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[Practice Report - Dillon day-to-day](#)

["There's no damage and that's the most important thing."](#)

By Mitchell Clinton

DENVER – Brenden Dillon escaped disaster on Friday night.

When the Winnipeg Jets defencemen left the ice with a cut on his hand from a skate blade – the result of falling to the ice during a big scrum at the final buzzer – there was concern throughout the dressing room for the veteran's well-being.

Dillon is officially listed as day-to-day, but things could have been much worse.

"There's no damage and that's the most important thing," said Jets head coach Rick Bowness. "It didn't look good so it's a big sigh of relief."

The 33-year-old has three assists in the series – which the Colorado Avalanche now lead 2-1 after winning Game 3 – but Dillon has also been a physical presence and is a key member of the Jets penalty kill (his 2:14 average shorthanded ice time per game this season is second only to Dylan DeMelo).

"He's often the heartbeat of the team," said Neal Pionk, who has spent the majority of the season paired with Dillon. "He's throwing his body around, stirring the pot out there and blocking a lot of shots and doing the little things that might not end up on the scoresheet, so he's a big part of the team."

Even though the Jets had a quick practice at Ball Arena on Saturday – which Dillon didn't partake in – there is no indication of what Winnipeg's defensive pairs will look like come puck drop on Sunday afternoon.

The formal part of the skate lasted about 20 minutes before the players moved into individual and position specific work. Bowness said line-up conversations will happen throughout Saturday afternoon, but replacing what Dillon brings will be a challenge.

"He's one of our toughest competitors, tremendous teammate and he gives you 100 percent every shift out there," said Bowness. "He's tough as nails, he battles everybody, he blocks shots. I mean, he does everything you want your veteran D to do and he's a great leader on the ice and in the room. He brings a lot to the table for us."

Dillon's injury brings back memories of last spring, when Jets forward Morgan Barron was cut just above the eye with a skate blade against Vegas. Earlier this season, Nino Niederreiter's cut resistant socks prevented him from missing significant time when he was cut on the leg (below the protection of the skate boot).

In all those situations, the Jets medical team stepped up, and this case was no different.

"Our doctors did a fantastic job," said Bowness. "They got right at it and did a great job stitching him up."

STAYING CONFIDENT

After winning Game 1, the Jets have had leads in both Game 2 and Game 3 before the Avalanche pulled away. In Game 2, it was three goals in 5:37 that turned a 2-1 Jets lead into a 4-2 deficit. In Game 3, it was a stretch of three goals in six minutes – with two coming on the power play – that once again erased a Winnipeg lead.

“We have these five-, six-, seven-minute lapses that are really slipping away from us,” said Pionk. “We’ve got to make some plays when they’re there, and if they’re not, flip it out and restart.”

Despite that, the Jets remain confident in their game. There are many examples from throughout the regular season – and even within this series – of Winnipeg responding in tough situations.

“I think we just have a lot of trust in this group and the depth we have, guys stepping up in different moments,” said captain Adam Lowry. “Every game is going to be different in this series. We’re just going to look to bounce back. Kind of what Colorado did. We were able to get the upper hand in Game 1, they played really well in Game 2 and got the split. That’s our job now, to take care of business tomorrow.”

Lowry acknowledged that the Jets penalty kill needs to improve (it’s currently killed seven of Colorado’s 11 power plays), but keeping the game at five-on-five remains a priority.

“If you look at the majority of five-on-five play last night, I thought we did a lot of really good things,” said Lowry. “I think staying on top of their D, managing the puck high in the zone and not allowing those easy rush chances against is going to be critical. And just getting back to our style of play.”

Bowness wants his team to have a bit more of a shoot-first mentality, but at the same time, not just shoot at Alexandar Georgiev just to put a puck on net. The timing of having bodies at the net – like they were in layers on both of Josh Morrissey’s goals in this series – is also important.

Colorado blocked 15 shots in Game 3, many of those coming from defenceman stepping in front of pucks coming from the point and preventing them from getting to Georgiev.

“We’re going to have to try and spread it out a little bit more so there are fewer bodies at the net, so the D actually have a chance to get the puck on the net,” said Bowness. “As soon as we see that opening, they have to get ready to shoot the puck. They can’t get ready for a second option or they can’t wait.”

After that, it’s up to the Jets to get the first touch on those loose pucks.

“When we’re playing well and we have guys in motion going to the net, you tend to get those loose pucks recovered,” said Lowry. “You can go low to high. You can create some more sustained pressure and it really causes confusion and causes them to have to make decisions on their sort outs because they’re collapsing to the net and you’re spreading the zone.”

The problems that have caused the Jets issues in the last couple games are fixable. And despite trailing 2-1 in the series, the group remains confident they can earn a split in this visit to Denver.

"I think we've got a lot of belief in this group with the depth that we have. Helle is a world-class goaltender and I think our back end is really solid," said Lowry. "So it was a disappointing third period (in Game 3) for sure. But we looked at some clips today and now we're getting ready for Game 4."

NHL.com

**[Jets aim to step up defensively in Game 4 with Dillon day to day](#)
[Defenseman injured hand following Game 3 loss to Avalanche in Western 1st Round](#)**

By Tracey Myers

DENVER -- The Winnipeg Jets were breathing a sigh of relief when they found out defenseman Brenden Dillon is day to day with the hand injury he sustained following their 6-2 loss to the Colorado Avalanche in Game 3 of the Western Conference First Round on Friday.

Whether or not Dillon plays, however, the Jets will have to up their defensive game to try to slow down the Avalanche, who have a 2-1 lead in the best-of-7 series heading into Game 4 here Sunday (2:30 p.m. ET; MAX, truTV, TNT, ALT, SN360, SN, TVAS).

