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[Three things - Impressive performance](#)  
[Lowry and Monahan score twice, Hellebuyck gets fifth shutout](#)

By Jamie Thomas

Connor Hellebuyck stopped all 31 shots he faced for his 37th career shutout as the Winnipeg Jets blanked the Colorado Avalanche 7-0 at Ball Arena today. Sean Monahan (2G, 1A) and Josh Morrissey (1G, 2A) recorded three points, Adam Lowry scored twice and David Gustafsson (2A), Nikolaj Ehlers (2A) and Kyle Connor (2A) also had multiple points for Winnipeg who swept their four-game road trip through the Central Division. The Jets (50-24-6) reached 50 wins for the second time since the franchise moved to Manitoba. Winnipeg closes out the regular season with two contests, Tuesday against Seattle and Thursday vs. Vancouver.

*DOMINANT FIRST*

There was a lot to be proud of after the first period in Dallas on Thursday night if you were Rick Bowness and the coaching staff. As impressive as that performance was, the first period in Denver today was at another level. Winnipeg scored four times in the first period with Sean Monahan (at 5:59) and Gabriel Vilardi (PPG at 8:02) scoring 2:03 apart to make it 2-0. Then Josh Morrissey (PPG at 15:07) and Adam Lowry (at 15:17) scored 10 seconds apart, the two fastest goals since the franchise moved to Winnipeg. Avs coach Jared Bednar pulled starting goaltender Alexander Georgiev at that point as he gave up four goals on 15 shots. The Jets ended up outshooting the Avs 15-5.

"I thought it was great, drew a couple of penalties, got pucks to the net, did everything right really," said Neal Pionk.

"Kept it to the outside, stayed disciplined. So, it was a good start for us, especially in this building."

*MAGIC OF MORRISSEY AND MONAHAN*

In big games like today, you need to see big performances from your top players. Josh Morrissey delivered with a goal and a couple helpers against the Avalanche. Morrissey scored 10 goals in a season for the third straight campaign – only one defenseman in Jets/Thrashers history has posted a run of that length: Dustin Byfuglien (4 seasons from 2013-14 – 2016-17). Meanwhile, Monahan scored a couple of goals and now has 13 goals since being traded to Winnipeg on February 6, second to Kyle Connor's 14 in that time span.

*RACE FOR SECOND*

Dallas beat Seattle on Saturday to clinch the Central Division title and that locked in the Jets and Avalanche as first round opponents. The only thing left to decide over the final two games of the regular season is who will have home ice advantage. Winnipeg has 106 points and 44 regulation wins; Colorado has 104 points, and 41 regulations wins. Colorado travels to Vegas tomorrow and closes out the regular season at home against Edmonton. The Jets will host Seattle Tuesday and Vancouver on Thursday.

"Yeah, that's in our control now. Give our guys credit, they've worked hard all year. We ended up with 25 road wins, so we've been really consistent on the road," said Rick Bowness.

"Give our guys credit, they've battled hard all year to put us in a position to take advantage of home ice."

**NHL.com**

**[Avalanche to play Jets in 1st round of Stanley Cup Playoffs](#)  
**[Teams have never faced each other in postseason](#)****

By David Satriano

The Colorado Avalanche will play the Winnipeg Jets in the Western Conference First Round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Home-ice advantage for the best-of-7 series will go to the team that finishes higher in the Central Division. The Jets (50-24-6) are second, ahead of the Avalanche (49-25-6).

The playoffs begin April 20.

Winnipeg won all three games against Colorado this season, including 7-0 on Saturday.

Defenseman Josh Morrissey led the Jets against the Avalanche with seven points (two goals, five assists), and forward Nikolaj Ehlers had five points (one goal, four assists). Gabriel Vilardi and Adam Lowry each had three goals, and Kyle Connor and Sean Monahan each had two. Connor Hellebuyck was 3-0-0 with a 2.00 goals-against average and .939 save percentage.

Forward Nathan MacKinnon led the Avalanche with four points (one goal, three assists), and was the only skater with more than one point in the season series. Alexandar Georgiev allowed three goals on 27 shots in a 4-2 loss on Dec. 7, and four goals on 15 shots before being pulled in the 7-0 loss; backup Justus Annunen allowed three goals on 12 shots in relief of the 7-0 loss in his only appearance against the Jets. Ivan Prosvetov allowed five goals on 24 shots in a 6-2 loss on Dec. 16.

The teams have never played each other in the playoffs.

The Jets lost to the Vegas Golden Knights in the first round last season in five games; the Avalanche lost to the Seattle Kraken in the first round in seven games.

This season, the Jets are led by forward Mark Scheifele with 70 points (25 goals, 45 assists), Morrissey with 67 points (10 goals, 57 assists), and Connor (32 goals, 27 assists) and Ehlers (24 goals, 35 assists) with 59 points each. Hellebuyck is 36-19-4 with a 2.38 GAA, .922 save percentage and five shutouts in 59 starts. Backup Laurent Brossoit is 14-5-2 with a 2.00 GAA, .928 save percentage and three shutouts in 22 games (21 starts).

The Avalanche are led by MacKinnon, who is second in the NHL with 137 points (51 goals, 86 assists), forward Mikko Rantanen with 102 points (40 goals, 62 assists) and defenseman Cale Makar with 87 points (20 goals, 67 assists). Georgiev is 38-18-4 with a 3.00 GAA, .899 save percentage and two shutouts in 62 games (61 starts) this season. Annunen is 7-4-1 with a 2.35 GAA, .925 save percentage and two shutouts in 13 games (11 starts).

Colorado has won the Stanley Cup three times, the last coming in 2022. Winnipeg has never won the Cup or been to the Stanley Cup Final.

[\*\*State Your Case: Avalanche or Jets in Western 1st round of playoffs  
NHL.com writers debate which team will win best-of-7 series\*\*](#)

By NHL.com

The Colorado Avalanche will face the Winnipeg Jets in the 2024 Stanley Cup Playoffs, which start April 20.

The matchup, the first one decided this season, became a reality when the Dallas Stars clinched the Central Division with a 3-1 victory against the Seattle Kraken on Saturday.

These two teams have never met in the postseason.

Home-ice advantage for the best-of-7 series will go to the team that finishes higher in the Central. The Jets (50-24-6) are second, two points ahead of the Avalanche (49-25-6). Each has two games remaining.

Winnipeg won all three games against Colorado this season, including 7-0 on Saturday, but who will win the series? That's the question before staff writer Tracey Myers and senior director of editorial Shawn P. Roarke in this playoff edition of State Your Case.

