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[Practice Report - Preparing for Game 3](#)

["We know we have to win another game in this rink."](#)

By Mitchell Clinton

DENVER – As the best-of-seven series between the Winnipeg Jets and Colorado Avalanche shifts to Ball Arena, the Jets line-up could see a shift as well.

Of course, the word 'could' in the previous sentence carries a lot of weight, as head coach Rick Bowness stopped short of confirming that Nate Schmidt would draw in for Game 3 on Friday night alongside Dylan Samberg.

"We have eight National Hockey League defencemen and 14 National Hockey League forwards ready to go," Bowness said following a 30-minute skate on Thursday. "We'll make final decisions tomorrow."

But if the line rushes are to be believed, and Schmidt indeed makes his 2024 Stanley Cup Playoffs debut in Game 3, he's looking forward to the opportunity to help his team move ahead in the series, which is currently tied at one.

"As game 3 approaches, it turns into best-of-5 and you're still in a series," said the veteran defenceman with 73 playoff games under his belt. "This road game is going to be a matchup test for our guys. Things that we played in Games 1 and 2 that are available to us in games 3 and 4 are going to be put to the test as well. Yeah, it's exciting to be part of a series that has so much explosiveness, so much excitement that's been around the game. It should be a good one."

According to Natural Stat Trick, the duo of Schmidt and Samberg have played 529:54 at five-on-five this season, the third most of any defensive pair the Jets have used this season. Not only do they find themselves on the positive side of the ledger when it comes to shot-attempt percentage (53.33 percent), expected goals (53.42 percent) and high-danger chance differential (89-82), but there is also the fact the Jets have outscored their opponents 19-11 with Schmidt and Samberg on the ice.

The change would also put Dylan Samberg back on the left side with Schmidt occupying the right, where he has been most of the season even as a left-shot defenceman.

"That right side for a left hand, that's a tough position," said Bowness. "You get stuck in the corner, and the way they forecheck and the way they bring the puck in, it's hard for a lefty going back into that right corner. We do want to move the puck a little quicker, we still played a little too slow for our liking last game. So get moving the puck quicker and playing north—a lot faster game—is going to help us, for sure."

The full line rushes on Thursday afternoon looked like this:

Connor-Scheifele-Vilardi
Ehlers-Monahan-Toffoli
Niederreiter-Lowry-Appleton

Gustafsson-Namestnikov-Iafallo

Morrissey-DeMelo
Dillon-Pionk
Samberg-Schmidt
Stanley-Miller

Throughout those nearly 530 minutes they've played together at five-on-five, and the countless practices they've been alongside each other, Schmidt and Samberg have preached communication.

"That's a crucial part of any D pair," Schmidt said. "That has to be the foundation for him and I. I believe we've laid those bricks. Now it's time to reap the rewards."

Now, with the series heading into Ball Arena – where the Avalanche own the league's best home record of 31-9-1 – communication will be even more important.

And the Jets are used to communicating and working together in tough environments. After all, they do own the NHL's third-best road record at 25-13-3 with two of those victories coming in Denver.

"I don't think anyone expected this series to go four straight for either side," said Bowness. "So here we are in Game 3. It's 1-1, we know we have to win another game in this rink."

LOOKING FOR MORE

When Tyler Toffoli thinks back to Winnipeg's last visit to Denver, the thoughts that come to his mind can only be positive.

After all, his trio with Sean Monahan and Nikolaj Ehlers combined for two goals and six points in the 7-0 win.

Playoffs are an entirely different animal, of course, but there are things that Toffoli feels his line can take from that contest.

"I thought we were really crisp and we executed on every play," Toffoli said. "We did a really good job creating space for each other and capitalizing on our opportunities."

So far, that line has been kept off the score sheet in the series against Colorado, but that hasn't shaken their confidence.

"Once the game starts, any other game throughout the rest of the season doesn't matter," said Toffoli. "It's just a matter of going out and performing and playing up to our abilities."

Bowness would like to see that line, which has combined for 16 shots on goal in the first two games, use the width of the ice to their advantage.

"I find that they're getting bogged down a little bit. They're getting too much in the middle," said Bowness. "Sean's a very smart player, he's a great passer with the puck but if he's got one of the guys right beside him, then you're losing an option, so we'd like them to spread it out a bit more. And with Nik's speed and Tyler's hands and hockey sense, that's when it was working."

With the Jets as the visiting team for the next two games, Colorado will have last change and the ability to change match-ups to suit their game plan.

“They know they can give us more and we're going to need more, especially in here, with the changes and the matchups we talked about,” said Bowness. “But they're three pros, they've been around and they know they can give us more.”

NHL.com

Lehkonen again thriving in playoffs for Avalanche entering Game 3

By Tracey Myers

DENVER -- Artturi Lehkonen planted himself in front of the net, the Colorado Avalanche forward lowering his stick at just the right time to get a piece of defenseman Cale Makar's shot for a game-tying goal in Game 2 against the Winnipeg Jets on Tuesday.

It's the type of play that's become commonplace with Lehkonen in Colorado, one that the Avalanche defensemen almost expect him to make on a nightly basis.

“Anytime as D we see him with even half his stick available to shoot at, we shoot at it because most of the time he gets it,” defenseman Devon Toews said with a laugh.

“He's able to find soft points in coverage and he's got a great stick. He's able to deflect so many pucks and he works on it. He works so hard on it.”

Lehkonen's hard work has paid off for a while, including in these Stanley Cup Playoffs. He has four points (two goals, two assists) in two playoff games, second on the Avalanche behind Makar, who has five points (one goal, four assists).

He'll look to keep being a key for the Avalanche when they host the Jets in Game 3 of the Western Conference First Round on Friday (10 p.m. ET; MAX, truTV, TNT, ALT, TVAS, CBC).

The best-of-7 series is tied 1-1 after the Avalanche defeated the Jets 5-2 on the road in Game 2.

It's not easy work, getting into the hard areas, taking the whacks, hacks and slashes, but it's the price Lehkonen is willing to pay.

“Nothing comes easy when you're out there,” he said. “Especially scoring goals, it's the hard work from all five guys that will create an opportunity for someone.”

Lehkonen's ability to take the punishment and produce has earned him the nickname Warrior from the Avalanche.

“We all know. We all call him that,” defenseman Josh Manson said. “He goes to the hard areas, plays that tough-style game, forechecks hard, blocks shots. Goes to the hard areas and does exactly what we need to do in the playoffs, and I think that's why you see all of the success he's had in the playoffs because his game flourishes.”

Indeed, the 28-year-old has been at his best in the postseason. He has seven game-winning goals in 62 playoff games with the Avalanche and Montreal Canadiens. Four of those came in the 2022 postseason, when Colorado won the Stanley Cup.