Still, their chances improve if they have Dillon, who plays on the second defense pair with Neal Pionk and is averaging 21:04 of ice time per game in the Stanley Cup Playoffs, fourth among their defensemen.

"Listen, he's one of our toughest competitors, tremendous teammate and he gives you 100 percent every shift out there. He's tough as nails, he battles everybody, he blocks shots," Winnipeg coach Rick Bowness said Saturday. "I mean, he does everything you want your veteran D to do and he's a great leader on the ice and in the room. He brings a lot to the table for us."

So how to shore things up against the Avalanche, with or without Dillon? The Jets were doing a good job of that through the first two periods of Game 3, when Colorado was getting its scoring opportunities but goalie Connor Hellebuyck was keeping them out of the net.

Once they got on the penalty kill in the third period, however, things fell apart. The Jets need to quell the Avalanche power play, which scored two goals in the third (Ross Colton's goal was two seconds after another Colorado power play ended) and changed the complexion of the game.

Winnipeg also has to regain its composure quicker when things go wrong.

"Just stay with it," Pionk said Saturday. "I know it's cliché, but we've got to play a full 60. We have these five-, six-, seven-minute lapses that are really slipping away from us."

"I think in a couple of games we've given up two, three goals in a five-minute span. So, we've got to stick with it and the leaders have to lead. We've got to make some plays when they're there, and if they're not, flip it out and restart."

There could be some lineup changes as well. One addition could be forward Axel Jonsson-Fjallby, whom the Jets recalled from Manitoba, their American Hockey League affiliate, on Saturday.

"Axel's been playing a lot down there, he's been killing penalties," Bowness said. "He gives us more speed and we need some help on the penalty kill at this point. If he plays, and we'll talk about those things today, that's what we're going to use him on."

As for the other side, Winnipeg has scored two goals in each of the past two games, but that hasn't been nearly enough against Colorado. Bowness said after Game 3 that the Jets couldn't keep passing up shot opportunities, but they also had to be selective.

"I think you've got to look at everything in its own lens, right?" Jets captain Adam Lowry said. "You don't want to waste a shot just to say, 'Oh, I got the puck there,' but have no one at the net. Kind of, like I said, the one-and-done that allows them to transition the puck."

"But, at the same time, if we have bodies going to the net, if we have numbers, we've got to do a better job of getting in front of (Colorado goaltender Alexandar) Georgiev, force him to make second and third stops, and creating that scramble. When we're playing well and we have guys in motion and we're going to the net, you tend to get those loose pucks recovered. You can go low to high. You can create some more sustained pressure and it really causes confusion and causes them to have to make decisions on their sort-outs because they're collapsing to the net and then you're spreading the zone."

The Jets know what they have to do to even the series. It's just a matter of doing it from start to finish.

"Every game is going to be different in this series," Lowry said. "We're just going to look to bounce back. Kind of what Colorado did. We were able to get the upper hand in Game 1, they played really well in Game 2 and got the split. That's our job now, to take care of business tomorrow."

[3 Keys: Jets at Avalanche, Game 4 of Western 1st Round Winnipeg needs to slow down Colorado offense in order to earn split](#)

By Tracey Myers

(2C) Jets at (3C) Avalanche
Western Conference First Round, Game 4
2:30 p.m. ET; MAX, truTV, TNT, ALT, SN360, SN, TVAS

Avalanche lead best-of-7 series 2-1

DENVER -- The Winnipeg Jets will try to return home with a split when they play the Colorado Avalanche in Game 4 of the Western Conference First Round at Ball Arena on Sunday.

The Avalanche broke open a close game in the third period with five unanswered goals, including two on the power play, in their 6-2 win against the Jets in Game 3 on Friday.

"You're trying to accomplish the same things that you did the game before (5-2 win in Game 3) – or at least the good parts of it – and trying to clean up some of the bad and make it tighter and better in all areas," Avalanche coach Jared Bednar said.

"I think your confidence should be high. You're winning some games. You're playing hard. You're playing well, but it's still about focus and execution. When you're playing good teams, when you're down to the (final) 16, it's all about executing at the right time and playing your best hockey on that particular night. Sometimes you have it. Sometimes you don't. You've just got to do the best you possibly can going from game to game."

The Jets are looking to turn the page quickly and regroup for an early start in Game 4.

"It's about getting as much rest and recovery, doing all of those little things to feel our best come Sunday, and it's turning the page," Jets defenseman Josh Morrissey said.

"You can take some real positives from that game (on Friday), especially in the first two periods. It's a seven-game series for a reason. Unfortunately, we dropped this one and Game 4 is pivotal. We need to come out with our game and (play) a full 60-minute game on Sunday."

Teams that take a 3-1 lead in a best-of-7 Stanley Cup Playoffs series have won the series 90.5 percent of the time (306-32).

Here are 3 keys for Game 4:

1. Slowing the Avalanche down

Colorado's speed has been an issue for Winnipeg through the first three games. Trying to contain the Avalanche has clearly been a focal point in the series but the Jets absolutely need to find a way to do it in Game 4.

"You slow them down with better puck management in their zone and making sure we don't get our forwards trapped deep," Jets coach Rick Bowness said. "Their 'D' are coming. Really, it is puck management in their zone and making sure we have good support on the puck, and making sure there is always somebody on the puck."

"If it's a 4-on-3, we can live with that. But they had a couple of 4-on-2s. They do an excellent job of pushing our 'D' back and gaining the blue line and turning up and finding that second wave. Our forwards are going to have to reload and know exactly where they are going to take away that rush."

