

**Winnipegjets.com**

**[Three things - Hellebuyck puts on a show](#)  
**[Hellebuyck makes a season high 45 saves, Connor scores OT winner](#)****

By Jamie Thomas

The Winnipeg Jets continued their run of facing Central Division opponents with a 4-3 overtime win over the Nashville Predators at Bridgestone Arena. Kyle Connor scored 1:52 into OT, Mark Scheifele finished the night with three points (1G, 2A) and Connor Hellebuyck made 45 saves for the Jets (48-24-6). Winnipeg will head to Dallas to face the Central Division leading Stars on Thursday.

***HELLEBUYCK SAVES THE DAY***

The Jets felt pretty good about their game heading into the second period with a 3-1 lead, but Nashville took over in the middle frame. The Predators proceeded to outshoot the Jets 34-9 over in the second and the third including 22-5 in the second. If it was not for the efforts of Connor Hellebuyck, Winnipeg's win streak would have come to a screeching halt. Hellebuyck was the main reason the team went a perfect 4-for-4 on the penalty kill as well.

"Fantastic. He's got my Vezina vote, that's for sure.," said Dylan DeMelo.

"That was a huge game. We needed him for sure. We were hanging on there, there's no doubt about it."

***HUGE GAME FOR 55***

Since his hat trick at Madison Square Garden, Mark Scheifele had recorded one goal and three assists over his next nine games. Tuesday night, Scheifele had a goal and two assists for his eighth game of three or more points this season. He assisted on Gabriel Vilardi's power play goal in the first period, 1:28 later, scored his 24th goal of the season and in overtime he got the puck to Kyle Connor on a 2-on-1 and Connor ended the game. Scheifele also led the forwards in ice time (19:19).

"Obviously, KC is a good shooter," said Scheifele.

"You want to get the puck on his stick. I just tried to attend the pass right. Obviously, a great shot by him."

***HIGHLIGHT REEL GOAL FROM VILARDI***

Gabriel Vilardi continues to give the power play a huge boost with his presence on the ice. He scored his second power play goal in the last three games to tie the game up in the first. Taking a pass from Scheifele, Vilardi went between his legs and roofed a shot over Juuse Saros glove.

"He's got great hands down behind the net. He makes that power play go," said Rick Bowness.

"He's such a threat. They've got to respect that."

**NHL.com**

**[Predators clinch Stanley Cup Playoff berth in OT loss to Jets](#)**

## [Hellebuyck makes 45 saves, Connor wins it at 1:52 for Winnipeg](#)

By Robby Stanley

NASHVILLE – Kyle Connor scored at 1:52 of overtime to give the Winnipeg Jets a 4-3 win against the Nashville Predators, who clinched a berth into the Stanley Cup Playoffs with a point at Bridgestone Arena on Tuesday.

Connor took a pass from Mark Scheifele on a 2-on-1 rush and beat Juuse Saros with a snap shot from the bottom of the left face-off circle.

Schiefele had a goal and two assists, and Connor Hellebuyck made 45 saves for the Jets (48-24-6), who have won four straight games.

“[Hellebuyck] stood on his head,” Scheifele said. “He made those saves look easy and he kept us in that one. We didn’t play our game. We were just whacking the puck around and just giving them transition. That’s not the way we want to play.”

Ryan O’Reilly, Tommy Novak and Spencer Stastney scored, and Saros made 18 saves for the Predators (45-29-5), who have lost three of four (1-2-1).

“It’s the first one off the checklist,” O’Reilly said. “Obviously, to make the playoffs is a huge accomplishment. I think we’re proud as a group. Guys worked hard for this. Of course, it would’ve been nice to win that one, but I thought we showed great resilience tonight. We stuck with it. I thought we owned them for most of the game. To get in the playoffs, that’s the first step. It’s a big step and something to be proud of, for sure.”

Novak gave the Predators a 1-0 lead at 4:05 of the first period, shifting the puck from backhand to forehand around Hellebuyck and putting it in at the left post.

Gabriel Vilardi tied it 1-1 at 6:51 with a power-play goal. He took a pass from Scheifele below the left face-off circle, put the puck between his legs and lifted it over Saros’ shoulder.

“Pretty nasty goal, for sure,” Jets defenseman Dylan DeMelo said. “That one is going to be on the highlight reel. We’ll see that one a lot. He’s got great hands in tight. We’ve seen it all year, and we’ve missed him there when he hasn’t been there. He’s such a key on the power play, sucks a lot of guys in, and then if you give him room, he’ll do something like that. That was an amazing goal by a top player for our team.”

Schiefele gave the Jets a 2-1 lead at 8:19, beating Saros with a backhand in front on a partial breakaway after receiving a lead pass from Tyler Toffoli.

