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Hellebuyck | 26.02.26 (VIDEO)

Connor Hellebuyck on the bonds he built with fellow Olympic athletes, bringing a Stanley Cup to Winnipeg, and much more

[https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/topic/connor,%20vilardi%20and%20perfetti%20\(ot%20winner\)%20scored%20for%20jets/three-things-jets-get-huge-overtime-win-in-vancouver](https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/topic/connor,%20vilardi%20and%20perfetti%20(ot%20winner)%20scored%20for%20jets/three-things-jets-get-huge-overtime-win-in-vancouver)

THREE THINGS: Jets get huge overtime win in Vancouver Connor, Vilardi and Perfetti (OT winner) scored for Jets

By Jamie Thomas

Cole Perfetti scored his first career overtime goal at 1:37 of the extra frame to give the Winnipeg Jets a 3-2 win. Kyle Connor and Gabe Vilardi also scored for the Jets who ended their eight-game losing streak in games decided past regulation. Mark Scheifele recorded his 23rd multi-point game of the season (2A) and Eric Comrie made 21 saves to win his fourth start in a row. The Jets will head to Anaheim to face the Ducks on Friday.

KC BACK IN ACTION

Kyle Connor arrived back in Winnipeg on Tuesday after winning gold with the United States in Milan. Connor did not play in the final four games of the Olympics, so he returned to the Jets lineup fresh and ready to go. The 29-year-old didn't play in the final of the 4 Nations Face-Off last February and in his first game back with the Jets he recorded 10 shots on goal and an assist against the Blues. Tonight, Connor extended his point streak to six in the first period finishing off a beautiful behind the back pass from Mark Scheifele to tie the game at one. Connor has 39 points in 29 career games against the Canucks.

"With those same side plays, you usually get the goalie probably looking over his shoulder, thinking it's going to go the other way," said Scott Arniel.

"Just a great play. That chemistry those two have had over the years, it was a nice way to bounce back after we gave up that first one."

Scheifele added his second assist of the night in the second period when he banked a pass off of Gabe Vilardi giving him 70 points in 56 games which is the fastest he has ever reached 70 in his career.

VILLE'S OPPORTUNITY

Ville Heinola has been trying to become a regular NHLer since his first season in the National Hockey League back in 2019-20. The Finnish defenceman played eight times in the Jets first 11 games of that season and registered five points (1G, 4A) in that stretch. Heinola played a career high 18 games last season for the Jets. Now with the injuries to Josh Morrissey and Neal Pionk, a door has opened for Heinola who played on the Jets third defence pairing with Luke Schenn and quarterbacked the team's second power play unit in Vancouver. Heinola finished the night with 13:44 TOI, two shots, one block and two hits.

HAD TO WIN

With the Jets sitting 11 points out of a playoff spot in the Western Conference as the NHL began its post-Olympic schedule, Winnipeg has very little room for error and beating the NHL's worst team had to happen ahead of games against Anaheim Friday and San Jose Sunday. Winnipeg will be without Morrissey, Pionk and Nino Niederreiter for an extended period making the task even more challenging. The Jets made sure they left Vancouver with two points when Cole Perfetti converted a pass from Adam Lowry beating Nikita Tolopilo for the winning goal.

"It was a great play by Lowry to go wide on the three on two and their guy changing. I had a good chance. I would have liked to have scored on the 2-on-1, 3-on-1 before," said Perfetti.

"I got baited by their guy as I thought Sammy was calling for it, but it was the guy behind him. I thought we had a 3-on-1 and trying to hit him, but luckily I got another crack at it and was able to put it home."

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<https://www.nhl.com/news/winnipeg-jets-vancouver-canucks-game-recap-february-25-2026>

Perfetti scores in OT, Jets rally past Canucks Wins it at 1:37 for Winnipeg; Tolopilo makes 25 saves for Vancouver

By Kevin Woodley

VANCOUVER -- Cole Perfetti scored 1:37 into overtime, and the Winnipeg Jets came back twice to defeat the Vancouver Canucks 3-2 at Rogers Arena on Wednesday.

Perfetti snapped a rebound high over the blocker of Nikita Tolopilo from close range after the goalie deflected Adam Lowry's centering attempt into the slot to his right.

"Great play by Lowry to go wide on the 3-on-2 and their guy changing," said Perfetti, who was upset he turned the puck over on an earlier odd-man rush in overtime. "But luckily I got another crack at it and was able to put it home."

It was the first game for each team following the break for the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026.

Mark Scheifele had two assists, and Eric Comrie made 21 saves for the Jets (23-26-8), who won despite missing No. 1 goalie Connor Hellebuyck after winning a gold medal with Team USA on Sunday, and No. 1 defenseman Josh Morrissey after getting injured during Team Canada's first game at the Olympics.

"It was really nice to just get back into a game after a long break," Scheifele said. "So, obviously, we're happy to get a win coming off that."

Gabriel Vilardi and Kyle Connor, who was back with the Jets after winning a gold medal with Team USA but not playing in the final game on Sunday, also scored for Winnipeg.

"Crazy travel and all that," said Connor. "But, yeah, no place I'd rather be than back on the ice."

Tolopilo made 25 saves for the Canucks (18-33-7), who have lost four in a row and are 2-14-4 in their past 20 games. Vancouver played without veteran defenseman Tyler Myers, who was a late scratch for roster management purposes.

"I found out last night it may happen and then was told after the morning skate that we'd have to take him out," coach Adam Foote said. "This is the time of year where this kind of thing comes up and you're kind of ready for it and it's just the way it is. It comes with the (NHL) Trade Deadline (on March 6). We're all aware of what could happen, so it's our job to make adjustments."

Drew O'Connor put the Canucks ahead 1-0 at 1:58 of the first period after a turnover to Brock Boeser at the right point. He passed it cross-ice to O'Connor at the left face-off dot and he snapped a shot under the pads of Comrie that trickled over the goal line.

Connor, who was re-united with Scheifele and Vilardi on the top line, tied it 1-1 at 11:42 after a blind backhand pass by Scheifele from below the goal line. He cut behind the net and pulled Tolopilo across to his right post before passing back the other way to leave Connor with an open net.

"I reunited them and I knew that coming down the stretch here we're going to need their offense," Jets coach Scott Arniel said. "They were real good right from the get-go with (Connor) and (Scheifele) with that chemistry that they have. But the thing I liked about 'KC' is that he's one of our best [back] trackers. He's one of the guys that [comes] back on that line and helps to defend. He's a real solid two-way player for us."

Evander Kane restored the Vancouver lead 38 seconds into the second period with a quick wrist shot over Comrie's glove to make it 2-1 after forward Elias Pettersson won an offensive zone face-off back to him inside the left circle.

"We'd tried it twice earlier in the first period, and 'Petey' actually said 'third time might be the charm' and he did a great job of winning the battle in the face-off circle," Kane said. "And Jake (DeBrusk) made a nice play to halt the guys coming on at me, and I was able to put it away."

Vilardi tied it 2-2 at 18:45 of the second period, outbattling Canucks defenseman Elias Pettersson at the edge of the crease to redirect a cross-ice pass from Scheifele at the bottom of the left circle over the outstretched pad of Tolopilo.

"We had a lot of good chances," Scheifele said of his line. "Had some speed. Nice to be back all together just playing hockey again. It was a big, big two points for us."

NOTES: Winnipeg was also missing forward Nino Niederreiter, who is week to week with an undisclosed injury that he was playing through before joining Team Switzerland and playing at the Olympics. ... The Canucks got four players back from injury. Defenseman Zeev Buium played 16:30 wearing a full face shield after missing five games with a facial fracture sustained Jan. 25 against the Pittsburgh Penguins. Center Marco Rossi was plus-1 in 17:07 after missing 18 games with a lower-body injury; Boeser played 19:53 after missing five games in concussion protocol; and forward Nils Hoglander played 9:25 after missing four games with a lower-body injury.

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/2026/02/26/jets-goaltender-displays-insulting-medal-winning-lack-of-awareness>

Jets goaltender displays insulting, medal-winning lack of awareness

By: Tom Brodbeck

Connor Hellebuyck is an extraordinary goaltender. On the ice, his excellence is indisputable.

Off the ice, however, the Winnipeg Jets starting goaltender faltered this week, not by accident, not by association, but by choice.

His decision to attend U.S. President Donald Trump's State of the Union address and to publicly emote over Trump's announcement that he would receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom was a political act. And it deserves to be treated as such.