2. Avalanche appreciating depth

Forwards Nathan MacKinnon and Mikko Rantanen, and defenseman Cale Makar are three of the Avalanche's biggest threats. Colorado, however, has gotten scoring throughout the lineup.

Makar leads the Avalanche with six points (one goal, five assists). Forward Artturi Lehkonen has five points (three goals, two assists), tied for second with MacKinnon (two goals three assists) and Rantanen (five assists). Casey Mittelstadt has four points (one goal, four assists) and four other Avalanche have three points each, including forward Valeri Nichushkin, who has three goals.

It's helped them gain the edge in this series and is something they want to continue.

"It's unreal," MacKinnon said. "All series long, everybody's been really good, and we need that. When we won, we had everyone going, everyone contributing and not just scoring, but you know guys are eating pucks and playing really good two-way hockey."

3. Stay even strength

The Jets allowed two power-play goals in the third period of Game 3 that proved to spark the Avalanche to their win. Winnipeg was playing its best hockey through the first two periods, which were predominantly played 5-on-5, and wants to see more of that in Game 4.

"I thought we did a lot of really good things. We had some more zone time. Still, we've got to clean up the rush game," Jets captain Adam Lowry said. "[The Avalanche] do a great job of generating chances off the rush, they do a great job of getting their 'D' active, especially that Makar pairing, jumping up and creating four-man attacks and creating a little confusion. I think staying on top of their 'D', managing the puck high in the zone and not allowing those easy rush chances against is going to be critical. And just getting back to our style of play."

Status report

Dillon, a defenseman, will not play because of a cut to his hand sustained during a scrum after the final whistle in a 6-2 loss in Game 3 on Friday. Jets coach Rick Bowness hopes he'll be back for Game 5 in Winnipeg on Tuesday. Stanley will replace Dillon in the lineup. ... Jonsson-Fjällby, a forward, was recalled from Manitoba of the American Hockey League on Saturday and will play for Gustafsson. ... Avalanche coach Jared Bednar said there was no update on whether Drouin, a forward, will resume skating during the Western Conference First Round. He has not played since the final game of the regular season April 18.

Winnipeg Free Press

[Dillon escapes major injury](#)

[Gruesome cut to hand quickly stitched up by Jets medical staff](#)

By: Mike McIntyre

DENVER — Winnipeg Jets defenceman Brenden Dillon has dodged disaster after suffering a gruesome skate cut to his hand.

The injury, which occurred at the end of Friday's 6-2 loss to the Colorado Avalanche, ended up looking a lot worse than it was.

"It's a big sigh of relief there wasn't any damage done," coach Rick Bowness said following Saturday's practice at Ball Arena.

That means no harm to the muscle or tendons, which was the initial fear given how deep the wound appeared to be.

"Our doctors did a fantastic job of stitching him up," said Bowness.

Indeed, give a big assist to Dr. Peter MacDonald, the head team physician of the Jets who is travelling with them during the playoffs. Sources say his quick actions played a pivotal role during what was a chaotic and troubling scene that left teammates visibly shaken in the immediate aftermath.

"It was scary," said captain Adam Lowry. "I think any time a skate blade is involved you never know what's going to be the outcome or anything like that. Rob Millette and our training staff do a great job making sure we're taken care of, we're ready to play, through bumps and bruises, the treatments they do, and having Dr. McDonald on the trip and Dr. Gerald Olin, taking over in that scary situation where Brenden comes off and he's cut and there's blood going everywhere, I think we're very lucky to work with the best people in the world.

"It's nights like those that you're really grateful that we have a supporting staff like that."

Dillon did not participate in Saturday's skate, but Bowness wouldn't rule him out for Game 4 on Sunday afternoon, even though that would seem to be a longshot.

"Basically it's day-to-day," said Bowness. One of Logan Stanley or Colin Miller would come into the lineup if Dillon can't go.

As for how the injury occurred, nobody is entirely sure.

There was a huge scrum following the final buzzer, with Dillon and Avalanche forward Brandon Duhaime getting tangled up as tempers flared between the Central Division rivals.

"You have mayhem in there, all those bodies in there, it's tough to figure it out," said Bowness. "Obviously a skate blade got him in there somewhere."

Duhaime was asked on Saturday for his take on what went down.

"No idea. We got up after that and I kind of saw he was gushing blood there. It's a scary scene and you never want to see that," he said.

"He was on the ground there and you never really want to be on the ground in scrums like that. Ref was telling us to cool it and we kind of just parted ways there. And he had that cut, so that's unfortunate."

Duhaime, who was acquired at the trade deadline from the Minnesota Wild, has had plenty of fierce battles with Dillon over time.

"He's really tough. He's really hard to play against," he said. "I've been playing against him for years. He's a great defenceman, plays a really hard game. He's really physical."

Dillon, 33, is a pending unrestricted free agent who brings plenty of physicality, poise and leadership. His absence would be significant.

"He's often the heartbeat of the team," said blue-line partner Neal Pionk.

"He's throwing his body around, stirring the pot out there and blocking a lot of shots and doing the little things that might not end up on the scoresheet, so he's a big part of the team."

Dillon had a career-high eight goals in 77 regular-season games, along with 12 assists, and was off to a strong start in the playoffs with three assists in the first three games.

“He’s huge,” said Lowry. “He offers a different element on the back end. He’s abrasive, he’s physical, he moves the puck well, he’s a great penalty killer, he’s a leader in the dressing room.

“I can’t say enough good things about what he means to our team. He plays big minutes, he plays against other team’s best, he sticks up for teammates, and yeah. We’re thankful that the cut wasn’t worse. It could have got his wrist or could have gone elsewhere. First and foremost, just thankful that there wasn’t a worse outcome.”