DeMelo pushed it to 3-1 at 12:46 with a snap shot from the slot off a centering pass from Morgan Barron.

“We played well in the first, and we played really well after they tied it up,” Jets coach Rick Bowness said. “The in-between there wasn’t our best hockey, for sure, but we’ve played better than that and lost, so we’ll take that. Our goalie was outstanding.”

Stastney cut it to 3-2 at 7:34 of the third period when he batted in the puck in front after Roman Josi’s centering pass was deflected up in the air.

"I've been on a lot of teams in my career, and I haven't been on a team that fights until the end like this," Predators forward Michael McCarron said. "It's a pretty special group. It was good to get that point tonight, and it definitely feels good that we're heading to the playoffs."

O'Reilly tied it 3-3 at 9:41 of the third period on a wrist from the slot off a pass from Roman Josi.

"Those are the ones as a kid you dream of scoring, just the big goals at the right time," O'Reilly said. "It always feels good. To get that point and get us solidified was a good feeling."

*NOTES:* The Predators have made the playoffs nine times in the past 10 seasons. ... Josi became the third active defenseman with multiple 80-assist seasons (96 in 2021-22), joining Erik Karlsson and Cale Makar.

## **Associated Press**

### **[Predators clinch playoff spot, lose to Jets in overtime](#)**

By Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Kyle Connor scored at 1:52 of overtime to give the Winnipeg Jets a 4-3 victory over the Nashville Predators on Tuesday night.

Mark Scheifele had a goal and two assists, Gabriel Vilardi and Dylan DeMelo also scored and Connor Hellebuyck made a season-high 45 saves for Winnipeg, winners of four straight.

"I think we start the bus and get out of here as fast as we can," DeMelo said. "Without (Hellebuyck), we don't win the game. That's why he's the best goalie in the league and we're lucky to have him."

Tommy Novak, Spencer Stastney and Ryan O'Reilly scored and Juuse Saros made 18 saves for Nashville, losers of five of seven. Kiefer Sherwood and Roman Josi each had two assists.

With the overtime loser point, the Predators clinched a playoff spot. After missing the playoffs last season, the Predators have reached the post-season in nine of the last 10 seasons.

"Obviously, making the playoffs is a huge accomplishment," O'Reilly said. "I think we're proud as a group. Guys worked hard for this. Of course, it would have been nice to win that one, but I thought we showed great resilience tonight."

In overtime, Connor and Scheifele came in on Saros on a 2-on-1, with Connor beating the goaltender with a wrist shot from the left side after a feed from Scheifele.

"Obviously, (Connor) is a great shooter, you want to get the puck on his stick," Scheifele said. "So, I just tried to time the pass right and obviously great shot by him."

After falling behind by a goal early, the Jets rallied for three goals in the first. The three goals were scored on their first five shots of the game.

“We played well in the first and we played really well after they tied it up,” Winnipeg coach Rick Bowness said. “In between that wasn’t our best hockey for sure. We’ve played better than that and lost, so we’ll take that.”

Nashville trailed by two goals entering the third, but Stastney and O’Reilly scored 2:07 apart near the midpoint of the period to pull the Predators even.

Novak scored the game’s first goal at 4:05 of the opening period, but Vilardi tied it on the power play at 6:51.

Scheifele found Vilardi all alone just outside the Nashville crease, where he put the stick between his legs before roofing a shot just underneath the crossbar on Saros’ glove side.

Scheifele then scored on a backhand at 8:19 of the first and DeMelo followed with 7:14 remaining.

O’Reilly tied it at 9:41 of the third with a wrist shot from the slot that beat Hellebuyck on the stick side.

“It was a heck of a shot,” Nashville coach Andrew Brunette said. “He just seems to relish ... he’s almost calmer when things get chaotic. He’s been around. He’s had some big moments, won some big games, won the ultimate thing. He’s been unbelievable for our group all year.”

#### *UP NEXT*

Jets: Visit the Dallas Stars on Thursday.

Predators: Visit the Chicago Blackhawks on Friday.

### **Winnipeg Free Press**

#### **[Jets steal win in Music City](#)**

#### **[Hellebuyck’s heroics rewarded as Connor’s OT goal salvages victory against relentless Predators](#)**

By: Ken Wiebe

NASHVILLE – The race for second place just got a lot more interesting.

With a 4-3 overtime victory over the Nashville Predators on Tuesday night at Bridgestone Arena, the Winnipeg Jets continue to go toe-to-toe with the Colorado Avalanche in the chase for second place in the Central Division.

Kyle Connor delivered the game-winner at 1:52 of the three-on-three session, converting a feed from Mark Scheifele to secure the extra point and give the Jets a fourth straight victory.