*Myers:* First, let me say I'm looking forward to this series big time. I won't be a bit surprised if it goes seven games. That said, I'm taking the Avalanche. They're a pretty complete team and loaded on offense. They are No. 1 in the NHL in goals for per game (3.68) and fifth on the power play (24.5 percent). A specific reason for my pick? Two words: Nathan MacKinnon. He's been a man possessed this season, which is saying something given his consistency during his career. He has an NHL career-high 137 points (51 goals, 86 assists) and is two points from tying Peter Stastny for the Avalanche/Quebec Nordiques single-season record set in 1981-82. There could be an Art Ross Trophy in his immediate future, a Hart Trophy and another Stanley Cup championship for him down the road. The Avalanche are dominant on offense, a big reason why I think they'll pull this series out.

*Roarke:* It's rare that a team can outscore its problems in the playoffs. What do they say, defense wins championships? Yes, it does, and few teams play defense better than the Jets, who are the stingiest team in the League when it comes to allowing goals (2.41 per game). I've been driving the Avalanche bandwagon all season, but they couldn't have drawn a worst first-round opponent. The Jets have the best goalie in the Western Conference field, Connor Hellebuyck, who has to be a favorite to win the Vezina Trophy voted as the best goalie in the NHL. His .922 save percentage is the best among goalies with at least 30 games. Alexandar Georgiev, the Avalanche starter, is at .898. That's a clear advantage for the Jets at the most important position in the postseason. The Jets are deep on the blue line, led by Josh Morrissey, who should be in the conversation for the Norris Trophy as top defenseman, and have multiple lines that can shut down a top line, even one as good as the one anchored by MacKinnon. They proved that Saturday in a 7-0 demolition of the Avalanche, on the road no less.

*Myers:* Oh, there's no doubt I have my concerns about the Avalanche goaltending, and those concerns didn't ease with that lopsided loss to the Jets. But much like the Avalanche, who have

struggled down the stretch, I believe Georgiev will get it together too. He has a strong defense around him as well. That starts with Cale Makar (speaking of Norris Trophy candidates), who has an NHL career-high 87 points (20 goals, 67 assists) but is pretty good on the defensive side too. After the Jets' win Saturday, coach Rick Bowness said, "We know we're going to see a lot better than that" from the Avalanche in their first-round series. He's right. It's going to be an incredible series and getting the best of Hellebuyck won't be easy, but I think the Avalanche will prevail.

*Roarke:* The Avalanche got decent goaltending in the playoffs last season when Georgiev had a 2.60 goals-against average and .914 save percentage, but still lost the first round in seven games to the upstart Seattle Kraken. Why? Because the Kraken were a deep team that found opportune offense and could matchup against Colorado's dominant top-six forwards and then win the depth battle. Who does that sound like? The Jets. They might have the deepest set of forwards in the League with 11 having at least 10 goals and 20 points. They also have four defensemen with at least 20 points, but it will be Hellebuyck who will be the difference in this series. He has allowed two or fewer goals in 35 games this season, has five shutouts and gave up four goals in three starts against the Avalanche. It's tough for a team built on offense to win when it can't score goals.

### **[Jets score 7, shut out Avalanche in playoff preview](#)** **[Take sole possession of 2nd in Central; teams will meet in Western Conference 1st Round](#)**

By Ryan Boulding

DENVER -- Connor Hellebuyck made 30 saves, and the Winnipeg Jets took sole possession of second place in the Central Division by defeating the Colorado Avalanche 7-0 at Ball Arena on Saturday.

The shutout was Hellebuyck's fifth of the season 37th of his NHL career.

"We have the best goalie in the League," Jets defenseman Neal Pionk said. "It gives us a ton of confidence, let's you play freely, make some plays. And like I said, when we play these good teams, they're going to make some plays no matter what we do. We could play a perfect game and still give up a few scoring chances, and that's where the goalie helps us out."

Sean Monahan had two goals and an assist, Josh Morrissey had a goal and two assists, and Adam Lowry scored twice and for the Jets (50-24-6), who have won six straight. Kyle Connor, Nikolaj Ehlers and David Gustafsson each had two assists.

Winnipeg and Colorado will meet in the Western Conference First Round.

"That's not their best game," Jets coach Rick Bowness said of the Avalanche. "We know we're going to see a lot better than that. I know their goalies had a tough night. We're happy with what we did knowing it's not going to look like that when the playoffs start."

"We know they're a lot better than that. They're a great hockey team over there. They are. They have elite players, the coaches have got them playing hockey. Today, that's not their hockey team. We know they're a great hockey team, and we know it's going to be a tough series."

Winnipeg is two points ahead of Colorado for second in the Central, and home-ice advantage in the first round, with two regular-season games remaining for each. The Dallas Stars clinched the division with a 3-1 win against the Seattle Kraken on Saturday.

“For us, starting at home, it would be awesome playing in front of the fans. We’ve worked so hard to put it in our control,” Lowry said. “That’s nice, but whether we start at home or on the road, we’re a real confident group. We like our team, we like our depth, we like how we can match up players at home or on the road. We’ll try to take care of that in the next couple of games, but regardless of that we’re just focusing on being ready for Game 1.”

Alexandar Georgiev allowed four goals on 15 shots for the Avalanche (49-25-6) before being replaced late in the first period by Justus Annunen. Annunen made eight saves for Colorado, which has lost four of seven.

“We’re going to have to remember it,” Avalanche coach Jared Bednar said. “We’re going to have to learn from it, study it, and understand it, because we’re going to have to be a lot better than that. That’s two out of our last three games were like that. It’s a huge game, right, and that’s the way we came out in the first period ...

“This is a really good team, but it doesn’t change the fact that you’ve got to be ready to start. Can’t wade into hockey games.”

Monahan put Winnipeg ahead 1-0 at 5:59 of the first period, hammering home Ehlers’ backdoor pass. Ehlers had taken the puck around the back of the net before passing across the crease to the left post.

Gabriel Vilardi extended the lead to 2-0 with a power-play goal from the left post at 8:02. He dropped to one knee and one-timed Connor’s pass from low in the right face-off circle.

“Our first period, we did a really good job of staying on top of them, forcing turnovers, and our power play got two huge goals for us,” Lowry said. “They have some of the best players in the world, a lot of speed coming through the middle.”

Morrissey scored a power-play goal to make it 3-0 at 15:07, scoring with a slap shot from the blue line.

Lowry made it 4-0 at 15:17, chasing Georgiev. He tucked a rebound past the goalie’s leg from the top of the crease.

“I think we’re too late in the season here to kind of brush things off and say they had it and we didn’t,” Colorado forward Andrew Cogliano said. “I don’t know. It’s disappointing. The bottom line is, you get behind on a team like that, it’s going to be really hard to come back. So that’s just the nature of the beast where we’re at with a team like that. They checked hard, we didn’t.

“They got all their offense from mistakes we made, which were a lot of mental mistakes, a lot of bad reads, a lot of things that we just haven’t done in a long time. And you faced a team that checked hard and we didn’t, and when you give teams, good opportunistic teams like that, 2-on-1s and breakaways, eventually they’re going to go in. So we left our goalies out to dry a lot.”