Some of Hellebuyck's teammates, some fans and defenders have rushed to construct a comforting narrative: that this was merely an expression of American pride, that Hellebuyck served his country in international hockey, that he is therefore deserving of recognition from the highest office in the land. It is a tidy story. It is also a false one.

There is a profound difference between loving your country and standing shoulder-to-shoulder with a man who is actively corroding it.

The Presidential Medal of Freedom is not a neutral honour. It is bestowed at the discretion of the president, and it carries with it an implicit endorsement — or at least a validation — of the values, conduct and leadership of the person doing the awarding.

You cannot separate the medal from the person placing it around your neck. You certainly cannot pretend that attending a highly choreographed political spectacle such as a State of the Union address, particularly this one, is apolitical.

There is a profound difference between loving your country and standing shoulder-to-shoulder with a man who is actively corroding it.

If Hellebuyck wanted to demonstrate genuine American patriotism — the kind rooted in democratic values rather than flag-waving symbolism — he would have done the opposite. He would have declined the invitation (as five members of the U.S. Olympic team did).

He would have refused the medal. He would have said, politely but firmly, that he could not stand alongside a president who represents the antithesis of the ideals the United States claims to champion.

Donald Trump is not just another president with whom people happen to disagree. He is a convicted felon. He is a serial liar. He is a racist and a misogynist whose political career has been built on division, resentment and the deliberate dehumanization of others.

More dangerously, he is a president who has systematically undermined democratic institutions — attacking judges, journalists, elections, civil servants and even the peaceful transfer of power itself.

This is not hyperbole. It is the public record.

A proud American does not stand idly by while a reckless, out-of-control president attempts to dismantle the very foundations of democracy in a once-proud nation. A proud American understands that patriotism sometimes requires dissent — that love of country means holding its leaders accountable.

Nor does this controversy exist in a vacuum. Hellebuyck earns his living in Canada. He plays in a Canadian market. He benefits from Canadian fans, Canadian infrastructure and Canadian economic stability. Meanwhile, the man he chose to publicly celebrate is actively attacking Canada's sovereignty and economy.

Athletes are often quick to insist that sports and politics should not mix, right up until they decide to mix them. Once that line is crossed, criticism is not only fair, it is inevitable.

You cannot pose for the cameras at a State of the Union, bask in the glow of presidential praise, and then retreat behind the shield of “just being an athlete” when people object.

Hellebuyck is entitled to his political views. He is entitled to admire Trump if he chooses. What he is not entitled to is immunity from scrutiny when he publicly aligns himself with, or at least gives credence to, a political figure whose conduct and policies are so profoundly corrosive, not only to his own country, but to the country in which Hellebuyck works and lives for much of the year.

The idea that accepting Trump's medal somehow represents service to the United States cheapens the very concept of service. True service to country is not rewarded with medals from strongmen. It is demonstrated through courage — the kind of courage to say no when saying yes is easier, more lucrative or more flattering.

History is not kind to those who remain silent, compliant or celebratory during periods of democratic backsliding. It rarely remembers them as patriots. More often, it remembers them as enablers — people who mistook proximity to power for principle.

Hellebuyck had a choice. He could have used his platform to send a quiet but powerful message that democracy matters more than personal accolades. Instead, he chose the ceremony, the applause and the embrace of a president who is doing measurable harm to democratic norms at home and to allies abroad.

That choice does not negate his achievements as a hockey player. But it does puncture the myth that his actions were somehow noble, apolitical or representative of the best of American values.

Patriotism is not about who hands you a medal. It is about what you are willing to stand up for and what you are willing to stand against.

On that test, Connor Hellebuyck came up short.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/02/26/scheifele-stays-focused>

Scheifele stays focused

Jets star centre committed to raising his game, chasing down playoff spot

By: Ken Wiebe

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Mark Scheifele isn't firing up the bus for the latest instalment of the revenge tour.

That's not to say the Winnipeg Jets centre wasn't disappointed he didn't get the call to represent his country at the Olympics in Italy.

He most certainly was and he expressed that disappointment on several occasions, but Scheifele also knows he can't change what's in the past and he's not spending his time dwelling on what might have been.

His sole focus right now is to do whatever he can to keep his team in the playoff race for as long as he can, no matter how slim those hopes may be mathematically.

"There's plenty of examples throughout the history of hockey of that happening," Scheifele said in an interview before departing for the three-game road trip that continues on Friday against the Anaheim Ducks. "All we've got to focus on is trying to get in. Not every shift and not every period and not every game is going to go your way. You just have to keep pushing forward and keep looking to the ultimate goal."

After a 3-2 overtime victory over the Vancouver Canucks on Wednesday, the Jets started the arduous process of chipping into the deficit, moving within nine points of the Seattle Kraken in the chase for the second wild card spot in the Western Conference.

With 25 games left in the regular season for both the Jets and Kraken, the margin for error is razor thin and Winnipeg will essentially need to go on the equivalent of a magic carpet ride to remain relevant in the chase.

Scheifele certainly did his part to contribute to the first victory coming out of the Olympic break.

Reunited with Kyle Connor and Gabe Vilardi, Scheifele made two smart passes to help the Jets overcome a pair of one-goal deficits to get the game to overtime.

The vision to realize Connor would be open on the first goal was elite, since most Canucks defenders and goalie Nikita Tolopilo figured Scheifele was going to keep skating around the net rather than sneak a no-look backhand dish in front of the net against the grain.

Scheifele surveyed the situation along the boards and found the stick of Vilardi through traffic for the equalizer with 1:15 to go in the second period.

"All we've got to focus on is trying to get in... just have to keep pushing forward and keep looking to the ultimate goal."

There were numerous situations over the course of the contest where Scheifele showcased his ability to create space for himself down low and below the goal line.

“Honestly, playing basketball and lacrosse were the biggest things. You kind of understand leverage and you understand how to protect the ball in those scenarios,” said Scheifele, who has recorded 23 multi-point games this season. “At a young age, that just translated over into hockey. It’s obviously something I still work at, but the innate skill came from those two sports.”

By the time Cole Perfetti ended the game at 1:37 of overtime, Scheifele had logged 21 shifts for 23:18 of ice time, finishing with three shots on goal, five shot attempts and a blocked shot while winning 55 per cent of his draws.

It was a dominant performance from the Jets’ top trio, as they combined for nine shots on goal and 17 shot attempts while combining for four points, all of which came at even strength.

To reiterate, for Scheifele, this isn’t about the 2028 World Cup or any future international competition.

What drives Scheifele first and foremost is the continual pursuit of excellence.

It’s a daily pursuit and it continued throughout the Olympic break when he made his way to Florida for some additional work with skills coach Adam Oates.

“He’s one of the best players in the NHL,” said Jets goalie Eric Comrie. “I see him every single day. The meticulous love for the game just drives him. He truly loves this game. He just wants to be the best he can be.

“Most guys go for the break and they don’t bring their gear. He goes and sees his skills coach and works the whole time and he’s in the gym doing his program, doing his workout.”

Scheifele isn’t doing that for extra credit, it’s part of his investment in the quest to fend off Father Time.

“Age is just a number, you know what I mean,” said Scheifele, who turns 33 on March 15. “A lot of players over the years have proven that. It’s about how you take care of yourself now that makes you better for the future. Every day, you’re getting your sleep, naps, recovery stuff, massage, chiro, all of that jazz to go along with that, in terms of working on your game and making sure that you’re sharp at all times.

“As you get older, the statistics show that you start to slow down. But if your hands don’t slow down, no one can stop you.”

There are no signs of Scheifele’s hands slowing down, as he’s up to 70 points in 57 games, with 27 goals and 43 assists.

With a strong finish, Scheifele should eclipse the career-high 87 points he accumulated last season.

While Scheifele is quick to point out that he’d happily trade some of that offence for more wins, he recognizes the responsibility that comes along with being a No. 1 centre.

“You always want to have the best year that you can,” said Scheifele. “I would say that for sure it matters, but it comes second to the team. If our line is going and we’re producing, we give our team a better chance to succeed.

“I see him every single day. The meticulous love for the game just drives him... He just wants to be the best he can be.”

“It’s not the craziest dangles, it’s doing things the simple way and being consistent for your linemates. Obviously I play with some pretty great players. At the end of the day, it’s the continual work. Knowing that the job is never over and there’s always something to work on. Every game there are always little things that you could have done better and could have resulted into something more.”

