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Jets looking for a November to remember Road game will be put to the test as month to be spent in enemy territory

By: Mike McIntyre

The Winnipeg Jets finished October on a high. Now they open a challenging new month by hosting hockey's hottest team.

Few, if any, puck pundits had the Pittsburgh Penguins pegged to sit atop the NHL standings at any point this season. Yet that's exactly where they are, rolling into town with an 8-2-2 record.

That sets up a marquee matchup Saturday afternoon at Canada Life Centre, with the 8-3-0 Jets also feeling good about their game after back-to-back victories.

"Pittsburgh has been playing great lately. We have to be ready for a tough test," Jets centre Mark Scheifele said following Friday's practice at the downtown rink. "Playing against Sidney Crosby, there's always a lot of motivation."

Indeed, Sid "The Kid" has been leading the way, showing no signs of slowing down at age 38. He's already scored a team-leading eight goals and added seven assists. Evgeni Malkin, 39, is also keeping Father Time at bay, pacing the Penguins with 17 points (3G, 14A).

"Both are Hall of Famers, guys that have been amazing in this league for so long. Their hockey IQ is just amazing, so I'm not surprised at all," said Scheifele.

"They're good veteran guys, they work hard at their craft and it's no surprise. They're Hall of Famers for a reason. They keep pushing for more and it's really, really fun to watch."

There was a time when Pittsburgh being among the NHL heavyweights was routine. The Penguins made the playoffs 16 straight seasons, capturing Stanley Cups in 2009, 2016 and 2017.

But they've missed the post-season three years in a row, with declining point totals of 91, 88 and 80. They were a popular pre-season pick to finish near the bottom of the standings — and perhaps have the best odds at projected No. 1 draft pick Gavin McKenna next summer.

Crosby, Malkin and company seemingly have other ideas. Led by first-year head coach Dan Muse, the Penguins have turned back the clock so far and are strong in every category: goals scored (5th), goals against (4th), power play (2nd) and penalty killing (14th) among them.

"I think that there's a lot of doubt going into that team. Probably from all you geniuses that have all picked them maybe not to be as high as other teams," Jets head coach Scott Arniel told media on Friday with a laugh.

"No disrespect, but at the end of the day, it's motivation for them, too. They're trying to prove people wrong."

Pittsburgh has also been getting plenty of secondary scoring from wingers Justin Brazeau (6G, 6A), Anthony Mantha (6G, 5A), Bryan Rust (4G, 6A) and Rickard Rakell (3G, 5A), steady play from defencemen Erik Karlsson (0G, 9A) and Kris Letang (1G, 5A), and stellar goaltending from Tristan Jarry and Arturs Silovs.

"When you have the same voice for a while and then you get a new voice it kind of energizes and lightens the group," said Jets goaltender Eric Comrie.

"Nothing that (former head coach Mike) Sullivan was doing, I hear he is a fantastic coach, but just sometimes you need a new voice and a new message. I can really tell they are energized. They are playing good hockey."

The Jets are expected to make a couple of lineup changes from the group that beat the Chicago Blackhawks 6-3 on Thursday night. Forward Gustav Nyquist will sit out after suffering an undisclosed injury in the first period, with Brad Lambert likely to take his spot.

"There's no timeline on him yet," said Arniel, who expects a further update later this weekend.

Comrie is slated to make his third start of the year, giving Connor Hellebuyck a well-earned day off. He's won both of his previous starts and is looking to keep the good times rolling.

"The game feels good. I know I say it a lot, but being around Connor Hellebuyck has been great for myself," said Comrie.

"We are really close friends and have a really great goalie coach here. We share a lot of stuff with each other. I learn so much just from being around him. You can learn so much from being around a guy and seeing what he does, how he prepares every single day. For myself, I try to get the most out of that as I can. For myself you just have to put your best foot forward and be ready for whatever comes my way."

Jets captain Adam Lowry was a full participant in Friday's skate and is getting close to his season debut after having hip surgery over the summer. He won't be in the lineup against Pittsburgh but could be an option next week when the Jets hit the road for a six-game trip. That will be the start of a stretch that involves 11 of the next 14 games in enemy territory.

"It's great to see him in a regular jersey and skating with us. He's eager to get going again," said Scheifele. "Obviously getting your captain back on the ice with the team is a huge boost to the group. We're really excited to see him get back at it."

Cole Perfetti (high-ankle sprain) and Dylan Samberg (broken wrist) are continuing to skate in non-contact jerseys but likely still a couple weeks away.