Tyler Toffoli extended it to 5-0 at 10:19 of the second period when he finished a 2-on-1 off a pass from Connor, scoring with wrist shot that went past the glove.

Monahan's second goal of the game pushed it to 6-0 at 15:11 when he scored with a wrist shot from the left hash marks, and Lowry scored through the five-hole for his second of the game at 16:33 for the 7-0 final.

Lowry had gone 17 games without a goal since March 8.

"I was ice cold, so it's nice to heat up a little bit," he said. "It was nice to see the first one go in, and the second one was a bonus. Guys joke that I'm addicted to [shooting five-hole]. It was one of those things that I saw and tried to take advantage of."

*NOTES:* Avalanche defenseman Samuel Girard left the game in the first period following a collision with teammate Ross Colton and is in concussion protocol, Bednar said. ... Colorado center Nathan MacKinnon had four shots on goal to give him 400, making him the 10th player in NHL history to have that many in a season. ... Georgiev is scheduled to start at the Vegas Golden Knights on Sunday. ... Colorado forward Mikko Rantanen had two shots and was minus-3 in 16:11 of ice time after missing the previous two games while in concussion protocol. ... Bowness coached his 800th NHL game he is 307-408-37 with 48 ties. ... Morrissey and Lowry scored 10 seconds apart, tying for the second-fastest two goals in Jets/Atlanta Thrashers history. Ron Hainsey and Chris Thorburn scored the fastest seven seconds apart for the Thrashers in a 5-4 loss at the Montreal Canadiens on Dec. 2, 2008. ... Ehlers reached 255 assists, passing Toby Enstrom (254) for the seventh-most in franchise history.

## **Denver Gazette**

### **[Avalanche-Jets first round playoffs confirmed: Is Colorado in trouble?](#)**

By Kyle Fredrickson

The Avalanche and Jets are confirmed first-round NHL playoff opponents.

Colorado might be in trouble.

An embarrassing 7-0 home loss Saturday afternoon emphasized the obvious: The Avs struggle against Winnipeg. They lost all four regular season matchups (0-4-0) by a margin of 17-4. The Jets have an inside track for home-ice advantage over Colorado in points — 106 to 104 — with two games left each before the postseason. The No. 3 seed appears likely.

A silver lining? There is ample motivation to rebound when the postseason begins next weekend. Just don't assume Hart Trophy frontrunner Nathan MacKinnon is buying stock in that narrative.

"No, I don't think so. It's the playoffs," MacKinnon said. "Hopefully, we play our hardest regardless of what happened today."

Then again ...

"It should be in our memory," defenseman Devon Toews said. "That's embarrassing in our building to lose 7-0 in a game that means a lot for both teams. Especially us. We put on a poor performance for our fans. Now, it's going to be a little more difficult. We're probably going to

have to start (the playoffs) on the road. ... We had an opportunity to get home ice and we didn't show up."

The ugly Avalanche truth from this past week is difficult to ignore.

They had a window to still claim the Central Division last Sunday with a victory over the Stars. Colorado lost 7-4. They could have been a step closer to home-ice with a victory over the Jets. The Avs lost again. It's easy to draw parallels between beatdowns.

Poor defensive details and execution led to quality scoring chances. Starting goalie Alexandar Georgiev, while mostly solid, failed to step up when needed most. MacKinnon can't be expected to carry the team every game. On Saturday, the Avs were shutout for the fifth time this season.

"We just had two days off and really good practice," coach Jared Bednar said. "That's not fatigue. You're not getting more rest than that in this league, ever. You can't use that as an excuse. I thought we got outcompeted. ... You can't rest against a team like Winnipeg. As good as we think we are as a team, they're ahead of us."

Bednar, when asked about Georgiev, said, "He didn't make the big save tonight. So, he's grouped in with the rest of our team." Bednar added that Georgiev will start Sunday in the second of back-to-back games at the Golden Knights.

The Avalanche are now 3-5-1 over their last nine games. But it's not a sure sign of playoff failure. The Stanley Cup winning team went 1-5-1 to close the regular season in 2022. It's not unreasonable to think they can turn it around again. But the Jets are uniquely qualified to slow them down.

Colorado's penchant for comeback victories hasn't worked against elite goaltending from Connor Hellebuyck and Winnipeg's stingy defense. The Jets are deep offensively, too, with 12 different players scoring at least 30 points. The Avalanche are also 19-16-5 on the road this season.

How will they finally ground the Jets?

"We're going to find out soon enough," Bednar said. "It's my job to be concerned when we're giving up goals (and) chances that I don't like that are repetitive mistakes. ... I'm only not concerned with our team is cooking with gas and playing exactly the way I think they should play."

### **Associated Press**

#### **[Jets crush Avalanche in playoff preview](#)**

By Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — The Winnipeg Jets want to remember this game for everything that went right. Colorado wants to remember it, too, for all that went wrong.

Josh Morrissey and Adam Lowry scored 10 seconds apart in a four-goal first period that chased Colorado goaltender Alexandar Georgiev from the net, and the Jets moved into the driver's seat for the Central Division's second seed with a 7-0 win against the Avalanche on Saturday.

With Dallas wrapping up the division title earlier in the day, the stage is set for Colorado and Winnipeg squaring off in the first round of the playoffs. All that remains to sort out is which team has home-ice advantage. The Jets are two points ahead of the Avalanche for the No. 2 spot in the division with two games to play. They also hold the tiebreaker.

Winnipeg just may have found a blueprint as well for keeping in check a speedy Colorado team.

“That’s not their hockey team,” Jets coach Rick Bowness cautioned. “We know they’re a great hockey team and we know it’s going to be a tough series. ... We came out and wanted to play aggressive against them, and we did.”

The Avalanche aren’t looking to turn the page on this game. Not after this outcome.

“You can’t be forgetting why it ended up like that, especially when you have to play them at the most important time of the year,” said Avalanche coach Jared Bednar, whose team has lost three of their last four games. “We’re going to have to remember it. We’re going to have to learn from it, study it, understand it. We’re going to have to be a lot better than that.”

Connor Hellebuyck made 30 saves for his fifth shutout of the season.

Sean Monahan and Lowry each had two goals, while Gabriel Vilardi and Tyler Toffoli also scored to help the Jets extend their win streak to six in a row. Winnipeg led 7-0 after two periods as 10 players had a point. It’s the first time in franchise history the team has scored seven consecutive goals in a game, according to NHL Stats.

Winnipeg finished 3-0 against Colorado this season, outscoring the Avalanche by a 17-4 margin.

“It’s nice to come in here and play really well, but come playoff time we expect a better effort from them,” Lowry said.

Nathan MacKinnon and the Avalanche entered the game as the league’s highest scoring team (3.72 goals per game) but were bottled up by Hellebuyck. It’s the fifth time the Avalanche have been blanked this season — and first time at home.

