

## **Winnipeg Free Press**

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/03/20/weve-got-to-flush-it>

### ***'We've got to flush it' Lopsided loss not as damaging as it could have been for the Jets***

By: Mike McIntyre

PITTSBURGH — There once was a time in the National Hockey League when a putrid performance like the one the Winnipeg Jets delivered Thursday night in Boston would have carried some painful consequences.

Namely, a next-day practice filled with skating, skating and more skating — and perhaps nary a puck in sight.

But those “old-school” days are long gone, which is why Friday was all about rest and recovery for the Jets. Only a handful of players took part in an optional skate, while the majority stayed back at the team hotel for workouts and video sessions.

“Just reset. That’s a big thing. Do what everybody feels like they need to do today in order to be ready for tomorrow,” said rookie forward Isak Rosen, who was one of the few to hit the ice.

Mike Keenan likely would have tossed his whiteboard in disgust, wondering why nobody was doubled over in agony trying not to vomit.

The Jets opened this critical three-game road trip with a stinker, falling 6-1 to the Bruins in a game where head coach Scott Arniel openly questioned his group’s “compete level.”

“We were a little bit inconsistent about what we were doing working within a structure of five at times. They capitalized on their opportunities and the game got away from us a little bit,” said forward Cole Koepke.

“It wasn’t the result we wanted. The standings are so close. We’ve got to flush it.”

Although their playoff hopes are swirling the drain, the lopsided loss wasn’t as damaging as it could have been. The Seattle Kraken and San Jose Sharks both lost in regulation, while the Los Angeles Kings fell in overtime to move into the final Western Conference wild-card spot with 72 points.

Winnipeg (28-29-11) is five points back, now with just 14 regular-season games remaining.

Up next are the Pittsburgh Penguins who sit in second place in the Metropolitan Division with a 34-18-16 record. They welcomed back Evgeni Malkin from a five-game suspension earlier this week, followed quickly by the return of captain Sidney Crosby from an injury he suffered during the Winter Olympics last month.

“Everything for their team kind of starts around (Crosby) and revolves around him. He’s obviously a world-class player,” said Koepke.

“They’re in the heat of it as well. They’re having a good season. We just need to make sure that we’re ready and come out with a game plan.”

Crosby, 38, may no longer be a “Kid,” but he’s showing no signs of slowing down. The sure-fire Hall of Famer leads the Penguins in scoring with 61 points (28 goals, 33 assists) in 57 games. But they have plenty of depth as well — 13 players have at least 27 points this season. Only four members of the Jets have eclipsed that mark.

The Jets hosted the Penguins back on Nov. 1, beating them 5-2 to improve to 9-3-0 on the year. The season really took a sharp turn from that point on, with Winnipeg racking up just six wins over the next 30 games (6-19-5).

Winnipeg’s lineup is a bit of a mystery at this point. Since it wasn’t a formal practice on Friday, there were no line rushes, nor did Arniel participate or speak with media afterwards. There will be no morning skate on Saturday with the 1 p.m. (12 p.m. CT) local time puck drop, so we won’t know until the warmup.

There’s a good chance defenceman Neal Pionk returns from a two-month injury absence. He took part in Friday’s skate, with contact, and is likely good to go.

Haydn Fleury is probably in line to be a healthy scratch, given that he was benched by Arniel for most of the third period after being on the ice for three of Boston’s early goals. Ville Heinola, who has been a perennial healthy scratch, is another option, but the pending unrestricted free agent has clearly fallen out of favour with the coaching staff.

Up front, the Jets have no extra options beyond the 12 skaters who faced the Bruins. However, Arniel brought out the line blender in the final frame — re-uniting Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Gabe Vilardi; putting Brad Lambert with Adam Lowry and Cole Perfetti; putting Rosen with Morgan Barron and Alex Iafallo; and having Koepke, Jonathan Toews and Gus Nyquist as the fourth line.

Arniel also moved rookie blue-liner Elias Salomonsson up to play with Josh Morrissey. If he opts to keep them together, Pionk could slide in with his usual partner in Dylan Samberg, while Dylan DeMelo and one of Jacob Bryson, Fleury or Heinola would form the third pairing.

We’d expect to see Connor Hellebuyck get the start in goal, despite the fact he’s struggled in two straight outings. The Jets also play Sunday afternoon at Madison Square Garden, where Eric Comrie — who is riding a personal five-game winning streak — would likely get the call.