“Obviously, KC is a good shooter. You want to get the puck on his stick,” said Scheifele. “I just tried to attend the pass right. Obviously a great shot by him.”

Although the Jets still trail the Avalanche by two points, the Jets have a game in hand and hold the first tiebreaker, which is regulation wins (42-41).

It's a big deal, considering whoever ends up on top will have home-ice advantage in the first round.

With the win, the Jets improved to 48-24-6. Colorado beat the Minnesota Wild 5-2 in a late game and is now 49-24-6.

With just a few games left in the regular season, this race will likely go down to the wire – though Saturday's finale of the Jets current four-game road trip in Denver is looming large.

"It's huge. We're going to fight for home ice and the division until we can't no more," said Jets defenceman Dylan DeMelo. "This is a big win for us. A huge game obviously against Dallas and, I'm not looking too far ahead, but obviously a big one against Colorado. We want home ice, there's no doubt about it. The ability to sleep in your own bed, less travel and be able to get matchups, that's a big thing. That matters. It's not everything, but if we can get it, we'll try to get it."

Before that matchup takes place, the Jets will face the first-place Dallas Stars on Thursday night, who currently have a five-point cushion.

Let's take a look at what went down in Music City:

*1 One for the highlight reel* – Much has been made about the contributions Jets right-winger Gabriel Vilardi has made to the power play when he's been in the lineup, and he added another goal for the highlight reel to even the score in the first period. After some quick puck movement, Scheifele found Vilardi in his office in front and that's when Vilardi went to work. Thanks to a quick pivot, Vilardi created a lane for himself to put his stick between the legs and roof his shot over the outstretched glove of Juuse Saros.

"A pretty nasty goal, for sure. That one's going to be on the highlight reel. We'll see that on a lot," said DeMelo. "He's got great hands in tight. You've seen it all year. And we've missed him there when he hasn't been there. Such a key on the power play. Sucks a lot of guys in. And then if you give him room, he'll do something like that. That was an amazing goal by a top player for our team."

Vilardi is up to 20 goals, making it consecutive seasons of hitting that mark (he set a career high with 23 in 63 games last season. Injuries have limited Vilardi to 43 games so far, but he's done an excellent job of being productive when healthy.

There's been plenty of talk about the importance of getting the power play going and that doesn't just mean scoring, it means finding a way to provide some momentum even if the Jets don't find the back of the net with the man-advantage.

"He's got great hands down behind the net. He makes that power play go," said Jets head coach Rick Bowness. "He's such a threat. They've got to respect that."

*2 Battle between the pipes* – As he made his 58th start of the season, Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck turned in another excellent performance, finishing with 45 saves.

He was under siege in the second and third periods but stood tall and was the biggest reason the Jets got this game to extra time.

“We played really well in the first and really well after they tied it up (in the third),” said coach Rick Bowness. “In between wasn’t our best hockey, for sure. We’ve played better than that and lost, so we’ll take that. Our goalie was outstanding.

“Player of the game,” Bowness continued. “There was no win without him. It’s as simple as that.”

This was the type of outing the Jets are going to need from Hellebuyck if they want to go on a playoff run.

Hellebuyck was at his best, which is big and boring, with a heavy dose of making difficult saves look routine.

Hellebuyck had Luke Evangelista looking skyward on several occasions, including a clear-cut breakaway and a partial break late in the second period.

Evangelista finished with 10 shots on goal and 14 shot attempts.

“Fantastic. He’s got my Vezina vote,” said DeMelo. “We needed him for sure. We were hanging on there, there’s no doubt about it. Without him we don’t get that win.”

Saros, who leads the league with 62 starts, wasn’t to blame, but the Jets were certainly opportunistic in building a first period cushion, scoring three times on just five shots on goal. But the markers were a product of poor puck management or blown coverage.

Look for Laurent Brossoit to get the start on Thursday against the Stars. It will be his 21st start and 22nd appearance of the campaign.

*3 The Norris candidates* – Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey and Predators blue-liner Roman Josi figure to be on a number of Norris Trophy ballots in a couple of weeks and both guys were all over the ice – in a good way in this matchup.

Morrissey had an assist on Vilardi’s power-play marker and was excellent defensively.

Josi, who leads all defencemen in goals with 21, had two shots on goal, four shot attempts and two blocked shots in 25:42 of ice time. Josi had the primary assist on both of the Predators goals in the third period as they got the game to overtime and clinched their spot in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

*4 Fourth line strikes again (sort of)* – Morgan Barron did an excellent job of getting the puck into the offensive zone, retrieved it and then found DeMelo sneaking in from the right point. DeMelo worked his way into the high slot and ripped a shot past Saros to make it 3-1, just over four minutes after Scheifele had given the Jets the lead with his 24th of the year. DeMelo now has three goals this season.

