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<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/2026/03/09/so-youre-telling-me-theres-a-chance>

So you're telling me there's a chance Jets pull within five points of final Western Conference playoff spot

By: Ken Wiebe

Don't look now, but that double-digit deficit has been cut by more than half.

By rattling off at least a point in each of the six games coming out of the Olympic break — and by going 11-4-5 during the past 20 games — the Winnipeg Jets have pulled within five points of the final playoff spot in the Western Conference.

It's still a tall task, but it looks a whole lot more manageable with 20 games left in the regular season, including Tuesday's tilt with the Anaheim Ducks.

"You've got to keep winning games," said Jets centre Jonathan Toews. "It just goes to show that anything can happen. It's a horse race. You never know who is going to come from the back and put on a real charge in the last stretch here.

"A lot can change in the matter of a couple of days. Teams are playing every other day, so it's interesting to watch. But obviously, there's not much more we should be worrying about, other than our game."

The Jets appear to be playing their best hockey of the entire season, just as things are ratcheting up another notch.

Although there are still some areas to tidy up, the Jets seem to be settling into their structure and doing a better job defensively, while also finding a way to play faster — which is something that has plagued them at various points of the season.

After the trade deadline, the Jets moved from having the oldest team in the NHL to being 25th of 32 teams (averaging 29.69 in age, compared to 30.45 for the Minnesota Wild, who are now the oldest).

With a core group that is battle tested, the Jets figure to be able to lean on one another when times get tough.

"Our experience and the belief we've had in the locker room all year is going to matter a lot," said Toews. "There are going to be moments where younger teams maybe ride that emotional roller-coaster."

That's the thing.

Some of the teams the Jets are chasing — whether it's the Seattle Kraken or Utah Mammoth (who are above the playoff line) or the San Jose Sharks (who are just below it) — haven't been in this position often during the past several seasons.

There's a different kind of pressure that comes with having to fend off the teams chasing you during the stretch run, when the margin for error is extremely slim.

"I feel like we're not putting as much pressure on ourselves. We're just going out there and playing," said Toews. "Our energy is translating into results. Things are really starting to tilt in our favour."

Given the hole the Jets dug for themselves, things aren't going to get any easier and they'll basically need to keep playing around a .700 winning percentage through the end of the regular season to have a chance to qualify for the second wild-card berth.

"We've been on the outside looking in all year," said Jets forward Morgan Barron. "We have a tough stretch of hockey. It's nice to have a good homestand here, but we've got to keep stacking these games together and keep continuing to play the way that we know is going to make us successful."

Of those 20 remaining games, 11 of them are against Central Division opponents while 11 will come against teams currently below the playoff line.

However, four of those games will be played against the Colorado Avalanche and Dallas Stars, who are the top two teams in the NHL.

"We're just trying to accumulate as many points as possible and keep going until we can't anymore. We'll see what happens," said Jets defenceman Dylan DeMelo. "The schedule doesn't get any easier here with the games and even the opponents. So a huge stretch for us here to kind of finish off this homestand."

Even in some of the recent games that required late rallies, the Jets have put together a much more consistent effort, often resembling the template they used to have success in each of the three previous seasons dating back to when Scott Arniel arrived on the scene as an associate coach on Rick Bowness' staff.

They're also looking much more comfortable in one-goal games, which is an area that's brought more than its share of challenges this season — both in regulation time and those that went to overtime and shootouts.

"It's hard to say," said DeMelo. "Maybe during that stretch where we weren't winning, we were kind of shooting ourselves in the foot. Maybe we've just been staying with our game a little bit and executing at the right time."

"It's hard to say to really pinpoint one thing. But it just feels like we've been on our toes — assertive. We haven't sat back, just going at teams. And maybe that's a reflection of why we're winning those one and two-goal games."

The other thing the Jets are doing well is playing with more pace, the best example coming in the 4-1 victory over the Tampa Bay Lightning last week.

"Everybody's been on the same wavelength," said DeMelo. "That first two-thirds of the year there was an absolute grind. It's more mental than physical. Your mind's going to tell you you can't do something before your body. So, being able to recharge was huge for this group."