Scheifele isn’t only investing in his own improvement either. You can regularly find him working on the finer details of the craft.

“It’s the little things you don’t see every single day,” said Comrie. “The amount of stuff he does, the little techniques, picking pucks off the wall, finding guys in the slot — even with that, he’s always so welcome with sharing that information with the younger guys and the new guys that want to learn.

“He’s a true leader and he’s going to continue to get better because of his love for the game and how dedicated he is to it.”

Scheifele’s enthusiasm was apparent from the first interview he gave inside Xcel Energy Centre after he was chosen seventh overall by the Jets in the 2011 NHL Draft and he’s found a way to keep that fire burning brightly even with 936 NHL games on his resumé.

“It’s what I love to do. This is what makes me happy,” said Scheifele. “Playing the game, working on my game. I just try to absorb as much as I can and just keep pushing to get better.”

That willingness to share knowledge and help others get better behind the scenes, whether it’s before workouts get underway or long after the formal portion of the proceedings is complete, is part of Scheifele’s game that doesn’t end up on the stat sheet.

But that doesn’t mean it goes unnoticed.

“Sometimes you get guys talking to guys in the dressing room or on the bench and giving them advice that way. Scheif likes to give advice or help guys on the ice with skill things,” said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. “He’s extremely talented. He has skills that those guys envy and they hope that they can mirror, so when he works with guys they’re real appreciative of that.

“As a coach, you love to see that, helping guys do a little bit extra that maybe helps them score a goal or make a play when they’re in certain situations on the ice.”

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/featured/2026/02/25/jets-proud-of-legendary-goaltender>

***Jets proud of legendary goaltender
Hellebuyck to be first hockey player to receive Presidential Medal of Freedom***

By: Ken Wiebe

VANCOUVER – Connor Hellebuyck put his hand on his heart and from the emotional look on his face, you could tell how much it meant for the Winnipeg Jets goalie to hear he was going to be the next recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Given the current political climate that exists, the news was met with a wide variety of reactions.

After a one-on-one conversation with Jets captain Adam Lowry on Wednesday morning, it was apparent he was focusing on what the award stands for.

“As his teammate, I’m super proud for him to receive that honour,” Lowry said after the morning skate and before his team returned to action in a game against the Vancouver Canucks that was ongoing at press time.

“Looking at what it means and the implications of him representing his country, him playing one of the best games of his career and helping the U.S. men’s team win a gold medal after 46 years, to be recognized for his achievements and to be recognized for what he did and to show how meaningful that gold medal seemed to be taken by the entire U.S., it’s an incredible honour.

“He’s a true patriot and he loves the U.S.”

“To be the first hockey player recognized, he’s in incredible company, with incredible people that have done so much for their country. In talking to Helly, he’s a true patriot and he loves the U.S. He loved getting the opportunity to represent them. I’m sure he was extremely honoured.”

Hellebuyck is expected to rejoin his NHL teammates today, ahead of Friday night’s game against the Anaheim Ducks as they continue a three-game road trip.

He will become the 44th sports figure to receive the award and joins a list of remarkable athletes that includes Jackie Robinson, Billie Jean King, Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods, Yogi Berra, Simone Biles, Hank Aaron and Jack Nicklaus.

“For me, I didn’t know the history of it until I looked it up, with (40)-something athletes that have won it and those names that are on that, from Babe Ruth to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Muhammad Ali, it’s amazing,” said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. “To be the first hockey player to receive that is an amazing honour. It’s something he’s awfully proud of. When he won the Hart Trophy, that was an amazing thing. Now this is just another great accomplishment. That list of names is pretty impressive.”

Hellebuyck was singled out during the State of the Union address at the U.S. Capitol on Tuesday night as part of the celebrations for the men’s Olympic hockey team after they defeated Canada 2-1 in overtime.

Hellebuyck made 41 saves in the game in a performance for the ages, lifting Team USA to its first gold medal in men’s hockey since the Miracle on Ice in 1980.

“I mean, it’s the highest honour a civilian can get,” said Jets left-winger Cole Koepke. “So it’s cool to see him get that kind of recognition after the game he had.”

“He played a great game and he deserved to go and receive that award. We’re all supportive of him and he’ll be back when he’s back.”

“He played a great game and he deserved to go and receive that award.”

Not all observers — some of them Jets fans — have been as supportive about what has transpired since Team USA won the gold medal in Italy, whether it was the reaction to some of the viral videos that were posted or the belief from some corners that the invitation to the White House should have been turned down.

“Sometimes, it’s tough waters to navigate because generally, when you talk politics, unless you’re able to have a conversation and find some common ground, in these short snippit interviews and these small TV clips, everything can get skewed and almost picked apart to fit the narrative that the person is trying to have,” said Lowry. “Whereas, if you’re sitting across from somebody, you can have a 30- or 40-minute conversation and you’re able to articulate how you feel and really able to see the sides each party is coming from. Then you have context, you have nuance and you’re able to reach some common ground.”

“It is, and rightfully so, a very divisive subject. People that disagree on both sides and certain things that both sides would agree are unacceptable things we can’t stand for.”

Jets left-winger Kyle Connor was one of five American players who chose to skip the festivities so they could return to their respective NHL teams.

Arniel reiterated earlier this week that the plan was always for Eric Comrie to start the first game coming out of the break, so Hellebuyck didn’t need to rush back to Vancouver to serve as the backup.

Comrie also started the first game after the 4 Nations Face-Off last February.

“This is exactly like last year,” said Arniel. “We had talked about this. We didn’t know the White House part of it was coming, coming into it. But at the end of the day, he wasn’t playing (on Wednesday). (Comrie) was playing all along. (Hellebuyck) is going to meet us in Anaheim and then we’ll go from there.”

It can be difficult for players to go from rivals during the Olympics to resuming life as teammates, especially right before the most important stretch of the season.

“All of a sudden, you’re butting heads and then you’re turning around and sticking up for each other, making passes to each other,” said Arniel. “That shines a light on how big the Olympics are and how much it means to everybody in their country. To represent your country and to put that jersey on. You’re going to do anything it takes to win those games. When you come back here, it’s a different mindset. Now, it’s ‘OK, these are my brothers here and they’re going to help me win a Stanley Cup.’ It’s pretty cool.”

Arniel doesn’t believe he faces any additional challenges as a coach, given the politically-charged atmosphere of the present day.

"I know we have Americans, Canadians, Europeans. At the end of the day, that's a different business. It's (a road) we don't even go down," he said. "We're in the entertainment business and we're also in the results-driven business and winning hockey games. So that's our focus. Our team has always been that way. We've got good leadership.

"That (other stuff) doesn't come into our room. What's on the line right now for us is a playoff spot and that's our focus."

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/02/26/reunited-top-line-powers-jets-past-canucks-in-3-2-ot-win>

Reunited top line powers Jets past Canucks in 3-2 OT win

By: Ken Wiebe

VANCOUVER – Knowing a run will be required to make things interesting, the Winnipeg Jets came out of the Olympic break mostly playing with authority.

Sure, there was some rust to shake off, but after overcoming a pair of one-goal deficits, forward Cole Perfetti scored at 1:37 of overtime to propel the Jets to a 3-2 victory over the Vancouver Canucks on Wednesday at Rogers Arena.

"In that first period, he had some unreal looks and some great opportunities, so it's nice to see him get rewarded at the end of the game with that winner," said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. "There was some systems stuff that I'm real happy that we did. There were some mistakes where you can tell it was from guys not playing for a couple of weeks. You didn't have to really tell them when they came back to the bench. They recognized it.

"We were trying to do some things to play faster and to put the opposition on their heels and I thought we did that. Our (offensive) zone time was huge. If you (have) that, you've got the opposition on their heels."

The Jets, who improved to 23-26-8 on the season, continue this three-game road trip on Friday at Honda Center against the Anaheim Ducks.

Here's what else transpired in this one:

THE REUNION: Coming out of the break, Arniel opted to reunite the top line of Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Gabe Vilardi.

The move paid immediate dividends as they combined for the Jets first two goals, both on brilliant passing plays from Scheifele.

On the Jets first goal, which tied the game 1-1, Scheifele made a no-look backhand pass to Connor, who was uncovered as he tapped in his 26th goal of the season.

Then with 1:15 to go in the second period, Scheifele had the puck down low and surveyed the situation before finding the stick of Vilardi in a high-traffic area for a redirection that made it 2-2.