[No time to panic](#)

[Lowry believes Jets can get back on winning track against Avs](#)

By: Mike McIntyre

DENVER — The Winnipeg Jets are running out of time to find their game.

And while Sunday afternoon isn’t technically a “must-win,” it sure feels like one given the current state of their first-round playoff series against the Colorado Avalanche.

An offensive explosion in the opener that led to a wild 7-6 victory masked some obvious issues which have become quite apparent in back-to-back defeats by scores of 5-2 and 6-2.

Bottom line: The NHL’s best defensive team during the regular-season has looked anything but during the playoffs, with no answer for the high-octane Avalanche. If that doesn’t change — and fast — the Jets are going to make a hasty exit into their off-season.

“You know what? In this room, we’ve got a lot of belief in this group, a lot of belief in our ability to get back in the series,” said captain Adam Lowry following Saturday’s practice at Ball Arena.

“It’s not a time to panic. It’s a time to double down on what we’re good at. We’ve got a real strong conviction in what’s got us here and what’s made us successful and I think that’s what allows us to stay calm. We know the areas of our game that we can improve upon. We know the areas we’ll need to improve upon if we’re going to beat an elite team like the Avalanche and we feel like we’re up for the challenge.”

A loss on Sunday and Winnipeg will head home down 3-1 in the best-of-seven series, with their season on the brink and needing to rattle off three straight wins beginning Tuesday night at Canada Life Centre. But find a way to get a victory and it’s back to 2-2 with home-ice advantage once again in their back pocket.

“Just stay with it,” said defenceman Neal Pionk. “I know it’s cliché, but we’ve got to play a full 60.

“We have these five-, six-, seven-minute lapses that are really slipping away from us. I think in a couple of games we’ve given up two, three goals in a five-minute span. So we’ve got to stick with it and the leaders gotta lead. We’ve got to make some plays when they’re there, and if they’re not, flip it out and restart.”

Vezina Trophy favourite Connor Hellebuyck has now been torched for 15 goals in the three games (two others were empty-netters), which has led to questions about whether backup Laurent Brossoit could see some action?

"It's Connor Hellebuyck's net," said coach Rick Bowness.

However, there could be lineup changes coming. Winnipeg called up forward Axel Jonsson-Fjallby from the Manitoba Moose on Saturday, and there's a good chance he goes right in to help the leaky penalty kill.

"He gives us more speed and we need some help on the penalty kill at this point," said Bowness. "If he plays, and we'll talk about those things today, that's what we're going to use him on. Use his speed and use him on the penalty kill."

There's a good chance he would replace David Gustafsson on the fourth line. The Jets also have healthy forwards Cole Perfetti and Rasmus Kupari at the ready.

"We're going to talk about those things," is all Bowness would say.

The Jets may also have to make a switch on the blue line, with Brenden Dillon's status uncertain after suffering a skate cut to his hand on Friday night. One of Logan Stanley or Colin Miller would draw in.

"Last night I think we look at the first 35 minutes of the game and we really like how we played," Lowry said of building a 2-1 lead through two periods which then imploded in the final frame, thanks largely to five straight penalties.

"Our penalty kill has to do a better job. We've got to get a couple stops I think. It's tough when you take that many penalties against a lethal power play like Colorado has. And you get down in the game and you take some more. Every game is going to be different in this series. We're just going to look to bounce back. Kind of what Colorado did. We were able to get the upper hand in Game 1, they played really well in Game 2 and got the split. That's our job now, to take care of business tomorrow."

The temperature of the series sure kicked up a few degrees on Friday, especially in the final few minutes when all heck broke loose. That included Lowry dropping the gloves with Miles Wood.

"I think it's just one of those things," said Lowry. "There's a lot of battles in the series. You don't want to back down."

"It's disappointing with how the game ended but I think it's just making sure they know that we're not just going to roll over. We're going to be ready for Game 4. We're going to push this thing and try to get back in the series tomorrow."

Of course, the home team will have a say as well, and Colorado will be looking to keep the pressure on Winnipeg,

"This is a huge game," said coach Jared Bednar.

"You can talk about it all you want, but you have to go and have to execute at the right time. Even through these first three games, it hasn't been perfect but it's been pretty good. We're playing hard. We've been competitive. We're trying to tighten things up on the defensive side while staying dangerous on the other side of it."

The Avalanche have been getting contributions up and down the lineup, with nine skaters recording at least three points already through three games.

“It just seems like we’re playing a lot more up-pace. Everybody’s got energy and it’s kind of a full team effort rather than a couple of guys here, a couple of guys there, whatever,” said defenceman Josh Manson.

“Seems like everybody’s kind of rolling, skating hard, committed to offense, committed to defense, a little bit of that desperation, playoff desperation. It’s something you can’t fake. It’s something you can only feel once you get into those games. I feel like we’ve got that a little bit right now.”

That said, the Avalanche aren’t getting comfortable with the current state-of-affairs.

“Honestly, I don’t feel good at all,” said Manson.

“I mean, it’s better than being down, but I feel like everybody knows this now. But to quote Kobe Bryant, ‘the job’s not finished’, right? Yeah, it’s two wins in a row, and we’ve taken care of what we need to do here at home the first game, but I don’t think you feel good at all. It’s a seven-game series for a reason.”

Sportsnet.ca

[With or without Dillon, Jets must find best selves in Game 4](#)

By Eric Engels

DENVER — The good news for the Winnipeg Jets is that the damage Brenden Dillon sustained at the end of Friday’s Game 3 is, by all accounts, nowhere near as severe as it appeared to be when he rushed off the ice gushing blood from a deep gash in his hand.