Avalanche coach Jared Bednar called him “a coach’s dream.”

“I can pick guys around the League that I’m a big fan of the way they play for multiple reasons. He’s one of them,” Bednar said. “When you do the right things all the time, day after day, practice, games, and you’re an intense competitor, it’s going to pay off for you at some point. I feel like we’ve seen that out of him.

“Big moments, just doing the right thing, competing hard, great detail to his game, high level of skill and ability, that’s all you can ask for from a player. He’s never going to shortchange you on his effort, his competitiveness, the work he puts into the game. He’s one of those guys.”

Lehkonen was a solid player in his early career with the Canadiens, who selected him in the second round (No. 55) in the 2013 NHL Draft. Acquired in a trade with the Canadiens on March 21, 2022, Lehkonen has found his niche since joining the Avalanche and had an NHL career-high 51 points (21 goals, 30 assists) with them last season.

Winnipeg forward Tyler Toffoli, who played with him in Montreal from 2020-22, said Lehkonen always worked hard but “didn’t always have the greatest opportunity.”

“He was playing sort of limited minutes,” Toffoli said. “Once he came here, he started playing with the big boys and obviously he’s done a real good job. His game has definitely rounded out really well and he’s obviously been one of their better players so far this season.”

The Avalanche have benefitted from Lehkonen’s fearless style of play, especially in the postseason. For him, it’s just part of the job and a role he loves playing.

“I mean, it’s the most fun time of the year to play and it’s just fun to play hockey in these kinds of games,” Lehkonen said. “[You] really give it your all.”

Winnipeg Free Press

[Avalanche know they still have lots of work to do](#)

By: Mike McIntyre

DENVER — Don’t expect the Colorado Avalanche to get cocky now that their playoff series against the Winnipeg Jets has shifted to their own backyard.

Sure, they’re feeling confident after two solid efforts in Winnipeg to earn a split. Yes, their 31-9-1 record at Ball Arena was the best home mark in the NHL during the regular-season.

It’s worth noting two of those regulation losses came at the hands of Winnipeg, including a 7-0 beatdown on April 13 that left a very sour taste in their mouths.

“We know how deep Winnipeg is. We know how we’re going to have to play in order to beat them,” coach Jared Bednar said following Thursday’s practice.

“This is a team that finish ahead of us in the standings. We consider ourselves a pretty good team. We know how deep they are. You have to have a full team commitment in order to win, and then you’ve got to go to and play your best hockey at the key times, which is now. Two games doesn’t cut it. It might take seven and we have to be committed to doing that.”

There could be a couple lineup changes coming for the Avalanche. Backup goaltender Justus Annunen, who missed the first two games with illness, is expected to be in the lineup. However, his services won’t be required if No. 1 Alexandar Georgiev can look more like he did in Game 2 (30 shots, 28 saves) than he did in Game 1 (23 shots, 16 saves).

“I talked about how proud I was of him after that game, but there’s been a lot of belief from our room that he’s got that within him,” said Bednar.

“You don’t have to back up very far to find where we were 9-1 coming out of the deadline and Gorgy was playing every game and saving above expected in all those games. It slipped away from us there for a little bit, but that’s the thing. You’ve got to find a way to turn it back around, he did in that game and our team did in that game.”

Defenceman Sam Girard, who is battling an undisclosed injury, also skated Thursday and would provide a blue-line upgrade if he can get in.

“We’ll just wait for him to make sure that he’s feeling right and feeling like he can go,” said Bednar.

With the benefit of last change and the ability to control the matchups, it would appear Colorado is going to load up on the top line by having Valeri Nichushkin on the top line with Nate MacKinnon and Mikko Rantanen. Zach Parise had mostly been in that spot in the first two games.

The Avalanche have received plenty of depth contributions so far, with the likes of Artturi Lehkonen (2G, 2A), Miles Wood (2G), Josh Manson (1G,1A), Ross Colton (2A), Parise (1G) and Casey Mittelstadt (1G) supplementing the expected production from Cale Makar (1G,4A), MacKinnon (1G,2A) and Rantanen (3A).

“Nothing comes easy when you’re when you’re out there. Especially scoring goals, it’s the hard work from all five guys that will create an opportunity for someone,” Lehkonen said.

“We’re just focusing on ourselves pretty much. We know what we got to do to be so successful out there and just trying stick to the and we trust that the outcome will come.”

The Avalanche won the Stanley Cup in 2022 and certainly know the value of utilizing the full roster better than most.

If you want to advance in current playoff format, you have to be a four-line team. You have to get contributions throughout your lineup, not just your forwards but your D,” said Bednar.

“You’ve got to have guys waiting in the wings if there’s injuries. It’s just the way it is. When you’re playing teams that finished the same place you finished, or ahead of you, in the first round, you need everybody, and they’re doing a nice job so far in this series of contributing.”

Another thing Bednar hopes continues is his team's work ethic, which he says is as strong as it's been all year and has made life difficult for Winnipeg at times.

"When it comes to forecheck there's details to our forecheck that I'm not going to share with you, but it's all about work and skating, really, at the end of the day. Being predictable to where we know we want to put the puck in and what that looks like," he said.

"When you take our 12 forwards as a group, that's as hard and consistent I've seen them work all year, in the first two games. And so I think that's really the key to having success on our forecheck, is the work they've put into that forecheck."

[Jets second line needs to start having impact](#)

By: Mike McIntyre

DENVER — As he led his troops through a fast-paced 45-minute workout Thursday, it was notable Winnipeg Jets coach Rick Bowness went out of his way to have individual chats with Nikolaj Ehlers, Sean Monahan and Tyler Toffoli at various points of the practice.

Turns out the veteran bench boss had a message to deliver.

"They know they can give us more and we're going to need more, especially in here," Bowness said. "They're three pros, they've been around and they know they can give us more."

Ehlers, Monahan and Toffoli put up a combined 175 points (84 goals, 91 assists) during the regular-season and caused fits for opponents during their brief time together, which came after general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff made a pair of big trade deadline swings to beef up for a Stanley Cup run.

Naturally, there was plenty of excitement about the damage they could do in the playoffs. These three potential difference-makers have been mostly missing in action so far, with no points to show through the first two games despite the fact the Jets have put up nine goals (7-6 win in Game 1, 5-2 loss in Game 2).

If you're compiling a list of players who need to find another gear, the talented trio would be at the very top.

"It's just a matter of going out and performing and playing up to our abilities," Toffoli said of what needs to change now that the scene has shifted south for Games 3 (Friday 9 p.m. CT) and 4 (Sunday, 1:30 p.m. CT) with the best-of-seven tied 1-1, essentially making it a best-of-five.