The Jets believe they still have another gear to get their game too, one they came closer to reaching against Chicago. Can they ramp it up and make this a November to remember?

"We probably still haven't played our best game yet. I think that's the encouraging part," said Scheifele, who is leading the Jets with 18 points (9G, 9A).

"Obviously our record is good, but we still have a lot to work on. But we have a group that is eager to keep getting better and growing as a team and growing as a group. Just gotta keep pushing forward."

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/2025/10/31/buy-in-not-just-buzzword>

Buy-in not just buzzword

Team culture building best recipe for consistent results

By: Ken Wiebe and Mike McIntyre

Buy-in is the buzzword that just won't go away.

If you're a winning NHL team, it's impossible not to have it and, if you're trying to move from the also-rans to the contenders, it's what you lean into so heavily that you almost will it into existence.

Scott Arniel references it frequently and the proof is in the pudding for a Winnipeg Jets club that turned defending from a weakness into a strength.

Utah Mammoth bench boss André Tourigny talked about the importance of buy-in to his team's hot start prior to facing the Jets last Sunday and Chicago Blackhawks head coach Jeff Blashill was bombarded with questions about the early-season buy-in prior to Thursday's meeting in Winnipeg.

"It's a process, for sure," said Blashill. "Understanding that there has to be patience on the coach's side because you're going to have some roller-coaster (stretches) through that, it's just the reality of it.

"It's a process of video, it's a process of doing stuff on the ice. Our guys are seeing that ultimately, when you check for your offence, you'll create as much offence as if you try to cheat for your offence. Because when you cheat for your offence, you just spend so much time defending. Our guys are realizing that."

It seems like a simple concept, but so many young and skilled teams take a long time to truly figure that out. Scoring is fun, checking is hard work and requires commitment — and those two things don't always intersect.

"Our best young players, they don't want to be guys that just score points on bad teams, they want to produce offence on good teams. They want to win," said Blashill.

"So, sometimes you get a group at the right time and our group was ready to listen, they were ready to be coached, they're ready to work hard, they're ready to go through gruelling practices because they want to improve here and they want to get better and better and win hockey games. I would just give a lot of credit to our group for that."

It was clear Blackhawks players are starting to sign from the same hymn book as Blashill, who was hired as head coach this off-season after spending the previous three seasons as an assistant coach with the Tampa Bay Lightning following seven seasons as the bench boss of the Detroit Red Wings.

"That comes from accountability, too," said Blackhawks defenceman Connor Murphy, the longest serving member of the group.

“When you’re an offensive player, you put a little more pressure on yourself to create offence and to get points. If you understand that in the NHL, even if you are a point producer and a main offensive driver, the defence has to be there in order to win games because other teams have a lot of star power that you’re going to have to know how to play two ways against.

“The accountability our staff has brought to make sure that is something that’s important and a front focus on our minds going into games has really brought a full team game.”

Now, achieving the level of buy-in that is required to take the next step isn’t a quick fix, it’s a lifestyle that requires constant attention to attain consistent results. The Blackhawks are one of the surprise stories of the NHL this season and they were 5-1-1 in their previous seven games before Thursday’s 6-3 hiccup against the Jets.

“The better we play defensively, the more offence we get because we’re getting the puck back,” said centre Connor Bedard. “That comes from our structure and our pressure. We’ve got to continue to keep getting better at that.

“I don’t know. It’s hard to compare two years, but we’re just happy with the buy-in from everyone. We have a lot of areas we can improve on, but the work ethic is there, the mindset is there to do what we can to win and be a good team and we’ve just got to keep doing that.”

Although Spencer Knight allowed six goals on Thursday, the 13th overall pick in the 2019 NHL draft has been sensational between the pipes since he was acquired from the Florida Panthers in the deadline deal last spring for defenceman Seth Jones.

Knight is sporting a 2.59 goals-against average and .914 save percentage while carrying the mantle of being the No. 1 guy for an extended period of time for the first time in his young career.

“He’s been unreal. Probably the best goalie in the league up to this point,” said Bedard. “We’re pretty fortunate to have him.”

The Blackhawks are fortunate to have Bedard as well. The first overall pick in the 2023 NHL draft is off to a fantastic start offensively, with six goals — including his first NHL hat trick on Tuesday against the Ottawa Senators on Tuesday — and 14 points in 11 games.

Bedard is encouraged by his play, but true to form, the former Regina Pats captain wasn’t about to get swept away by the numbers.

