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***Perfetti scores late, Jets three back of Preds
Jets have won three of their last four, Perfetti has 4 GWG this season***

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG – Cole Perfetti scored with 5:11 left in the third period and that was the game winning goal in a 4-2 decision over the Colorado Avalanche at Ball Arena. Gabriel Vilardi, Cole Koepke and Kyle Connor also scored for the Jets who saw their record improve to 31-30-12. Connor Hellebuyck made 21 saves and is 18-9-4 in his career against the Avalanche. The Jets will head to Chicago and play the second game of their road trip Tuesday against the Blackhawks.

TAKING ADVANTAGE

For a week and a half, the Jets have not made up any ground on the Nashville Predators for the eighth and final spot in the west. Tonight, the Jets pulled within three points of the Preds after they lost to the Montreal Canadiens 4-1, the Seattle Kraken also lost, albeit in a shootout.

"Oh, it's huge. Every game's huge, We need to win every game just to keep afloat right now, to try and stay tied and then make up ground. I'm not sure what the other scores are today, or if Nashville played or San Jose played or whatnot," said Gabriel Vilardi.

"We'll take a look. But every game is big right now. This is a huge win, coming in to play the best team in the NHL right now. And winning. I'm not undermining that. It's a good win for us."

PATIENT IN THE THIRD

In the Jets previous two meetings with the Avalanche, Colorado took over in the third period especially in the last battle between the two Central Division rivals Thursday night. Nathan MacKinnon scored on the power play to open the third and then added his second of the night 3:42 later to give the Avs the win. Tonight, the Jets only gave up four shots. Perfetti's game winner came after some great work behind the net by Jonathan Toews, Toews gave the puck to Vilardi who send an indirect pass to Jacob Bryson and his shot was tipped by Perfetti. The Avs did challenge for goaltender interference claiming that Toews impeded Mackenzie Blackwood, however, the league felt differently and the goal stood.

FIRST GOAL IN FOUR STRAIGHT

One thing that has helped the Jets play so well since the Olympic break is their first period performances, and they got right to work in Denver tonight when Josh Morrissey sending a shot to the front of the Avalanche net that was redirected by Gabriel Vilardi for his career best 28th goal of the season.

"We were trying not to get in these foot races and just having numbers over their numbers and just thought we did a really good job of just being sharp in that first period," said head coach Scott Arniel.

"The first goal helped us a lot. Kind of got us kind of settled in. And, from there, like I said, it was a real solid team effort from everybody."

Since Jan. 1, Winnipeg has scored the opening goal in 24 games, the highest mark in the NHL in that span. Winnipeg's 43 games opening the scoring this season is already tied for the fifth-highest mark in franchise history with 9 games remaining.

NHL.com

<https://www.nhl.com/news/colorado-avalanche-winnipeg-jets-game-recap-march-26-2026>

Perfetti breaks tie in 3rd, Jets cool off Avalanche Vilardi has goal, assist for Winnipeg, which gains ground in wild-card race

By Ryan Boulding

DENVER -- Cole Perfetti scored the go-ahead goal late in the third period, and the Winnipeg Jets ended the Colorado Avalanche's four-game winning streak with a 4-2 victory at Ball Arena on Saturday.

Gabriel Vilardi had a goal and an assist, and Cole Koepke and Kyle Connor scored for the Jets (31-30-12), who have won three of four and are 3-2-2 in their past seven. Connor Hellebuyck made 21 saves.

Winnipeg moved three points behind the Nashville Predators for the second wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Western Conference.

"That was a gutsy team effort. That was everybody blocking shots, getting their noses in there, into the battles," Jets coach Scott Arniel said. "That's a heck of a hockey team over there. We tried to really do a job of taking away the rush game, that offensive-attack game that they have. There were times where we got stuck in our end, but it was that bend-don't-break mentality. But more than anything, I just, I thought that everybody found a way to play a little part in it.

"We looked at the scoreboard and we got some help around the League. That's what we need, but you've got to win to gain ground. We did that. Now all of our focus zeroes in on Chicago (on Tuesday). It can't be one of those ones where you have a great game here and then you take a big step back."

Brock Nelson and Parker Kelly scored for the Avalanche (48-14-10), who were 4-0-1 in their previous five. Mackenzie Blackwood made 17 saves.

Colorado is first in the Central Division, seven points ahead of the Dallas Stars.

"Tight-checking hockey game, I think. They're playing for their lives right now, so expected them to come out hard and be desperate," Colorado captain Gabriel Landeskog said. "I thought for us tonight, it was just more about us not getting to our game frequently enough. We did at times, and then we'd have periods where we just couldn't get to our forecheck, and even if we did, we didn't really create too many scoring chances off of it."

The teams split a home-and-home set, with the Avalanche winning 3-2 on Thursday.

Perfetti made it 3-2 at 14:49. He scored from the left hash marks with a downward tip of Jacob Bryson's shot, sending a bouncing puck past Blackwood. Colorado challenged the play for goaltender interference on Jonathan Toews, but the call on the ice was upheld.

"I thought it was probably going to be their decision," Avalanche coach Jared Bednar said. "I challenged it because (of the) timing of it. We had one goal the whole game 5-on-5, right, and it's hard to create offense. And if they go up 3-2, you've got a couple shifts and then you're pulling the goalie. So if you can try to erase it off the board, I thought it's worth a shot. It's close enough, and if we don't, we just need another kill."

Vilardi gave Winnipeg a 1-0 lead at 3:51 of the first period, deflecting Josh Morrissey's point shot down and past the blocker from the bottom of the left face-off circle.