“We came in with kind of that training camp mindset, where everybody is excited. You’ve got that good feeling again. There were a few things we touched on with regards to playing faster. And I think also we saw where we were and we’re like, ‘We’ve got nothing else to lose. Let’s just go after it.’ Maybe playing a little bit more loose. Not with regards to being careless, but just kind of that mentality that we weren’t playing tight, where we were kind of gripping the stick. We’re just going after it and just doing our best and just kind of seeing where everything falls.”

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7102023/2026/03/10/jets-playoffs-chase-nhl-draft-prospects-ncaa-free-agents/>

The top 5 Jets storylines during unlikely push for the playoffs, draft pick watch

By Murat Ates

This year’s Winnipeg Jets have long been at risk of joining some all-time miserable NHL company, but now they’re pushing back.

In 109 years of NHL history, there are only 11 teams that have finished in first place one season and then missed the playoffs the following year. Four teams have done so since the President’s Trophy was created for the 1985-86 season. Only one team has ever followed a first-place finish with a last-place finish — and that was the 1942-43 New York Rangers, who played in a six-team league.

The Jets were in last place in a 32-team league as recently as Jan. 8. They’ve picked up 27 points in 20 games since that time — the 10th-most in the league — and now, after three straight wins at home, Winnipeg has clawed to within five points of a playoff spot.

Kyle Connor says the team’s mentality has always been that the playoffs were within reach.

“It’s just belief — in each other and in this group,” Connor told The Athletic on Monday. “We’ve got all of the intangibles, everybody’s hungry, and we want to get back into that dance.”

Winnipeg’s quest to make the 2026 playoffs is unlikely. Our model gives the Jets a roughly one-in-three chance of passing the four teams they need to pass to claim a wild-card spot. That number is more generous than other publicly available probabilities; MoneyPuck and HockeyViz suggest the odds are closer to one-in-six. Whether you give as much weight to Connor Hellebuyck as our model does or defer to other sites, the prospect of playoffs seems a long ways off.

How are the Jets meant to avoid becoming an ugly footnote in playoff-missing history? How have the Jets changed their game since the Olympic break? And why should Jets fans pay extra attention to college hockey for the next month or two? Those are a few of several topics to zoom in on down the stretch — whether or not Winnipeg pulls off a Manitoba miracle.

Here are five storylines to track as Winnipeg pushes for the playoffs, but puts the quality of its first round pick at risk:

- 1. When to take the playoff quest seriously*

“Something’s clicked since the break,” Connor said on Monday. “I don’t know if it was just the reset for everybody, but we’re definitely playing more as a team, with more pace, and you can see the spark in everybody realizing the task in front of us — it’s very doable.”

Connor’s statement about team speed holds up, particularly if you’re looking at recent wins against the Tampa Bay Lightning and Vancouver Canucks. The Jets were successful in transition against the Lightning by making fast outlet passes, anticipating pinching Tampa defencemen and quickly moving the puck to a second wave of breakout options. It was a good plan, executed well, and doesn’t require elite footspeed if the decisions are fast.

That’s the point Dylan DeMelo was making on Monday, speaking as a defenceman who sees all five of Winnipeg’s skaters working on the same page more now than earlier this season.

“When D have the puck, forwards are in their lanes,” DeMelo said. “Our transition game has been good, I think breakouts have been good ... When you’re executing on those things, you don’t need the fastest skaters if you’re executing and making plays.”

One little problem. It’s possible that some of Winnipeg’s recent success has been a mirage.

The Jets have points in six straight games since the Olympic break, but that includes two overtime wins against 32nd-place Vancouver, an overtime win against the 30th-place Chicago Blackhawks, and overtime losses to the Anaheim Ducks and San Jose Sharks. When Winnipeg is controlling the flow of play against top teams like it did against the Canucks, we can all take the recent point streak a little bit more seriously.

Want a challenge? Good, because several of them are on the way.

2. The schedule is working against the Jets

The Jets have the 11th-toughest schedule remaining (based on their opponents’ points percentage) according to Tankathon.com.

Anaheim isn’t an easy out on Tuesday, the Colorado Avalanche are in town on Saturday, and then the Jets have two more games against the Avalanche on March 26 and 28. If the worst team in the league took a new-and-improved Jets team to overtime, twice, what might the No. 1 team do to them?