“It’s so early, I’m just trying to go out every game, have fun and it doesn’t matter what you did last game or the game before or whatever, it’s about right now, the moment, and the next challenge,” said Bedard, who had 23 goals and 67 points last season. “That’s how I view it.”

That said, seeing the Blackhawks in the mix in the ultra competitive Central Division is a far cry from being near the cellar for the last few seasons.

“It’s fun,” said Bedard, who has expressed plenty of frustration during his first two seasons in the NHL where wins have often been tough to come by. “It’s fun being in those games and we’re looking at the standings and seeing where we’re at.

Whether the Blackhawks can sustain the early pace is still up for debate, but it's clear there has been a shift when it comes to expectations — even if their window for contention isn't quite in full bloom.

"We've really just focused on ourselves and our processes and making sure that our processes are really good," said Blashill. "Where that puts us in the standings will be dictated by how good we play and what results we get. But they do walk into games believing.

"And I've said this a lot, we have talent. It just happens to be pretty young. It's one thing if you're devoid of talent. We're not. We have talent. Again, it's just a learning process. So let's play the right way, let's play a mature game and, when we do that, we put ourselves in position to win."

Around the glass

AWESOME ALUMNI: Milestones have been the order of the day for the Jets and another one was produced on Thursday by Jonathan Toews.

Per Brad Schlossman of the Grand Forks Herald, Toews' assist against his former team moved him into a tie with Zach Parise for the most NHL regular-season points produced by a University of North Dakota men's hockey player at 889. Toews achieved the feat in his 1,078th game.

For those keeping score at home, Toews is the highest playoff point producer in UND history with 45 goals and 119 points in 137 Stanley Cup playoff games.

GEEKING OUT: How about the hot start for Manitoba's Morgan Geekie? The pride of Strathclair entered play Friday tied for the NHL lead in goals with nine. He's also chipped in with two assists and has become a key offensive weapon for the Boston Bruins.

Geekie, 27, had a career-high 33 goals in 77 games last season and is on track to shatter that at this current pace. He's seemingly found a great fit in Beantown after a tough start to his NHL career with the Carolina Hurricanes (who drafted him in the third round in 2017) and then the Seattle Kraken.

Geekie signed a six-year, US\$33 million contract extension with the Bruins last summer and is already making that look like a steal for the organization.

NO DODGING HIS DISDAIN: Eric Comrie may have spent his formative years growing up in California, but the Jets goaltender made it crystal clear on Friday who he was rooting for in the World Series.

"I am not a Dodgers fan at all," said Comrie, who was born in Edmonton and holds dual citizenship.

"I am a Cubs fan, No. 1, but I am also a very big Blue Jays fan. It's really hard to like the Dodgers. I don't think anyone likes the Dodgers besides Dodgers fans. They are the most hated team. Dodgers, Yankees, I don't like very much."

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/how-have-jets-overcome-injuries-to-be-an-early-season-success-story/>

How have Jets overcome injuries to be an early-season success story? (VIDEO)

Jason Bukala joins the FAN Hockey Show to take a look at the Winnipeg Jets, and how they've managed to get a strong start to the season despite dealing with injuries in their lineup.

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6763916/2025/11/01/winnipeg-jets-free-agent-priorities/>

Winnipeg Jets free agent priorities: From Lowry to Schenn, who should stay and who should go

By Murat Ates

Adam Lowry's return to the Winnipeg Jets lineup could come with a contract announcement.

The Jets' 32-year-old captain is more than a player working his way back from hip surgery. He's a vital piece of an aging core on what's meant to be a win-now, Stanley Cup-contending team. He was the second draft pick in Jets 2.0 history, highly involved in the community, and was the centrepiece of the top shutdown line in hockey until surgery sidelined him this summer.

Winnipeg has made a habit of signing core players such as Mark Scheifele, Connor Hellebuyck, and Kyle Connor before their UFA seasons began. Kevin Cheveldayoff and Lowry's camp have certainly had time to engage in discussions while Lowry has been working on his rehab, with Darren Dreger first reporting that talks began in early October.

Whether or not Lowry's deal gets done before he plays his first game — perhaps as soon as Tuesday in Los Angeles — the Jets' captain is at the top of Winnipeg's UFA priorities list. But Winnipeg is scheduled to have eight other unrestricted free agents this summer, even after Lowry is signed.

So how will the Jets prioritize their UFAs?

