

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/12/18/jets-season-on-thin-ice>

Jets' season on thin ice

Without major shakeup, Cup hopes for club rapidly fading

By: Mike McIntyre

DENVER — The Winnipeg Jets cancelled their scheduled practice here on Thursday, apparently deciding a day away from the rink was the best course of action.

That's a curious move for a club that has struggled to show up on game nights for large stretches of the season — the latest example coming Wednesday in St. Louis, where the Jets suffered their 15th loss in the past 21 outings (6-13-2).

How bleak are things for the reigning Presidents' Trophy winners, who were just three points clear of the NHL basement prior to Thursday's slate of games? Allow us to count the ways.

General manager Kevin Cheveldayoff hasn't made a move beyond sending a few promising young skaters back to the farm, seemingly unwilling to disrupt the slow, aging lineup he assembled. A frustrated head coach Scott Arniel appears to have run out of fresh ideas. Underperforming players have few words to explain what's happening — and not happening — on the ice.

And last, but certainly not least, fan disappointment and anger is threatening to morph into something even more troubling: apathy. Recent crowd sizes have shrunk. The downtown rink often has the atmosphere of the Millennium Library. And the product on the ice is anything but entertaining.

It would be one thing if the Jets were bad but fun. Instead, they're bad and boring — as we were reminded again Wednesday when the Blues, who entered play as the worst defensive team in the NHL, held what was supposed to be a desperate, highly motivated Jets club to 24 shots and no goals in a 1-0 triumph.

It marked the fourth time in 33 games Winnipeg has been blanked. The 15-16-2 Jets are a tough watch these days, to put it mildly. And just when it feels like they've hit rock bottom, along comes an even deeper sinkhole.

Next up is a Friday night clash with the Colorado Avalanche, who just so happen to sit atop the league standings with an incredible 24-2-7 record. Hide the children, folks. This one could get ugly.

Cheveldayoff recently told the Free Press that the answers to his team's troubles "must come from within." Is that really still the mindset? Is he not seeing what has become painfully obvious to anyone who's watched this Jets club struggle on a near-nightly basis?

Perhaps it's time to start asking some different questions. Among them:

1) Are there truly no better options available right now?

The Manitoba Moose are off to a strong start, with plenty of players producing and likely champing at the bit for a chance to make an impact in Winnipeg. Why aren't any of them being given one?

Go up and down the list: Younger pros like Brayden Yager, Brad Lambert, Nikita Chibrikov, Danny Zhilkin, Parker Ford and Samuel Fagemo. More established skaters like David Gustafsson, Mason Shaw, Walker Duehr, Phil Di Giuseppe and Jaret Anderson-Dolan. All might have something to offer.

Blues head coach Jim Montgomery, speaking prior to Wednesday's game, mentioned that two young players would be making their NHL debuts. He talked about how that could inject energy and excitement into a struggling veteran group in need of a jolt. His team went out and played that way, too.

Winnipeg Jets forward Gustav Nyquist attempts to pressure St. Louis Blues defenceman Philip Broberg Wednesday night. Nyquist is yet to score a goal in 24 games this season.

There's been no such boost for the Jets, who continue to roll out largely the same tired lineup night after night. Are they really afraid of losing players like Gustav Nyquist (no goals in 24 games), Tanner Pearson (five points in 27 games) and Colin Miller (a healthy scratch for 23 games so far) who are all pending unrestricted free agents?

It's worth the risk. If they get claimed, so be it. If not, send them to the AHL and make room for hungry players who — at the very least — can't bring any less to the table.

An organization that prides itself on loyalty and patience now appears to be trapped by its own philosophy. It's starting to look like they're more worried about hurting feelings than winning hockey games.

2) Speaking of which, how much longer can the Jonathan Toews experiment last?

This once feel-good story is showing little sign of a happy ending. Toews' play continues to trend in the wrong direction, with just a single secondary assist over his past 17 games. His role has diminished, his ice time has been slashed, and he looks to have very little left in the tank.

Isn't it time, at the very least, to consider a healthy scratch or two? Call it load management if you want. It's hard to believe the fiercely proud Toews is enjoying this. And aside from winning some faceoffs, the 37-year-old is not helping his hometown team in any tangible way. That hoped-for playoff payoff now feels like a pipe dream.

Other than solid fourth-liner Cole Koepke, the summer signings — Toews, Nyquist and Pearson — have been a bust. And that lands squarely on Cheveldayoff, who didn't do enough to fill the holes left in his lineup following free agency.