“Everything went wrong,” MacKinnon said.

Georgiev allowed four goals on 15 shots before being pulled for Justus Annunen with 4:43 remaining in the opening period. Annunen surrendered three goals on 11 shots as goaltending remains a big question mark for Colorado heading into the post-season.

Monahan opened the scoring 5:59 into the contest as Winnipeg nearly finished the period with as many goals (four) as Colorado had total shots (five).

The goals by Morrissey and Lowry 10 seconds apart tied for the second-fastest two scores in Jets/Atlanta Thrashers history. The fastest two were seven seconds apart on Dec. 2, 2008.

Mikko Rantanen returned to the lineup for Colorado after missing two games while in concussion protocol. Now, defenceman Samuel Girard enters the concussion protocol after leaving in the first period after running into teammate Ross Colton.



“Competitively, we were not where we needed to be,” Colorado's Andrew Cogliano said. “I feel like we got a good taste of what it’s going to be like in the playoffs.”

#### *UP NEXT*

Jets: Host the Seattle Kraken on Tuesday.

Avalanche: Visit the Vegas Golden Knights on Sunday.

### **The Athletic**

#### **[The Winnipeg Jets are back — just in time for their series against the Avalanche](#)**

By Murat Ates

It is almost as though when the Winnipeg Jets play a committed defensive game and make smart plays in all three zones, they’re some type of four-wheeled, newspaper-carrying, hand-pulled cart.

Just when the Jets’ story had grown too troubled, too clumsy with the puck, too careless — even by their elites — Winnipeg outscored division-leading Dallas and the Jets’ first-round playoff opponent, the Colorado Avalanche, by a combined score of 10-0. Dallas and Colorado had last change, allowing them the opportunity to run their stars out against Winnipeg’s defensively porous top-end forwards, yet Winnipeg kept Nathan MacKinnon and Cale Makar off the scoresheet.

For the Jets inclined, it’s a wonderful sign: a Cup contending team, on paper, re-establishing itself as a Cup contending team, by way of commitment to its own process. Colorado’s ace in the now-official first-round matchup is MacKinnon — and, as Winnipeg’s top line of Mark Scheifele, Gabriel Vilardi and Kyle Connor has struggled defensively this season, it’s an ace the Avalanche are supposed to be able to exploit on home ice.

Heading into Saturday’s 7-0 dismantling of Colorado, the trio had been outscored 12-9 at five-on-five — meek numbers for anybody but miserable numbers for a top line. Opposing coaches had started running their top offensive players at Scheifele’s line, ignoring defensive matchups with the knowledge that they could score goals of their own against the Jets’ top offensive players.

If Colorado can’t run MacKinnon at Scheifele and win — and if Winnipeg gets to dress Connor Hellebuyck and Laurent Brossoit against Alexandar Georgiev and Justus Annunen in net — then the Jets have an advantage heading into the playoffs that they hadn’t had for the past couple of months.

“They’ve got to tighten it up a little bit. We split them up because they were spending a little bit too much time in our zone,” Rick Bowness told reporters in Dallas on Thursday.

Bowness had tried a few different options, including promoting Nikolaj Ehlers, but Winnipeg looked disconnected for long stretches from late January through last week. The Jets ultimately want to land on Connor, Scheifele and Vilardi on line one and Ehlers, Sean Monahan and Tyler Toffoli on line two with Adam Lowry taking the bulk of the defensive matchups, but the results hadn’t been there — and the process hadn’t looked good. The Jets can take over games when

they take care of their own zone first but, in their efforts to take over games with talent instead of tenacity, Winnipeg was losing ground.

Advantage Avalanche, right? Absolutely not — at least, not during the regular-season series.

Winnipeg's top line went toe to toe with Colorado's top line on Saturday and, instead of being a problem, Scheifele and company set the tone. The Jets' first goal of the game was Monahan's, set up by Ehlers, but Scheifele's line had spent the previous shift attacking the Avalanche in waves. By the time Ehlers was racing around Colorado's zone and firing a cross-crease to Monahan for Monahan's first of two goals on the day, it was an inevitable conclusion of team-wide excellence as opposed to a one-off, highly skilled play.

Connor found Vilardi for a power-play tap-in — Vilardi's third power-play goal in five games — and Josh Morrissey unloaded on a slap shot on another power play in the first period, reminding observers that the Jets' 22nd-ranked power play is top tier when both Vilardi and Sean Monahan are in the lineup. From there, the rout was on, with Lowry scoring 10 seconds after Morrissey's goal, and the Jets never looking back en route to their third win in three games against Colorado this season. Now Winnipeg can clinch home-ice advantage against Colorado by beating Seattle on Tuesday or Vancouver on Thursday (or if the Avalanche lose either of their two remaining games, starting Sunday in Vegas.)

It reminded me of a joke Lowry made — that might not have been a joke — back in January when the Jets were winning with the same commitment to team defence that saw them beat Dallas and Colorado this week.

We'd just wrapped up our interview for the Jets' player poll series we're running in the build-up to the playoffs. I commented, off-hand, that this kind of stuff is more fun than writing that you've won, yet again. I thought it was a flattering truth about a first-place team: Winnipeg's scorching hot December had propelled it to the top of the NHL standings and national media had caught on. It was time to believe in the 2023-24 Jets.

Lowry didn't take the bait. Instead, he said those kinds of stories worried him. It seemed to him, he said, that every time the hype train got carried away with stories about Winnipeg's greatness, the Jets let that greatness slip. He might have been kidding. He might have been telling a cold, hard truth. Either way, the captain looks wise as can be in hindsight.

The Jets' elite forechecking, backchecking and five-man zone defence that committed to excellent coverage in the guts of the ice was the stuff of their rise to the top. The absence of that commitment was the formula for a second-half slide that featured a five-game losing streak, a six-game losing streak, and questions about Winnipeg's legitimacy as Cup contenders.

Were the Jets en route to wasting their first-half promise? Were their additions of Monahan, Toffoli and Colin Miller in vain?

"It's going to be about puck management and commitment to transition defence," I wrote. "When the Jets' forwards get back to the middle of the ice — not just F1, but F2 and F3 — and you look at the Jets' defensive zone and Winnipeg's skaters make the shape of a 'five' on a die, Winnipeg is one of the best defensive teams in the league. That hasn't always happened, particularly during looks at Connor-Scheifele-Vilardi on the top line."

Their second straight shutout, with strong defensive performances from their offensive elite, keeps Winnipeg's goals-against number at 193 — the best number in the NHL. Florida is close behind, but shutouts from Brossoit and Hellebuyck give the Jets a shot at the William Jennings Trophy as the league's top defensive team.

Lowry, whose shutdown line is an enormous part of that success, says he's seeing the quality of team game that gives him hope heading into the playoffs.