Could Arniel consider shaking things up and reversing the order? Having one goalie play both games? We shall see.

One thing is clear: The bench boss is obviously hoping his latest public blast of his team brings the desired response.

“That’s a one-off hopefully, because we’ve got to turn around. We’ve got two back-to-back afternoon games, three (games) in four nights. No time to dwell. We’ve got to get focused again now on Pittsburgh,” he said following the game.

Koepke said they just need to focus on what they did well during the first period against the Bruins.

“We were ending plays quick in our own zone, quick to support one another. Defending as a group of five and then from there just transitioning quick, ending plays early,” he said.

“We just need to do that for a full game.”

For whatever reason with this wildly inconsistent group, that’s been a lot easier said than done this season.

<https://www.nhl.com/news/nashville-predators-winnipeg-jets-game-recap-march-17-2026>

***Step aside Oscars, hockey awards season is just heating up  
The best picks — and most likely candidates — for the league’s top trophies***

By: Mike McIntyre and Ken Wiebe

PITTSBURGH — Rick Bowness has never won the Jack Adams Trophy during his decorated coaching career. He was named a finalist for the first — and only — time while guiding the Winnipeg Jets during the 2023-24 season.

That campaign ended with a disappointing first-round playoff exit and a retirement announcement from Bowness, who along with his wife, Judy, had battled health issues that year.

Life has a funny way of circling back sometimes, and Bowness is not only back behind a big-league bench, but making a compelling case that he might just be the best in the business.

The fact that Bowness was still soaking up his post-hockey life at the start of 2026, spending time with family in Florida, makes this story even more incredible.

Now 71, he’s stepped back into a league dominated by youth and speed and skill and turned the Columbus Blue Jackets from a pretender to a legitimate Stanley Cup contender.

Bowness has led the club to a sizzling 17-2-4 record since taking over from Dean Evason on Jan. 12. That is No. 1 in the league during that span and should have his name on plenty of ballots this spring.

Some voters might hold the fact he’ll only coach for about half the season against him. But if the award is to truly recognize impact on a team, how can Bowness possibly be overlooked? The Blue Jackets were going nowhere fast without him, scuffling along with a 19-19-7 record.

The “Bones” bump is real — and it’s been spectacular. And it couldn’t happen to a nicer man. Bowness is beloved in the sport, and you wonder where the Jets might be today had he been able to stick around.

Bowness changed the culture of Winnipeg’s room, bringing much-needed accountability and attention to defensive detail which are now ingrained in the organization’s DNA. It wasn’t easy, nor was it always pretty — stripping Blake Wheeler of the captaincy left a mark, as did some of Bowness’ public shaming of his players at times.

But it always came from a place of love and respect, which the majority of players appreciate. It's easy to see why he's been able to turn an underperforming Blue Jackets team around. They had all the talent. They just needed the right leader. And that's what Bowness does. That is who he is.

His fingerprints are still all over the Jets, including mentoring current head coach Scott Arniel who worked with him as an associate for two seasons. As Winnipeg's play has really slipped this year, you wonder whether Bowness would have had some tricks up his sleeve to right the ship?

By the way, the Jets will get to catch up with Bowness in two weeks from now as they pay their lone visit to Nationwide Arena on Apr. 4.

There's another trophy Bowness has never won, even bigger than the Jack Adams. And wouldn't it be something if his timeout on retirement ended with a Stanley Cup celebration? You couldn't script a better story.

At this point, would you want to be against him?

### **Global Winnipeg**

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/03/19/beatdown-in-beantown>

### ***ANALYSIS: Tough loss, now tough decisions lie ahead for Winnipeg Jets***

By John Shannon CJOB

Losing in the NHL always stings. The 6-1 loss for the Jets in Boston Thursday night hurts twice as much, as Winnipeg's playoff hopes become even more faint.

Pure and simple, it was all about execution. As Adam Lowry talked about on the CJOB post-game show, it wasn't effort that killed the team, it was execution. But in life, and in hockey, there are many more lessons learned in defeat than in victory.

And really, this isn't the time to micromanage what went right and what went wrong in Game 68 of the season. This might be the time to start looking at the big picture. There is no greater lesson for this team than to look across the ice at Marco Sturm's team and try to learn from them.