3) What are core members like Connor Hellebuyck, Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Josh Morrissey thinking?

You can't blame them. Along with Gabe Vilardi, they've routinely been Winnipeg's best players. But it hasn't been nearly enough.

This was supposed to be a win-now team. Instead, the Jets look like a group whose wide-open window from a year ago may have slammed shut — with the only race they're truly competitive in being for the No. 1 overall draft pick. This wasn't what they had in mind when they put pen to paper and inked long-term extensions.

Shouldn't the organization be doing everything possible to pry that window back open? If not, what message are you sending to your core?

4) What's next for Arniel?

We've lost count of how many times the coach has stressed the need for better starts, discipline and puck management — only to watch his team do the exact opposite.

Arniel tried one-on-one meetings last month in California. He publicly called out his team in Carolina. He fell on the sword after a closed-door players' meeting in Buffalo. And now, here in Denver, perhaps he's trying to kill them with kindness by gifting an unexpected day off.

Some might suggest he's lost, or losing, the room. But it's important to remember he's just a season removed from taking this group to new heights, and it was just last Saturday the Jets came out with their most complete game of the year, a dominant 5-1 victory over Washington.

Making that the norm, rather than the exception, has been the challenge. If his message is getting stale, that might just be more of an indictment of the players rather than the head coach.

What's left in his bag of tricks? Splitting up Scheifele and Connor to see if they can each drive a line would be dramatic, but he seems unwilling, or unable, to do it. With Cheveldayoff offering no reinforcements from the Moose, the waiver wire or the trade market, Arniel is left rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic.

5) Where have the high standards gone?

For years, this group has talked about accountability and pushing each other to be better. That's hard to find now, with so many players struggling mightily, including several key returnees.

Vlad Namestnikov has one assist in 22 games. You might soon spot his face on a milk carton. Linemate Nino Niederreiter has no points in nine games. Cole Perfetti — in what was supposed to be a breakout season — has regressed significantly with just two goals in 19 games, not helped by the high-ankle sprain suffered in the pre-season.

Dylan DeMelo, skating on the top pair with Morrissey, has been prone to costly turnovers — including the one that led to the Blues' goal Wednesday — and unnecessary penalties. Dylan Samberg doesn't look like himself following a broken wrist in camp. Neither does captain Adam Lowry as he works his way back from hip surgery.

This ship is taking on water, and it has far too many passengers.

6) What's left to salvage at this point?

Unfortunately for the Jets, this season is teetering perilously close to being lost. Catching Colorado, Dallas or Minnesota for a top-three spot in the Central appears unrealistic. That

leaves a desperate scratch-and-claw attempt for a wild card berth that would likely end in a first-round meeting with a powerhouse.

Cheveldayoff must tread carefully. Sacrificing top prospects or high picks for a short-term patch would be reckless. It may be time to take a deep breath, accept that this isn't the year, and look toward a retool.

Sell whatever spare parts you can. Create opportunity. And finally, start getting a glimpse of what the future might look like — because the present isn't working.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/article/sputtering-jets-searching-for-offence-as-losses-pile-up-weve-got-to-figure-it-out/>

Sputtering Jets searching for offence as losses pile up: 'We've got to figure it out'

By TSN.ca Staff

The Winnipeg Jets are in a tailspin.

Wednesday's 1-0 loss to the St. Louis Blues marked Winnipeg's 11th loss in their past 14 games, a span that has seen them pick up just eight of a possible 28 points.

Jets head coach Scott Arniel was not interested in having the latest defeat excused by a lack of confidence from his struggling club.

"We've been saying that for a while," Arniel said. "That's part of your job. That's what you get paid for. Show up. Do your job. And you know what? We have to do it more consistently, with more bodies and more people.

"It doesn't get any easier."

The Jets have averaged just 2.43 goals per game over their past 14 contests, a number buoyed by five-goal outbursts in wins over the Nashville Predators on Nov. 29 and against the Washington Capitals last week. That number sits at just 1.82 in their 11 losses over that span.

Goaltender Connor Hellebuyck, who returned for Saturday's win over the Capitals, has been stellar after missing a month due to knee surgery. However, the 32-year-old has only been able to propel the Jets to a 1-1-1 record despite a .939 save percentage and 1.65 goals-against average in his first three games back.

Winnipeg outshot the Blues 9-3 in the third period on Wednesday, but still finished with two fewer shots than St. Louis' 26 on the night.