"It's huge. Every game's huge," Vilardi said. "We need to win every game just to keep afloat right now, to try and stay tied and then make up ground. ... This is a huge win, coming in to play the best team in the NHL right now and winning. I'm not undermining that. It's a good win for us."

"I don't want to be sitting here a month from now not playing hockey. That would (stink). So that's our thoughts and my thoughts right now."

Nelson tied it 1-1 with a power-play goal at 8:59 when he redirected Nazem Kadri's shot at the right hash marks. Cale Makar got the secondary assist for his 500th career point (136 goals, 364 assists).

"Obviously, this has got to be a place where teams (have) got to come in and feel our presence, and I felt like we didn't (do that)," Makar said. "We started OK today. Obviously, gave them a quick one, but yeah, I think there's different areas we can tighten up. We were working as hard as we can. Felt like our work ethic today was great, but just offensively just felt like we were a little disorganized sometimes and didn't really get much at the net."

Koepke put the Jets back in front 2-1 at 2:14 of the second period. He cut inside Avalanche defenseman Brent Burns and fanned on a backhand-forehand shot from the slot, pushing the puck through the five-hole.

"I'd like to say I did (it on purpose), but no, I didn't," Koepke said. "I didn't get all of it on the shot, but it went in. So that's all that matters for me. We've been in the spot where we need to win every game, but when we say we play the right way, that we can keep up with anyone, I think we've showed that kind of the past two games. I mean, we didn't get the win at home against these guys (on Thursday), but we still played a close game with them, and then tonight, we really dialed in and showed what we can do, and we seem to gain confidence from that and keep going."

Kelly tied it 2-2 at 18:05, deflecting Josh Manson's point shot while screening Hellebuyck in front.

Connor scored into an empty net at 17:51 for the 4-2 final.

NOTES: Makar (467 games) required the fourth-fewest games to reach 500 points by a defenseman in NHL history, after Bobby Orr (396 games), Paul Coffey (422 games) and Denis Potvin (465 games). ... Morrissey recorded an assist and reached the 50-point mark (12 goals, 38 assists) for the fourth straight season. Only Dustin Byfuglien (five) has more in Jets/Atlanta Thrashers history. ... Vilardi set career highs in goals (28) and points (62).

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/03/28/jets-inch-closer-to-playoff-spot-with-win-in-denver>

Jets inch closer to playoff spot with win in Denver

By: Ken Wiebe

To say this might go down as a season-saver isn't hyperbole for the Winnipeg Jets.

With their playoff hopes hanging by a thread, the Jets got a late goal from Cole Perfetti that survived a coach's challenge for goalie interference and ultimately earned a 4-2 victory over the Colorado Avalanche on Saturday night at Ball Arena.

With the game knotted late in the third period, Gabe Vilardi found Jacob Bryson at the left point and his shot was tipped home by Perfetti in the high slot.

Behind them, Jets centre Jonathan Toews was battling with Avalanche captain Gabe Landeskog and there was some contact in the blue paint with goalie MacKenzie Blackwood that was ultimately deemed incidental after video review.

"We need to win every game just to keep afloat right now, to try and stay tied and then make up ground," Vilardi told reporters in Denver after the game. "This is a huge win, coming in to play the best team in the NHL right now. And winning. I'm not undermining that. It's a good win for us."

Goalie interference has been a hot topic around the NHL this season and the Jets had three challenges over the course of the past five games – two of which went Winnipeg's way and one that did not.

"Honestly, I'm standing there and I'm sure (for Avalanche head coach Jared Bednar), it's the same thing. We're not sure what the call is going to be because it's hard to figure out," Jets head coach Scott Arniel told reporters in Denver. "Every one is a little bit different. The only thing for me on that one is that the goalie's blocker hit (Toews) after the puck was by him. That's what we thought, what we were hoping and we had our fingers crossed and it went our way. That was a big call."

With the win, the Jets pulled within three points of the Nashville Predators in the chase for the second wild card berth in the Western Conference standings.

The Jets, who improved to 31-30-12, continue a four-game road trip on Tuesday against the Chicago Blackhawks.

"It's just one at a time. I know you guys don't want to hear it, but we looked at the scoreboard and we got some help around the league," said Arniel. "That's what we need, but you've got to win to gain ground. We did that. Now all of our focus zeroes in on Chicago. It can't be one of those ones where you have a great game here and then you take a big step back."

Let's take a closer look at what unfolded:

The new mark

Vilardi helped the Jets open the scoring, thanks to a nifty redirection of his own after a point shot by Josh Morrissey, giving him 28 goals for the season (which set a career high).

Vilardi's emergence as a driver on the second line with Perfetti and captain Adam Lowry (who chipped in an assist) has been a massive development for a Jets team that has been lacking secondary scoring this season.

By assisting on the game-winner, Vilardi moved to 62 points for the season (which is also a career high).

In vintage Vilardi fashion, he dismissed a question about whether splitting the season series with the Avalanche would give his team confidence if the two teams happened to meet down the road in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

"Nah, let's not get ahead of ourselves here," said Vilardi. "We won a game, we're still whatever points we are out of it. We're focused on Chicago. We need to win another game, and then we need to win another game after that. That's our mindset, we're not thinking about that at all."

Koepke delivers

Jets left-winger Cole Koepke gave his team a 2-1 lead just 2:14 into the second period by using his speed to explode through the neutral zone.

After taking a pass from Toews, Koepke cut to the middle and snuck his shot past MacKenzie Blackwood, who was fooled by the change up.

Sportsnet commentator John Garrett referred to it as a Harry Potter goal, because he waved his stick like a magic wand over the puck on the shot.

"I would like to say I did (it intentionally) but I didn't," said Koepke. "I didn't get all of it, but it went in, and that is all that matters to me."