Perhaps a return to Ball Arena will help. Monahan (2G, 1A), Ehlers (2A) and Toffoli (1G) played big parts in a 7-0 victory on Apr. 13 that basically wrapped up home-ice advantage for the Jets.

"I thought we were really crisp and we executed on every play," Toffoli said. "We did a really good job creating space for each other and capitalizing on our opportunities."

Bowness said it's easy to pinpoint what hasn't worked so well for the second line, which he plans to spend additional time with them going over on video at Friday's morning skate.

“Usually when they’re clicking, (you notice) their ability to move the puck and read off of each other. Right now, I find that they’re getting bogged down a little bit. They’re getting too much in the middle,” he said.

“We want them to use the width of the ice a little bit better. Sean’s a very smart player, he’s a great passer with the puck, but if he’s got one of the guys right beside him, then you’re losing an option, so we’d like them to spread it out a bit more. And with Nik’s speed and Tyler’s hands and hockey sense, that’s when it was working.”

The Jets are expected to roll the same four lines, meaning forwards Cole Perfetti and Rasmus Kupari will again be healthy scratches while Morgan Barron remains out with a lower-body injury.

However, a change on the blue-line is likely, with Nate Schmidt replacing Logan Stanley.

“It’s been an exciting series so far. Can’t wait to be a part of it,” Schmidt said following practice. “A lot of energy in Winnipeg, hopefully bring that over here in the next two games.”

Winnipeg has struggled at times to deal with Colorado’s heavy forecheck, and moving the puck out of the zone quickly and efficiently has been a challenge. The result is spending far too much time trying to defend.

“It’s been the focal point of the series. The team that’s gotten out of their zone quicker has been the team that’s been able to break the pressure and both teams have been pressuring each other extremely hard,” said Schmidt.

“You haven’t seen as much neutral-zone play in the first two games because both teams are committed to going in and forcing the other team to try and get it. Our guys having the confidence in themselves and each other, even under duress, to make that outlet pass on the breakout, we will be able to create a little bit more speed through the neutral zone for ourselves.”

Although Stanley has brought a physical presence, including a team-high eight hits last game, Schmidt’s mobility could be an asset especially in a game where the Jets are the visitors and can’t control the matchups. No doubt Colorado would love to get their big guns out against Stanley and his partner, Dylan Samberg, a left-shot who moved to the right side.

“It’ll look different early, for sure. Then as the game goes on, the score dictates some of those matchups as well,” said Bowness.

“Listen, I don’t think anyone expected this series to go four straight for either side, so here we are in Game 3. It’s 1-1, we know we have to win another game in this rink. But the matchups are probably a little different as the game goes on, again, probably depending on how each team is playing. Faceoffs in either our zone or their zone, that changes it as well. We’ll make changes depending on that.”

With Schmidt expected back in, Samberg can go back to the left, where he’s much more comfortable.

“That right side for a left hand, that’s a tough position. You get stuck in the corner, and the way they forecheck and the way they bring the puck in, it’s hard for a lefty going back into that right corner,” said Bowness.

“We do want to move the puck a little quicker, we still played a little too slow for our liking last game. So get moving the puck quicker and playing north—a lot faster game—is going to help us, for sure.”

On the subject of players who need to be better, we’re not forgetting goaltender Connor Hellebuyck. He’s already been beaten 10 times on 77 shots, which are disappointing stats for a guy who should be the obvious winner of the Vezina Trophy this season.

For all the talk about Colorado’s issues in net, Alexandar Georgiev has given up one fewer goal so far.

“I never worry about his confidence. He’s very confident in himself. He knows he’s an elite goalie. He wants the ball. He loves being in there in these big moments,” said Bowness.

[Bowness, players remember Cole Cudos for Connor’s newfound defensive game](#)

By: Mike McIntyre

DENVER — The Winnipeg Jets and Colorado Avalanche joined hockey fans around the world Thursday in mourning the passing of the great Bob Cole, one of this country’s most decorated broadcasters whose voice provided a soundtrack to the sport.

“We lost a legend today,” is how Jets coach Rick Bowness put it.

“We lost a wonderful human being. I spent a lot of time with Bob over the years. There’s not necessarily a specific story, but the most important thing is that all the coaches around the league and all the hockey people, they trusted him. He was a true pro. You could tell him anything and he called a great game. Very respectful, very professional.”

Bowness, who has been in the NHL in some capacity for nearly 50 years, said there was no shortage of material whenever he crossed paths with Cole.

“I’m from the Maritimes, he was from Newfoundland. He’s not a Maritimer, he was a Newfoundlander,” Bowness said with a laugh.

“But I always had a great rapport with Bob. I just had nothing but respect for him. The hockey world lost a really good human being today.”

Winnipeg will always have a strong connection with Cole, and he called the second-last game of his career at Canada Life Centre in April 2019 and was given a lengthy standing ovation

“Tonight we are in the presence of greatness,” the PA announcer said at the time.

Plenty of current players grew up listening to Cole, and many cherish the time they got to spend with him at rinks around the league.

“Seeing that this morning, waking up, was pretty disheartening. Real unfortunate,” said Jets forward Tyler Toffoli. “The career he had affected so many people, and so many guys’ careers as well. It’s definitely very emotional. Just a huge part in hockey and affected a lot of people.”

Avalanche forward Nathan MacKinnon, who is from Halifax, met Cole at several charity golf tournaments over the years.

“He’d come out and support Atlantic Canadians. Amazing person, super funny. Just a great guy and obviously some of the best calls of all time, so super sad to hear that,” said MacKinnon.

“Just growing up, I mean, every playoffs, it was unreal. I mean, I was a big Penguins fan and anytime Hockey Night in Canada came on, I loved watching them. I’m from Nova Scotia. So games are pretty late for me. I didn’t see much, but he’s a legend.”

Is Kyle Connor becoming a more complete player before our very eyes?

His coach certainly thinks so.

Known more for his goal-scoring ability than his defensive work, Bowness singled Connor out for praise Thursday in terms of his playoff performance so far.

“I always show backchecking clips and Kyle, I told him the other day, he’s one of our best backchecking forwards we have right now because of his speed,” said Bowness.

“He forces it. When he’s back-checking like that our D have much better gaps because he’s putting a lot of pressure on the puck carrier. So I know he’s doing a great job offensively, but watch what he’s doing defensively – he’s made huge improvements in that area.”

Connor, 27, will never be in the running for a Selke Trophy, to be clear. Bowness was asked if he’s essentially playing a “harder” game right now.

“Yes, he is. Without the puck, he wants it back,” said Bowness. “You watch him on the back-check, the pressure he puts on people that he didn’t do before. He’s become a much better two-way player.”

Connor has two goals and two assists through the first two games of the playoffs, skating on the top line with Mark Scheifele and Gabe Vilardi.