“It’s going to get tougher down the stretch. All of the games mean that much more, so we’ve got to elevate our play that much more,” Connor said.

The difference between the most difficult and least difficult schedules isn’t massive, so let’s not get carried away as we look at the difference between “11th-toughest” and what the Jets’ rivals are facing:

The Los Angeles Kings have five pairs of back-to-back games between now and the end of the season, while San Jose has four, and Winnipeg, Seattle, Nashville and Utah all have three.

3. When to start worrying about the first-round draft pick

Corey Pronman’s top prospect ranking has nine players in the top two tiers before a steep drop-off in talent. There are good players, to be sure, but Pronman warns that potential No. 1 picks like Gavin McKenna and Ivar Stenberg don’t match Matthew Schaefer in terms of quality.

Pronman adds that years in which there hasn't been a standout No. 1 aren't usually the ones we remember for exceptional quality at the top end of the draft.

Pronman's No. 1 prospect as of Jan. 27 is Keaton Verhoeff, the 6-foot-4 right-handed defenceman at the University of North Dakota. Kevin Cheveldayoff watched Verhoeff in a pair of UND wins against Omaha last weekend. In addition to Verhoeff in that top tier, Pronman includes electric Swedish forward Stenberg, 6-2 right-handed defenceman Chase Reid, and the once-obvious No. 1 McKenna.

Scott Wheeler's prospect ranking places Stenberg in the top tier with McKenna, before placing 10 prospects in his second tier of players. Wheeler makes it clear good players are available but shares the same consternation about the lack of an obvious, franchise-changing No. 1 pick.

Meanwhile, one league source deeply familiar with this draft class believes the steepest drop-off in talent occurs after pick No. 7. The Jets are currently slated to pick sixth, barring change via draft lottery, but move one spot down the draft order for every spot they climb in the standings.

Their veteran players might not worry about that — they're in it to win as much as possible as soon as possible — but what about you, as a fan?

4. Boumedienne and NCAA free agents

Winnipeg drafted smooth-skating Boston University defenceman Sascha Boumedienne at No. 28 last year and the Jets have watched him develop on BU's second pair and second power-play unit. He's likely to return to Boston for a third year, where Cole Hutson's expected NHL departure should leave a top-pair, top power-play job open for Boumedienne to take.

A college prospect taking as many as three years before signing a pro contract is normal. The timeline is sobering, though, when compared to what the players at the top end of a draft might do. Verhoeff and McKenna might be as close to the NHL as Boumedienne is, for example, despite their relative youth.

Keep an eye on college free-agent signings when the NCAA season ends next month. I think the Jets have recognized the importance of prospects in their early 20s at all levels, whether projected to play a top-six role up front, a top-four job on defence or to help their club in other ways. Trading for Isak Rosén is a good step toward building out the breadth of Winnipeg's prospect group, making up for deficiencies in the number and quality of picks Winnipeg has made in recent seasons.

I think the Jets will try to be active — and I don't think that's limited to signing Garrett Brown, their 2022 fourth-rounder, when Denver's season is done. It would make a lot of sense if they pursued college free agents, too. To learn more about who's available, take a look at Pronman's review of the top college and European free agents of 2026.

Vitaly Pinchuk in the KHL is the clear prize this season, and there will be wide NHL interest in him if he chooses to come over.

5. Salomonsson, Rosén, Lambert and other top prospects

We'll analyze Rosén's game in more depth as the sample grows, but Winnipeg did well to acquire a fast, skilled forward with offensive creativity and a much bigger AHL impact than Manitoba's top scorers so far this season. Rosén, who knows Elias Salomonsson from playing

for Sweden at the World Juniors, will remain with the Jets for the rest of the season. He played 11:24 against Vancouver on Saturday, registering one shot on goal in the win.

My first impression of Rosén was of a fast skater, but one missing that top-end explosion of a Connor or Winnipeg's previous No. 27, Nikolaj Ehlers. He has good instincts in the offensive zone, although there were a few plays he tried to make with his hands when keeping his feet moving would have better helped his case. I'm told concerns about his compete level in the AHL were real but that he made great progress in that area this season.