Koepke got off to a slow start offensively this season, but he's suddenly up to seven goals for the campaign and providing the type of complementary scoring the Jets were hoping for when they inked him to a one-year deal as an unrestricted free agent last summer.

After scoring 10 times for the Boston Bruins last season, Koepke is showing why he's a strong candidate for a contract extension.

His recent offensive surge, coupled with the fact he leads the team in hits, provides speed and is a valued member of the penalty kill means he could command a multi-year deal and a raise from the US \$1 million he made this season.

The key play

Perfetti's late redirection proved to be the game-winner.

The three stars:

Gabe Vilardi, Jets, Scored once, set up the GWG.

Cole Perfetti, Jets, Scored the game-winner.

Connor Hellebuyck, Jets, Finished with 21 saves in his 50th start of the season.

The changes

The Jets made three lineup changes, inserting Bryson on the back end for Haydn Fleury and putting in Danny Zhilkin and Parker Ford up front for Morgan Barron (concussion protocol) and Gustav Nyquist (undisclosed).

Bryson was used primarily on the third pairing with Elias Salomonsson and contributed his second assist since being acquired in a trade with the Buffalo Sabres.

Zhilkin took eight shifts for just over five minutes of ice time, but recorded a shot on goal and was 50 per cent in the faceoff dot, while Ford took 12 shifts for nine minutes of ice time and registered one hit.

“The big thing with those kids coming in, they’ve been here,” said Arniel. “I know they didn’t play big minutes (since) we have a couple of days off and I could overload some guys. But at the end of the day, that’s what has to happen at this time of the year, whether it’s injuries or whether it’s guys getting called up to play, you’ve got to be at your best. There’s a role to play and there’s something you have to add to the game, to each and every shift you’re out there. I thought those guys showed well.”

Extra! Extra!

The Jets split the four-game season series with the Avalanche and have handed them two out of their 14 regulation losses so far this season.

“That was a gutsy team effort,” said Arniel. “That was everybody blocking shots, getting their noses in there, into the battles. That’s a heck of a hockey team over there. We tried to really do a job of taking away the rush game that offensive attack game that they have. There were times where we got stuck in our end, but it was that bend don’t break mentality. But more than anything, I just, I thought that everybody found a way to play a little part in it.”

Winnipeg held Nathan MacKinnon without a point and limited him to three shots on goal and six shot attempts after he scored twice on Thursday and had seven shots and 10 shot attempts.

The Jets healthy scratches were defencemen Haydn Fleury and Ville Heinola.

Avalanche D-man Cale Makar recorded the 500th assist of his NHL career in his 467th game on the first period redirection by Brock Nelson. Parker Kelly rounded out the scoring for the Avalanche.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/03/27/colorado-the-team-to-beat>

Colorado the team to beat Avalanche Cup favourites going into regular-season homestretch

By: Ken Wiebe and Mike McIntyre

Motivation comes in many forms when you’re trying to go wire to wire for the Presidents’ Trophy.

The Winnipeg Jets found this out last season and the Colorado Avalanche are going through a similar process in the current one.

Although the Avalanche (48-13-10) have built their lead over the Dallas Stars to nine points, they're not about to let their foot off the gas during the final 11 games of the regular season — which includes a rematch with the Jets on Saturday night in Denver.

“Like almost everybody else in the league right now, we're playing important games,” said Avalanche head coach Jared Bednar. “We have our goal set on first place — it's been set there all year — and we're still fighting and trying to accomplish that goal. We feel like home ice is a big thing. You can avoid a couple of really strong opponents.

“There's no easy rounds, but you know that if you get (first place) and get there, you're starting at home and letting a couple of other really good teams beat up each other in the first round.”

Similar to when the Jets jumped out to a 15-1 record to start the season, the Avalanche were strong out of the gate and had only one regulation loss through 25 games at 19-1-6.

Despite the incredible start, the Avalanche have been pushed by both the Dallas Stars (who pulled within two points just last week) and the Minnesota Wild. That's the reality of the quality of competition in the Central Division, which had three of the top-5 teams in the NHL going into Friday's action.

So even though they knew they were bound for the Stanley Cup playoffs for several months, the Avalanche still found a way to avoid going into cruise control mode. Part of that fine tuning includes Bednar sorting out which line combinations work best with the playoffs just around the corner.

The depth down the middle for the Avalanche is incredible, with Nathan MacKinnon, Brock Nelson, Nazem Kadri, Jack Drury and Nic Roy among the options available to Bednar when all are healthy.

While the top-end talent is elite, the complementary scoring has also been there, with 10 skaters already in double digits for goals and three more at eight or nine.

Combine that with a solid defence corps and one of the best goalie tandems in the NHL with Mackenzie Blackwood and Scott Wedgewood and you've got an impressive collection of talent pursuing the ultimate goal.

Having nine players on the current roster that captured the Stanley Cup in 2022 certainly helps heighten the focus.

Having the likes of MacKinnon putting together a season worthy of the Hart Trophy (48 goals, 117 points), Cale Makar in the Norris Trophy discussion and captain Gabriel Landeskog back at full health doesn't hurt either.

“Our record with (Landeskog) and without him is significantly different this year,” said Bednar. “It's hard to explain because he touches our room and touches the game in so many different areas. Just having him around, he's a sounding board for all our guys, he helps keep us on track. We don't seem to ride the emotional roller-coaster when he's in the lineup.”

Landeskog's journey back from a series of knee surgeries is well documented, but after returning for the Stanley Cup playoffs last spring, he's managed to stay mostly healthy, appearing in 50 games so far while also competing for Sweden at the recent Olympics in Italy.

“For us, we set a high standard early on in the season,” said Landeskog. “We try to make sure our game is as tight as it possibly can be for the majority of every 10-game segment.”