Associated Press

[Avalanche goalie Alexandar Georgiev hoping confidence boost carries into Game 3 against Jets](#)

By: Pat Graham, The Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — Alexandar Georgiev got out of his own way in order to get out of his own head.

The Colorado goaltender began imagining winning and all the feelings that went along with it. By kicking out the negative thoughts, Georgiev snapped out of his shot-stopping doldrums and helped the Avalanche split games in Winnipeg.

Georgiev's confident he has regained his confidence heading into Game 3 on Friday night in the Mile High City.

"Have a short memory," said Georgiev, who allowed two goals in Game 2 after surrendering seven in the series opener against the Jets. "Just try to come with a fresh mind."

That sort of approach can be applied to Vezina Trophy favorites, too. Winnipeg goaltender Connor Hellebuyck has surrendered 10 goals in the series.

"I never worry about his confidence," Jets coach Rick Bowness said. "He's very confident in himself. He knows he's an elite goalie. He wants the ball. He loves being in there in these big moments."

Georgiev struggled down the stretch of the regular season and it followed him into Game 1. There was some thought that backup Justus Annunen, had he not been under the weather, might have appeared in net for Game 2. Georgiev quieted that by turning back 28 shots. He left the ice with a smile amid congratulations.

"There's been a lot of belief from our room that he's got that within him," Avalanche coach Jared Bednar said. "That's the thing: You've got to find a way to turn it back around. He did in that game and our team did."

No matter the position, a little bit of confidence goes a long way this time of year.

"I think for both individuals and a team, having confidence in yourself and as a group and that belief is huge," Washington fourth-line winger Beck Malenstyn said. "It gets you through those lower times, and it helps you really thrive in those high times."

One goalie seeking his first career NHL playoff win is Washington's Charlie Lindgren, who has not been bad despite the Capitals falling behind 2-0 in their series against the Presidents' Trophy-winning New York Rangers. Lindgren, who carried his team into the playoffs, doesn't lack for confidence and is feeling good about his play.

"There's a lot of self-belief," Lindgren said Thursday. "It stems from obviously work ethic and working hard and feeling good on practice days. When I'm stopping a lot of pucks in practice, that's going to give me the confidence to go stop a lot of pucks in the game. I think that's where a lot of it starts from."

Because confidence, "is the most important thing in hockey," Avalanche forward Casey Mittelstadt said.

JETS at AVALANCHE, series tied 1-1, 10 p.m. ET (TNT)

The Jets could move defenseman Nate Schmidt back into the lineup in an effort to contain the speed of Nathan MacKinnon and the rest of the Avalanche.

"If we can get (MacKinnon) in the corner and keep him there, we're a lot happier," Bowness said. "He's just so quick."

RANGERS at CAPITALS, New York leads 2-0, 7 p.m. (TNT)

Changes could be coming for the Capitals, including rookie Ivan Miroshnichenko replacing Nicolas Aube-Kubel on the fourth line. With Miroshnichenko, coach Spencer Carbery is looking for “speed and competitiveness, hard on the puck, physicality, which he’s shown, especially early when he was called up,” Carbery said. “His speed was on display, and he was tenacious all over the ice on the puck.”

The 2022 first-round pick said he wasn’t sure if he was playing but added, “I am ready the whole time.”

Winger Sonny Milano, who missed practice for maintenance, is questionable. Defensemen Rasmus Sandin and Nick Jensen continued skating in no-contact jerseys and are “working their way back,” Carbery said.

CANUCKS at PREDATORS, series tied 1-1, 7:30 p.m. EDT (TBS)

Nashville goalie Juuse Saros gave up three goals on 20 shots in a Game 1 loss to Vancouver. But the 29-year-old goalie shook off the shaky performance by allowing one goal in a Game 2 win.

Saros is looking for the first playoff series victory of his career after replacing Predators legend Pekka Rinne, who almost singlehandedly took Nashville to the 2017 Stanley Cup Final. Saros started a league-high 64 games and led the NHL with 1,672 saves during the regular season.

Vancouver coach Rick Tocchet isn’t overly worried about how his Canucks have been playing. This is a group that won the Pacific Division.

“There’s a few tweaks that we can do, but I don’t think there’s a major game plan change, to be honest with you,” Tocchet said. “You stick with what got us here. But there are some tweaks I’d like to see us do differently.”

OILERS at KINGS, series tied 1-1, 10:30 p.m. EDT (TBS)

This is the straight season the series between the two that has been tied 1-1 heading back to Los Angeles.

The Oilers have gone 4 of 7 on the power play in the first two games. Edmonton has the second-most power play goals in the postseason so far; second only to the Boston Bruins, with five.

Kings center Anze Kopitar will play in his 95th career playoff game, passing Luc Robitaille for most in franchise history.

[Jets need to pick up their play as first-round series shifts to Colorado](#)

By: Gregory Strong, The Canadian Press

DENVER – Resting on top of an audio speaker just inside the entrance to the Winnipeg Jets’ locker-room sits a reminder of what the NHL team is fighting for.

A blue board, complete with team logo and Stanley Cup in the background, has plastic slots for 16 hockey pucks — one for each post-season victory.

One slot was filled after Winnipeg split its first two home games against Colorado. The Jets will need to pick up their play on the road to make it a growing collection.

"I don't think anyone expected this series to go four straight for either side, so here we are in Game 3," said Jets head coach Rick Bowness. "It's 1-1, we know we have to win another game in this rink."

Bowness ran his players through a firm one-hour practice Thursday at Ball Arena. Winnipeg opened the best-of-seven series with a wild 7-6 victory but Colorado responded with a potent 5-2 win in Game 2.

Colorado has some momentum entering Friday's Game 3 after converting on opportunities and using its forechecking prowess to prevent the Jets from building plays.

The Avalanche posted a league-best 31-9-1 home record in the regular season, although two of those nine losses came to the Jets.

"This is a team that finished ahead of us in the standings," said Avalanche head coach Jared Bednar. "We consider ourselves a pretty good team. We know how deep they are. You have to have a full team commitment in order to win and then you've got to go and play your best hockey at the key times, which is now."

"Two games doesn't cut it. It might take seven and we have to be committed to doing that."

There have been some surprises in the first-round matchup between clubs that were separated by just three points in the Central Division.

Few hockey observers expected a combined 20 goals over two games or for Avalanche netminder Alexandar Georgiev to have had the edge on Jets goalie and Vezina Trophy favourite Connor Hellebuyck.

"I never worry about his confidence," Bowness said of his No. 1 goaltender. "He's very confident in himself. He knows he's an elite goalie. He wants the ball. He loves being in there in these big moments."

While not in stone, the Jets are expected to bring defenceman Nate Schmidt back into the lineup after sitting as a healthy scratch. Schmidt skated with Dylan Samberg on Thursday.