"We're not going to have success in the playoffs if we don't play with that solid defensive structure," he told reporters in Denver on Saturday. "We have world-class goaltending and we can rely on that on some nights but, to have success and go on a run, we're going to need to play well in front of them."

To watch the Jets commit to defence first, trusting that the offence will come if they take care of the dirty work first, is to believe that a "run" is possible. I'd recommend not getting too confident about a Saturday afternoon win — we know the playoffs are a different animal, that Colorado is better than they showed Saturday, and that Winnipeg hasn't won a best-of-seven series since sweeping Edmonton in 2021.

But Winnipeg has enough quality pieces from top to bottom of its lineup to believe playoff success is possible. Its power play works whenever Vilardi is healthy and is great when Monahan is playing the bumper position. Hellebuyck and Brossoit give Winnipeg an advantage over any team in the NHL. Take it from Jesse Granger, who ranked goaltending tandems around the league. Morrissey has added to his game in all three zones since scoring 76 points one year ago. Lowry's line with Mason Appleton and Nino Niederreiter (and more recently, with David Gustafsson) has beaten any and all opposition this season. The Jets' fourth line of Alex Iafallo, Morgan Barron and Vladislav Namestnikov has started to produce in the way that Brossoit tells me Vegas' fourth line produced en route to last year's Cup win.

There are trouble spots. Winnipeg's second pair is starting to give up ice and, as recently as Tuesday in Nashville, puck management on that pair and beyond had been burning the Jets right up until these last two brilliant games.

But Winnipeg is heading toward the playoffs with confidence and quality. That's what this road trip was about. That's what its 3-0 and 7-0 shutouts were for. There are two regular-season games left to play and now, instead of worrying if the Jets can play the style of hockey that led them to so many quality wins early in the season, Jets fans can wonder about clinching home-ice advantage. Rest assured the Jets players would love to start their first-round series against the Avalanche with Jets fans on their side.

"For us, starting at home, it would be awesome playing in front of the fans. We've worked so hard to put it in our control," Lowry said. "Whether we start at home or on the road, we're a real confident group. We like our team. We like the depth. We like how we can match up, whether it's at home or on the road, so we'll try to take care of (home ice advantage) but, regardless of that, we're focused on being ready for Game 1."

Winnipeg's road trip put "Winnipeg Jet hockey," as Bowness likes to call it, back on the ice for its fans to see. Their confidence seems well placed after a lengthy second-half question mark. There will be whiteouts in Winnipeg once again, with street parties on Donald Street and a fighting chance to beat the 2022 Stanley Cup champions.

Could you have imagined that, one year ago?

## **Winnipeg Free Press**

### **[Jets hammer defenceless Avs Monahan, Lowry score twice each; Hellebuyck posts fifth shutout](#)**

By: Ken Wiebe

DENVER — Never mind a statement game. This was downright domination.

With second place in the Central Division at stake, the Winnipeg Jets steamrolled the Colorado Avalanche 7-0 Saturday afternoon before a stunned crowd at Ball Arena.

While it won't count for anything tangible when the Stanley Cup playoffs begin this week, there could be no more palpable reinforcement of what the Jets can accomplish when the commitment to playing team defence is a top priority.

"We like how the majority of this road trip went, outside of Nashville. So we'll look to continue that when we get home," said Jets captain Adam Lowry, who scored twice to pace the offensive attack along with Sean Monahan, who scored two of his own.

"We're not going to have success in the playoffs if we don't play with that solid defensive structure. We have world-class goaltending and we can rely on that some nights but to have success and go on a run, we're going to need to play well in front of him and do the little things. (Nikolaj Ehlers) turns it over and makes two huge shot blocks. It's 7-0 but when you're playing for your goaltender, it's little things like that that go a long way."

Gabriel Vilardi, Tyler Toffoli, Josh Morrissey also scored for the Jets, who won their sixth consecutive game and improved to 50-24-6 on the season.

The Jets head home to face the Seattle Kraken on Tuesday before closing out the regular season against the Vancouver Canucks on Thursday.

The Avalanche faces the Vegas Golden Knights on Sunday before facing the Edmonton Oilers on Thursday.

As for the standings race, the Jets are up two points over the Avalanche, but also own the first tiebreaker with 44 regulation wins, so they're in the driver's seat to have home-ice advantage in the first round.

"Give our guys credit, they've battled hard all year to put us in a position to take advantage of home ice," said Jets head coach Rick Bowness, whose team finished with a franchise record for road wins with 25. "We know they're a lot better than that. They're a great hockey team over there. They are. They have elite players, the coaches have got them playing hockey. Today, that's not their hockey team."

The Jets also swept the season series with the Avalanche 3-0 and outscored them 17-4, though that's not going to mean much when the real games start next week.

“Out the window, fresh slate,” said Jets defenceman Neal Pionk. “But at the same time, (we) have some confidence that we can do it.”

Let’s take a closer look at what transpired on the ice in the Mile High City on Saturday:

*THE START:* It didn’t take long to figure out what the Jets were going to do for an encore after delivering one of their most complete efforts of the season Thursday against the Dallas Stars.

The Jets showed a commitment to structure out of the gate and won a bunch of races and puck battles and were eventually able to score four times in the opening period, chasing goalie Alexandar Georgiev — who was under siege while facing 15 shots.

“Certainly one of our best of the year. It was,” said Bowness. “We came out and wanted to play aggressive against them, and we did. We won some faceoffs, the power play was outstanding. That got us going, too. That’s not their best game, we know we’re going to see a lot better than that. I know their goalies had a tough night. We’re happy with what we did knowing it’s not going to look like that when the playoffs start.”

Finding consistency has been a battle for the Jets at times during the second half, but they certainly seem to be peaking at the right time.

*THE ADVANTAGE:* Speaking of goaltending, the belief is that the Jets hold a significant advantage between the pipes in a playoff series.

And while Georgiev — or backup Juustus Annunen — were far from the reason the Avalanche were blown out, Connor Hellebuyck came through with another impressive outing in what has been a Vezina-worthy season.

Making his 59th start of the campaign, Hellebuyck stopped 31 pucks to record his fifth shutout of the season and 37th of his NHL career.

“(Hellebuyck) gives us a ton of confidence,” said Pionk. “(It) lets you play freely, make some plays. And like I said, when we play these good teams, they’re gonna make some plays no matter what we do. We could play a perfect game and still give up a few scoring chances and that’s where the goalie helps us out.”

By getting consecutive shutouts from Hellebuyck and Laurent Brossoit (who has three goose eggs in 22 appearances, including 21 starts), the Jets could have an advantage over a lot of teams when it comes to goaltending.

*THE SLUMP BUSTER:* Lowry has been doing an excellent job at even strength, limiting the offence produced by the opposition and on the penalty kill, but he had gone 17 games without scoring a goal. So when he picked up a loose puck and stuffed it past Georgiev to make it 4-0, there was an element of relief attached to it.