Meanwhile, Salomonsson continues to look like someone who will play a top-four role on Winnipeg's blue line — if not next season, then soon after. His decisions are made with speed, his coverage is strong and he's not afraid to make plays at the offensive blue line. When we talk about the Jets playing faster in recent days, the 21-year-old Salomonsson's breakout decisions deserve a small portion of the credit.

Brad Lambert still has work to do to carve his way into the middle of the ice against NHL competition, but it's encouraging that Winnipeg has made a roster spot available for him down the stretch. He played just 7:26 against Vancouver on Saturday, though; don't mistake his call-up for intention to have him play a major role.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/>

Can Jets continue push and make the playoffs? (VIDEO)

Is there a path for the Jets to sneak into the playoffs? Is Winnipeg a team that could make noise if it does make it to the postseason? Marty Biron takes a look.

Winnipeg Sun

https://www.winnipeg.sun.com/sports/winnipeg_jets/do-something-about-it-jets-connor-inspired-by-deadline-sell-off/article_17c0139e-b6d9-48b9-a01d-23fc5d04e558.html

'Do something about it': Jets' Connor inspired by deadline sell-off

By Paul Friesen

The so-called experts wrote them off, some fans called for a late-season tank job and their GM went into sell mode at the trade deadline.

Yet the Winnipeg Jets entered a new week just five points out of a wildcard playoff spot, with 20 games left in their regular season.

"It's encouraging... the job's not done," Kyle Connor was saying on Monday. "I don't think this group ever gave up, per se. But there's a lot more excitement. We realize the season's not just a write-off."

It felt like a write-off going into the Olympic break.

And at Friday's trade deadline, GM Kevin Cheveldayoff shipped out veteran defencemen Logan Stanley and Luke Schenn, plus journeyman forward Tanner Pearson.

While the Jets did get a third-pairing defenceman (Jacob Bryson) and a young, developing forward (Isak Rosen) in return, it was a far cry from previous seasons, which saw team brass load up, and give up nothing, for a playoff run.

From where Connor sits, the moves had an interesting effect.

"Sometimes you make those moves, and we haven't been in this position very often, it almost takes the pressure off," the 29-year-old winger said. "We're just playing in a sense to prove someone wrong. Not that they give up on you, but... to not add, let's go do something about it."

Their first chance after the deadline was Saturday's overtime win over Vancouver.

That left them with a record of 4-0-2 since the Olympic break. Six games without a regulation loss, and they've cut an 11-point deficit down to five in the space of 11 days.

Who saw this coming back in early January, when they were at the very bottom of the NHL and a Jets fan in Ottawa showed up wearing a paper bag over his head with the words "From First to Worst" scrawled on it?

Connor remembers head coach Scott Arniel getting the team together one day in January, pulling up the standings and telling players to just focus on catching the team directly above them, not the many more they needed to pass to reach a playoff spot.

"And next thing you know, here we are talking about being five points out," Connor said. "It's still five points. But it's encouraging."

Forward Morgan Barron calls it rejuvenating.

"We've got 20 games left here and we're right in the thick of it all of a sudden," Barren said. "It's a breath of fresh air."

Defenceman Dylan DeMelo points to the Olympic break as a mental reset. Coming back from that, he says, had a bit of a training-camp feel.

"We saw where we were," DeMelo said. "And we're like, 'We've got nothing else to lose. Let's just go after it.' Maybe playing a little bit more loose. We're just going after it... and seeing where everything falls. We're keeping that good feeling in the room right now."

If the trade-deadline message from the front office added some motivation, the coaches welcome it. Whatever works.

"I didn't sense it that much, but good for them for saying that," assistant coach Dean Chynoweth said. "A lot of times, especially in the Canadian markets, there's a lot of pressure on the players to play and perform and the expectations sometimes aren't managed as well. There's nothing like being able to play... loose and comfortable, (with) not a lot of worries."

Those worries might just be a couple of regulation losses away from returning. But being at home for five more games, starting with Anaheim on Tuesday, has the potential to extend the good vibes for at least another week.

“It can go the other way,” DeMelo warned. “It's really bunched up. It's tight.”

But with as many teams below them as in their way, it's not as steep a climb as it used to be.

Getting Josh Morrissey back as his defence partner – the Canadian Olympian scored the winner in his first game back on Saturday – provides DeMelo with another reason for optimism.