The Avalanche will enter the post-season as the favourite to win the Stanley Cup, even though the path through the Central Division is going to be incredibly tough.

Being able to lean on some of those past experiences is a valuable resource.

“It’s the most important thing you can bring. Playing in a (Stanley Cup) final game, there’s no simulation for it, unless you play in it,” said Kadri. “We all understand how great of an opportunity that we have. None of us are taking it for granted.”

Around the glass

Ping-pong king

He may be struggling on the ice this season, with just one goal through 51 games, but Jets forward Gustav Nyquist continues to clean up at the ping-pong table.

“He beats everyone,” Jets goaltender Eric Comrie revealed Friday.

“If he wanted to, he beats everyone 11-0. He’s as good as a ping-pong player — and I’ve played against some good ping-pong players — as I’ve ever seen. He gets to the point where he embarrasses people.”

Comrie made the revelation while a ping-pong tournament was happening inside the club’s gym area following their optional skate, a few hours before they took flight to Denver to start their latest road trip.

“Our second best player is Nino Niederreiter, and he beat him 11-0. Like not even trying,” said Comrie.

“I’m actually searching up now on ChatGPT for ping-pong lessons. It went from golf lessons to ping-pong really fast. My whole Instagram algorithm went to ping-pong. I’m trying to learn different serves and different things. Honestly it’s making me worse. I’m in my head.”

Comrie said he recently asked Nyquist if he’s ever met his match in this particular sport.

“He told me that every team he’s played on he’s never actually faced any competition. Except for Daniel Alfredsson. He’s the only guy that’s given him a challenge,” said Comrie.

Maurice milestone

Move over Scotty Bowman.

Old friend Paul Maurice made some hockey history this week when he became just the second NHL coach to ever spend at least 2,000 games behind the bench.

Maurice, who has led the Florida Panthers to back-to-back Stanley Cups, hit the milestone in Tuesday’s 5-4 shootout win against the Seattle Kraken.

A video tribute included messages from several former colleagues, managers and players, including defenceman Nate Schmidt, who played for Maurice in both Winnipeg and Florida and is now with the Utah Mammoth.

“Appreciate everything you’ve done for me. Hopefully I can see you around soon,” said Schmidt. “Champs forever. Cheers.”

A third straight championship doesn’t seem in the cards, with the injury-riddled Panthers unlikely to make the playoffs, but Maurice told reporters he wouldn’t change a thing.

“This place has been great. The fans have been great here,” he said. “I really appreciate the acknowledgement from the Florida Panthers and the fans. I truly appreciate that.”

The man who originally hired him for his first job at the tender age of 28, Jim Rutherford, also weighed in.

“Congratulations, Paul. You have come a long way from that first game you coached in Hartford when I asked you to start coaching in your mid-20s,” said Rutherford, who is now the president of hockey operations in Vancouver.

“It’s been a long road for you, you are highly respected by the players who have played for you, by the people who work with you, and you have had great success now winning two Stanley Cups and coaching 2,000 games. As a friend, and on behalf of all the people you have touched in the game of hockey, I want to say thank you. And we are very proud of you.”

Maurice could eventually overtake Bowman, who coached in 2,141 games, for No. 1 all-time.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/2026/03/27/we-know-what-we-have-to-do>

***‘We know what we have to do’
Jets have 10 games left to climb into wild-card berth***

By: Mike McIntyre

You’ve got to hand it to the Winnipeg Jets — they aren’t going down without a fight.

Quite literally, in some cases.

On Tuesday, it was leading scorer Mark Scheifele dropping the gloves to defend Kyle Connor after a questionable hit from Vegas forward Brett Howden.

On Thursday, Morgan Barron answered the bell, squaring off with Colorado defenceman Josh Manson just seconds after absorbing a high, heavy hit.

Let’s be clear: neither Scheifele nor Barron is a natural fighter, and both came out on the wrong end of their bouts. Scheifele, fortunately, escaped unscathed. Barron wasn’t as lucky — he’s now in concussion protocol and will miss at least the start of the team’s four-game road trip, including Saturday’s rematch with the Avalanche in Denver.

The altercations have reignited a familiar debate: are the Jets, as currently constructed, tough enough? After all, this is a team that moved on from brash blue-liners Logan Stanley and Luke Schenn at the trade deadline.

Are opponents starting to take liberties with a Winnipeg team some may view as vulnerable?

"I don't think any additional liberties," captain Adam Lowry said following Friday's optional practice at Canada Life Centre.

"Guys are going to play our star players hard. Brett Howden, not a real seasoned fighter, it was just a guy playing hard and catches one of our best players and our other best player doesn't like it. The Manson one that is just two big bodies, obviously Barron was upset with the hit and standing up for himself."

Translation: The very same thing might have occurred even if Stanley and/or Schenn — or some heavyweight version of them — were on the roster right now.

"Losing those guys, yeah, we are losing some of the fighting aspect, but there isn't a ton of that in the game anymore and the guys in the room, if the game goes that way, we can step up and handle that business," said Lowry, who is no stranger to playing a physical style.

"I just think it is guys standing up for themselves and their teammates. There is a lot of respect earned from guys in the room going up against a real tough customer, playing hard right to the end."

And you won't find any debate surrounding the Jets over whether they look like a team that has already checked out despite being outside the playoff picture. They continue to play hard — and for each other — even when things don't go well, such as Thursday's tough 3-2 loss to the Avalanche which snapped a three-game point streak.

"We did a good job of getting it close but any time you play on your heels against the Avs they are so fast and so dangerous," said Lowry.