The fourth line has been excellent of late, scoring three times in Saturday’s 4-2 win over the Minnesota Wild.

*5 The issues with puck management* – One of the priorities for the Jets going into the contest was to limit the turnovers and they didn’t exactly excel on that front during the first period. Jets winger Nikolaj Ehlers was caught trying to do too much in the neutral zone and this example of

poor puck management proved costly, as it opened the door for Tommy Novak to cruise in and score on a nifty individual effort.

The Jets finished the game with 10 giveaways and that's a number they will need to shave down in the coming days.

*6 Extra, extra* – With just under three minutes left in regulation time, Jets defenceman Brenden Dillon prevented Predators left-winger Cole Smith from scoring the go-ahead goal on a rebound. Dillon dove headfirst and got his stick on the puck before Smith could score on his backhand.

The blender was out in full force, as the Jets continue to work to find an optimal top-6 here as the regular season winds down. During the third period, Connor was back up on the top line with Scheifele and Vilardi. A number of different permutations and combinations were tried on the second, third and fourth lines.

"Yeah, I liked that," said Bowness, asked about reuniting Connor with Scheifele. "Things weren't going our way so we always have that in our back pocket that we're going to make some adjustments for the first couple of lines. And we did."

There was a heavyweight tilt in the third period, as Jets defenceman Logan Stanley dropped the gloves with Predators centre Michael McCarron. It was a spirited bout and McCarron knocked Stanley down with a right hand that connected. Stanley continues to leave an impression in the battle to be the sixth D-man come Game 1 of the Stanley Cup playoffs. It will be interesting to see if the Jets coaching staff sticks with Stanley on Thursday or if they go back to Nate Schmidt.

### [Chameleon lafallo gets the job done](#) [Jets' versatile forward capable in any role](#)

By: Ken Wiebe

NASHVILLE — Alex lafallo is built for what's right around the corner.

Although the Winnipeg Jets' versatile forward isn't getting ahead of himself, a conversation about the post-season prior to Tuesday's game against the Nashville Predators got his attention.

"For sure. Just trying to do everything right and working hard in every area," said lafallo. "You need everybody. It's the best time of the year and good teams can go a long way if everybody is buzzing and doing their little niche. (You become) unstoppable."

lafallo, an important part of the off-season trade with the Los Angeles Kings that also brought in Gabriel Vilardi, Rasmus Kupari and a second-round pick in the 2024 NHL Draft that previously belonged to the Montreal Canadiens, has played the role of chameleon this season.

His ability to blend in has been noticed by everyone around him.

"He's very predictable," said Vilardi. "He's easy to play with. He works hard and you know what you're going to get every night. He can play anywhere. He can play on the first line, he can play on the fourth line."

lafallo can — and has — played everywhere in between, shuffling through all four units this season and playing effectively on each.

Whether he was skating alongside Mark Scheifele or with current linemates Vladislav Namestnikov and Morgan Barron, lafallo is hounding pucks and doing the little things that don't always show up on the scoresheet but are valued by teammates and coaches.

“He just gets the job done,” said Jets head coach Rick Bowness. “You can put him with anybody and he plays his game, no matter who he's playing with. That's important. Sometimes you play with the top line and you change your game. He doesn't. He just knows one way to play and it's all out. He's very reliable and he's very consistent.

“He knows what he does well and he sticks to it.”

Being malleable is something lafallo has done since the Kings signed him as a college free agent after his senior season with the University of Minnesota-Duluth Bulldogs.

“I understand what I have to do out there,” said lafallo, who suited up in the 498th game of his NHL career on Tuesday. “It's been pretty fun playing with everybody. You've got to find your role and go with it.”

lafallo's role has evolved over the course of the season as well.

When Vilardi was out at various points, he got a promotion to the power-play unit but now is settled on the penalty kill, often going out with captain Adam Lowry as the first forwards over the boards.

When the Stanley Cup playoffs begin, the importance of unsung heroes is on the rise and lafallo is the type of player who could be called upon to deliver in a critical moment.

“Al is a complete player and he's a great dude,” said Jets right-winger Mason Appleton. “He's smart enough where he can go up and down the lineup and mesh with different players. At the same time, he's trusted to the point where he can be on the ice at the end of the game if we're winning or losing.”

The fourth line played a vital role in the 4-2 win over the Minnesota Wild on Saturday, combining for three goals and six points in the contest. lafallo scored his 11th goal of the season to snap a 2-2 tie in the third period and picked up his 15th assist on a Namestnikov marker in the opening frame.