"We've got to generate some more chances and some more looks than that," winger Kyle Connor said. "We just weren't able to get going there, so it's frustrating."

"At the end, there's frustration, for sure," Arniel added. "But we got ourselves in a one-goal game on the road and you have to find a way to score goals. We talk about defending and doing

the right things. Well, offensively we've got to do the right things as well. And we've got to do it more consistently."

The Jets have tumbled down to sixth in the Central Division and now sit five points out of a wild-card spot after winning the Presidents' Trophy as the league's top team in the regular season last year.

"It's just not easy right now going through it," defenceman Dylan Samberg said. "But we have 49 games left. We're coming to the halfway point of the season. We've got to figure it out here."

Winnipeg will face the NHL's top team this season, the Colorado Avalanche, on Friday in the second of a three-game road trip before the holiday break.

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11582684/winnipeg-jets-waste-great-hellebuyck-performance-in-1-0-loss-in-st-louis/>

Winnipeg Jets waste great Hellebuyck performance in 1-0 loss in St. Louis

By Christian Aumell Global News

When your goalie allows just one goal in an NHL game, you should expect to win that game.

But expectations have been something the 2025-26 Winnipeg Jets have been struggling with all season, and they continued their slide with a 1-0 loss in St. Louis Wednesday night.

The Blues dominated the first period from the drop of the puck, thanks in part to a power play just over two minutes into the period.

But their best stretch of play came around eight minutes into the first when they hemmed the Jets' top line in their own end and sent a barrage of shots on goal.

Robert Thomas hit the post, Pavel Buchnevich hit the crossbar, and Connor Hellebuyck stopped seven shots before the Jets iced the puck.

Winnipeg was in survival mode for most of the period, with the shots favouring St. Louis 11-1 with 9:20 left in the frame but the Jets outshot the Blues 5-0 from that point until the end of the period.

The Jets also earned a power play with 1:15 to go in the period, which they carried into the second of a 0-0 game.

They were unable to capitalize on the chance, nor were they able to score on another power play that began 34 seconds after the first one expired.

But they were able to control the shot clock, not allowing a Blues shot on goal until there was 11:14 left as Winnipeg went almost a full 20 minutes without allowing a shot.

That was not a good sign for the Jets, though, as the Blues took control for the rest of the period, outshooting the Jets 10-3 over the duration of the second.

That included a breakaway opportunity for Brayden Schenn that was turned aside by Hellebuyck, but the league's reigning MVP couldn't stop them all as St. Louis was able to break the ice at the 13:17 mark.

The play began innocently enough, with Hellebuyck fielding a dump in behind his net and leaving it for Dylan DeMelo. But DeMelo coughed up the puck after being hit by a forechecking Pavel Buchnevich, with Robert Thomas picking up the loose puck near the corner. He fed a charging Justin Faulk who wired one home from the slot.

The Blues nearly grabbed a 2-0 lead when Pius Suter tried to outwait Hellebuyck as he circled the crease but as he tried to tuck it around the post, Hellebuyck got a piece of Suter's stick, causing the puck to slide harmlessly through the crease.

There were few dangerous chances to go around in the third period, and though Winnipeg tried to push for an equalizer, their efforts were undone when DeMelo was called for tripping with 2:54 remaining.

The Jets got the kill, but 12 seconds later, Suter and Josh Morrissey got tangled up behind the Winnipeg net before Logan Stanley entered the picture and shoved Suter to the ground. The Jets received an extra penalty on the play, and after the ensuing faceoff, St. Louis played keep-away with the puck until the clock struck zeroes.

Hellebuyck was fantastic in goal for Winnipeg, giving his team a chance by making 25 saves. Winnipeg native Joel Hofer picked up his fifth career shutout by turning aside all 24 shots he saw.

The Jets continue their pre-Christmas road trip Friday night in Colorado, which on paper is a massive mismatch based on how the two sides have been playing this season. Pregame coverage on 680 CJOB begins at 6 p.m with the puck dropping in Denver just after 8 p.m.

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/how-jets-are-really-feeling-the-loss-of-ehlers-in-their-secondary-scoring/>

How Jets are really feeling the loss of Ehlers in their secondary scoring (VIDEO)

NHL insider Elliotte Friedman joins FAN Hockey Show to discuss what he thinks is wrong with the Jets this season, how they've looked slow in a fast league, and why they're having trouble adapting to life without Nik Ehlers.