"When you are not playing a tight checking or hard forechecking game you start to give them some space and when they get rolling around in the O-zone with three or four guys high, sometimes it's tough to stop that when you have those numbers away from your net and they start slinging some pucks and generating some chances."

The Jets will try to limit those chances in the rematch. They remain five points out of the final Western Conference wild-card spot, currently held by the Nashville Predators, with 10 regular-season games remaining.

The next four occur in enemy territory: Winnipeg will move on to face Chicago, Dallas and red-hot Columbus on this trip.

"We know what we have to do. We take care of business and I think we'll be in," said goaltender Eric Comrie, who is riding a personal six-game winning streak and will likely get at least one start in that span.

"I think we just have to take care of what we can do. I was talking to Lowry about it the other day, he said, 'You can't make every game a do-or-die game because it puts so much pressure on

yourself.' You have to go out there and focus on your process and have your process be right and let results take care of themselves.”

The Jets made a pair of roster moves on Friday following the injury to Barron, which left them with just 11 healthy forwards on the roster.

Danny Zhilkin and Parker Ford were both called up from the Manitoba Moose.

Zhilkin, 22, made his NHL debut in January, going without a point in four games. He has 22 points (11 goals, 11 assists) in 54 AHL games this season. Ford, 25, has played in 11 games with the Jets so far this season, registering one assist. He has 21 points (6G, 15A) in 45 games with the Moose.

NHL teams are only allowed five regular AHL callups after the trade deadline. Winnipeg has already used two on Elias Salomonsson and Brad Lambert. Zhilkin and Ford do not count because they are under emergency conditions, meaning the team is in danger of falling below the minimum number of healthy players.

Both Zhilkin and Ford can play centre, so expect one to step into the spot Barron was holding down on the third line between rookies Lambert and Isak Rosen.

Veteran forwards Nino Niederreiter and Vlad Namestnikov are both currently working their way back from injuries and have been skating in non-contact sweaters. They are on the road trip and could be options within a week or so, according to head coach Scott Arniel.

Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff recently said he'd like to give defenceman Tyrel Bauer — one of the toughest players in the AHL — a chance to make his NHL debut at some point down the stretch. For now, Bauer remains with the Moose.

“I think we're playing a lot better as a team,” Comrie said of bringing confidence on the road.

“If you look at our defensive metrics, we're playing quite good right now. Like we're defending really good. At the end of the day that makes a big difference for goalies, when your team defends in front of you. And we're defending very well.”

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7149507/2026/03/28/jets-elias-salomonsson/?redirected=1>

How Elias Salomonsson went from top prospect to unexpected top four Jets defenceman

By Murat Ates

When Elias Salomonsson was a boy in Skellefteå, Sweden, his school gave him the opportunity to follow his dad to work for a whole week.

Salomonsson's father is a carpenter, so this meant putting in sweat equity. His job on his dad's renovation project that week included carpet removal, flooring, and the installation of new carpet. It wasn't easy for Salomonsson as a youngster but when asked whether he remembers working with his dad as grueling stuff, Salomonsson is unfazed.

“In Skellefteå, we’re pretty quiet, hardworking people,” Salomonsson told The Athletic. “I think that’s what sticks out (about us).”

So those are Salomonsson’s roots. His dad works with his hands. His mom used to work with the elderly and is now a cleaner. His industrious hometown is known for mining, especially for gold, and for a company called Northvolt, which specialized in manufacturing lithium-ion batteries for electric vehicles prior to its bankruptcy in 2025. Skellefteå is a nine-hour drive north of Stockholm along the Baltic Sea and Gulf of Bothnia coast, which puts it as far north as Nunavut. If you’re not willing to work, you don’t get very far.

Remember that the Winnipeg Jets’ plan was not for their 21-year-old right-handed defenceman to play in the NHL this season. Head coach Scott Arniel confirmed that the Jets saw Salomonsson as a solution for next year, not a top-four, shutdown option who routinely plays against other teams’ top lines and beats them. For a player to make his NHL debut in November, go back to the AHL, and then excel when thrust into a major role during Winnipeg’s must-win stretch run, the Jets have been caught by surprise.

“He’s had to go trial by fire just because of all the injuries,” Arniel said. “We knew there was a player coming. We knew he was there (but) this happened a lot faster (than expected).”

Winnipeg’s top prospect has become a top-four defenceman faster than his head coach anticipated. Dig into Salomonsson’s Skellefteå roots and you find a player who has elevated his game every time he’s been asked.

Salomonsson, a smooth-skating, right-shot defenceman, was seen by some as a first-round talent who fell to the Jets in the second round in 2022.

His 16-year-old performance with Skellefteå’s U20 team had put him in the spotlight, but Salomonsson’s 17-year-old season didn’t launch him into stardom. Some scouts wavered. Others dug deeper, looked at his Aug. 31 birthdate, and gave him credit for his performance as one of the youngest players in his draft class.

Salomonsson attended day one of the draft with his mom and dad, hoping to hear his name called in the first round. Winnipeg selected Rutger McGroarty and No. 14 and Brad Lambert at No. 30, but Salomonsson could only applaud as friends and rivals got to hear their name. When Winnipeg got set to make the No. 55 pick on day two, more than 20 picks had already been made in Round 2, but Salomonsson wasn’t discouraged. He remembered the good meeting he’d had with the Jets at the combine.

Then he heard his name, put on a Jets jersey for the first time, and went to work. He wanted to carve out a full-time job on Skellefteå’s men’s team, so Salomonsson made his 2022 offseason the best of his life.

Pierre Johnsson, an assistant coach with Skellefteå got to reap the rewards of Salomonsson’s offseason work.