"I think the last little bit here, he's still hearing my voice in his ear, even when I wasn't there," Schmidt said. "That's a crucial part of any (defence) pair. That has to be the foundation for him and I."

"I believe we've laid those bricks. Now it's time to reap the rewards."

Game 4 is scheduled for Sunday afternoon at Ball Arena with Game 5 set for Winnipeg on Tuesday. If a sixth game is necessary, it would be played May 2 in Denver.

"They're really tough to play against," said Avalanche forward Nathan MacKinnon, who has three points in the series. "Big, heavy, fast, just a really good team. We knew it all season and we need our best tomorrow."

The Jets are looking for bigger things this year after crashing out in a dispirited first-round loss to the Vegas Golden Knights last spring.

Winnipeg's ability to roll four solid lines helped the team cap the regular season with eight straight victories. But there has been some inconsistency since, notably from the second line of Nikolaj Ehlers, Sean Monahan and Tyler Toffoli.

"It's just a matter of going out and performing and playing up to our abilities," Toffoli said.

The Jets delivered a statement win in their last visit here on April 13, rolling to an emphatic 7-0 victory. Now they want to do it again when it matters more.

"It's exciting to be part of a series that has so much explosiveness, so much excitement that's been around the game," Schmidt said. "It should be a good one."

FINAL CALL

Bowness was asked directly about whether Schmidt would return for Game 3, but wouldn't confirm his lineup plans.

"The answer to that is that we have eight National Hockey League defencemen and 14 National Hockey League forwards ready to go and we'll make final decisions tomorrow," he said.

CUP DREAMS

The Avalanche last won the Stanley Cup in 2022. The Jets have yet to win an NHL championship.

Sportsnet.ca

[Jets' second line must take back depth edge to help wrestle home-ice advantage](#)

By Eric Engels

DENVER — They are the most notable omissions on the long list of players who have accumulated points through two games of this thrilling series, but they no longer can be that by the end of Game 3 if the Winnipeg Jets are to wrestle back the advantage they surrendered to the Colorado Avalanche.

As the action shifts to Ball Arena, where the Avalanche went 31-9-1 this season, Nikolaj Ehlers, Sean Monahan and Tyler Toffoli have to make the difference they're capable of making. We're talking about three players who accumulated 84 goals and 175 points between them over the regular season, so zero beyond this point isn't going to cut it if the Jets are going to regain home-ice advantage.

This is supposed to be a strength for this team — a layer of depth the top-heavy Avalanche shouldn't be able to quite match — and it has to be one for them moving forward. Thirteen Colorado players have produced in this series to Winnipeg's 12 and taken the edge the Jets must regain.

"We've talked a lot about depth here, but certainly, so far in this series, they've done a really nice job," Avalanche coach Jared Bednar said of his charges. "They're chipping in with the offence, they've been really, pretty good on the defensive side of things.

“If you want to advance in current playoff format, you have to be a four-line team. You have to get contributions throughout your lineup, not just your forwards but your D. You’ve got to have guys waiting in the wings if there’s injuries, it’s just the way it is. When you’re playing teams that finished the same place you finished or ahead of you in the first round, you need everybody, and they’re doing a nice job so far in this series of contributing.”

It’s time for Ehlers, Monahan and Toffoli to do the same for the Jets.

Their ability together is proven. Through 106:13 as a line at five-on-five — between the time Toffoli was acquired from the New Jersey Devils, on March 8, through the end of the regular season — they outscored their opposition 11-4.

That wasn’t a function of luck, either. Ehlers, Monahan and Toffoli completely outplayed whomever they were matched against, owning 58 per cent of the shot attempts and a 61-per-cent share of the expected goals while producing seven of their goals and allowing only one against from the high-danger zone.

In the process, they proved they fit well together.

Speaking with Ehlers ahead of Game 2, he explained why that is — and why they should continue to work well together — despite all three of them being such different players.

“Tof is a guy who can shoot the puck really well,” Ehlers said. “Monny is a great two-way centreman who’s in the right spots, who you know is going to pass you the puck, and he’s also got great patience with the puck. All I have to do is skate and use my speed as much as I can with or without the puck to get the puck into spots where Tof is finding that open shot or Monny’s coming into a spot where I can lay it into him. I need to get into the races without the puck to shake it loose or create looks.”

All three of them need to execute better than they have to this point of this series, and it’s not just their finish that needs polishing.

Ehlers, Monahan and Toffoli have managed just 44 per cent of the shot attempts and only 28 per cent of the expected goals in their 19:19 at five-on-five in this series, and those are numbers that have to climb for them to succeed. Especially if they continue to start 64 per cent of their shifts in the offensive zone.

It is there that all three players have proven to be threatening throughout their respective careers.

Monahan, who was drafted sixth overall by the Calgary Flames in 2013, has been particularly productive in playoffs prior, accumulating 10 goals and 21 points in the 30 games he played coming into this series.

Even if Toffoli hasn’t quite matched his regular-season production in the post-season — scoring just 18 goals in the 88 playoff games he played before this series started — he’s always found a way to come up clutch since making his spring-time debut with the Los Angeles Kings in 2013. Jets fans know this well, after seeing him come up with one of his four game-winners in the playoffs to send the Montreal Canadiens past their team in the 2021 playoffs.

Ehlers played in all four of those games against the Canadiens but missed four of five the Jets played against the Vegas Golden Knights last year. He has accumulated 457 in 605 regular-season games, but most of his playoff experience came at a time far earlier in his career, when he was less poised to impact the game in the way he should be able to now.

Monahan believes the 28-year-old not only has everything it takes to do it right now, but a burning desire to make a difference as one of the most tenured Jets.

“He wants to win,” said Monahan ahead of Game 2. “You look at him, and I can feel it now being in the same boat, he’s been here a long time and he wants to win and prove to the city and the organization that he’s a big part of it.”

Both of them and Toffoli have a chance to influence the outcome in Friday’s Game 3, and they must.

Last time they played together at Ball Arena (on April 13), they combined for three of the goals the Jets scored in a 7-0 win over the Avalanche. Just teaming up for one while keeping whomever they’re matched up against to none can make all the difference in a playoff game likely to be decided by a far slimmer margin.

Toffoli, who turned 32 on Wednesday, felt there was something to take from that regular-season performance to transfer to Friday’s game.

“I thought we were really crisp, and we executed on every play,” he said. “We did a really good job creating space for each other and capitalizing on our opportunities.”

Jets coach Rick Bowness said Toffoli, Ehlers and Monahan will have to do a better job of spreading out and moving the puck across the width of the ice to access what makes them successful as a line.

“They know they can give us more,” Bowness concluded, “and we’re going to need more.”