"I thought we were good. We had a lot of good chances. Had some speed," said Scheifele, who is up to 70 points in 57 games this season. "Nice to be back all together and just playing hockey again."

For Vilardi, it was his 22nd goal of the season.

Scheifele also has 27 goals, giving the trio a total of 75 for the season.

"I reunited them and I knew that coming down the stretch here, we're going to need their offence," said Arniel. "They were real good, right from the get-go. But the thing I liked about KC is that he's one of our best (back) trackers. He's one of the guys that (comes) back on that line and helps to defend. He's a real solid two-way player for us."

FINDING BALANCE: One of the issues for the Jets has been finding enough secondary scoring, but part of the reason Arniel felt comfortable going back to the dynamic trio was the improved play of captain Adam Lowry and Perfetti.

Lowry, Perfetti and Alex Iafallo were highly effective in this game, using a strong cycle game to generate offensive opportunities.

Perfetti had six shot attempts — most of which were of the high-danger variety — through two periods alone and finished with nine in the game, including a first period wrist shot that clanged off the crossbar.

"I could have had a hat-trick in the first period," said Perfetti, who is up to seven goals and 19 points in 43 games this season. "When you are getting those chances and looks, that is what matters. The puck is going to go in eventually."

"You are not going to beat the goalie every single time and I hit a crossbar in there, too. It is all about getting those looks and when you get four or five shots a game from high-quality spaces the puck is going to go in."

THE KEY PLAY: Perfetti secured the extra point for the Jets by roofing a shot at 1:37 of overtime.

THE THREE STARS

Cole Perfetti, Jets: Scored the game-winning goal, had four shots on goal.

Mark Scheifele, Jets: Recorded two assists.

Evander Kane, Canucks: Scored a goal, had four shots on goal.

THE PROMOTION: Speaking of the power play, the absence of Josh Morrissey and Neal Pionk meant that Logan Stanley was running the top unit.

Stanley did a nice job of distributing the puck and was a dangerous shooting option on the man-advantage.

"I've talked with (Scheifele) about it and he kind of said 'you're not trying to please us. Whatever you see up there, if you see the shot, take it,'" said Stanley. "The two guys on the flank (Scheifele and Connor) are pretty good, so I'm just trying to make a simple play and give them the puck and let them do the work. When something happens, try not to end plays and keep things going."

Stanley's ability to get shots through from the point was on display both at even strength and on the power play, as he finished with five shots on goal and nine shot attempts.

Stanley took 26 shifts for a team-high 25:34 of ice time.

THE RETURN: With the rash of injuries to the defence corps, the door opened for Ville Heinola to make his season debut with the Jets.

Heinola skated on the third pairing with Luke Schenn and also had an opportunity to run the second power play, finishing with two shots on goal, two hits and a blocked shot in 13:44 of ice time.

Suiting up in his first NHL game since last April, Heinola showed plenty of confidence and forced Canucks forward Nils Hoglander to take a hooking minor midway through the second period to give the Jets a power play.

EXTRA, EXTRA: Eric Comrie made his 20th start of the season (tying his career high) and finished with 21 saves as he improved to 10-9-1. Comrie has allowed just five goals during his past five starts, lowering his goals-against average to 3.01.

The Jets improved to 3-8 in overtime this season and recorded their first extra time victory of any kind since Nov. 15 against Calgary Flames, snapping a string of eight consecutive losses in that category.

The healthy scratches for the Jets were defenceman Kale Clague and forward Walker Duehr.

Former Jets D-man Tyler Myers was a late scratch for roster maintenance purposes. Myers, who has one more year on his deal that includes an AAV of US \$3 million, is a trade target and is reported to be mulling over a potential move to a contender. Myers has a full no-movement clause, essentially giving him control of the situation.

The Manitoba Moose earned a 3-2 overtime victory over the Grand Rapids Griffins on Wednesday in American Hockey League action at Van Andel Arena. Phil Di Giuseppe scored the OT winner at 2:21 of the extra session. Sam Fagemo (with his 14th, which ties him with captain Mason Shaw for the team lead) and Isaak Phillips also scored for the Moose, who got 25 saves from Thomas Milic.

The Moose, who continue a three-game road trip on Saturday against the Milwaukee Admirals, improved to 25-24-4-1 and went into Thursday's action in third place in the Central Division, one point clear of the Texas Stars.

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11707160/perfettis-first-career-ot-goal-lifts-winnipeg-jets-past-vancouver-3-2/>

Perfetti's first career OT goal lifts Winnipeg Jets past Vancouver 3-2

By Christian Aumell & Russ Hobson Global News

If the Winnipeg Jets want to believe there is hope of a longshot, late-season playoff push, beating the Canucks in Vancouver Wednesday night was an absolute must.

Mission accomplished, albeit barely, as Cole Perfetti's first career overtime goal was the difference in a 3-2 win to start a three-game road trip coming out of the Olympic break.

Perfetti couldn't light the lamp on a number of grade-A chances in the first period, but he made it count when it mattered the most.

"I felt like I could have had a hat trick in the first period," said Perfetti. "When you're getting those chances, when you're getting those looks, that's what matters. The puck is going to go in eventually. You're not going to beat the goalie every single time.

"It took to overtime but luckily it went in."

It was just their second overtime victory of the season after losing their last eight games that included OT.

Perfetti has just seven goals this season but has four points in his last four games and they're going to need more of it if they're going to make a push to the playoffs.

"The first period – he had some unreal looks," said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. "It's nice to see him get rewarded at the end of the game with that winner."

Kyle Connor and Gabriel Vilardi scored the other goals for the Jets, while Mark Scheifele recorded a pair of assists to become just the third player in franchise history to have three straight 70-point seasons. Both Scheifele and Connor are now riding six-game point streaks.

The Jets were outshot 11-3 in the third period but responded with four of the five shots on goal in the extra frame.

With Josh Morrissey out with an injury, Logan Stanley had a game-high seven shots on goal and led all Jets skaters with over 25 minutes of ice time.

"I thought he did a good job," Arniel said. "I thought all our 'D'. At times there's a lot of pressure coming from Vancouver and I thought we did a pretty good job of playing fast and getting out of our end quickly. That's what's going to have to happen. Guys have to step up, take advantage of the ice time or the situations that have been thrown at them and help us have success."

With Morrissey, Neal Pionk, Nino Niederreiter and Connor Hellebuyck out of the lineup, the game got off to a shaky start for the Jets as they fell behind just 1:58 into the contest.

Stanley tried to clear the puck out of his end but his weak chip up the ice was grabbed out of the air by Brock Boeser. He sent it to a wide-open Drew O'Connor in the slot, whose shot squeezed through the five-hole of Eric Comrie and into the net.

Winnipeg nearly equalized the contest on the power play roughly eight minutes into the period but Perfetti's chance from the slot hit the crossbar.

A few minutes later, the Jets did respond thanks to one of their Olympians.

The play began when an Evander Kane pass out of the Vancouver end went awry, allowing Scheifele to collect the puck and skate into the Canucks' zone. He passed it off to Dylan DeMelo in transition, whose shot was blocked into the corner, but Connor won the battle for the puck and gave it to Scheifele.

As Scheifele carried it behind the net, he dropped a behind-the-back pass to Connor, who quickly got in front and snapped it into the goal for his 26th of the season, adding validation to his decision to return to Winnipeg team immediately after arriving in North America from Italy.

The game went to the first intermission tied 1-1, with Winnipeg outshooting the Canucks 8-7 in the opening period.

But just 38 seconds into the middle frame, the Canucks reclaimed the lead. Elias Pettersson won a faceoff in the Winnipeg end back to Kane, who quickly fired a shot that beat Comrie high to make it 2-1.

The rest of the period was all Winnipeg, though for the most part, they had nothing to show for it. They failed to convert on two more power plays against the league's worst penalty kill but had the puck in Vancouver's end for most of the period until finally breaking through with 1:15 to go.

The puck found its way to Luke Schenn at the point in the Canucks' end before the veteran blueliner sent it to a wide-open Scheifele at the faceoff dot. He held the puck for a few seconds as traffic converged around Vancouver goalie Nikita Tolopilo before sending a pass to the goalmouth that ricocheted off Vilardi and into the net.

Winnipeg wound up outshooting the Canucks 13-4 in the second but the game remained tied heading to a third period that was dominated by the home team.

It was Vancouver's turn to strike iron just over four minutes into the third when Filip Hronek beat Comrie from the point, but the shot rang off the post and careened away from danger.

