second and midway through the third to provide the winning margin. Connor has 64 game-winning goals in his Jets career.

He acknowledged the difficulty in the task at hand, but the Jets have been in playoff mode since late February.

They’ve managed to endure the emotional bandwidth that comes with every win or loss. They’ve trailed by a dozen points in the wildcard standings and managed to whittle the deficit down to one point on April 1. And now the deficit stands at three with six to play.

“That just speaks to the maturity of the group and not really worrying about too much outside noise,” Connor said when asked about the team’s inspired play in the last 20 games.

Winnipeg have given themselves at least another game’s stay in the wildcard chase after winning three of four games on the road trip.

Prior to Saturday’s win over the Jackets, the Jets beat the Colorado Avalanche and the Chicago Blackhawks. The lone loss was a 3-0 setback to the Dallas Stars on Thursday night.

“We needed it,” Connor said. “Obviously, it would have been great to be (undefeated on the road trip), but you take what you can get.”

“We had a good win in Chicago, and we had a good win in Colorado,” Arniel added. “Now, we have got to go home, take care of business before we go back on the road.”

Maybe the ‘big game’ cliché is overused in the coming sound bite, but that fact doesn’t make it any less true.

“It is going to be a big game,” Mark Scheifele said of the matchup with Seattle. “Every game is a big one. We have just got to get our rest and be ready for another big game.”

Scheifele earned two assists in the one-goal victory against Columbus. Scheifele has 60 helpers this season. Sixes are wild in this case as Scheifele needs six points in the remaining six games to reach the 100-point plateau for the first time in his career.

These opposing forces that will collide have gone in the opposite direction since the Olympic break came to a halt. The Jets (33-31-12) are 11-5-4 since the restart. The Kraken (32-32-11) are 5-12-2 heading into league action on Sunday night. Both teams are idle.

Seattle is still in the mix, but fading fast, six points behind the second wildcard spot in the Western Conference, currently occupied by both the Los Angeles Kings and Nashville Predators with 81 points. The Kraken has seven games remaining in the regular season.

The Jets’ playoff plight is slightly less ominous, only three points behind the Kings and Predators. The Kings have 19 regulation wins this season.

“At this time of year, everybody is fighting for their lives,” Connor said. “There’s always something on the line. It’s (always) competitive, because it’s the NHL. There are no easy games. They’re a team that needs every point, and they’re right there in that fight. It’s going to be another dog fight. It’s (a game) that we (must) come ready for.”

[https://www.winnipegssun.com/sports/he-d-rather-have-45-slow-night-for-hellebuyck-in-jets-win/article\\_967f951e-9b1a-4c98-9468-9bab59a042ac.html](https://www.winnipegssun.com/sports/he-d-rather-have-45-slow-night-for-hellebuyck-in-jets-win/article_967f951e-9b1a-4c98-9468-9bab59a042ac.html)

### ***‘He’d rather have 45’: slow night for Hellebuyck in Jets win***

By Gordon Anderson

There is both a good and bad motif attached to a lack of sustainable action in the defensive zone.

“It’s tough for your goalie when he’s standing there not getting anything for that long,” Jets head coach Scott Arniel told reporters in Columbus. “But at the end of the day, we needed Connor Hellebuyck at the end.”

The Jets allowed a season low of 16 shots on goal to cap off a four-game road trip with a 2-1 win over the Blue Jackets on Saturday night.

“That’s just playing a good road game,” Arniel said, echoing the good in a shot suppression game. “Columbus can really transition fast, and I thought with a very mobile defence we did a good job of beating them back up the ice and limiting stuff to the outside.”

Hellebuyck stopped 15 pucks to earn his 21st victory of the season. The Jets number one netminder has started six in a row and nine of the last 10 games. He is 4-3-2 in that span.

As the theory goes, the more possession the Jets have of the puck, the less chance the opposition has to score. Alternatively, a goaltender can seize up and lose his edge after extended minutes without any action.

During game play, Hellebuyck faced three shots on goal between Boone Jenner's attempt with 10:12 remaining in the first period and Jenner's shot at 4:08 of the third period.

The home team's first shot on goal of the second was registered with 4:16 remaining in the period. The second shot was two seconds later. According to the math, that is 25:56 with zero rubber on goal.

"It's nice that he didn't have too much work. but he loves it," Arniel said. "He'd rather have 45 shots. That's a tough part of the game, too, is when you don't have any action and all of a sudden somebody comes down and you haven't seen a shot in a while. That's just part of a goalie, staying mentally focused and into it."

As Arniel mentioned previously, the team needed Hellebuyck to make a couple of tidy saves late on. He turned away Adam Fantilli with six seconds remaining in the game and the Jets on the penalty kill with Mark Scheifele off for tripping at 19:51.

Hellebuyck also stopped a Charlie Coyle chance with 35 seconds left in the third. Columbus had a total of eight third-period shots.

"He did a great job staying in the moment," Kyle Connor said. Connor scored both goals for the Jets. The Shelby Township, Mich., native is up to 36 goals with six games remaining in the season. Connor now has 64 game-winning goals in his Winnipeg career.

The Jets were credited with 12 blocked shots. Dylan Samberg and Haydn Fleury blocked three each, to lead the team.

In games where the Jets have allowed 19 shots or fewer, they are now 3-3-1.

Natural Stat Trick credited the Jets with 11 high danger chances to Columbus' 10 in all situations and favoured the Jets 33-25 on overall chances in all situations.

In the short-term, the lack of sustained action more than likely frees Hellebuyck up to start the next game when Jets host the Seattle Kraken on Monday night.

"We didn't want to give him one of those games where he gets bombarded, especially with us traveling home," Arniel said. "(We are) off on Sunday but then turn around and play again on Monday. It's nice that he didn't have too much work."