Jets and Avs weigh in on Bob Cole’s life and legacy

It was sombre around the rink on Thursday, with news spreading that legendary broadcaster Bob Cole had passed away.

Members of both the Avalanche and Jets were saddened to hear of his loss at age 90. They shared their thoughts on his long life and his lasting legacy.

Avalanche superstar Nathan MacKinnon, who hails from Halifax, got to know Cole at different charity events in Eastern Canada.

“Really sad,” MacKinnon said when told of the St. John’s, N.L., native’s passing. “He’s such a legend, such a great man. I’ve met him a few times over the years. At charity golf tournaments in Halifax, he’d come out and support Atlantic Canadians. Amazing person, super funny, just a great guy, and obviously some of the best calls of all time. Super sad to hear that.”

Cale Makar was surprised to hear it upon reaching his stall in the Avalanche locker room following Thursday’s practice.

“So many memories of his announcing games,” he said. “That’s very sad, wow. I’d have to look back and see if anything stands out specifically, but obviously he was such a legendary announcement and such an awesome human being. That’s a tough loss for the hockey world.”

Zach Parise, who grew up in Minnesota and has spent the entirety of his 20-year career playing in the United States, still felt Cole’s reach.

“Just an iconic voice,” Parise said. “We didn’t get it as much in the States, and we might not be as familiar with it as the Canadians are, but we know it.

“It’s brutal news. Terrible, and very sad.”

For Toffoli, who grew up in Scarborough, Ont., Cole’s voice was one he heard often coming out of his television set.

“Seeing that this morning, waking up, was pretty disheartening. Real unfortunate,” he said. “The career he had affected so many people, and so many guys’ careers as well. Definitely a sad day in hockey for sure.

“Waking up to it (the news) this morning, you see some of the videos, some of the calls, it’s definitely very emotional. Just a huge part in hockey and affected a lot of people.”

For Bowness, who hails from Moncton, N.B., and came across Cole many times over his hockey career, the news hit hard.

“I think the hockey world, we lost a legend today,” Bowness said. “We lost a wonderful human being. I spent a lot of time with Bob over the years. There’s not necessarily a specific story, but the most important thing is that all the coaches around the league and all the hockey people, they trusted him. He was a true pro. You could tell him anything, and he called a great game. Very respectful, very professional. I had a good rapport with Bob ... I just had nothing but respect for him. The hockey world lost a really good human being today.”

[**Are Jets, Avalanche bound for a split in Colorado? \(VIDEO\)**](#)

NHL betting analyst Jonathan Davis joins Follow The Money to break down the series between the Winnipeg Jets and Colorado Avalanche, saying he thinks the teams are bound for a split in the two games in Colorado.

Winnipeg Sun

[**Jets need more from Ehlers-Monahan-Toffoli trio to keep up with Avalanche firepower**](#)

By Ted Wyman

Before we get too far into this, let’s preface things by saying that very few of the Winnipeg Jets players have been great so far in the 2024 Stanley Cup playoffs.

They are getting outplayed by the Colorado Avalanche through two games of the first-round series, and despite the best-of-seven being tied at 1-1, the proof comes in the fact that the Avs

have poured 161 shot attempts toward the Jets goal, while Winnipeg has mustered only 108. At five-one-five, it's 128-83.

None of the Jets' forward lines has outperformed its Colorado counterpart so far in this series at five-on-five and that can be identified as a major reason why the Avalanche have seemingly been able to impose their will offensively.

In simple terms, the Jets are spending way too much time in their own zone and are not getting anywhere near enough sustained time at the other end.

It's been particularly rough on the lines centred by Adam Lowry and Mark Scheifele, who have been tasked with facing overdoses of Nathan MacKinnon and Mikko Rantanen throughout the series.

Things have been a little better for the lines centred by Sean Monahan and Vlad Namestnikov, perhaps because they don't face MacKinnon as much, but they haven't been winning the possession game either.

At least the Scheifele, Lowry and Namestnikov lines have been scoring, taking advantage of opportunities for quick strikes. The Scheifele line, with Kyle Connor and Gabe Vilardi, had generated four goals, Lowry has two goals himself, and fourth-liners Namestnikov and David Gustafsson have also found the net.

Which brings us to the point here: That second line of Monahan, Tyler Toffoli and Nikolaj Ehlers simply has to do more for the Jets to be successful.

They do not have a single point between them, and have been on the ice for a couple goals against.

"They're going to have to put some points on the board," Jets coach Rick Bowness said. "That's our second line, we expect them to generate some offence.

"They know they can give us more and we're going to need more, especially in here, with the changes and the matchups as you talked about. But they're three pros, they've been around, and they know they can give us more."

This from a line made up of veteran players who scored 33 (Toffoli), 26 (Monahan) and 25 goals (Ehlers) during the regular season. This from a line that has a combined 155 games of playoff experience and has a Stanley Cup champion (Toffoli).

"(The Avalanche) have four really good lines, they're a really good team," Toffoli told reporters in Denver on Thursday after the Jets practised at Ball Arena.

"Matchups are whatever. It's just a matter of going out and performing and playing up to our abilities."

Monahan and Toffoli are new here, having been acquired during the 2023-24 season, but this is nothing new for Ehlers.

He has not been a particularly visible playoff performer in his time with the Jets.

The 28-year-old Danish winger has four goals and 12 points in 34 career playoff games. In the last 19 post-season games he has four goals and one assist.

He has a plus/minus rating of plus-92 for his career in the regular-season, but is minus-7 in the post-season.

Some more numbers that show his drop in production once the post-season rolls around: He has averaged 0.33 goals per game and 0.75 points per game over his 605-game NHL career, but in 34 playoff appearances he has averaged 0.18 goals per game and 0.35 points per game.

From the way Ehlers talks, no one wants to prove himself more when it comes to playoff production and two-way effort, and yet two games into these playoffs, there's been little to show.

His most memorable moment of the series was tripping (or getting tripped) in the offensive zone, trying to make a play from his backside, losing the puck and watching helplessly as MacKinnon found Josh Manson coming out of the penalty box for a back-breaking breakaway goal in Game 2.

That second line should be a big advantage for the Jets. It should match up well with Colorado's second or third lines and have a chance to be a difference-maker.

So far it hasn't happened. And that was when the Jets were getting favourable line match-ups on home ice. In Denver, the Monahan line could see much more of Colorado's big guns.

Still, should that trio find a way to step things up offensively, it just might start to even things out.

"I find that they're getting bogged down a little bit," Bowness told reporters Thursday. "They're getting too much in the middle. When you get a couple of forwards in the middle, you limit your options. We want them to use the width of the ice a little bit better."

Bowness said the key is going to be spreading things out as much as possible, allowing Monahan to use his passing skills, Ehlers to turn on the jets and Toffoli to show why he scored 33 goals this season.