“I had Rasmus Dahlin in Frölunda and I had Lucas Raymond, and I mean, I’ve seen a lot of guys take a step from being good to really good but not from average to really good. I mean, Salomonsson was in my eyes; he was good, he was an average player, I would say. But he went from average to like f—ing dominant in the autumn here,” Johnsson told The Athletic in 2022.

An NHL hockey team has difficult decisions to make about its young players. When are they ready to help? Which mistakes are acceptable in the name of growth and which ones indicate that a player isn't ready to play in the world's best league? Are the same standards meant to be applied to veteran players who have earned their place — and who are, as any coach will tell you, more likely to be consistent from shift to shift through the rigors of an NHL season?

Arniel has called Salomonsson's ascent from the minors to big minutes for the Jets down the stretch "a trial by fire." It's working — the results are stunning when compared to some of the veterans who started the season with Winnipeg — but how?

"He doesn't let too much bother him either way," Arniel said. "If he makes a mistake, he's right back out and does better the next time. On the other side, if he does a great play, on his next shift, he's right back doing it again. His consistency is there, for a young player."

There is an old saying about skill development that says it's one thing to practice a new skill until you can do it right. It's another feat altogether to practice it until you can't get it wrong. It may be that the level of play required to help Winnipeg win, and the level of consistency NHL coaches look for from young players, are not the same. This would reconcile the thought that Winnipeg played Luke Schenn as its third right-handed defenceman until the trade deadline, despite getting outscored 29-16 during his five-on-five playing time.

Salomonsson's NHL debut against the Capitals in November was no more sparkling, nor was his follow-up against the Hurricanes later that week. Both were road games, allowing opposing coaches to match lines against the rookie defender, and he was on the ice for five goals against through his first two games. He knew he could do better and didn't let himself get down in his quest to prove himself.

"I didn't like my game at the start of the year," he said. "With the Moose, I think I had a slow start. But I think as the season went on and I played my first NHL games, I think I got some confidence. I felt like I could play (in the NHL). Then during my second recall, that's when it really took off."

If everybody stayed healthy — and if the Jets were a playoff-bound team — it's reasonable to expect Arniel to have continued to play his veterans. But Salomonsson skates faster, defends quicker, makes more accurate passes, and contributes to Winnipeg's attack more than many of his veteran rivals for playing time.

When Josh Morrissey and Neal Pionk were injured and the Jets traded Schenn and Logan Stanley, Salomonsson seized the opportunity.

In a recent 16 Stats, colleague Dom Luszczyszyn listed Salomonsson's sterling possession numbers and, noting that he and Dylan Samberg team up to face tough competition, and shared the scoreline with Salomonsson on the ice. Since the Olympic break, Winnipeg is beating its opponents 9-5 with Salomonsson on the ice at five-on-five, while dominating the flow of play.

On that front, the rookie defenceman shares the praise.

"I felt more calm and poised out there than in my first couple of games. And I play with Sammy. He makes it easier out there, too. He's probably the best player I've played with," Salomonsson said.

The duo gives the Jets a shot at a formidable shutdown pair — not just for the future, but the here and now. Even acknowledging mistakes that could be the rushed result of inexperience, such as Salomonsson's delay of game penalty against Colorado on Thursday, the results are overwhelmingly positive. Winnipeg may be surprised by the speed at which he has arrived as a top-four defenceman, but it's clear that Arniel recognizes Salomonsson's quality now.

"He has such a great set of tools," Arniel said. "I think he has a great head on his shoulders. I think his feet are excellent. He can make plays, he's a first-pass defenceman ... We were looking at him next year to kind of be running like this. The opportunity came and he's the one that grabbed it and is showing us what he can do."

There is one other note from Salomonsson's childhood in Skellefteå that seems important to share. His childhood home was located a short distance from school and a short distance from the hockey rink.

"I'm super close. I lived in between them," Salomonsson said. "Probably 500 metres this way is the school and then, come home, 500 metres this way is the rink. I had it pretty good."

Asked how he made the grueling commute, Salomonsson smiled.

"It depends. Summer or winter? Usually, I walked. I biked sometimes. But I also had a little snow-glider. Like a scooter with blades on it that you kick with your feet."

He is altogether quite used to charting his own path to get to the places he needs to go. His rapid ascent up Winnipeg's depth chart may be a trial by fire, but he's handling it with skills he learned through Skellefteån ice and snow.

Associated Press

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/jets-help-playoff-hopes-with-win-over-avalanche/>

Jets help playoff hopes with win over Avalanche

By Associated Press

DENVER — Cole Perfetti scored a tiebreaking goal late in the third period, and the Winnipeg Jets kept their postseason hopes alive with a 4-2 win over the Colorado Avalanche on Saturday night.

Connor Hellebuyck made 21 saves, Gabriel Vilardi had a goal and an assist, and Cole Koepke and Kyle O'Connor scored for Winnipeg. The Jets, with 74 points, are three behind Nashville for the second wild-card in the Western Conference.

Winnipeg earned a split of the season series and won the second game of the home-and-home between the teams. Colorado won in Winnipeg, 3-2, on Thursday night.

Brock Nelson and Parker Kelly scored for Colorado, which had its four-game winning streak snapped. The Avalanche loss, combined with Dallas' win at Pittsburgh, cut their Central Division lead over the Stars to seven points.

Colorado, which leads the NHL with 106 points, has played one less game than Dallas.

The Avalanche carried the play for much of the third but the Jets got the go-ahead goal at 14:49 when Perfetti redirected Jacob Bryson's shot from the point past a screened Mackenzie Blackwood.

Colorado unsuccessfully challenged that Jonathan Toews interfered with Blackwood. O'Connor sealed it with an empty-net goal at 17:51, his 33rd of the season.

Blackwood made 17 saves.