“Not surprised at all,” DeMelo said. “He does that on a nightly basis for us and on a year-to-year basis. We definitely missed him. A lot of guys had to step up to fill that void, and even then I don't think we can fully fill it, for the impact he (has) for our team and in our room. So it was really nice to have him back and definitely made a lot of guys' jobs easier out there.”

Nobody says it'll be easy these next few weeks, but using Arniel's January strategy, Nashville is just two points ahead.

Maybe the best part of all for players and coaches: the games aren't meaningless.

Their goal is to make all 20 of them matter.

Or, as DeMelo put it: “Keep going until we can't anymore.”

https://www.winnipeg.sun.com/sports/winnipeg_jets/rosen-makes-impactful-first-impression-with-the-jets/article_e3ce094f-edf6-404d-9a53-5e48db4c2ac9.html

One break all it takes: Jets' Rosen makes good first impression

By Paul Friesen

Often it just takes one break, a chance you don't even see coming.

Winnipeg Jets forward Kyle Connor looks at new teammate Isak Rosen's trade from Buffalo as just that for the 22-year-old Swede.

Rosen, who turns 23 next weekend, was down in the AHL when the Sabres shipped him to Winnipeg at Friday's trade deadline.

The move reminded Connor of the break he got as a 21-year-old toiling for the Jets farm team, the Manitoba Moose, early in the 2017-18 season.

“Sometimes that's all it takes,” Connor said on Monday. “I look back on my route to where I am today, and it's a Mathieu Perreault injury and I get called straight up and I start playing.”

Seventy-six games and 31 goals later, Connor was an NHL fixture.

Rosen will be given the Jets' last 20 games of the regular season to make his own case.

“You can tell he’s relishing this opportunity,” Connor said. “And he’s aware. So if he’s able to come in here and make a real impact, I’m sure that’s going to stay with him for a long time.”

The Sabres first-round draft pick, 14th overall, in 2021, Rosen made his Jets debut on Saturday, getting one shot on goal in 11:24 of ice time against Vancouver.

He’s expected to play on the same line with Jonathan Toews and Gustav Nyquist against Anaheim again on Tuesday.

“Rosie seems like a real smart player,” Connor said. “Knows his space and (how) to make plays.”

“Highly-skilled,” defenceman Dylan DeMelo added. “He made some really good plays.”

DeMelo is more familiar with defenceman Jacob Bryson, the other player picked up in the deal, as the two share the same hometown, London, Ont., and skate together in the summer.

“He’s a smooth skater, smooth operator out there,” DeMelo said. “He controls the game well. For a smaller guys he battles in there. He doesn’t let that size be a disadvantage. He goes after it. I’ve always liked his game. I felt like he was just a smart, steady, smooth defenceman.

“It’s going to take some time for them obviously to get used to how we do things around here with regards to systems and stuff. But so far they’ve looked good.”

Ducks on the menuThe Ducks come to Winnipeg as the top team in the Pacific Division, with a 7-3 mark in their last 10 games.

“You want to talk about a fast team, they play with a ton of speed,” Jets forward Morgan Barron said. “They have a ton of skill. They get a few chances and it seems like they’re really good at capitalizing on them. We’re confident that if we play the way we need to and the way that we know how to, we’ll get a good result.”

Barron will play next to prospect Brad Lambert for a second straight game, as the 22-year-old plays just his sixth NHL game of the season.

His advice to the kid: keep things simple, at least until he gets the puck in the offensive zone.

“That’s where you let his creativity take over,” Barron said. “You don’t want to take away his skill set. But you’re just trying to keep him playing an honest game and he did a great job of that. He made some great defensive plays too. I really liked what I saw from him and I know he’s going to continue to show well.”

The Jets have lost both previous games against the Ducks this season, both on the road: 4-1 back in November and 5-4 last month.

A season first for ScheifeleJets centre Mark Scheifele on Monday was named the NHL’s first star of the last week on the strength of his eight points in three games, including two game-winning goals.

Scheifele scored an overtime winner against Chicago on Tuesday, the eventual winner in a 4-1 victory over Tampa Bay two nights later and his 30th goal of the year in Saturday's overtime win over Vancouver.

It's the first time this season Scheifele has been one of the league's three stars of the week.