Another great chance for the Canucks came just past the midway point of the third when they broke free on a 2-on-1. Comrie stopped the initial shot from Marco Rossi and the rebound appeared to be available for Conor Garland but right before he could shoot it, a backchecking Vladislav Namestnikov dove to knock it away.

Just over a minute later, the Jets were called for their first penalty of the night as Connor picked up a minor penalty for high-sticking, but Winnipeg killed it off.

Each team had decent looks to score in OT before Perfetti played the role of hero. Adam Lowry drove the puck deep into the Canucks zone before trying to centre the puck. It took a touch off

the stick of Tolopilo and right to the stick of Perfetti, who wired it home from the slot for his third goal in his last four games.

Comrie turned aside 21 shots in the win, including one just moments before Perfetti scored the winner.

The Jets will get Hellebuyck back for their next game in Anaheim on Friday night. The puck will drop just after 9 p.m. with pregame coverage on 680 CJOB beginning at 7 p.m.

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7074647/2026/02/27/connor-hellebuyck-best-goalies-history-olympics-nhl/>

After Olympic gold, where does Connor Hellebuyck rank among history's best goalies?

By Sean McIndoe and Jesse Granger

Connor Hellebuyck has had a good month. You might have heard about it.

The three-time Vezina winner and defending Hart Trophy winner as NHL MVP was the story of the story of Team USA's gold medal win over Canada on Sunday, making 41 saves in a 2-1 OT win. It was the sort of signature game that a goaltender's reputation is built on. After years of hearing about how he couldn't win the big one, Hellebuyck went out and almost single-handedly won one of the biggest ones that there's ever been. Then he became the first hockey player to earn the Presidential Medal of Freedom. And also, one of Frankie's dudes.

Not bad. So now what?

That's the question that comes up when a hockey history buff and a goaltending guru get together. So today, Sean McIndoe and Jesse Granger are teaming up to try to figure out where Hellebuyck stands in modern NHL history.

That's modern as in the post-1967 expansion era, meaning we won't be trying to compare Hellebuyck to names like Terry Sawchuk, Jacques Plante or Glenn Hall. But that still leaves a lot of great goaltenders to sort through. After the biggest win of his life, where does Hellebuyck fit in? Upper echelon? The truly elite? Mount Rushmore? Even higher?

We're not sure. So let's figure it out.

McIndoe: So before we start to dig into the other names, let's get into Hellebuyck's resume. He has three Vezinas, which ties him with Patrick Roy and Tony Esposito, trailing only Ken Dryden, Martin Brodeur and Dominik Hašek, putting him in rare company with just Hašek's two, plus wins by Carey Price and, uh, Jose Theodore. Now he has Olympic gold.

That's pretty good! So let's start with what seems like an easy one: We both agree he's already a Hall of Famer, right?

Granger: In my eyes, Hellebuyck is already a Hall of Famer at this point without ever stepping on the ice again. At 32, he's beyond his physical prime, but we've seen plenty of all-time-greats

add to their resume quite a bit beyond that point in their career. Both Brodeur and Hašek won half of their Vezina trophies after the age of 32.

On top of his impressive trophy case, which is already HOF-worthy, Hellebuyck is already top-15 in NHL history in goals saved above expected (GSAA), and is on pace to fly past Jonathan Quick as the all-time leader for wins by an American goalie.

McIndoe: Fully agreed. So he's already Hall-worthy. But that's not our question for today. We're trying to figure out how high up the modern list he's climbed, and how far he could realistically go.

Let's establish a baseline. In my mind, there's a holy trinity of modern goaltenders: Hašek, Roy and Brodeur, in whatever order you want to put them. The next tier down would include older names like Dryden and Esposito, and then Grant Fuhr, Billy Smith and Eddie Belfour, plus some more recent ones like Price, Henrik Lundqvist, Marc-André Fleury and Roberto Luongo. Maybe you'd want to put a fellow active goalie like Sergei Bobrovsky on the list, or even Jonathan Quick, as well as guys who are closer to their prime like Andrei Vasilevskiy and Igor Shesterkin.

Am I missing anyone? I know asking you to pick your favorite goalies is like asking a parent to pick your favorite children, but have I left anyone that belongs in the "best of the era" conversation?

Granger: I think you covered just about everyone. My only quibble is that I personally consider Dryden in the top tier with Hašek, Roy and Brodeur. Yes, he played behind stacked Montreal teams in an era with a shallower talent pool, but Dryden's dominance was on a level that has never been matched. If he hadn't retired at 31, I think he might've been in his own tier at the top.

I think Bernie Parent belongs somewhere on that list, although his career began just before the expansion era, which could explain that.

McIndoe: Yep, good call on Parent. Alright, comparing stats across eras can be tricky, since scoring rates have changed so much over the years. You could have won a Vezina in the 1980s with numbers that would get you sent to the AHL today. But you had an interesting number that you flagged for Hellebuyck.

Granger: We've yet to perfect quantifying good goaltending, but the best statistic we currently have is goals saved above expected (GSAX). Unfortunately, we didn't begin tracking that until 2007-08, which limits its use in this discussion. I still think it's worth bringing up that Hellebuyck's career GSAX is in its own stratosphere in comparison to all other active goalies.

Hellebuyck's 195.09 GSAX isn't just the best among active netminders, it's 43.42 ahead of Ilya Sorokin in second place. Only Lundqvist's 277.94 GSAX tops Hellebuyck's number since the stat was tracked. Those two are the clear top two in this era, in my opinion, despite their lack of success in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

A better stat for historical comparison is goals saved above average (GSAA). I like it because it compares a goalie's save percentage to the league average that season, so it accounts for the differences in scoring across eras. It's still not perfect, but it's the best we have to compare goalies from the 1970s and 2020s (and everywhere in between).

Hellebuyck is already 15th on the all-time GSAA list, behind 13 Hall of Famers, John Vanbiesbrouck and Glenn Resch. I will reference this stat quite a bit as we compare Hellebuyck to the other greats.

McIndoe: OK, so let's plant our first real flag. Given what the numbers tell us, plus the three Vezinas, is Hellebuyck the best goaltender of the cap era?

Granger: Yes, Hellebuyck is the best of the cap era in my eyes. His main competition are Lundqvist, Luongo and Fleury, and Hellebuyck's individual accomplishments already outpace all three, and he still has plenty of time to add to them.

McIndoe: When we listed all of Hellebuyck's accomplishments up above, there was something missing, and it's one thing Hellebuyck has in common with other cap-era names like Price, Lundqvist and Luongo: He hasn't won a Cup. We should add a "yet" qualifier, since he's 32 and far from being done. But given some of the legends who led their teams to multiple championships, does that lack of a ring put a ceiling on how highly Hellebuyck could rank some day?

Granger: There's no question Hellebuyck needs a Cup to enter the conversation for the greatest goalie of all time. Even Hašek, who had won six Vezinas, two Harts and two Jennings trophies through the first 12 years of his career, didn't truly cement himself at the top until his Cup win with Detroit in 2002.

Hockey is a team sport. Wins and championships are team accomplishments. But in my opinion, nothing determines the outcomes more than the starting goalie. It's possible to be an all-time great without a Cup, but the higher you get on the list, the more championships become a factor.

McIndoe: Here comes another flag to plant, and it's a tough one. Is there a case to be made — not an ironclad one, but a reasonable one — that Hellebuyck belongs in the Roy/Brodeur/Hašek conversation?

I'll be honest, I find it tough. Hašek has double the Vezinas with six, double the Harts with two, a pair of Cup rings, and his own Olympic gold medal that he won almost single-handedly. Brodeur has 691 wins, well over 100 more than the next name on the list, to go with three Cups and four Vezinas. Roy is third all-time in wins and won four Cups, and he was the Conn Smythe winner for three of those, and may have been the single best big-game goalie to ever live.

Each of those guys achieved some of those honors in their mid-30s or beyond, and again, Hellebuyck isn't done yet. But right now, is there any case that he's knocking on the door of the big three?

Granger: I am in complete agreement with you. Hellebuyck still has time to climb into this tier, but as of now, he's not there.

McIndoe: Let's go rapid-fire for a few names. I'll give you a goalie, you tell me whether you have Hellebuyck above or below him on your list. Let's start with Belfour.