The Jets' forward depth has given the offensive attack some balance, and having each member of the fourth line in double digits for goals is a luxury not every playoff-bound team boasts.

Depending on what happens with the rest of the lineup after Nino Niederreiter returns from a left leg laceration, there's a chance the 13th forward will also be in double-digits.

“The fourth line often changes a little bit when there's an injury, but they've got to play together enough now that there's a little consistency,” said Appleton. “I feel like their game is trending (upward). There are three really good players on that line and they should have their way against a lot of matchups.”



Another thing Lafallo will bring to the table is playoff experience, as he was involved in a pair of hard-fought series against the Edmonton Oilers in each of the past two seasons and has suited up in 16 post-season games during his career.

Lafallo saw firsthand how tight the margins are, going six and seven games before coming out on the losing end both times.

“You get in that zone, that playoff zone,” he said. “Just hard-nosed hockey, I guess. You want to contribute in any way you can. Goals, defence, whatever we need. We’ve just got to be hard workers and be doing the right thing every shift.”

## **Global Winnipeg**

### **[Hellebuyck, Jets steal 4-3 OT victory over Nashville for fourth straight win](#)**

By Ross Levitan & Russ Hobson Global News

The Winnipeg Jets have clinched a top-three spot in the Central Division after earning a 4-3 overtime win over the Nashville Predators on Tuesday night.

The Jets probably didn’t deserve the two points, but Connor Hellebuyck was spectacular, and Kyle Connor scored in overtime for their fourth straight victory to guarantee the Jets finish no lower than third place in the division.

The Jets scored three times in the first period, but squandered a two-goal lead in the third and surrendered a season-high 48 shots on goal.

“We played well in the first and we played really well after they tied it up,” said Jets head coach Rick Bowness. “In between, it wasn’t our best hockey, for sure. But we’ve played better than that and lost, so we’ll take that. Our goalie was outstanding.”

Nikolaj Ehlers and Cole Perfetti were both benched for much of the final frame and didn’t see the ice again after the midway point of the period. Ehlers also rode the pine for a good chunk of the first after his turnover led directly to the Predators’ first goal.

Winnipeg was outshot 34-9 in the second and third periods.

“We knew we had to play better,” said Bowness. “It was turnovers and the penalties just took the flow right out of our game, and gave them life. And they just kept coming at us.

“A little more discipline, stay out of the box, don’t give those guys momentum, and just again, puck management.”

“That definitely felt like a playoff game and yeah, they brought it tonight and they probably deserved better,” said Jets defenceman Dylan DeMelo. “We felt we gave them those goals. There’s a lot we could have done better. So just take a deep breath and move on. And just try on the next shift, try to get the puck in their end and win your shift. Whoever is out there next, just try to turn the momentum the way you can.

“So you got to be able to manage your emotions, manage the game. There’s going to be ebbs and flows, so when things happen like that, get back to the basics, and get back to our game.”

The victory is Winnipeg's 23rd road victory, establishing a new franchise record.

Connor Hellebuyck made 45 saves in the win, while the Jets only mustered 22 shots on goal.

Nashville opened the scoring 4:05 into the first period when Tommy Novak capitalized on a neutral zone turnover and beat Hellebuyck for his 16th goal of the season.

However, the Jets responded just under three minutes later when Gabe Vilardi scored a highlight reel power play goal. Vilardi took a Scheifele feed on his backhand before going between his legs in tight and roofing it top shelf above a surprised Juuse Saros.

The goal was Vilardi's team-leading eighth power play goal and 20th of the season – in just 43 games.

Minutes later, Winnipeg took a lead. Tyler Toffoli helped create a turnover at the offensive zone and gave Scheifele a pass to lead him into open ice. Scheifele made no mistake, scoring his 24th goal of the season.

Winnipeg wasn't done there, either.

The Jets made it three goals in a span of 5:55 when Morgan Barron found a streaking DeMelo, who ripped a shot past Saros from the slot. It was DeMelo's third goal this season.

The ice was slanted towards Winnipeg's defensive end through the second period, but no goals were scored in large part due to Hellebuyck's consistency in goal and a little help from Neal Pionk, who pulled a loose puck out of harm's way.

Nashville continued to press in the third period, and finally broke through 7:34 into the final frame.

Preds captain Roman Josi's centring attempt deflected into the air and Spencer Stastney hit it into the net out of mid-air to make it 3-2.

Just two minutes later, another neutral zone turnover led to Ryan O'Reilly's game-tying goal with so much time and space to walk through the slot and beat Hellebuyck blocker side.

Connor's 10th game-winning goal this season came 1:52 into overtime. He took a great pass from Mark Scheifele on a 2-on-1 break and shot it past the Predators goalie.