The bad news is that it was severe enough to potentially keep the six-foot-four, 225-pound defenceman from participating in Sunday’s Game 4 at Ball Arena — a game the Jets must win to tie this series with the Colorado Avalanche 2-2.

After Saturday’s practice, partner Neal Pionk referred to Dillon as “the heartbeat” of the Jets, so playing without him to avoid heading back to Winnipeg with their season dangling by a thread certainly wouldn’t be ideal.

Head coach Rick Bowness wouldn’t guarantee the Jets would have to do that — stating Dillon was “day-to-day” roughly 12 hours after he received an unknown amount of stitches to close the wound — but he did offer insight into what they’d be missing if he was unavailable.

“Listen, he’s one of our toughest competitors. Tremendous teammate and he gives you 100 percent every shift out there,” said Bowness. “He’s tough as nails, he battles everybody, he blocks shots. I mean, he does everything you want your veteran D to do and he’s a great leader on the ice and in the room. He brings a lot to the table for us.”

The Jets don’t quite have another defenceman who can come in and do as much.

In 77 regular-season games, Dillon averaged 18:44, scored eight goals, recorded 20 points, played a primary penalty-killing role and threw 221 hits. Replacing that wouldn't be as simple as just throwing Logan Stanley back into the fire.

But, without any confirmation of what Bowness will do should Dillon not be able to play, that appears like the most likely option.

Colin Miller, who's been scratched for all three games against the Avalanche, stayed on long after the Jets finished practising Saturday, while Stanley was in the room preparing with the rest of the players expected to play Game 4.

The six-foot-seven, 231-pound lefty might bring similar attributes to Dillon in some departments, but what he lacks in another is a big part of why he was watching Game 3 from the press box.

Through Games 1 and 2, Stanley had a hard time moving the puck out of Winnipeg's end, and he wasn't the only one.

But Dillon was one player who didn't struggle much with that. He hadn't been credited with a single giveaway in this series despite playing the bulk of his minutes against Colorado's top-six forwards, he only had 28 all season, and few of the Jets defencemen have been as efficient.

That's helped feed the lethal Avalanche offence.

If it continues to, the Jets are going to be facing elimination come Tuesday.

There are many other things they need to do in order to avoid that scenario.

"I think staying on top of their D, managing the puck high in the zone and not allowing those easy rush chances against is going to be critical. And just getting back to our style of play," said Jets captain Adam Lowry. "Discipline is important for us. I think we've got a lot of belief in this group with the depth that we have. (Connor Hellebuyck) Helle is a world-class goaltender and I think our back end is really solid."

But everyone in a Jets uniform has to bring more for the dynamic of this series to change.

It's been dictated by a galvanized Avalanche group that came into Game 1 needing to prove it could beat a Jets team that manhandled it over three games during the regular season.

Their belief has only grown since it began — even in spite losing that first contest 7-6 — because they've been the better team from top to bottom.

"You can talk about it all you want, but you have to go and have to execute at the right time," said Avalanche coach Jared Bednar after a handful of his players participated in an optional practice on Saturday. "Even through these first three games, it hasn't been perfect but it's been pretty good. We're playing hard. We've been competitive. We're trying to tighten things up on the defensive side while staying dangerous on the other side of it. There's so many things that go into your game that you work on for 82 games of the regular season to try and perfect that when you go out and play well and get the results — and sometimes even if you don't play that well and you get the results and but you know you can be better in certain areas — that helps build confidence and belief. I don't think our team ever really doubted themselves, but I do think

that going out and performing and seeing all your teammates perform and give it their best and having success is contagious.

“It should be. That's what you're trying to accomplish. You've got to see your teammates go through it and have success, or a certain level of success, to believe that you can do it. The more often you do that, the more your confidence is going to grow.”

The Jets have only done it in bits and pieces so far, and their confidence doesn't appear to be as strong on the ice as they're suggesting it is in their room.

Even if you give them the benefit of the doubt, it's impossible to suggest that confidence is on the level with Colorado's at the moment.

The Jets need to assert themselves now to change that.

That's a tall task, even if Dillon is able to play Sunday. It'll be an even more monumental one if he can't and if Dylan Samberg moves into his spot next to Pionk while Stanley jumps back in next to Nate Schmidt.

But that doesn't mean the Jets don't have it within them. They were a defensive powerhouse and offensive wagon during the regular season, and they have arguably the best goaltender in the world in Hellebuyck.

He has to be much better than he has been in allowing 15 goals against through the first three games, and there's plenty of reason to believe he can be.

There's reason to believe the Jets can be, as well, no matter how their defence is put together for Game 4.

“I think we just have a lot of trust in this group and the depth we have, guys stepping up in different moments,” said Lowry. “We're just going to look to bounce back. Kind of what Colorado did — we were able to get the upper hand in Game 1, they played really well in Game 2 and got the split. That's our job now, to take care of business tomorrow.”

[What changes do Jets need to make to find success in Game 4? \(VIDEO\)](#)

Sean Reynolds and Eric Engels discuss changes the Winnipeg Jets need to make to find success against the Colorado Avalanche in Game 4 of their first-round series and who may need to step up if defenceman Brenden Dillon can't suit up.

Winnipeg Sun

['Sigh of relief:' Jets defenceman Dillon day-to-day after suffering nasty gash against Avalanche](#)

By Ted Wyman

Not much has gone right for the Winnipeg Jets in the last couple games of their playoff series against the Colorado Avalanche, but they may have at least dodged a bullet when it comes to the hand injury suffered by defenceman Brenden Dillon on Friday night.

Dillon had his left hand cut by a skate during a post-game scuffle with Brandon Duhaime of the Avalanche and he left the ice surface bleeding profusely.

There was certainly concern from his teammates after the game, but there was relief along with much better news on Saturday when the Jets practised in Denver.