"Nik's speed and Tyler's hands and hockey sense, that's when it was working," Bowness said. "When we first put them together, that's what they were doing, just using the width of the ice, hanging on to the puck and making plays. Right now, I find them bumping into each other a couple of times in the neutral zone and again, you're limiting your options."

The Jets are still in an excellent position, tied at 1-1 with Games 3 and 4 in Denver on Friday night and Sunday afternoon.

They're also a stellar road team, having won 25 games away from home during the regular season, including two in Colorado.

They're looking for someone to make a difference, change momentum, put the Avalanche on their heels more than they have been so far.

A couple more timely saves from goalie Connor Hellebuyck, more sustained pressure from all the forward units, and some big chances and goals from that second line would be a great start.

[Jets winning MacKinnon matchup as series shifts to Colorado](#)

By Scott Billeck

Success against Nathan MacKinnon's top line in Colorado should never be measured by the shots he or his linemates generate.

"They're going to get their chances," as head coach Rick Bowness conceded on Wednesday.

Instead, Winnipeg's Litmus test should be gauged by where those shots are allowed to take place and how many of those Grade-A types — attempts from high-danger areas — the Jets can mitigate.

Through two games of their best-of-seven series against the Avalanche, the Jets can take confidence from what they've achieved thus far.

"MacKinnon's line wasn't the major threat (in Game 2)," Bowness confidently said.

He's right.

No matter the configuration, the Jets have limited dangerous slot shots by the MacKinnon line, both in a 5-2 loss in Game 2 and in Game 1, where the Jets took the opener in a 7-6 slugfest.

Avalanche head coach Jared Bednar moved away from his Game 1 configuration, with Zach Parise at right-wing alongside MacKinnon and Mikko Rantanen early in Game 2.

They weren't creating anything of note.

Once Valeri Nichushkin replaced the 39-year-old Parise, the Jets defended well enough to allow just one slot attempt from Colorado's top line for the rest of the game.

Crucially, they didn't allow a goal and have outscored MacKinnon's line 2-1, allowing just two high-danger attempts in the series.

Even when that line was double-shifted often in Game 2, the Jets held the line.

They'd hard-matched Adam Lowry's third line as much as possible but had to rely on others to pick up the minutes where Lowry et al., were rested.

"We've been running Mark (Scheifele's) line against them a little bit, and Sean (Monahan's)," Bowness said. "When those things happen, it's the players on the ice that have to have on-ice awareness.

"They have to know who they're up against. And then play the game accordingly, play the game the right way. So you're relying on your players that are on (the ice). You can't start yelling from the bench. No one's going to hear you anyway because of the crowd noise. That's up to the players. They're pros. They've got to look around them, 'OK, they're on the ice. We've got to play the game accordingly.'"

Colorado will look to exploit better matchups in Game 3.

Having the last line change has helped the Jets stymie MacKinnon so far, but it's going to be different on the road.

"We talked about it before the series," Josh Morrissey said. "The coaches on both teams are going to have the matchups that they want to see and it's easier to dictate that on home ice

"But you're going to get out there, even when we're on home ice, whether it's an icing or just the game flow or whatever it is, everyone is going to play against their top guys."

Puck management, Morrissey said, is key, as is relying on the team's defensive posture that served them so well during the regular season.

They also have to keep an eye on Colorado's other lines.

Keeping MacKinnon at bay is certainly helpful in the cause of winning this series, but the Jets can't be allowing Ross Colton's line, with Joel Kiviranta and Miles Wood, to outshoot them 7-2, including a 5-1 edge in high-danger chances, and have a 1-0 advantage on the scoreboard.

"Look who scored their goals (in Game 2)," Bowness said.

Wood's equalizer in the second period came quickly off a lost faceoff for Winnipeg. Artturi Lehkonen converted on a tip in front, and Zach Parise benefitted from Andrew Coligiano catching Connor Hellebuyck sleeping while handling the puck behind his net. Josh Manson's goal came off a giveaway, and the Jets seemingly forgot he was coming out of the penalty box and into a breakaway.

"Those guys got in there and got some greasy goals," Bowness said after Tuesday's game.

Morrissey preached more aggression on Wednesday, something that would help Winnipeg play more of the game in the offensive zone and, by the nature of that, limit zone time the other way and chances along with it.

"We can be aggressive as well and make them worry about us," Morrissey said. "That's going to be our mindset going into Game 3, we can be aggressive as well and push that pace."

[JETS SNAPSHOTS: Hockey world loses a legend; Schmidt ready to ride in Game 3](#)

By Scott Billeck

The death of legendary play-by-play man Bob Cole on Wednesday reverberated through the dressing rooms of the Winnipeg Jets and Colorado Avalanche in Denver on Thursday.

Cole, who was 90, passed away in St. John's, NL.

For five decades, he became the soundtrack of Saturday nights as the play-by-play man on Hockey Night in Canada.

“He’s such a legend, such a great man and I’ve met him a few times over the years at charity golf tournaments in Halifax,” Avalanche superstar Nathan MacKinnon told reporters in Denver. “He’d come out and support Atlantic Canadians. Amazing person, super funny. Just a great guy and obviously some of the best calls of all time, so super sad to hear that.”

MacKinnon grew up as a big Pittsburgh Penguins fan, following the career of good friend and fellow Cole Harbour native, Sidney Crosby.

“Just growing up, every playoff, it was unreal,” MacKinnon said. “I was a big Penguins fan and anytime Hockey Night in Canada came on, I loved watching them. I’m from Nova Scotia. So, games are pretty late for me. I didn’t see much, but he’s a legend.”

Jets forward Tyler Toffoli, a native of Scarborough, Ont., said it was tough news to wake up to on Thursday.

“Plenty (of memories),” he said. “Seeing that this morning, waking up, was pretty disheartening. Real unfortunate. The career he had affected so many people, and so many guys’ careers as well. Definitely a sad day in hockey for sure.

“You see some of the videos, some of the calls. It’s definitely very emotional. Just a huge part in hockey and affected a lot of people.”

Jets head coach Rick Bowness said the hockey world lost a legend and a wonderful human being.

“I spent a lot of time with Bob over the years,” Bowness, 69, said. “There’s not necessarily a specific story, but the most important thing is that all the coaches around the league and all the hockey people, they trusted him.

“He was a true pro. You could tell him anything and he called a great game. Very respectful, very professional. I had a good rapport with Bob. I’m from the Maritimes, he was from Newfoundland. He’s not a Maritimer, he was a Newfoundlander. But I always had a great rapport with Bob. I just had nothing but respect for him.

“The hockey world lost a really good human being today.”

Jets turn to veteran Schmidt

Bowness appears set to return to a defensive pairing that relinquished very little during the regular season.