Connor's OT winner was his 32nd goal of the season. The Jets remain two points back of the Colorado Avalanche for second place in the Central Division, after the Avs defeated Minnesota 5-2 Tuesday night. Winnipeg still has a game in hand on Colorado, and the tiebreaker.

Nashville clinches a playoff spot with the single point, but can finish no higher than a wild card spot after the loss.

Winnipeg will continue its road trip through the division on Thursday against the Dallas Stars. The pregame show will begin at 5 p.m. with puck drop just after 7 p.m. on 680 CJOB.

## [ANALYSIS: Another stellar performance pushes Jets' Hellebuyck closer to Vezina trophy](#)

By Paul Edmonds CJOB

Connor Hellebuyck may have unquestionably won his second Vezina trophy Tuesday night in Music City. And if he didn't, his performance pushed him so far ahead of his closest competition that if he doesn't earn the award at season's end, an investigation should commence immediately afterward.

In starting his 58th game of the season, Hellebuyck backstopped the Jets to their fourth straight win, a franchise-record 23rd road victory, and the team's 48th overall of the season.

While Winnipeg scored four goals — players like Mark Scheifele had a multiple point night and Kyle Connor notched the game-winner with his team-leading 32nd of the season — Hellebuyck in every aspect stole the victory and single-handedly willed the Jets past the Predators.

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His coach, Rick Bowness, said post-game: "There was no win without him." And it's been like that a lot of nights this season.

In turning aside 45 of 48 shots, the 30-year-old now owns the best save percentage and second-best goals-against average among netminders with over 30 games played. He's second in wins and keeps delivering quality outings night-and-after-night and game-after-game.

In fact, his numbers would likely be even more gaudy were it not for a Jets penalty kill that has struggled all season — and that is in no way a reflection of Hellebuyck's play.

As the regular season winds down, it's become clear that Hellebuyck is not only a lock to be nominated for a fourth time for the Vezina — and arguably the favourite to win it for the second time in his career — but he's also been the Jets' best player: consistent, reliable and fantastic.

Last night in Music City, Connor Hellebuyck hit all the right notes in stealing another game for the Jets and when you collectively assess his entire season, he's likely also struck a major chord at securing the Vezina trophy once again.

### **Winnipeg Sun**

#### [Jets survive Predators onslaught, find overtime winner in Music City](#)

By Scott Billeck

They say that they don't ask how, but rather how many.

The Winnipeg Jets won't argue with that logic after their 4-3 overtime win over the Nashville Predators on Tuesday night.

Mark Scheifele found Kyle Connor cross-ice on an odd-man rush 1:52 into the extra frame as the Jets snatched both points from their Central Division rivals at Bridgestone Arena.

In doing so, they also saved themselves from having to beg Connor Hellebuyck for forgiveness after leaving him on an island for the final 40 minutes of the game.

Hellebuyck, who might as well have been handed the Vezina in Music City, was otherworldly, making 45 saves, including nearly half of those in a 22-save second period to pick up his 35th win of the season.

Hellebuyck's heroics and an overtime connection we've seen so many times before helped the Jets improve to 47-24-6.

They leapfrogged Colorado temporarily for second place in the Central, with the Avs still in action at home to Minnesota when Connor's wristed beat Juuse Saros.

The Jets strung together three of the prettiest goals of the season, highlighted best by Gabriel Vilardi's pull of the puck through his legs, roofing a shot in tight on the power play during a run of three unanswered goals in the first.

Mark Scheifele went forehand-backhand after that, and then a perfect forecheck by the fourth line ended with Dylan DeMelo uncorking his third to put the Jets in front 3-1 after 20 minutes.

A team that played a pretty good defensive game and used its skill to dig its way out of an early hole after Tommy Novak's opener didn't emerge for the second or the third.

Nashville, who clinched a playoff spot with the point they earned, fired 22 shots in the middle frame, limiting Winnipeg to just six.

For an encore, the Predators tied the game on a pair of goals in 2:07 in the third as Spencer Stastney and Ryan O'Reilly feasted on defensive zone breakdowns for Winnipeg.

The Jets were outshot 34-9 in the final 40 before finding the only two shots in overtime.

Vladislav Namestnikov nearly ended the game a minute in, but his deke in tight was turned aside by Saros, who stopped 18 in a losing effort.

Winnipeg now heads to Dallas on Thursday before closing out their four-game road trip in Colorado on Saturday.

### **[BILLECK: 'No win without Hellebuyck' Bowness says](#)**

By Scott Billeck

Rick Bowness labelled Connor Hellebuyck's performance on Thursday night as outstanding, named him the player of the game, and then said what everyone else was thinking.