Head coach Rick Bowness told reporters that Dillon is day-to-day and that there was no structural damage to his hand. Doctors were able to get the cut stitched up and while Dillon didn't practice on Saturday, he hasn't been ruled out of the best-of-seven series, which resumes Sunday afternoon at Ball Arena.

"We know the gash was there but our doctors did a fantastic job of stitching him up and there's no damage and that's the most important thing," Bowness said. "So, we'll keep him as day to day.

"It didn't look good so it's a big sigh of relief that there wasn't any damage done. Give our doctors credit. They got right at it and did a great job stitching him up."

Colorado leads the series 2-1 after winning 6-2 on Friday night.

The veteran Dillon is a very important player for the Jets, a steady presence on the second defence pairing who is one of the most physical and physically tough players on the team.

"He's huge," Dillon's defence partner Neal Pionk told reporters in Denver.

"He's often the heartbeat of the team. He's throwing his body around, stirring the pot out there and blocking a lot of shots and doing the little things that might not end up on the scoresheet, so he's a big part of the team."

This is the second straight year the Jets doctors have had to perform a major stitch job during the first round of the playoffs.

Last season, winger Morgan Barron was cut for 75 stitches on his face but was able to return to the same game.

Asked if Dillon could possibly play in Game 4 on Sunday, Bowness again said "He's day-to-day."

If Dillon does have to sit out, the Jets will sorely miss the 33-year-old, who has three assists and is a plus-1 in the series so far. He's averaging 21:04 of ice time per game and has six blocked shots and four penalty minutes.

"He's one of our toughest competitors, tremendous teammate and he gives you 100% every shift out there," Bowness said. "He's tough as nails, he battles everybody, he blocks shots. I mean, he does everything you want your veteran D to do and he's a great leader on the ice and in the room. He brings a lot to the table for us."

Dillon and the Jets are fortunate things weren't worse. The defenceman didn't even seem to realize he was cut while lying underneath Duhaime during the scuffle. When he finally did

realize it, he quickly skated off, leaving both the ice surface and Duhaime's jersey covered in blood.

"He was on the ground there and you never really want to be on the ground in scrums like that," Duhaime told reporters. "Ref was telling us to cool it and we kind of just parted ways there. And he had that cut, so that's unfortunate.

"He's really tough. He's really hard to play against. I've been playing against him for years. He's a great defenseman, plays a really hard game. He's really physical."

While an injury like that just illustrates how silly post-game scrums like that can be, Duhaime said people getting hurt, even cut, are part of the game.

"I think those scrums are part of the game as well," he said. "It's a hard game. We were pressing in the right direction there."

"I think it's just one of those things," Jets captain Adam Lowry added. "There's a lot of battles in the series. You don't want to back down. It's disappointing with how the game ended but I think it's just making sure they know that we're not just going to roll over. We're going to be ready for Game 4. We're going to push this thing and try to get back in the series."

Bowness didn't tip his hand as to who might replace Dillon if he is out on Sunday, but 6-foot-7 Logan Stanley might be best suited to do so as he is the only player who can bring that type of physicality and toughness.

Stanley played the first two games of the series on the third defence pairing but was replaced by Nate Schmidt for Game 3.

JETS NOTEBOOK: Jets sticking with Hellebuyck; Jonsson-Fjallby called upon for speed, tenacity

By Scott Billeck

Talk about shutting it down before it could even begin.

Any thoughts of Rick Bowness turning to backup Laurent Brossoit, with his No. 1 Connor Hellebuyck struggling between the pipes for the Winnipeg Jets, were shot down faster than you can "Vezina."

"It's Connor Hellebuyck's net," Bowness told reporters in Denver after the Jets put in a short practice at Ball Arena on Saturday.

Say no more.

The truth is it wouldn't have mattered who was between the pipes in Game 3 on Friday evening, a game the Jets lost 6-2 in the end after coughing up power play after power play in the third period after leading the game 2-1 through 40 minutes.

You give Colorado a chance to cook, and they'll plate something you'd find in a Michelin-star kitchen.

In fairness to reality, Hellebuyck has been far from his Vezina self.

His .890 save percentage during 5-on-5 play in this series is 12th among goalies who have featured in the postseason so far.

Interestingly enough, those who believe Alexandar Georgiev is outduelling him only have a case when power plays are introduced. Georgiev has a .867 save percentage in the series at 5-on-5.

Another reality for Winnipeg is that they haven't been able to keep themselves out of the box. Their penalty kill has only worked 63.6% of the time, good for just 13th among the 16 playoff teams.

"Our penalty kill has to do a better job," captain Adam Lowry, one of Winnipeg's top penalty killers, said.

"We've got to get a couple stops. It's tough when you take that many penalties against a lethal power play like Colorado has. And you get down in the game and you take some more."

And while it might be exhausting, Lowry believes it impacts a team more in terms of rhythm.

"There's only certain guys that kill penalties," he said. "There's other guys that you'd like to get on the ice and they don't get the opportunity. They're not playing shifts, or one shift in 15 minutes. It's tough to get them going, it's tough to mount our counter-attack and things like that.

"With the high-end talent they have, discipline is going to be critical for us."

In addition, the team as a whole is giving up nearly 40 shots per game on average, the most of any team coming into Saturday's action.

Tallied up, it paints a grim picture, even with the Jets only trailing the series 2-1.

The analytics may offer some friendly shades, but the fact is this: If Hellebuyck can't perform miracles, and the Jets can't stop ending up in the sin bin, it will be lights out before a winner-takes-all game ever comes to fruition.

Jets confident in their 5-on-5 play

It's been their greatest strength all season long.