Today, we're going one by one from Lowry to Luke Schenn, discussing key context, and ranking Winnipeg's free agent priorities — plus sharing our own opinions about who is a "must-sign" player and who the Jets should let walk.

1. Adam Lowry, C

Age: 32

Current AAV: \$3.25 million

There is no world in which True North lets Lowry reach free agency. Winnipeg announced its team name — the Jets — at the 2011 draft, then drafted its franchise centre, Scheifele. It used its second pick to draft its future captain, Lowry, and that's an equally important part of Jets lore.

From 2011 to now, Lowry has made himself an integral part of Winnipeg's shutdown line. He's emerged as a leader in the community, volunteering his energy to the Toba Centre — an opportunity that came to him, handpicked, via Mark Chipman. This summer, while recovering from hip surgery, Lowry announced his engagement to longtime Manitoban girlfriend, Laura Quinton.

Lowry's shutdown line with Nino Niederreiter and Mason Appleton beat its opponents 22-12 on the scoreboard last year. It is reasonable to question what level the veteran can establish coming off of hip surgery — or maintain, given that Lowry turns 33 in March — but he's a win-now player who captains a win-now team. Whether or not there's a contract announcement before his season debut, I expect the Jets to lock Lowry up long term well in advance of July 1.

Ates' angle: Sign the man. There's too much lore and too much quality. Just don't load it with signing bonuses, making it buyout proof. Winnipeg needs to give itself an "out" if it's investing in the long-term future of a 33-year-old, hard-nosed veteran.

2. Jonathan Toews, C

Age: 37

Current AAV: \$7.0 million (\$2.0 million base salary + up to \$5.0 million in games played bonuses)

The grand experiment of Jonathan Toews' bonus-laden Winnipeg homecoming appears to be working. He's not dominating like a \$7 million star should but Toews has scored five points in 11 games and has improved with each game. He's still an NHL player.

Retirement would seem an odd choice if Toews were to finish the season with 40 points, particularly if he improves such that he ends up driving play at five-on-five. A Chicago reunion makes even less sense — that franchise is in its Connor Bedard era now — and it's difficult to imagine an old-school player like Toews romanticizing bouncing from one NHL city to the next until his playing days are done.

If Toews is a productive, healthy NHL player when he turns 38 in April, the Jets will want him back.

Ates' angle: It's easy to say Toews' outcome should be tied to performance. The hard part belongs to the Jets: The opportunity to send No. 19, Toews, over the boards will be tempting for longer than he helps. That's true of all NHL legends and particularly true in the case of his homecoming.

3. Eric Comrie, G

Age: 30

Current AAV: \$825,000

This is where the list of essentials comes to an end. You may recall that Winnipeg let Eric Comrie become a Group VI free agent back in 2022 by not giving him enough starts to maintain his rights. Comrie responded to that by seeking more opportunity with the Sabres, where injuries and an .886 save percentage reduced him to 19 games — the same number he'd played as Connor Hellebuyck's backup the year before. Comrie came back to Winnipeg when he got the chance and has since played the best hockey of his career.

Winnipeg has had mixed results with alternative backups, with Laurent Brossoit setting a standard that David Rittich couldn't meet. I don't think Comrie is a priority the same way Lowry is now or Toews will be if everybody ends up happy at the end of the year, but he works in Winnipeg. He has great relationships with Hellebuyck, Wade Flaherty, and the rest of his teammates. He's also cheap, cap-wise, which helps Winnipeg best complement Hellebuyck's \$8.5 million AAV.

Ates' angle: If there were ever a decision to be made based on human reasons, the starter/backup relationship is it. And Comrie has been good.

4. Gustav Nyquist, LW/RW

Age: 36

Current AAV: \$3.25 million

Gustav Nyquist was a day two free agency signing for Winnipeg. He's a clever, creative playmaker who navigates traffic with puck skill as opposed to physicality, contributing five assists in 11 games so far.

Nyquist's role could fluctuate on a healthy Jets roster. He played on Winnipeg's second line with Toews and Cole Perfetti at training camp and seems like a good bet to keep playing in the middle six, regardless of line combinations. That doesn't make him a must-sign player on a team with Alex Iafallo, Vladislav Namestnikov, and Nino Niederreiter occupying similar space and the expectation that Nikita Chibrikov and Brad Lambert emerge as everyday players.

Ates' angle: I think there will be some "wait and see" on this front. Nyquist is creative and talented and an ideal complementary player in some ways. It's hard to see him as an indispensable fixture, but that part will be up to him.