“I don’t know, it’s springtime. I was ice cold so it’s nice to heat up a little bit,” said Lowry, who is up to 12 goals and 35 points in 80 games. “It was nice to see the first one go in and the second one was a bonus.”

On the second goal, Lowry elected to shoot through the five-hole on a two-on-one rush when the D-man cheated toward the other Jets player.

“Guys joke that I’m addicted to it,” said Lowry. “It was one of those things that I saw and tried to take advantage of.”

Bowness loved seeing Lowry rewarded for his efforts.

“He’s so consistent every night,” said Bowness. “He just lays it on the line,” said Bowness. “From a coaching perspective, you couldn’t ask for more than what Adam’s given us, both from on and off the ice. He’s been a great captain, a great leader in the room, a great leader on the ice. When you play that hard as he does every night, once in a while you want that reward and he got it.”

*THE HIT:* Avalanche centre Nathan MacKinnon isn’t on the receiving end of big hits very often and it looked like he was caught by surprise when Jets defenceman Neal Pionk stepped up on him during the second period. It was a hard, clean check and the Avalanche spent the rest of the shift chasing after Pionk.

After the whistle sounded, Avalanche forward Ross Colton took a roughing minor that left his team short-handed.

“I was just taking the angle on him. I think he lost his balance more than anything,” said Pionk. “So yeah, that’s how I saw it.”

So what did Colton say to you on the way by?

“(He) said, ‘Is it snowing in Winnipeg?’ And I said, ‘No’ and then ‘Yeah,’ ” quipped Pionk.

Pionk had some tough outings recently, but he’s at his best when he’s playing an aggressive game and taking the body. This is the kind of play the Jets are going to need from Pionk when the playoffs begin.

“He made a big hit,” said Bowness. “Just as important as the hit was was his discipline. He didn’t retaliate.”

MacKinnon was held off the scoreboard on home ice for just the second time in 40 games this season.

Pionk had some success in the playoffs frustrating Connor McDavid of the Edmonton Oilers and he’d love to do the same to MacKinnon, who is having a Hart Trophy-calibre season.

“Best in the world, right? Like those are arguably 1A, 1B, so that’s always a challenge,” said Pionk. “I think any athlete looks for that ultimate challenge and that’s what it is when you play those two.”

*EXTRA, EXTRA:* The Jets didn’t make any changes to their lineup on Saturday, which left defencemen Nate Schmidt and Colin Miller and forwards Cole Perfetti and Rasmus Kupari as healthy scratches.

Because there were a couple of question marks related to health, Schmidt and Perfetti took the pre-game skate. Nino Niederreiter missed a fifth consecutive game with a leg laceration. The

expectation is that Niederreiter will return to the lineup for the Jets on Tuesday against the Kraken.

Jets forward Vladislav Namenstnikov didn't take a shift in the final 11:22 of the contest, while Monahan didn't take a shift in the final 9:08 but Bowness said there was nothing to be concerned about. The players are a bit banged up, but the score allowed the Jets to give them some additional time for recovery.

Toffoli had a team-leading five shots on goal and eight shot attempts in the contest. The line with Monahan, Toffoli and Ehlers has contributed three goals and seven points at even strength since being reunited on Thursday.

## **Winnipeg Sun**

### **[Jets throttle Avalanche in playoff preview, get leg up for home-ice advantage](#)**

By Ted Wyman

The Winnipeg Jets made sure the sneak preview of a first-round Stanley Cup playoff series was more like a full-length horror movie for the Colorado Avalanche.

In a game that could well decide second place in the NHL's Central Division and home-ice advantage in the first round of the playoffs, the Jets destroyed the Avalanche in their own building Saturday afternoon, opening up 4-0 and 7-0 period leads and skating to a 7-0 victory.

The Jets improved their record to 50-24-6 (106 points) on the season and moved two points ahead of the Avalanche (104 points) in the race for second place. Both teams have two games left and the Jets hold the tiebreaker.

The Jets won all three meetings between the two teams during the regular season.

The two teams will meet in the first-round of the playoffs, likely starting next weekend. The Dallas Stars wrapped up first place in the Central with a 3-1 win over the Seattle Kraken on Saturday afternoon.

"It's nice to come in here and play really well but come playoff time we expect a better effort from them," said Jets captain Adam Lowry, who scored two goals for the Jets, ending an 18-game personal drought.

"We know they're a much better team than they showed tonight. You can't take too much out of this. It's nice to finish the road trip strong, it's nice to continue playing well and go into these last two games with a lot of confidence."

Sean Monahan also scored two goals apiece for the Jets, while Gabriel Vilardi, Josh Morrissey and Tyler Toffoli also tallied. First-period goals by Morrissey and Lowry came just 10 seconds apart.

Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck made 31 saves to earn the shutout. The Jets shut out their opponent for the second straight game and outscored top teams Dallas and Colorado 10-0 over two games.

“We’re not going to have success in the playoffs if we don’t play with that solid defensive structure,” Lowry said. “We have world-class goaltending and we can rely on that some nights but to have success and go on a run, we’re going to need to play well in front of him and do the little things.”

The Jets have now won six games in a row, a streak that started on the heels of a six-game losing streak. Their last three wins came against playoff-bound Nashville, Dallas and Colorado.

Winnipeg, which has struggled on the power play much of the season, scored on its first two power plays of the night, getting a tap-in from Vilardi off a great pass from Kyle Connor and Morrissey’s point blast off a face-off won by Monahan.

It was the first time this year the Jets scored as many as seven goals and they did it against two goalies. Alexandar Georgiev allowed four goals on 15 shots in the first period, while Justus Annunen gave up three goals on 12 shots.

The Jets will wrap up their regular-season schedule with home games against the Seattle Kraken on Tuesday and Vancouver Canucks on Thursday at Canada Life Centre.

### [WYMAN: Jets look ready for playoff run after convincing wins in Dallas and Colorado](#)

By Ted Wyman

If anything is ever going to give Winnipeg Jets fans hope that their team can go on a long playoff run, it’s the way the team played in the last two games.

To recap, the Jets went into Dallas on Thursday and beat the first-place Stars 3-0, defensively dominating one of the top teams in the NHL and a clear Stanley Cup favourite.

Then on Saturday, the Jets went into Denver and thoroughly thrashed the Avalanche 7-0 in a game that was not only a preview of a first-round playoff series but also could determine home-ice advantage in that best-of-seven.

In total, it was a combined score of 10-0 as the Jets took down their two closest rivals in the Central Division standings.

They were structured defensively, powerful offensively, scored some beautiful goals and even looked good on the power play.

Combining that with shutout performances by Laurent Brossoit Thursday and Connor Hellebuyck Saturday, the Jets looked like a team that is very much a contender to come out of the Central Division and go after the Stanley Cup.