So, getting back to it would seem paramount if they're to earn a split in Colorado on Sunday.

"If you look at the majority of 5-on-5 play (on Friday), I thought we did a lot of really good things," Lowry said.

"Chances off the cycle, creating chances off the forecheck and things like that. In Games 1 and 2, we didn't really sustain a lot of o-zone time. The number went up (in Game 3) but it's still one of those things, we don't want to be one and done against this team in terms of the chances we create.

"Any time you don't get those loose puck recoveries, they do such a good job in transition and that's where they can really hurt you. The more time we can make MacKinnon's line and

Mittelstadt's line have to defend, the more likely our chances of winning the game go up. That's where we do a really good job of getting in, cycling, changing and creating chances like that."

And then they can't allow it to sag at any point.

In Game 2, the Avs scored three goals in a span of 5:37, effectively ending the game. In the third period on Friday, a six-minute chunk in the third period reversed Winnipeg's 2-1 lead into a 4-2 deficit.

"Just stay with it," defenceman Neal Pionk said. "I know it's cliché, but we've got to play a full 60 (minutes). We have these five-, six-, seven-minute lapses that are really slipping away from us.

"In a couple of games, we've given up two, three goals in a five-minute span. So we've got to stick with it and the leaders gotta lead. We've got to make some plays when they're there, and if they're not, flip it out and restart."

AJF's speed on tap for Game 4?

Winnipeg's recall of speedster Axel Jonsson-Fjallby from the AHL on Saturday comes at a time when the Jets need those afterburners.

Known for his blazing speed and tenacity on the penalty kill, Bowness suggested those taps will be opened for Game 4 on Sunday afternoon, providing he gets into the lineup.

"He gives us more speed and we need some help on the penalty kill at this point," Bowness said. "If he plays, and we'll talk about those things today, that's what we're going to use him on."

With the Jets struggling to slow Colorado down, particularly on the penalty kill, it seems likely that the Swede will get his first shot at playoff action this season.

Who comes out is unknown, with Bowness telling reporters they would speak about that following his media availability.

My guess is David Gustafsson.

The Athletic

[The Winnipeg Jets collapsed again. Here's why they're in trouble](#)

By Murat Ates

DENVER — Rick Bowness has said this team is different.

Before Game 3, the Winnipeg coach talked about how the Jets came into not just this series against the Colorado Avalanche but the entire season with a chip on their shoulder. Something to prove.

Now, after the Jets scored the go-ahead goal — again — and proceeded to collapse — again — as self-inflicted wounds took them out of a game they controlled, Bowness is still urgently trying to solve a familiar problem: how to bounce back from a playoff loss.

The Jets fought harder in the middle of the ice in Game 3. They boxed out better. Cleared pucks out of the slot. Their goaltender played better, stopping 27 of 28 shots through 40 minutes, giving the Jets a 2-1 lead heading into the third period. Winnipeg even spent more time in Colorado's zone in Game 3 than at any point in the series. With that opportunity to break the series open in Winnipeg's favour, the Jets imploded for the second straight game, losing 6-2 and falling behind 2-1 in the series.

Winnipeg took 10 minutes' worth of minor penalties in the first 10:34 of the third period. The first call was questionable — with Mason Appleton's stick catching Miles Wood as Appleton followed through on a shot — while the next several were obvious and unmissable. The Colorado power play vs. Winnipeg penalty kill is the only mismatch for which the Jets don't have an answer, so Nathan MacKinnon scored. Of course he did. It was inevitable.

But a game-tying goal is just a game-tying goal. A veteran, composed, elite team would shake it off and pour it on all over again.

Winnipeg followed MacKinnon's goal with an offensive zone double-minor for high-sticking when Gabriel Vilardi's stick caught Devon Toews in the face. It was a call that the referees missed but the linesman caught — likely waiting until he was sure that the high-stick drew blood (linesmen cannot stop play for minor penalties). Double-minor high sticks are reviewable by video, which confirmed Vilardi's four-minute penalty.

That sequence of officiating, plus the Jets' struggles to win faceoffs, clear the puck, take away seams, or pressure Colorado's star players, created the perfect storm for Valeri Nichushkin's 3-2 Avalanche goal.

This is where the problem lies. Appleton's penalty was questionable but it was called. Winnipeg's players were irate — and justifiably so, given that Appleton was following through on a shot and it looked like Miles Wood embellished the play. Vilardi's high stick was careless and necessary to call but, even then, in a story about an elite Jets team, there would be a major sidebar about how Colorado failed to score on the power play.

Instead, there was an absolute shooting gallery: Nine of Colorado's 40 shots and 15 of its 74 shot attempts came on the third-period power plays. By the time Nichushkin scored, Hellebuyck had taken himself out of the play, losing his balance trying to stop a cross-seam pass with the paddle of his stick. Thus Winnipeg's implosion wasn't about things going wrong; it was about its inability to cope after things went wrong.

The Jets put together three shifts' worth of pushback before Mark Scheifele gave the puck away at the blue line, Dylan DeMelo stumbled, and Casey Mittelstadt took full advantage, feeding Artturi Lehkonen a cross-ice pass for a counterattack tap-in into a gaping net.

A veteran, composed, elite team gets Scheifele's puck deep. It makes DeMelo's turn cleanly. It doesn't give away a goal for free at five-on-five at a time it's positively reeling on the penalty kill. And it doesn't follow that up with David Gustafsson's clear tripping penalty or Neal Pionk's clear over the glass to give Colorado a five-on-three for free. The Avalanche have proven to be tough enough to beat without Winnipeg's help. Ross Colton scored the 5-2 goal one second after Pionk's penalty came to an end.