"There was no win without him," the Winnipeg Jets head coach told reporters after the game. "It's as simple as that."

While Kyle Connor netted the overtime winner and Gabriel Vilardi scored one of the prettiest goals you'll see all season, Winnipeg's netminder stole the show — and the two points — in a 4-3 win over the Nashville Predators.

The 30-year-old, soon-to-be two-time Vezina winner, stopped a season-high 45 shots, including 22 in the second period (and another 11 on the penalty kill), as the Jets held on in regulation before Connor scored the 10th overtime winner of his career.

Hellebuyck was dialed in all night and only succumbed to the breakdowns in his team's defensive structure. Even then, he stopped far more than he was supposed to.

MoneyPuck, which tracks goals saved above expected during games, pegged Hellebuyck's number at 1.88. As near as makes no difference, Hellebuyck denied two goals that should have been in the back of the net.

Thanks to Thursday's efforts, his season number in that department vaulted over 30, more than 10 more goals saved above expected than Vancouver's Thatcher Demko in second place.

"Fantastic," is how Dylan DeMelo described his goalie's performance. "He's got my Vezina vote, that's for sure. That was a huge game. We needed him for sure. We were hanging on there, there's no doubt about it. Without him, we don't get that win tonight."

Scheifele, who fed Connor the game-winner, had a similar assessment after Winnipeg won their fourth straight.

"Bucky stood on his head," Scheifele said. "He made those saves look easy and he kept us in this one.

"We didn't play our game. We were just whacking the puck around giving them transition and that's not the way we want to play."

Scheifele hit the nail on the head in a game where he scored his 24th of the season and led the team with three points, including the cross-ice pass to Connor in overtime.

His team completely lost their way over the final two periods, outshot by a staggering 34-9 margin.

Hellebuyck held the fort as long as he could before a pair of brutal breakdowns allowed Spencer Stastney and Ryan O'Reilly to score 2:07 apart to tie the game.

Nashville earned the tied game. The Jets deserved the blown lead.

In fairness, the Jets buckled down after the tying goal.

They also benefitted from winning the special teams battle. Hellebuyck's 11 saves aside, the Jets kept a clean sheet on Nashville's four power-play attempts, while Vilardi's wizardry had the Jets 1-for-3 in the game.

"A pretty nasty goal," DeMelo said. "That one's going to be on the highlight reel. We'll see that on a lot.

"He's got great hands in tight. You've seen it all year. And we've missed him there when he hasn't been there. Such a key on the power play. Sucks a lot of guys in. And then if you give him room, he'll do something like that. That was an amazing goal by a top player for our team."

It will only get harder for Winnipeg on Thursday when they travel to Dallas to face the Central Division-leading Stars, a team they have yet to beat this season.

There's arguably no deeper team in the NHL than Dallas, who collected their 50th win against Buffalo on Thursday.

- For what it's worth, MoneyPuck's Deserve To Win O'meter pegged Nashville's chances at over 80% after 1,000 game simulations. And to further highlight how good Hellebuyck was on the night, Nashville was expected to score 4.7 goals. Hellebuyck continues to be the great equalizer.

- Morgan Barron doesn't get enough credit for his work on Winnipeg's fourth line. He's been taking faceoffs for some time and went 7-for-13. That's pretty good for a guy who hadn't taken many coming into this season. He was 7-for-11 in Saturday's win in Minnesota. He also made a sublime pass to DeMelo on the 3-1 goal in the first after a strong forecheck.

- If Nino Niederreiter is fit to return on Saturday against Colorado (Bowness wants him to practice first, and the Jets don't practice until Friday), I suspect Cole Perfetti will return to the press box. He played fewer than 10 minutes on Tuesday, and just over eight if you take away the power-play time. With Winnipeg's fourth line rolling right now, there's no room for the younger forward in the inn. Perfetti was stapled to the bench during the third.

- It was another tough game for Winnipeg's top-line trio of Scheifele, Vilardi and Nikolaj Ehlers. The latter had a couple of giveaways early in the first, including one that led to Tommy Novak's opener. They were outshot 7-2, outchanced 8-3 and outscored 1-0. Bowness moved Ehlers off the line in the third in favour of Connor. That line was on the ice for O'Reilly's goal, outshot 5-2, and outchanced 7-2.

- Historically speaking, Ehlers on the top line has worked the best regarding chances for and against. They're better defensively. But over the past couple of games, no combination has looked good. Winnipeg's best line on Thursday was Connor with Perfetti and Sean Monahan, the only line of the seven combos that outshot their opposition (4-3). Ehlers, like Perfetti, was also benched during the game.