Vilardi scored his 28th goal 3:51 into the game and Nelson tied it on a redirect for his 33rd of the season midway through the first.

Cale Makar had the primary assist on Nelson's goal, his 52nd of the season. It was the 500th point of his career since debuting with the Avalanche in 2019. He reached the total in his 467th career game, fourth fastest among defensemen in NHL history.

Koepke put the Jets back in front 2:14 into the second period but Kelly tied it at 18:05 with his career-best 17th of the season.

Up next

Jets: At Chicago on Tuesday night.

Avalanche: Host Calgary on Monday night.

Winnipeg Sun

https://www.winnipegsun.com/sports/perfetti-nets-the-winner-jets-defeat-the-avalanche-4-2/article_e529e6c4-8b49-40d0-98b8-7e7e4635fa9e.html

Perfetti nets the winner, Jets defeat the Avalanche 4-2

By Gordon Anderson

The Jets scored two third-period goals in a 4-2 victory over the Colorado Avalanche on Saturday night in Denver.

"That was a gutsy team effort," Jets head coach Scott Arniel told the media in Colorado. "That was everybody blocking shots, getting their noses in there, into the battles."

"That was just a full team effort, from start to finish," forward Cole Koepke said. "... That was a great team win."

Cole Perfetti nosed his way into traffic before deflecting a Jacob Bryson point shot past Mackenzie Blackwood at 11:49 for his third game-winning goal of the season.

Bryson returned to the lineup after being a healthy scratch for four games. Bryson logged 9:26 of ice time on his return.

"That was a heck of a play on the winning goal, with Bryson getting that shot through. Good for him," Arniel said.

The Avalanche challenged Perfetti's goal for interference as Jonathan Toews and Gabriel Landeskog battled for position in the crease before the puck squeezed through Blackwood.

"We were not sure what the call was going to be because it's hard to figure out," Arniel said.

The goal was Perfetti's third game winner this year.

"To see the outcome come up the way it did was awesome," Koepke said.

A similar situation happened on Thursday night, when the Jets challenged Nathan MacKinnon's second goal of the third period for goalie interference but were rebuffed by replay. After the game, Arniel said there was a replay showing MacKinnon interfering with Connor Hellebuyck's glove prior to the Avs forward redirecting the puck into the empty net.

This time, the Jets got the benefit of the doubt.

"Everyone is a little bit different," Arniel said. "That was a big call."

Kyle Connor then scored into the empty net at 17:51.

Koepke and Gabe Vilardi also scored for the Jets (31-30-12). The teams split the season series, each team both winning home and away. Hellebuyck (19-20-11) turned aside 21 of 23 shots to get the win.

Brock Nelson and Parker Kelly scored for the Avalanche (48-14-10). Cale Makar notched his 500th career point when he earned an assist on Nelson's powerplay goal. The point came in his 467th regular-season game. Blackwood (21-9-1) stopped 17 of 20 shots in defeat.

The Jets are now three points behind the Nashville Predators for the second wildcard spot in the West. The Predators lost 4-1 to the Montreal Canadiens.

"It's just one at a time," Arniel said. "I know you guys don't want to hear it, but we looked at the scoreboard, and we got some help around the league ... Now our focus zeroes in on Chicago. It can't be one of those ones where you have a great game here and then you take a big step back."

The Jets play the Blackhawks in Chicago on Tuesday night.

Ice Chips

Vlad Namestnikov, Gustav Nyquist, Haydn Fleury and Morgan Barron were scratched. On Friday, Parker Ford and Danny Zhilkin were both recalled from the Manitoba Moose on an "emergency basis."

Both recalls were in the lineup on Saturday. Ford logged 9:00 of ice time. Zhilkin skated for 5:39.

Barron left Thursday night's game against the Avalanche after he was involved in a fight with Josh Manson. Barron took several hard blows to the face courtesy of the Avalanche defenceman. Manson blasted Barron from behind into the sideboards to the right of the

Colorado net during third-period action. Barron didn't appreciate the hit, so he challenged Manson. After the game, Arniel said Barron was in concussion protocol.

https://www.winnipeg.sun.com/sports/are-tough-guy-tactics-a-new-reality-for-the-winnipeg-jets/article_af09e2d3-29ea-4a8a-998b-fad885694738.html

Are tough-guy tactics a new reality for the Winnipeg Jets?

By Gordon Anderson

Now that willing pugilists Luke Schenn and Logan Stanley are no longer with the Jets, is the opposition taking advantage of the reduced level of overall toughness?

"I don't think (there are) any additional liberties, guys are going to play our star players hard and it was (Vegas Golden Knights centreman) Brett Howden that Mark Scheifele fought. (Howden isn't) a seasoned fighter, it was just a guy playing hard and catches one of our best players, and our other best player doesn't like it," Jets captain Adam Lowry said on Friday morning prior to the team's departure for Denver.

The Jets open a four-game road trip against the Colorado Avalanche on Saturday evening.

As Lowry referenced, Scheifele dropped the gloves with Howden late in the second period on Tuesday evening after the Oakbank native threw a hefty shoulder into Kyle Connor behind the Vegas net. As an aside, Scheifele earned his fourth career Gordie Howe hat-trick as he scored and picked up an assist in the 4-1 triumph over the Golden Knights.

And in the 3-2 loss to the Avalanche on Thursday, Morgan Barron squared off with Josh Manson not long after the Avalanche defender blasted Barron into the boards near the goal line to the right of the Colorado net.

Additionally, Manson was given a two-minute minor for interference on the original play.

"Barron was upset with the hit, and I think it should have been interference, and that is another guy standing up for himself," Lowry said.