Granger: Belfour had a much quicker start to his career than Hellebuyck, but he burned bright and fast. Eddie the Eagle racked up two Vezinas and a Calder trophy in his first three full seasons in the NHL, but added only two Jennings trophies over his final 13 seasons.

Belfour had an incredible shining moment, outdueling Hašek to finally win a Stanley Cup in 1999. He helped Dallas back to the Cup final the following year, and was absolutely sensational in both runs, which is arguably more impressive than Hellebuyck's Olympic run.

I think this one is razor tight at the moment. I'd give Hellebuyck the slight edge, and he obviously has time to widen the gap.

McIndoe: What about Fuhr?

Granger: Fuhr and Hellebuyck's careers are polar opposites. From a statistical perspective, Hellebuyck is far superior. His 170.7 GSAA are laughably ahead of Fuhr's 2.2. That's right, Fuhr saved 2.2 goals above average for his entire career. That number was somewhat depressed by three poor seasons at the end in St. Louis and Calgary, but Fuhr never put up individual numbers close to Hellebuyck's.

However, the biggest criticism of Hellebuyck's legacy is his lack of clutch playoff performances and Cups, and Fuhr is one of the best examples of both in NHL history. Fuhr was excellent in the postseason and won four Cups before turning 26.

This is a matter of preference. I personally think Fuhr is overrated (in relation to the all-time greats) due to the teams he played behind, so I side with Hellebuyck here. I'm sure this opinion won't be ridiculed at all.

McIndoe: How about Dryden, who you wrote an excellent tribute to when he passed away last year?

Granger: As I mentioned earlier, I think Dryden belongs in the conversation for the greatest goalie of all time. He ranks fourth all-time with 320.3 GSAA despite playing less than half of the games of the three ahead of him on the list.

Here's a fun stat: In Hellebuyck's masterpiece 2024-25 season that earned him the Hart and Vezina trophies, he saved a career-high 41.6 goals above average. Dryden played only seven full seasons in the NHL, and he topped Hellebuyck's GSAA number in five of them. Oh, and he won both the Vezina and Stanley Cup in four of those seasons.

Say what you want about the team in front of him, but Montreal couldn't get out of the first round of the playoffs the year Dryden took off (1973-74). Dryden is criminally underrated because of the brevity of his career.

McIndoe: Esposito?

Granger: Esposito is the perfect example of how the lack of a Stanley Cup championship can limit a goalie's ceiling in the all-time discussion. "Tony O" is the NHL's all-time leader in GSAA (453.6). His rookie season in 1969-70 is one of the greatest single seasons by any goalie, ever. He had a lengthy career that was tremendous, essentially from start to finish. And yet you never really hear his name in discussions for the greatest of all time, and the lack of a Cup certainly plays a factor in that.

At this point Esposito ranks above Hellebuyck, but there's room for Hellebuyck to catch him with an impressive finish.

McIndoe: And how about four-time Cup winner Billy Smith?

Granger: It stirred the pot quite a bit when I ranked Smith over Fuhr as the best goalie to wear No. 31 this summer, so I'll continue stirring. Like Fuhr, Smith has a four-Cup lead over Hellebuyck. Unlike Fuhr, Smith's individual statistics stand up pretty well to Hellebuyck's.

Smith may not have a single season as impressive as Hellebuyck's 2024-25, but he lapped the field in save percentage for most of his career. This is the toughest call yet for me. I'll say Smith has the edge for now, but I think Hellebuyck will pass him when it's all said and done.

McIndoe: And you already gave Parent his flowers. I think, having gone through this exercise, here's where I'm at: I think it's still the Hašek/Roy/Brodeur trinity, in some order. (For what it's worth, that's my order right there, but it's close at all spots.) Dryden comes in next, and like you say, maybe he should make it a Big Four. And I really think there's a strong case that Hellebuyck has cracked the top five. I think I have him ahead of all the others, with the caveat that the next few years could still change things. But for now, he's passed most of the greats, but hasn't quite cracked the Mount Rushmore.

Granger: The last thing I'd like to mention is that aside from the numbers, most of these all-time greats had something else in common, which Hellebuyck also shares. They were all so great that they actually innovated the position in their own way, pushing boundaries and improving future generations of goalies as a result.

Esposito and Roy both made huge contributions to the development of the butterfly. Brodeur literally changed the lines with his puck handling and set a standard for mistake-free goaltending. Hašek played an unreplicable style, but showed the importance of play-reading and reactive goaltending.

I could go on and on, and I think Hellebuyck's mental approach to the game will go down in a similar vein when it's all said and done. He isn't nearly as athletic or flexible as most of today's goalies, but he processes what's happening in front of him at an almost superhuman rate. His thoughtful, efficient brand of goaltending will inspire future greats with similar physical limitations.

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7070450/2026/02/26/winnipeg-jets-nhl-trade-deadline-prospects-window/>

How Jets can use the trade deadline and beyond to get value from a lost season

By Murat Ates

Connor Hellebuyck's gold-medal-winning dominance quelled doubts about his ability to win "the big game." Hellebuyck's paddle save on Devon Toews, a friendly goalpost and breakaway saves on Connor McDavid and Macklin Celebrini turned recent playoff misery into a distant memory.

It might have been inspiring for Jets fans. If Hellebuyck could win that game — against that flood of Canadian scoring chances — then why not believe in his ability to do the same for Winnipeg during a Jets playoff run?

It's not cut and dry — the speed and skill of the Olympics makes a goaltender's job different than Hellebuyck's was against the net-front dominance of the St. Louis Blues in 2025, Colorado Avalanche in 2024 or Vegas Golden Knights in 2023.

Are Hellebuyck's playoff demons slain, then?

Does it matter?

It's a debate Winnipeg would have gotten to enjoy if the Jets had a realistic chance to play in another big game this season. The team that played the last-place Vancouver Canucks to an overtime win Wednesday night is simply not up to the task of making the playoffs this season — and it wasn't when Josh Morrissey, Neal Pionk and Nino Niederreiter were healthy, either.

The question facing Winnipeg heading into the deadline, then, isn't about how to make the Jets a competitive team for March or April. It's about how to salvage a competitive window built around a Hart Trophy-winning, gold-medal-stealing goaltender on a team set to miss the playoffs in two of the five most recent seasons.

As Cheveldayoff and his staff prepare for the trade deadline, their goal must be about helping the 2026-27 and 2027-28 Jets win playoff games — or else it must be about a rebuild that goes well beyond their interest or intentions in scope.

Here are the most important considerations.

Winnipeg isn't nearly as bad as its place in the standings

We'll make this short because missing the playoffs with a player who drives regular-season wins at a level surpassed only by Connor McDavid should be embarrassing. But there are reasons to believe that the Jets could return the exact same roster and do better than the 27th-place position they find themselves in now.

Those reasons include Hellebuyck's month-long absence (and sub-.900 save percentage since returning), Eric Comrie's poor performance in his stead, Adam Lowry's hip surgery-induced decline from dominant shutdown centre to offensive black hole, early injuries to Dylan Samberg and Cole Perfetti, recent injuries to Josh Morrissey and Neal Pionk, and seven points given away via last-minute goals against the Minnesota Wild, Toronto Maple Leafs (twice), Vegas Golden Knights and Edmonton Oilers.

That exquisitely miserable storm isn't going to repeat itself.

That doesn't make it good

Here is one potential look at Winnipeg's lines next season, solely using players under contract (and Perfetti, who is a restricted free agent).

See any holes?

I view Kyle Connor, Mark Scheifele and Gabriel Vilardi as a really good offensive trio who can win their minutes against top competition. I don't like their odds of dominating the flow of play against top lines on recent Stanley Cup champions, so Winnipeg needs to be able to count on its second and third lines to win their minutes, too. I'd argue that Winnipeg is two legitimate top-six forwards short of making that happen (as opposed to bets on Gustav Nyquist and Jonathan Toews).

The Jets will likely get better versions of Lowry and Perfetti via good health (and Perfetti's relative youth) next season. My guess is people underestimate Lowry's positive impact last season and the difficulty he's had this year. Still, four of the middle-six forwards listed here are in their early 30s — aging curves will hurt this core more than they help it.

So why not list top prospects?

Brad Lambert, 22, has scored 13 points in 32 AHL games this season. Brayden Yager, 21, has scored 17 points in 47 games. Nikita Chibrikov, 23, has five points in 32 games. There are bright spots (Daniel Zhilkin) and reasons to believe Yager, Lambert and Chibrikov may someday be NHL players, but top-six NHL forwards produce much more in the AHL, much younger, than any of Winnipeg's top prospects have done. Jack Roslovic never made it as high as Winnipeg's top six, by contrast, but achieved a point per game in the AHL at 20.