“(Hellebuyck) was great, (Brossoit) was wonderful in Dallas,” Jets head coach Rick Bowness told reporters in Denver after Saturday’s game.

“We know if we play with the right structure and the right pressure that we’re a very tough opponent. And when we do break down, which is going to happen, then our goalies are going to be there for us.”



It would be pretty difficult to find anything wrong with the Jets' performance on Saturday.

Not only did they pile on the offence, chasing goalie Alexandar Georgiev after scoring four first-period goals on 15 shots, and adding three more goals in the second, but they shut down a Colorado team that features Hart trophy and Art Ross Trophy contender Nathan MacKinnon, 102-point scorer Mikko Rantanen, and 87-point scoring defenceman Cale Makar in the line-up.

Getting two goals each from captain Adam Lowry and fellow centre Sean Monahan, along with singles from Tyler Toffoli, Gabe Vilardi and Josh Morrissey, the Jets were a scoring machine.

The power play looked great, with Vilardi finishing off a slick pass from Kyle Connor for one goal and Morrissey blasting one home after a face-off win by Monahan.

Three of the big keys for the Jets to be successful in the playoffs would be adhering to defensive structure, great goaltending and secondary scoring.

Check, check, check.

Given, the Avalanche were not close to their best. They offered little resistance to the Jets all afternoon, save for a few big hits early in the game, but the Jets don't seem like they'll be fooled by that poor performance.

"That's not their best game, we know we're going to see a lot better than that," Bowness said. "I know their goalies had a tough night. We're happy with what we did knowing it's not going to look like that when the playoffs start."

The Jets and Avalanche will meet in the first round of the playoffs, although it's not yet determined when or where it will start.

Winnipeg now has the upper hand on second place in the Central Division and holds the tie-breaker between the two teams, with both sides having two games remaining.

If the Jets beat either the Seattle Kraken on Tuesday at Canada Life Centre, or the Vancouver Canucks on Thursday, they'll be guaranteed second place and home-ice advantage in the first round. If the Avalanche lose either of their last two games, the Jets will finish second as well.

Should Winnipeg finish second, the first-round playoff series will start at Canada Life Centre, likely next weekend.

"For us, starting at home, it would be awesome playing in front of the fans," Lowry said. "We've worked so hard to put it in our control. That's nice, but whether we start at home or on the road, we're a real confident group."

"We like our team, we like our depth, we like how we can match up players at home or on the road. We'll try to take care of that in the next couple of games, but regardless of that we're just focusing on being ready for Game 1."

The Jets improved to 50-24-6 on the season. They are 25-11-3 at home, 25-13-3 on the road.

So Lowry is right, it doesn't matter where they start. But if they can get off to a good start to the series at home, and play the way they have shown all season on the road, they'll have a great shot of winning the series.

The Avalanche are a much better home team than road team. Colorado has a 30-9-1 record at home, 19-16-5 on the road.

Here are some more thoughts on Saturday's Winnipeg win.

—Lowry has played a key role in shutting down some top opponents of late and he finally found a way to put the puck in the net as well. He had gone 18 games without a goal but scored in the first and second period — his first goal came just 10 seconds after Morrissey scored — and played a big part in the Jets biggest offensive onslaught of the season. “I don't know, it's springtime,” Lowry said. “I was ice cold so it's nice to heat up a little bit. It was nice to see the first one go in and the second one was a bonus.”

—Neal Pionk put a hit on MacKinnon that was perfectly clean, but one the Avalanche didn't like because it was their star player. Colorado ended up taking a penalty as the Avalanche tried to get revenge on Pionk. The Jets scored on that penalty, as Pionk didn't take the bait from Ross Colton, who wanted to fight. Pionk really shouldn't have to fight in that situation because there was nothing wrong with the hit. He's no fan favourite but he can get under the skin of opponents, which could boost Pionk's value in a long playoff series. No doubt the Avalanche will remember that hit once the post-season gets under way.

—The Jets had plenty of pretty goals on the night, but the one that was most impressive was the second one scored by Monahan, giving the Jets a 6-0 lead. Nikolaj Ehlers made a great play from the boards in his own zone to hook the puck ahead to Monahan, who moved it quickly to Morrissey in the neutral zone. Morrissey barrelled into the Colorado zone and managed to bat the puck back over to Monahan, who fired it past backup goalie Justus Annunen. From start to finish, it was the kind of 200-foot transition from offence to defence that will benefit a hockey team in big games.

—The last time the Jets pulled off a huge win — before Thursday's shutout of Dallas — they started to play lousy hockey in the very next game. So it had to be good for the coaching staff to see the Jets come out with such fire and structure two days after dominating the Stars. “We showed that we can play good team defense against the best teams in league,” Pionk said. “I mean those two teams that we played just now are you know, you ask anyone around the league, they're at least top five, if not top three. So we proved that tonight.”

### **[JETS MAILBAG: Pionk, Connor and Scheifele, and can the Jets beat the Avs?](#)**

By Scott Billeck

The Winnipeg Jets are a just a few days away from an appearance in the Stanley Cup playoffs and are wrapping up the second-best season, points-wise, of their existence.

With an all-world goaltender in Connor Hellebuyck, a steady group of defencemen led by the perpetually underrated Josh Morrissey and 13 forwards who have scored at least 10 goals this season, the Jets have the pieces to make some noise in the postseason.

Of course, they'll have to get through both the Colorado Avalanche and the Dallas Stars to get through the Central Division, and that will be a tall order, but at the very least, the potential is there.

There are still question marks as head coach Rick Bowness tries to find the right line combinations and defence pairings to bring out the most consistent game from the team, and there's plenty on the minds of fans as we offer up our latest Jets mailbag.

*How terrible does Neal Pionk have to be to sit? He's the worst player on the team by miles, and the thought of him defending a Nathan MacKinnon rush is horrifying. —Jer on X*

Pionk's season started really well, but something seems to be bothering him. I'm told he isn't nursing an injury, but there are times when he struggles to turn right on the ice, putting his left foot over his right. I don't think he's been terrible. But I also have seen the dip in his defensive game.

So why haven't they sat him and given him some rest? Rick Bowness has mostly dodged the question, but he's given some insights elsewhere that give us clues. He's suggested he doesn't fully trust Dylan Samberg to play the right side (I'd suggest Samberg showed just fine in Winnipeg's 3-0 win on Thursday in Dallas, but I digress). He's uncomfortable with Stanley there, too, and Nate Schmidt seems to have fallen out of favour. Colin Miller is a right-hand shot, but he's further down the depth chart than Schmidt right now. The team lacks a lot of right-handed shots. Pionk is one.