### [Jets' Cole Perfetti trying to not be so hard on himself after 'growing' from press box stint](#)

By Ted Wyman

Like everyone who watched the Winnipeg Jets game against the Calgary Flames last week, Cole Perfetti heard what teammate Gabe Vilardi had to say about him.

"He's just a little hard on himself sometimes," Vilardi said during a first intermission interview with TSN's Kevin Sawyer.

"He's a great kid, first of all, and he works very hard. When you're a young guy, it's just mental, a mental grind playing all this hockey. You've got to find the confidence. You know, with Cole, he's got the skill and he's going to make plays. He's an incredible player and he's going to be a really good player for a long time.

"With him, it's just reminding him how good he is and not to be too hard on himself."

Perfetti, the 22-year-old winger who was drafted 10th overall by the Jets in 2020, is not about to disagree with his teammate.

He does tend to be very hard on himself, he does tend to get down when things aren't going well and he realizes he needs to overcome those tendencies.

"When things don't go the way I think they should for myself, I definitely get hard on myself, but it's something I've been working on and I feel like it's getting better," Perfetti said this week before the Jets left for their final three road games of the regular season, beginning Tuesday night in Nashville.

"It's something I've always struggled with and have struggled with this year, being really hard on myself. You get down on yourself and you go into a little bit of a funk."

Going through a slump that took him from the second line to the fourth line to the press box was a major challenge to a talented young player, but Perfetti seems to have recovered nicely, putting up two goals, including a game-winner, and two assists in the past three games while playing on a line with Sean Monahan and Kyle Connor.

Perfetti now has 17 goals and 36 points this season while playing a career-high 69 games. While it's unclear whether he'll be in the lineup for the start of the playoffs, Perfetti's scoring touch could certainly come in handy at times if the Jets find themselves in need of an offensive boost.

Being back in the top-six, something that really only happened because winger Tyler Toffoli missed a game due to illness and winger Nino Niederreiter got knocked out of the lineup with an injury, had seemingly buoyed Perfetti's confidence.

That and perhaps the humbling stint in the press box have combined to get his season back on track.

"It was a lot of learning and a lot of growing up," Perfetti said. "You face that kind of adversity, stuff you've never had to go through before in your life and in the game and you just learn about yourself and how you cope, and you hope you can become a better person and pro because of it."

"I feel like I've become a better person and learned a lot about myself from it. It's nice to be back, it's nice to be in the line-up in that top six and making an impact. That's where I ultimately want to be, so to get that shot again has been great."

The man who gave him that shot has liked what he has seen from Perfetti since his return to the lineup and continues to look for more growth on the mental side of the game.

"This is a tough league, man," Jets coach Rick Bowness said. "And you've got to learn how to handle the highs and the lows. There's only one way to do it and that's go through it."

"It's all the growing process of being a young player in a very, very tough league. Not every game's going to be a Picasso. And you're not going to feel great every game. You're not going to be on top of your game. When it really slides and you're not playing as much, how do you handle it, when you've never had to deal with it before?"

“So, a lot of it is us, the coaches, talking to him all the time and his teammates talking to him and helping him get through that.”

Perfetti is hitting a high note again right now, but the real test for him will come in the next low moment. He believes his much better prepared for such an eventuality.

“I’ve just been trying to manage that, have high expectations and demand a lot from myself but also not do it in a detrimental way,” Perfetti said. “It’s kind of a fine line, but that’s something I’ve really focused on and learned from.”

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### **[Is Hellebuyck a lock for the Vezina?](#) (VIDEO)**

The Jets continue to roll picking up their fourth straight win, while Connor Hellebuyck picks up his 35th victory of the season. It's the third time in his career he's reached that mark, so is Winnipeg's netminder a lock to win his second Vezina Trophy? TSN's Director of Scouting Craig Button shares his thoughts.

### **[How important were Hellebuyck and Scheifele in Winnipeg's win?](#) (VIDEO)**

Connor Hellebuyck picks up his 35th victory of the season, so does that make him a lock to win his second Vezina Trophy? TSN's Director of Scouting Craig Button shares his thoughts on that, and discusses the strong showing Mark Scheifele brought to get Winnipeg back into the game.

**Sportsnet.ca**

### **[Jeff Marek Show - Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff](#) (AUDIO)**

Jeff Marek and Winnipeg Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff kick things off reflecting on his long-term interest in Gabe Vilardi, Cole Perfetti's development and his team's trade deadline acquisitions. Next up, Producer Matt stops by to chat about the clinching scenarios in the NHL, Andrew Brunette's Jack Adams case, and if we could see three different winners for the Hart, Art Ross and Lindsay awards this season (18:22). Later on, Scott Burnside, former president of the Professional Hockey Writers' Association, weighs in on the interest in bringing an NHL team back to Atlanta and why it could work this time (50:21).