A contending team would have a star-caliber right-shot defenceman. Still, Josh Morrissey and Dylan Samberg are so good in their roles that Dylan DeMelo, Neal Pionk and Elias Salomonsson may be a viable right side. Aging curves work against DeMelo and Pionk, though, and while Salomonsson might someday be the best right-shot defender of the group, he's still a rookie.

Then there's Hellebuyck, who has to be viewed as a Cup-caliber goaltender. If not, there's no point.

Ideal approach to the trade deadline

Every decision made this season must serve a future Jets team. Luke Schenn may have a Cup-winning pedigree but the only route by which the 36-year-old defenceman can help the Jets win a Stanley Cup is via the acquisition of a mid-to-late-round draft pick. This must be the route Winnipeg takes with all of its veteran players on track to become unrestricted free agents this season.

Jonathan Toews has told *The Athletic* he wouldn't consider a move. It's possible the Jets sign him or Eric Comrie or another player from the following list to play next season.

Winnipeg's pending UFAs: Gustav Nyquist, Jonathan Toews, Tanner Pearson, Cole Koepke, Walker Duehr, Luke Schenn, Colin Miller, Logan Stanley, Ville Heinola (Group VI), Eric Comrie

Anyone on this list who isn't coming back needs to be moved for draft picks. The Jets don't have a second-round or a fourth-round pick this year or next, via past trades for Miller, Schenn and Brandon Tanev.

But if no one on this list is guaranteed to bring back a first- or even a second-round pick, why bother?

There are two good reasons. Most depth draft picks don't turn into NHL players but every additional selection increases the odds of Winnipeg finding another mid-to-late round gem like Lowry (third round, 2011), Hellebuyck (fifth round, 2012), Andrew Copp (fourth round, 2013) or Mason Appleton (sixth round, 2015.) The odds of each pick hitting that well are small, but they're bigger than the zero odds of pending UFAs like Schenn or Nyquist helping future Jets teams.

The second reason is that draft picks can be moved after acquiring them. The Jets paid a second-round pick for Nino Niederreiter, a fourth-round pick for Vladislav Namestnikov and a third-round pick for DeMelo in past years, following up on relatively cheap acquisition prices with contract extensions. If one of their pending UFAs can help add the fourth-round pick that becomes a future Namestnikov, they'll be grateful to have the asset. Meanwhile, organizations like the Washington Capitals have made a habit of acquiring and then moving picks, increasing their value with each transaction. Every asset counts, and the Jets need to turn paperclips into houses if they're committed to the Hellebuyck window.

It's worth noting that Winnipeg's list of late gems dries up starting with Mark Hillier's promotion to director of amateur scouting before the 2016 draft and its trend of trading picks away, which started in 2018. Winnipeg needs to hold on to its draft capital this season, unless ...

NHL teams only have a handful of games left to play before the trading window closes at 3 p.m. ET on March 6.

Acquiring players with term

It would be absurd for Winnipeg to acquire rental players in its pursuit of a playoff spot this season. It similarly would be absurd for the Jets to move their first-round pick — it's on track to be their highest pick since selecting Patrik Laine No. 2 in 2016.

It would not be absurd for the Jets to shop for players with multiple years of term left on their contracts. Peruse our latest trade board and you'll find several players of interest who aren't free agents until at least 2027. Vincent Trocheck may have a 12-team no-trade clause but he'd slot comfortably behind Scheifele on the Jets' depth chart and is under contract until 2029. Dougie Hamilton comes with a large cap hit and a 10-team trade list but he'd automatically become Winnipeg's fifth-highest scorer.

Winnipeg likely needs to dodge no-movement clauses, eliminating many of the veterans on our trade board. Shane Wright could be a fit, though, and matches youth (22) with a lack of trade protection, as does Morgan Frost, 26, who is scheduled to become a UFA in 2027. Neither is a perfect solution for the Jets roster but each would fit into the middle six of the projected 2026-27 lineup we listed above.

What about top prospects?

Winnipeg has a reputation for not promoting its youth — just look at today's roster — but some of that is about the prospect quality, not the organization. The Jets haven't picked inside the top five since Laine, who made the team at 18. It may not be fair to assume Ivar Stenberg, Caleb Malholtra, Gavin McKenna or whomever they pick with what could be a high selection wouldn't make the team this fall.

Assuming the player they take is ready to make the leap, he's one more route to a second-line offensive threat alongside Perfetti next season — and he automatically becomes Winnipeg's best bet at a long-term star to supplement the Connor, Scheifele and Vilardi top line.

Finally, Winnipeg's top prospects may no longer represent a path to stardom — Sascha Boumediene was Winnipeg's highest-rated player at No. 84 in Corey Pronman's prospect ratings — but the Jets need help from the next wave. This season is not leading to a playoff spot, so the Jets should lean into developmental auditions for players such as Salomonsson, Zhilkin, Lambert, Chibrikov from the trade deadline through the rest of the season.

Salomonsson may be here to stay, while the others may benefit from feeling like a piece of brighter days ahead. A playoff spot may be out of reach but there are opportunities for buy-in and team-building among Winnipeg's future depth players, too.

Winnipeg Sun

https://www.winnipegsun.com/sports/winnipeg_jets/i-started-shaking-jets-hellebuyck-on-honour-from-trump/article_8dd41cc8-7b42-4081-8c8d-e198a16359d3.html

'I started shaking': Jets' Hellebuyck on honour from Trump

By Paul Friesen

Connor Hellebuyck says the news he was going to get the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom from Donald Trump left him trembling.

In a sit-down interview with in-house reporter Sara Orlesky, posted on the team website on Thursday, the Winnipeg Jets goalie talked about the honour that left him shocked during his visit to the White House earlier this week.

"It's still so surreal," Hellebuyck told Orlesky. "I was going in there to shake the President's hand, and I had no recollection or even thought that I could possibly be getting anything more than that. So when he had told me that morning that I was going to win the Presidential Medal of Freedom, my heart skipped a beat. I was stunned. I started shaking. I didn't know how to respond to that. I know I'm in my thirties, but I'm just a kid playing a hockey game, right?"

"And the next 12 hours after that, I was on Cloud 9. It didn't feel real."

Hellebuyck and most of his Olympic gold-medal-winning American teammates visited the White House Tuesday morning, then attended Trump's State of the Union speech that night.

That's where Trump made the news public that Hellebuyck would become the first hockey player awarded the U.S.'s highest civilian honour.

The American team has taken some heat over how it handled Trump's invitation, delivered via the cell phone of FBI director Kash Patel during the post-game celebration.

On the call, Trump joked that he'd have to invite the U.S. women's team, too, or else face impeachment, drawing laughs from the players listening.

"We were so excited, on Cloud 9, coming into that room," Hellebuyck said. "And then some things unfolded. And I'm sorry that that's the way they unfolded. It's very unfortunate that the criticism that we're taking for all this, because that was not the way we intended it. I know this entire team, we used the women's gold-medal game as motivation for us to win gold. We were very close with them. There was no one more excited for when they won than us."

"It's unfortunate that their win is getting overshadowed right now, because what they did was just incredible."

Hellebuyck was also asked about the visit to meet Trump, a man who's already been convicted of 34 felony counts of falsifying business records to cover up hush-money payments to women,

been found liable for sexual assault in a civil case and who has suspicion swirling around him over his friendship with child sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein.

The 32-year-old product of Michigan says being able to visit the White House and U.S. Capitol is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity he couldn't turn down.

"As a team we did this for the nation, we did this for the country," Hellebuyck said. "And what better place to go celebrate than the heart of that nation and that country. And that's the White House. I want to be able to tell my kids one day I walked those halls. Regardless of who's in office, that's a really cool thing to do. There is so much history there. I got to take a picture of the Declaration of Independence. Not everyone can say that. I got to see the Oval Office, the same desk that our founding fathers sat at.

"I'm answering the call for the nation to go there... and for me being able to pass that onto my kids one day is going to be mean the world to me."

Hellebuyck revisited the day the U.S. beat Canada in overtime to win the gold, saying he woke up as calm as could be before going out to stop 41 of 42 shots in the 2-1 win.

"It blows my mind a little bit – I woke up with no nerves," he said. "It just felt like I woke up lucky. It was the best sleep I've ever gotten before a big game. And I was ready to go the second I opened my eyes.