I don't have a better answer because Bowness doesn't give us one, but I'd wager the head coach likes the physicality Pionk brings opposite another physical blue-liner in Brenden Dillon. I'd like to see Pionk get a couple of games off to reset after Saturday's game in Colorado. We will see if the coaching staff agrees.

*Why did it take a six-game losing streak after months of weak play to break up (Kyle) Connor and (Mark) Scheifele but only two periods of bad play after a three-game winning streak to break up (Nikolaj) Ehlers and Scheifele? —Mennoknight427 on X*

The numbers over those first few games and even into the fourth game weren't great. Historically, they are good with Ehlers on the top line. I think Bowness has found something with Ehlers, Sean Monahan and Tyler Toffoli. They're excellent. Does it help the top line with Scheifele and Connor? No. But at some point, those two need to figure it out. Can they swap Ehlers and Connor in a pinch? Sure. But I don't see it long-term. Scheifele wants to play with Connor and vice-versa. Ehlers, even though analytically it looks good, doesn't seem to fit with those two. I'm just as flummoxed with it as you are at times. But trying to force it hasn't worked either. They need Scheifele and Connor to commit defensively. If they can't, there may need to be a change in the offseason.

*Is there another playoff team that is so lost in their lines? How is this not at the feet of the coaching staff? —Keith Chadwick on X*

It's a great question, but I can't confidently answer it simply because I'm not in the room for the other 15 teams, and I don't know how much those respective decks have been shuffled. Having watched some of the Central Division teams more carefully over the last bit, I realize that injuries have changed things. For example, Mikko Rantanen's concussion has juggled some things in Colorado, but they seem fairly set, as well as Dallas. Winnipeg's also dealt with some

injuries, but Rick Bowness's penchant to get the line blender out quickly doesn't lead to much continuity. I'm interested to see if Thursday was the beginning of that, since Bowness spoke of it before the game. The line with Ehlers, Monahan and Toffoli seems to be Bowness's preference. We know the third line when healthy. It's been that way all season. And we know the fourth line has carved itself a nice role right now. I suspect there will be less motion, if you will, now that a few games are left. The Jets need that top line clicking.

*What do you think the Jets lines and D pairings should be versus what you think they will be, and what are your thoughts on why for any of the differences? —Loren Findlay on X*

What I think they should be:

Ehlers-Scheifele-Vilardi  
Connor-Monahan-Toffoli  
Niederreiter-Lowry-Appleton  
Barron-Namestnikov-Iafallo

What I think they will be:

Connor-Scheifele-Vilardi  
Ehlers-Monahan-Toffoli  
Niederreiter-Lowry-Appleton  
Barron-Namestnikov-Iafallo

Historically, Connor and Scheifele don't work well defensively. Also, historically, Ehlers and Scheifele do. But Ehlers works with almost anyone, and we're seeing that right now with the Monahan line. They've outscored their opposition 8-2 as of Friday. As mentioned above, I think Connor and Scheifele must commit to playing defence. Mark needs to be a leader here in this sense. If he does it, the rest of the line will follow.

Aside from the top six, the bottom six is a lock in my eyes. Cole Perfetti is an insurance policy for the top six and David Gustafsson is the same for the bottom six.

*Will the Jets add anyone to the playoff roster and who would it be? —Robpepper on X*

They've yet to make any of their four allowed call-ups, and at the moment, I'm not sure they make any. They already have two extra forwards and two extra defencemen. But, if they do, I could see some of the guys who are quite familiar with the system. At forward, that would be Dominic Toninato and Axel Jonsson-Fjallby, and on defence, Kyle Capobianco and Ville Heinola. All of those guys have played NHL games. I'm not sure they'd bring a guy like Brad Lambert or Nikita Chibrikov up unless the Moose aren't in the playoffs anymore. Of note, Capbianco is tied for the AHL scoring lead among defencemen with 47 points.

*Whatever happened with Ville Heinola? —Seymour Gore on X*

He's playing big minutes on the top pairing in the AHL. Since returning from his fractured ankle, he's scored eight times and has 21 points in 36 games. He's a victim of both his pre-season injury and the fact that he's waiver-exempt this year. Luckily for him, that exemption goes away next year.

*What are the top three things that MUST happen for to make the Jets a Cup threat? Please be specific —Ron Arnst*

Those three are in no particular order: Goaltending, defensive structure, and secondary scoring.

Connor Hellebuyck's only criticism is his playoff performances. They haven't been Vezina-worthy. Hellebuyck had a .886 save percentage last season. Adin Hill, who steered the Golden Knights to the Stanley Cup after the first round, had a .932. When Tampa won back-to-back in 2020 and 2021, Andrei Vasilevskiy had a .927 and a .937, respectively. The Jets need Hellebuyck on top of his game.

The defensive structure that helped limit the opposition to three goals or fewer in 34 straight games is a must for the Jets, who aren't a high-scoring team to begin with. The Jets showed then they were comfortable in tight-scoring games. They need that again, much the way they had it in the bag against Dallas on Thursday.

And secondary scoring needs to be there, especially when Winnipeg's top two lines are being matched against in away games. I like Winnipeg's fourth line here because it's one of the best in the league in its current configuration. They've shown an ability to score. The third line is where I'd want to see more. There have been long, barren stretches this season despite the time they chew up in the offensive zone. I'm not saying they need to be Brett Howden-Chandler Stephenson-Mark Stone from Vegas's run last year (yes, that was their third line...), but they need to produce.

*Do you think we really have a chance to beat the Avs, given what we've seen MacKinnon do this season? —Graham Tee Parker on X*

Connor McDavid scored 105 points in 56 games in 2021, and the Jets swept the Edmonton Oilers by shutting down McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, who had 84 points in the same number of games. Winnipeg's chances rest on several factors, but in my mind, it's goaltending for Winnipeg, and being able to shut down MacKinnon's line. They aren't going to shut them out. Don't get me wrong. But you need to negate a lot of the threat. I am also very curious about Georgiev between the pipes for Colorado. He hasn't had a great year, stats-wise, and he's played A LOT. So, in short, yes, they really do have a chance against Colorado, provided they can play the game they did against Dallas and get world-class goaltending in the playoffs.

*Does Laurent Brossoit get a multi-year, \$5 million-plus contract somewhere next year? —sitbooboo on X*

I'd be surprised if it were \$5 million-plus, but I suspect a multi-year deal will be on the cards. Why not more than \$5 million? There's not a lot of precedent for it. My sense is that, at maximum, Brossoit goes somewhere to become their 1A or 1B goalie, a timeshare, if you will. Looking at comparables, Joonas Korpi is making \$4 million on a five-year deal in Ottawa. That's the last goalie to sign a multi-year extension with a team where he would be a part of a tandem. There's also Samuel Montembeault in Montreal, but he signed while the Canadiens still had Jake Allen. My guess? In the \$3.5-\$4 million range over three-to-four years. I don't think a team would sink much more into a guy who isn't a proven starter.