It's not just the players. Bowness seemed to want to counter MacKinnon's Game 2 dominance, wherein MacKinnon played nearly half the second period via a series of double shifts, with a

Scheifele game of the same ilk. He double-shifted Scheifele in the first period, giving his star centre extra shifts with Vladislav Namestnikov and Alex Iafallo, then Nino Niederreiter and Mason Appleton, and in various combinations with Sean Monahan. Scheifele ended up leading Jets forwards with a completely sensible 19:34 of ice time, but it was a curious beginning from the Jets coaching staff.

Coaching is also partly to blame for Winnipeg's penalty kill — a shooting gallery against Hellebuyck that we knew would be a shooting gallery — although Colorado deserves credit for running an elite power play all season.

Winnipeg's most risky loss of composure came at the end of the game. Colorado had added a short-handed, empty-net goal during a Jets power play that looked a world away from dangerous, despite a good start to the game and Josh Morrissey's 2-1 goal that set the table for the third period. Down 6-2, Winnipeg's focus seemed to turn toward setting the tone for Game 4. Adam Lowry fought Miles Wood, defeating him handily but doing nothing to change the scoreline.

Then, as the final buzzer sounded, all 10 Jets and Avalanche skaters got involved in a lengthy scrum, leading to a dogpile in the Colorado zone. Brenden Dillon's hand was badly cut, sending him off the ice in a hurry, leaving his teammates shaken — and perhaps his team without one of its top-four defencemen heading into Sunday's pivotal Game 4. It's difficult to imagine Winnipeg coming back from a 3-1 deficit. It would be harder, still, without Dillon's steadying presence on Winnipeg's second pair. If Dillon misses time, Winnipeg could bring Logan Stanley back into the lineup or give trade deadline acquisition Colin Miller a shot, but neither brings Dillon's five-on-five game or penalty killing ability. Bowness didn't have an update after the game, saying Dillon was still being examined at the time.

What are the Jets meant to do now?

They'll start Hellebuyck in Game 4. This much is expected. They may be forced to dress another defenceman, pending Dillon's status. Is Cole Perfetti is going to play any games in the postseason? It seems far from guaranteed, but I suspect Gustafsson's tripping penalty cracks the door more open than it's been. We can also get into various combinations and permutations of Winnipeg's lineup — the old Ehlers/Scheifele/Vilardi and Perfetti/Namestnikov/Iafallo debates, based on their tremendous analytics.

Bowness will focus on puck management, execution in the offensive zone, and coping with Colorado's speed.

"You slow them down with better puck management in their zone and making sure we don't get our forwards trapped deep," Bowness said. "Their D are coming. ... If it's a four-on-three, we can live with that. But they had a couple of four-on-twos. They do an excellent job of pushing our D back and gaining the blue line and turning up and finding that second wave."

This is supposed to be a resilient Jets team capable of pushing back with a much higher floor in quality of play compared to last year. I believe those things are true — or at least that they have been true for much of the season — but this is the worst time of year for those qualities to fade.

The offence appears stuck in second gear.

“I think we still pass up too many shooting opportunities for sure,” Bowness said. “We’ve got to stop looking for that extra play and just do what they do — throw it at the net. Even when we did that, they were getting the retrievals and coming out. We’ve got to be careful watching that too, because that’s where they’re so strong, off the rush. We can’t waste shots. We’ve got to make sure they’re on a good chance.”

So, the Jets need to shoot more often, but also less wastefully. That seems like a philosophical problem.

Meanwhile, there are the MacKinnon problems and the overall problem of Colorado’s depth. All four Avalanche lines are forechecking with such pace that Winnipeg goes long stretches without being able to string consecutive breakout passes together. During Game 3, it got so bad for a while that Winnipeg made several stretch passes from its own zone to Avalanche players in the neutral zone.

That kind of pace is part of Colorado’s game from top to bottom.

“The forecheck has been the key to our team for years now,” said Avalanche veteran Andrew Cogliano. “With our team, it seems like our bottom lines, their identity is the forecheck. When you start forechecking hard, you start putting teams on their heels and then our big guys come out and sometimes teams back up and give them more respect.”

It has to be exhausting to play against a team like that. Mind you, I also remember when the Jets were a team like that. So I asked MacKinnon how Colorado was taking Winnipeg’s time away.

“Just trying to forecheck as hard as we can,” he said with a smile. “That’s really it. I mean, skating as hard as we can with the puck and trying to get active sticks. Obviously they’ll make some adjustments and we’ll have to be ready for it but our team is built on forechecking with the forwards we have. We have to keep that going.”

Does it take a special kind of grit to play that way?

“Yeah ... It’s also just awareness,” MacKinnon said. “You can’t even let up for half a second against these guys or anybody in the playoffs.”

It turns out that Winnipeg’s half-seconds are adding up.

The biggest reason for concern for the Jets is that they played a lot better in Game 3 than they did to start the series — and they still lost. Hellebuyck put together a 40-minute highlight reel, including five saves on MacKinnon alone heading into the second intermission — and they still lost. The second line scored, via Tyler Toffoli from DeMelo and Nikolaj Ehlers — but Winnipeg still lost.

It’s getting harder to see the Jets establishing enough of an edge at five-on-five to overcome their beleaguered penalty kill.

The Jets have to dig deeper, again, and give themselves a chance to get back into the series, again, lest we start talking about a one-and-done postseason for a much-improved team.

Again.

The trouble is teams develop a past. Winnipeg is a good team that hasn't responded to a playoff loss with a playoff win of its own since the qualification round against Calgary in 2020.

This is a much better team than any the Jets have iced between those years and now.

Now, the Jets need to overcome their own history — and to stop beating themselves. Colorado is good enough all on its own.