5. Logan Stanley, LD

Age: 27

Current AAV: \$1.25 million

Logan Stanley's NHL trajectory is a frequent topic of conversation. Winnipeg traded up to take him 18th in 2016, protected him from Seattle expansion in 2021, and waived defencemen like Johnathan Kovacevic and Declan Chisholm with the thought that Stanley was the superior option. Sunk costs don't matter as he approaches free agency: The Jets' left side alternatives are limited, while their top four lack size. In other words, Stanley's picked a great time to explode for six points in 11 games.

He's keeping things simple, earning praise from Scott Arniel and extra ice time while Dylan Samberg is hurt. He's one of one on the Jets roster in terms of size, playing at a higher level than Luke Schenn — his only competition in terms of physicality — and a well-liked teammate. Samberg's return will push Stanley back down to the third pair, while time will push his on-ice shooting percentage from 18th best in the NHL (minimum: 100 minutes) to something approaching normal.

Ates' angle: It would be a mistake to assume Stanley has arrived as a top-four defenceman because he's that high in the depth chart right now. It would also be a mistake to keep a closed mind about the possibility that he's improving.

6. Cole Koepke, LW/RW

Age: 27

Current AAV: \$1.0 million

Cole Koepke could pass a few players on this list if he starts finishing the plays he's creating with his speed. The hope when Winnipeg signed him was that Koepke's speed, physicality, and PK prowess would make him a key part of Winnipeg's bottom six. His 10 goals in Boston were a great starting point, too — it seems as though there could be more offence available.

I think there's more to this player than shows up in his zero goal, one assist stat line. I also think there's a good organizational fit, given Koepke's friendships with Neal Pionk and Samberg. Those thoughts alone don't make him a must-sign player and Tanner Pearson has played more often than Koepke has so far this season.

Ates' angle: I think the Jets rate Pearson above Koepke at the moment. I think they're close enough to pick the 27 year old (and it's possible they bring back both.)

7. Tanner Pearson, LW/RW

Age: 33

Current AAV: \$1.0 million

Tanner Pearson is giving the Jets a consistent work rate on a fourth line that's not yet matched the success of last year's edition. He's also chipped in two goals and shown the ability to win battles and then make good plays with the puck in tight spaces. Open ice can be a bit more of an issue, but Pearson's stepped up his game since the preseason ended and shown more of an ability to keep up with the pace.

The Jets' team-wide metrics should improve when they return to full health. Even one more defensive zone stop or offensive zone cycle per period would do a lot to improve the Jets' flow of play. I think the Jets' fourth line metrics will look better by season's end than they do now — and that applies to Pearson and Koepke alike.

Ates' angle: Pearson's preseason left me wanting more. I think he's delivering that.

8. Colin Miller, RD

Age: 33

Current AAV: \$1.5 million

Colin Miller can't seem to convince the Jets to give him minutes. He doesn't have the Cup-winning resume of Schenn, doesn't match up to Stanley's physicality — and can't keep up to Haydn Fleury's footspeed. We said similar things in 2023-24, when Miller played just one of Winnipeg's five playoff games, but he re-signed with the Jets later that summer all the same. It may be that the UFA market views Miller's ability to contribute the same way the Jets do. It may be that Miller is content as a No. 7 defenceman or values playing for a winning, Canadian team.

Either way, he seems to be far down Winnipeg's priority list — and may even be falling. Elias Salomonsson is probably going to take a right-shot defenceman's job next year.

Ates' angle: There would be value in bringing Miller back. Deep playoff runs require a deep defensive roster, including No. 7 defencemen and beyond.

9. Luke Schenn, RD

Age: 35

Current AAV: \$2.75 million

There is a point at which Schenn's physicality and Cup-winning experience will not be worth an assured roster spot. He hits, he blocks shots, and he fights, but it seems unreasonable to expect Winnipeg to prioritize him over Salomonsson next season. He's yet to be on the ice for a

Jets goal at five-on-five and has spent more time in his own zone than any defenceman so far this season, partly due to slow speed and partly due to poor puck management.

It may be that Salomonsson isn't ready or that Schenn's leadership earns him a depth role as a UFA.

Ates' angle: Schenn is a two-time Stanley Cup champion and has played key roles in other teams' playoff runs. The Jets were outscored 12-3 with him on the ice at five-on-five during the playoffs and he tied Stanley for the most minor penalties on the team with six. A Cup-contending team should want more from its No. 6 defenceman.