Head coach Scott Arniel was asked for his thoughts on the Manson hit. He didn't have a problem with it publicly, seemingly satisfied the correct call was made.

The captain says the team can handle any situation deemed necessary. And in his opinion, neither hit warranted any further action beyond what was done at the time.

"We are losing some of the fighting aspect, but there isn't a ton of that in the game anymore and the guys in the room, if the game goes that way, we can step up and handle that business," Lowry said.

Barron immediately left the game after taking a few haymakers to the face. He was in concussion protocol after the game.

As of Friday morning, there was no update on Barron's status.

The team made two corresponding roster moves on Friday. Parker Ford and Danny Zhilkin was recalled from the Moose.

Comrie getting the cage?

With four games in a week, the odds that Jets netminder Eric Comrie gets a start on the upcoming road trip seem good. Connor Hellebuyck has started 13 of the last 15 games.

In his previous start, Comrie stopped 27 shots as the Jets beat the New York Rangers 3-2 in a shootout on March 22. He has won six games in a row, allowing just nine goals.

It seems this winning feeling is not altogether unfamiliar.

“If you look back at the end of the season, I had a pretty good run as well,” Comrie said. “I lost my last game against Edmonton, but I shut out Vegas the game before that and I think I won four, five before that in a row.”

Comrie won five of his last seven starts last season, including a 4-0 shutout over Vegas on Apr. 3. In the penultimate game of the regular season, the Jets lost 4-1 against the Oilers. He made 35 saves in that game, earning third star honours that night.

And now back to this season.

The Edmonton native has stopped 149 of 158 shots in the win streak. His previous loss was a 6-5 setback to the Toronto Maple Leafs on New Year Day.

Regarding his extended stretch of solid play, the netminder deferred to his teammates.

“We’re playing a lot better as a team,” he said. “If you look at our defensive metrics, we’re playing quite good right now. Like we’re defending really good. At the end of the day, that make a big difference for goalies, when your team defends in front of you. And we’re defending very well.”

https://www.winnipegssun.com/sports/ten-tough-games-await-the-jets-the-avs-up-first-on-saturday/article_c187a8fa-5524-47fb-aafa-192e367700d6.html

Ten tough games await the Jets, the Avs up first on Saturday

By Gordon Anderson

Beginning in Denver against the Avalanche on Saturday night, the Jets will begin, arguably, their toughest stretch of the schedule with positive results and points at their most premium.

Adam Lowry was succinct with his words, knowing the club is running out of runway with just 10 games remaining in the season.

“We don’t have time to waste or points to squander,” the Jets captain told the Winnipeg Sun.

Heading into league action on Friday evening, the club is five points behind the Nashville Predators, with two teams—the Los Angeles Kings and the Seattle Kraken—between them and the post-season berth, and quite possibly a first-round matchup with the vaunted Avalanche.

But let's not put the cart before the horse just yet as the remaining schedule is a real bruin, to say the least, as the locals have the hardest remaining schedule for the teams competing in the Western Conference playoff race.

The winning percentage of the remainder of the teams on the schedule is .585. Going forward from the Mile High City, Winnipeg will lock horns with the Columbus Blue Jackets, Chicago Blackhawks, Dallas Stars, Kraken, St. Louis Blues, Philadelphia Flyers, Vegas Golden Knights, Utah Mammoth and the San Jose Sharks.

The only team with a .500 record is the Blues at 30-30-11. The Los Angeles Kings have the easiest remaining schedule at .478. The Jets and four points behind the Kings and two behind the Kraken.

The Jets (30-30-12) have gained at least one point in 10 of 14 games, going 7-4-3 since the beginning of March.

Frankly, the Jets will need more secondary scoring and a level of consistent play that hasn't been there for large segments of the season. Lowry was asked if the team has another gear.

"Down the recent stretch of games against good teams where we have been able to win, and we see it, finding that every night, it is a tough league to win in, regardless of who you are playing," Lowry said. "We know we have a tough schedule ahead but if we want to make the playoffs and do well in the playoffs, then we have to put our best foot forward every night and prepare for the challenge, regardless if we are playing the best team or the worst team in the league."

Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey has been buoyed by their play and the commensurate results since March roared in like a lion.

"Our record's been really solid out of a sense of urgency in the standings with where we're at, but beyond just the compete and urgency, I just think our game has been a lot better," Morrissey said. "It's been more repeatable. It's hard to pinpoint one moment, but clearly, we've played a lot better."

The longest win streak was five games, they went 0-7-4 from Dec. 15 to Jan. 8., their PK is currently 18th in the league and the PP is ranked 26th overall, and they've lost games to beatable teams, perhaps the toughest one a 6-3 setback against the New York Rangers on March 12.

Or maybe the 4-1 loss to the Anaheim Ducks on March 10, where the team was mocked and booed by the crowd. The effort was bad enough that Morgan Barron roasted his team during his second intermission chat with Kevin Sawyer of TSN, saying, "It looks like we have nothing to play for out there."

"This year has been a year of inconsistency, where we have played well for stretches of time and then we have played extremely poorly," Lowry said. "We will rise to the occasion against top teams and then stub our toes and fall flat on our faces in games we think we should win."

And while the odds remain slim, 4.5 per cent qualify for the post-season, according to MoneyPuck, here they are with all still left to play with less than three weeks remaining in the regular season.

“To still have the opportunity to push for a playoff spot and still being the mix with the way the season has gone, it keeps you motivated, keeps you coming to the rink trying to win every night and that is all we are trying to do right now,” Lowry said. “We can’t control what the other teams we are chasing do, all we can do is control the game in front of us and we have a busy schedule to finish with a lot of tough teams. It is going to take some great hockey from us, and we are prepared for the challenge.”