A year ago, in so many ways, the Boston Bruins were living the life that the Jets are experiencing this season. After three consecutive 100-point seasons, the Bruins finished six games under .500 last season. Like the Jets this season, Boston had too many injuries and not enough depth scoring to be a playoff team. Like the Bruins, the Jets have a quality core of players. Swayman, McAvoy, Zadorov, Pastrnak and the Lindholms. Hellebuyck, Morrissey, Pionk, Lowry, Connor, Scheifele and Vilardi. Say no more.

So what did the Bruins do to quickly reinvent themselves as a playoff team? Well, Bruins general manager Don Sweeney didn't do major surgery on his team, but he wasn't afraid to move a veteran or two to get younger and faster. Brandon Carlo became Fraser Minten and a first-round pick.

Sweeney also found a way to improve the Bruins' forward depth through free agency. In so many ways, Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff has those same challenges. Get younger, get faster, without compromising most of the core group. Reinventing the bottom six forwards will be vital to reinvigorating the roster, as will a possible aggressive play in free agency. There has been a ton of loyalty displayed in Winnipeg through this whole decade. Now is the time to be pragmatic.

Yes, the Jets lost in Boston badly, but forget the loss. Learn from it. Understand that the opponent faced the same challenge a year ago and is back in a playoff spot, just one year later. There is no reason to think that the same can't happen in Winnipeg, too.

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[https://www.winnipegsun.com/sports/jets-hope-to-increase-compete-level-against-the-penguins/article\\_ab8813b-a65c-49d6-8f49-e32ff6d8e67e.html](https://www.winnipegsun.com/sports/jets-hope-to-increase-compete-level-against-the-penguins/article_ab8813b-a65c-49d6-8f49-e32ff6d8e67e.html)

### ***Jets hope to increase 'compete level' against the Penguins***

By Gordon Anderson

You can fault the local hockey team for any number of things related to the on-ice product, but an honest effort isn't usually one of them.

"To me, that's something that as coaches, and with our leadership group we've just got to focus and make sure that doesn't happen again," Jets head coach Scott Arniel told reporters in Boston on Thursday night. "Hopefully, that is a one off because we've got to turn it around. No time to dwell. We've got to get focused again now on Pittsburgh."

As Arniel mentioned, the Jets continue their three-city road trip with a Saturday afternoon matchup with the Penguins. The Jets opened the roadie with a 6-1 loss to the Bruins on Thursday. The Jets have allowed six goals against in two of their last five games. They dropped a 6-3 decision against the New York Rangers on March 12.

The stakes will be high for both teams when the puck drops just shortly after 12 p.m. on Saturday.

Heading into league action on Friday night, the Penguins (34-18-16) are second in the Metropolitan Division, one point ahead of both the Columbus Blue Jackets and the New York Islanders. The Blue Jackets are currently third in the Metro, and the Islanders are out of the playoff mix in the Eastern Conference.

Meanwhile, the Jets (28-29-11) received somewhat of a break on the out-of-town scoreboard on Thursday night as both the San Jose Sharks and Seattle Kraken lost in regulation. The Los Angeles Kings earned one point following an overtime loss to the Philadelphia Flyers.

The Jets are now five points behind the Kings for the final wildcard spot in the Western Conference. San Jose, Seattle and the Nashville Predators are all within three to four points of the locals.

The Penguins are 5-3-4 since the break. Winnipeg is 6-3-3 since the resumption of regular-season action.

Sidney Crosby made his return to the Pittsburgh lineup in the 6-5 loss to the Carolina Hurricanes on Wednesday night. Crosby missed 11 games due to a lower-body injury he suffered playing for Canada at the Winter Olympics.

The 38-year-old was injured in Canada's quarterfinal game against Czechia. His leg bent awkwardly on a hit by Anaheim Ducks defender Radko Gudas. He did not return for the remainder of the tournament.

Crosby scored and picked up an assist in the overtime loss. Despite missing 11 games, Crosby leads the team in scoring with 28 goals and 33 assists for 61 points in 57 games.

"Everything with that team goes through him and revolves around him," Jets forward Cole Koepke said. "He is a world-class player, and they are in the heat of (the playoff chase), as well. They are going to be playoff like games from here on out on our side. I expect that both ways."

Koepke, skating on a line with Morgan Barron and Brad Lambert, earned 9:41 of ice time against the Bruins. He was the only skater wearing Winnipeg colours who was an even player on Thursday. Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Gabe Vilardi were all minus-3.

The Jets conclude the road trip on Sunday morning against the Rangers.

"(These are) really important games coming up, and we just have to be ready," Elias Salomonsson said. The rookie defender was a minus-1 on 21:21 of ice time against the Bruins.