Veteran blue-liner Nate Schmidt will likely return to the fold for Game 3 of Winnipeg’s best-of-seven series with the Avalanche on Friday.

During their time together this season, Schmidt was paired with Dylan Samberg, a duo that gave up a league-low 11 goals at 5-on-5 (minimum 500 minutes played) and the second-lowest goals against per 60 minutes at 1.25.

Schmidt will replace Logan Stanley, who played 31 shifts over the first two games, with no points and no shots on goal.

"It's been an exciting series so far, can't wait to be a part of it," Schmidt said. "A lot of energy in Winnipeg. Hopefully, bring that over here in the next two games, Games 3 and 4."

If Schmidt does play, Bowness said, he'll be back on the right side.

"That right side for a left hand, that's a tough position," Bowness said. "You get stuck in the corner, and the way they forecheck and the way they bring the puck in, it's hard for a lefty going back into that right corner.

"We do want to move the puck a little quicker, we still played a little too slow for our liking last game. So get moving the puck quicker and playing north — a lot faster game — is going to help us, for sure."

Schmidt said he has seen a couple of things that can be done to slow Colorado's speed when they start churning in the offensive zone.

"Trying to cut off before they get into that motion is No. 1," he said. "No. 2, when we do have a chance to outnumber in the corner, we can't let them off. When we let them out, and they start getting low to high, and all of a sudden, their forwards in the corner can swing low to high and get above the top of the circle, and all of a sudden, the zone opens up.

"It's something we talked about (on Thursday) and hopefully will be able to implement (in Game 3)."

Meanwhile, Schmidt feels the communication skills fostered between himself and Samberg will play a crucial role.

"That has to be the foundation for him and I," Schmidt said. "I believe we've laid those bricks. Now, it's time to reap the rewards."

They said it

Jets head coach Rick Bowness on the confidence he has in goalie Connor Hellebuyck:

"I never worry about his confidence. He's very confident in himself. He knows he's an elite goalie. He wants the ball. He loves being in there in these big moments."

['Part of home:' Members of Cup-winning 1976 Jets team ready to reunite in Winnipeg](#)

By Ted Wyman

Back in 1976, there was a strong belief that a North American pro hockey team could not win with a large number of European players in the line-up.

Up to that point, the Winnipeg Jets of the World Hockey Association were proving the doubters to be correct.

The Jets had added seven players from Sweden and Finland to their roster for the 1974-75 season and had not made the playoffs.

“A lot of the critics were like ‘European hockey, what are you talking about?’ Winnipeg sports historian and author Geoff Kirbyson said.

“There were calls to break up that team.”

Instead, Jets management doubled down on its strategy for the 1975-76 season, adding two more European players, and this time they put the naysayers in their place.

The Jets won the Avco Cup in 1976, and truly established themselves as part of the fabric of the city. Just two years removed from a “Save the Jets” campaign that resulted from lagging ticket sales, the hockey team with the European flavour became the toast of the town, setting the stage for a long pro hockey history that continues to be written to this day.

“We had a few superstars, but we played as a team and it made those times very special,” said Veli-Pekka Ketola, a Finn who made his mark as a pro in Winnipeg.

Ketola and a dozen or so other members of that 1976 Jets team will be back in Winnipeg next month for a reunion, some 48 years after they hoisted the Avco Cup.

The event will be held on May 11 at the Fort Garry Hotel, with the focal point being a gala dinner that night.

It’s the third reunion Kirbyson has put together for Avco Cup-winning Jets teams. The 1977-78 team was celebrated in 2018, the 1978-79 team a couple years later and now it’s the 1975-76 team’s turn.

Now 76, Ketola is a legend in Finland and he played three seasons with the Jets, putting up 80 goals and 173 points in 218 games.

He always will be thankful to Winnipeg and the organization for opening their arms to European players, and he always will remember having a chance to hoist that Cup in 1976.

“At that time, Heikki Riihiranta and myself, we were the first Finns who came to North America, in 1974,” Ketola said over the phone from his home country.

“At this moment there are over 50 Finnish players in the NHL.

“They’re not as good as we were,” he added jokingly. “They’re close, but still, they play in the NHL.”

The 1975-76 Jets featured Swedes Anders Hedberg, Ulf Nilsson, Lars-Erik Sjoberg, Mats Lindh, Willy Lindstrom, Thommie Bergman, and Curt Larsson, along with Ketola and Riihiranta from Finland.

They meshed well with Canadian star Bobby Hull, Peter Sullivan and Norm Beaudin and a powerhouse team was born.

“They dispelled the myth that European players were chicken s—s,” Kirbyson said. “The Swedes weren’t getting hit eye-to-eye, they were getting hit on the numbers, but they didn’t change the way they played. They dispelled the myth that European players were soft and they had the puck all the time, so it was hard for other teams to compete with them.”

Among those confirmed to be coming to Winnipeg for the reunion are Ketola, Riihiranta, Nilsson, Beaudin (the original Jet), Mike Ford, Bill Lesuk, Lyle Moffatt, Perry Miller, Bobby Guindon, Joe Daley, and Duke Asmundson.

All of the players are in their 70s or older and given that five members of that team have already passed on, there's a sense that they want to take this opportunity to see one another again.

Those no longer with us include Hull, who died in February of 2023, Sjoberg, Larry Hornung, Larry Hillman and Ted Green.

"I'm almost 100% sure this is the last time I'll come to Winnipeg," Ketola said.

"It's special because you are getting a little bit old and all those memories, they are so meaningful, and you haven't met those guys in many, many years.

"For almost everybody, this will be the last time, for sure, so it's a big thing, at least to me."

There was a time when Ketola thought he never would leave Winnipeg. He and his wife enjoyed it so much, they were considering making it their permanent home.

"If I would have been in Winnipeg one more year, we'd still be there right now," Ketola said.

"But at the end of the 1976-77 season, they traded me and it was a big shock to me. So I said, that's enough of this hockey, and I went home."

He played a bit with the Calgary Cowboys of the WHA and later with the Colorado Rockies of the NHL, but it was never the same.

"I feel like I come to part of home," Ketola said of coming back to Winnipeg.

That 1976 Jets team went 12-1 in the playoffs to win the Avco Cup. They swept the Edmonton Oilers in four straight games, beat the Calgary Cowboys 4-1 in the semifinal and then swept Gordie Howe and the Houston Aeros in the final.

Later that year, nine members of the team represented their countries in the Canada Cup. Hull played a big role on Team Canada and Ketola was the captain of Team Finland.

No other WHA nor NHL team had as many players in the tournament.

"It tells what kind of team it was in Winnipeg," Ketola said.

"Lots of memories and good hockey players and great stories. They always tell me I should write a book but I don't because I'd have to mention too many things."