"It's definitely one of the best games that I've played."

The interview with Orlesky was done in Winnipeg early Thursday morning. Hellebuyck had flown back to spend one night at home to see his kids for the first time since the Olympics.

He flew to Anaheim to meet up with his teammates later in the day. The Jets face the Ducks on Friday.

As for the prospect of getting back in front of Canadian fans back in Winnipeg, Hellebuyck acknowledged a bit of a mental struggle.

"This is the hardest part of it, because I play in Winnipeg... a Canadian city where I've given my heart and soul for my entire career. And to go into a moment like that where now I have to break the hearts of where I play, it's tough mentally. Because I want them to be just as happy as I am."

He knows there's one thing that will accomplish that.

"I have now experienced it and I can now use the confidence and the experience that I feel like I needed to really get over the hump, the push for the Stanley Cup," he said. "And now I'm really excited to bring that here to this city, and see if they can feel that same 48 hours that I just felt."

https://www.winnipegssun.com/sports/perfetti-nabs-overtime-winner-jets-beat-canucks-3-2/article_ea9bfe41-f36a-4867-8db8-0c97e9f38d6d.html

Perfetti nabs overtime winner, Jets beat Canucks 3-2

By Gordon Anderson

Theoretically speaking, it is not how many goals you score, but when you score them.

“I could have had a hat-trick in the first period,” Cole Perfetti told reporters in Vancouver after Winnipeg’s 3-2 overtime win over the Canucks on Wednesday night. “You are not going to be the goalie every single time, and I hit a crossbar in there too. It is all about getting those looks and when you get four or five shots a game from high-quality spaces the puck is going to go in. It took (until the) overtime, but it went in.”

Adam Lowry drove wide and centred the puck to Perfetti, his fourth shot of the game finding the back of the net behind Nikita Tolopilo at 1:37.

The goal was Perfetti’s seventh of the season and third marker in his last four games.

“It was awesome to see him get the game winner,” Scheifele said. The Jets No. 1 centreman assisted on both regulation goals. He has two goals and seven assists in his last six games.

With the win, the Jets snapped a six-game losing streak in overtime games. They had also lost eight in a row in overtime and shootouts combined. Their last overtime triumph was a 4-3 result against the Minnesota Wild on Oct. 28.

“Three-on-three can be dangerous, both ways,” head coach Scott Arniel said. “You can give up looks, but usually what happens is that you give up a two-on-one one way and it turns. If your goalie makes a save, you go back the other way and that’s exactly what happened.”

Kyle Connor and Gabe Vilardi also scored for the Jets. (23-26-8) in regulation. The Jets moved into sixth place in the conference. They are nine points behind the Seattle Kraken for the second wildcard spot in the Western Conference and 10 behind the Utah Mammoth for the first wildcard spot. The Kraken lost 4-1 to the Dallas Stars on Wednesday, and the Mammoth lost 4-2 to the Colorado Avalanche.

With wins over Los Angeles Kings, St. Louis Blues and Florida Panthers prior, Eric Comrie (10-9-1) has now won his last four starts in relief. Connor Hellebuyck is expected to join the club on Friday. He stopped 21 of 23 for the win.

Drew O’Connor and Evander Kane scored for the Canucks (18-33-7). The Canucks home record drops to 6-17-5 with the loss. Vancouver defenceman Tyler Myers was held out of the lineup for Wednesday’s game due to roster management reasons. Kevin Weekes of ESPN says the Canucks were fielding offers on Wednesday for the towering rearguard. The 36-year-old has one goal and eight points in 57 games with the Canucks this year.

The Jets continue their three-city road trip against the Anaheim Mighty Ducks on Friday night.

Ice Chips

Kale Clague, Nino Niederreiter and Walker Duehr were scratched on Wednesday night.

Josh Morrissey was placed on injured reserve on Tuesday, retroactive to Feb. 12. He was injured in the first game of the Olympics against Czechia. Neal Pionk was cleared to play against the Canucks over the weekend, but he hurt himself prior to departure for Vancouver on Tuesday and didn't skate with the team on Tuesday. He is considered week-to-week. Niederreiter is also considered week-to-week. He did skate with the team on Tuesday, but he was ruled out after practice.

Game one

Defenceman Villie Heinola played in his first NHL game of the season in Vancouver. He was called up from the Manitoba Moose on Tuesday. His previous NHL game was in April of last season against the Oilers. The Jets placed Heinola on waivers on Oct. 5, but he was not claimed by any other organization, the Finnish defender thus returning to the AHL. Heinola told Finnish media outlet Ilta-Sanomat back in January that he felt stuck in the Winnipeg organization, not given a chance to prove himself.

The Jets selected the 25-year-old 20th overall in the 2019 NHL draft. He has one goal and a dozen assists in 54 career NHL games played.

"It is never fun to see the guys go down, but I am excited to get the opportunity to play," Heinola said. "It has been mentally tough, for sure, but I think my game has been improving all year and I feel my game is in a good spot right now."

Heinola logged the second most power-play minutes among the defenceman with 2:07. He played 11:37 overall.

PP woes

After scoring power-play goals in two consecutive games, the powerplay went 0-3 against the league's worst penalty kill. Coming into the game, the Canucks PK had allowed 50 goals in 170 powerplay chances against. Logan Stanley logged the most powerplay minutes among the d-core with 3:52. Stanley was credited with three even-strength shots and two power-play shots on goal.

Early goals

The Jets allowed early goals in both the first and second periods.

Vancouver opened the scoring at 1:58 of the opening stanza when Logan Stanley failed to clear the zone with a flip pass, the puck picked off by Brock Boeser inside the Jets defensive zone.

Boeser quickly passed the puck to the wide-open O'Connor, his shot from the right face-off circle squeezing through the legs of Comrie.

Vancouver restored its one-goal lead 38 seconds into the second period when Kane's shot beat Comrie to the glove side following a clean face-off win by Elias Pettersson to the right of the net.

https://www.winnipeg.sun.com/sports/cole-perfetti-picking-up-the-pace-for-the-winnipeg-jets/article_c2e54747-33ae-4987-ac72-b037fc129be1.html

Cole Perfetti picking up the pace for the Winnipeg Jets

By Gordon Anderson

Cole Perfetti netted the winner as the Jets opened the post-Olympic break with a 3-2 overtime win over the Vancouver Canucks on Wednesday night.

“When you are getting those chances and looks, the puck is going to go in, eventually,” the game-winning goal scorer told the assembled media in Vancouver after the victory.

The OT winner was the Whitby native’s third marker in his last four games. He skated with Adam Lowry and Alex Iafallo. Perfetti was credited with three shots. One of his attempts hit the post.

“I thought we were really good going into the break too, and (on Wednesday) I thought we had a lot of good chances,” Perfetti said. “I felt like I had a few chances, Lowry had a couple (of chances) and Iafallo had a couple. We are building in the right direction.

Lowry earned the primary assist on the winner when he drove wide and passed the puck to Perfetti in the low slot. Dylan Samberg earned the second assist.

“He had some unreal looks and some great opportunities, so it’s nice to see him get rewarded at the end of the game with that winner,” head coach Scott Arniel said. “That line was good. To get the secondary scoring like that certainly helps.”

Perfetti has seven goals in 43 games played this season but four in his last eight. The goal was his second game winner of the year.

“That ankle sprain really got him off to a slow start, missing those early games in training camp, exhibition and the regular season where the whole league gets themselves up to speed, and he missed that,” Arniel said.

As Arniel mentioned, Perfetti sustained a high-ankle strain during the final game of the pre-season against the Calgary Flames. The jets placed Perfetto on injured reserve on Oct. 5.

The 24-year-old did not get a lot of practice time with the team when he returned to the practice ice after nearly a month of rest and rehab. His first game was Nov. 9 against the Ducks. The 24-year-old missed 14 games. He came back with the players operating at full blast.

“He got into some fast-moving water, and I don’t think his ankle was 100 per cent,” Arniel said. “Now, he looks good, he looks more comfortable and looks like the player we saw last year. Confidence is a big thing, and hopefully he continues that and builds off what he did (prior) to the break.”

With the win, the Jets (23-26-8) moved into sixth place in the conference. They are nine points behind the Seattle Kraken for the second wildcard spot in the Western Conference and 10 behind the Utah Mammoth for the first wildcard spot heading into league action on Thursday night.

