

## [Winnipegjets.com](http://Winnipegjets.com)

### [Three things - Discipline costs Jets Game 4 Jets give up two power play goals in second period in 5-1 loss to Avs](#)

By Jamie Thomas

The Winnipeg Jets lost Game 4 at Ball Arena 5-1 Sunday afternoon and now trail the best of seven series 3-1. Nate Schmidt scored the only goal for Winnipeg who went 0-for-4 on the power play and allowed two more power play goals. Connor Hellebuyck made 26 saves in the first two periods before being replaced by Laurent Brossoit before the third period, Brossoit stopped all four shots he faced. Game 5 of this series will be played at Canada Life Centre on Tuesday at 8:30 CT.

#### *DISCIPLINE, DISCIPLINE*

The Jets discipline hurt them again in Game 4. With the game tied at one in the second, Vladislav Namestnikov took a holding penalty at 11:22. 14 seconds into that power play, Valeri Nichuskin redirected a Cale Makar shot off the post and in to make it 2-1. With the Avs leading 3-1, Nino Niederreiter took a roughing penalty on Sean Walker. It took Colorado all of 36 seconds to score on that man advantage, Nichuskin found a loose puck in the crease and put in his second power play goal of the period to give the Avs a 4-1 lead after two.

"Wanna take penalties. Wanna play a three-quarter ice game? You're playing right into their hands. Our issues are self-inflicted," said Rick Bowness.

"You saw us play the right way for 10 minutes in the second half of the first period. You take four penalties; you turn the puck over. That's exactly how they want to play. The issues are self-inflicted."

#### *CHANGE UP FRONT*

In an effort to find some offence, Rick Bowness flipped his left wingers on the second and third lines. Nino Niederreiter moved to the left side of Sean Monahan and Tyler Toffoli and Nikolaj Ehlers joined Adam Lowry and Mason Appleton. The Monahan line generated two scoring chances and gave up six at 5v5, and the Lowry line ended up with one scoring chance according to Natural Stat Trick. Axel Jonsson-Fjallby made his 2024 playoff debut on the fourth line with Vladislav Namestnikov and Alex Iafallo. Bowness said there will be some lineup changes made ahead of Game 5 on Tuesday.

#### *SCARY INCIDENT*

For the second straight game the Jets lost a player to a serious injury. In Game 4, Brenden Dillon suffered a cut to his hand which forced him to miss Sunday's contest. Today, Namestnikov was hit in the face with a redirected shot. The Jet forward left the ice and was sent to a nearby hospital for treatment. Rick Bowness didn't have an update on Namestnikov after the game.

## [NHL.com](http://NHL.com)

### [Jets face elimination, 'need to change some things up' after Game 4 loss Winnipeg has struggled to create offense, committed too many penalties against Avalanche](#)

By Tracey Myers

DENVER -- For the Winnipeg Jets, Sunday was more of the same, and not in a good way.

Once again, they struggled to find offense. Once again, they took too many penalties. Once again, they couldn't kill off enough of those penalties.

And for the second consecutive season, the Jets find themselves on the brink of an early exit from the Stanley Cup Playoffs ahead of Game 5 at Canada Life Centre in Winnipeg on Tuesday (9:30 p.m. ET; CBC, TVAS, SNW, ALT, ESPN).

"The problems are self-inflicted," Jets coach Rick Bowness said after a 5-1 loss to the Colorado Avalanche in Game 4 of the Western Conference First Round on Sunday.

"Want to take penalties? Want to play a three-quarter ice game? You're playing right into their hands. Our issues are self-inflicted. You saw us play the right way for 10 minutes in the second half of the first period. You take four penalties, you turn the puck over, that's exactly how they want to play. The issues are self-inflicted."

Forward Mark Scheifele has repeatedly said that the Avalanche have made adjustments from their three regular-season meetings, all of which the Jets won, and Winnipeg hasn't.

"They're a fast team. They keep you on your toes and clearly they've made those adjustments from the regular season, and we just let that get away from us and lost our composure a little bit in that second period and it cost us," Scheifele said.

Perhaps it was apropos that the postgame comments came up more than once because the same problems arose for the Jets in Game 4 as in Game 3. For the second consecutive game, the Jets committed too many penalties in one period. On Sunday, the Avalanche got four power plays in the second period after getting five in the third in Game 3. The result was the same: once again, the Avalanche scored two power-play goals to break open a close game and take control.

Sure, the Jets missed defenseman Brenden Dillon, who sustained an injury to his left hand in a scrum after the Jets' 6-2 loss to the Avalanche in Game 3 on Friday. But much of what the Avalanche did against the Jets on Sunday happened with Dillon in the lineup the previous game.

Asked how close the Jets are to playing their best game, forward Nino Niederreiter said, "very far."

"We always have some stretches where we play very well, and then we get stretches where we don't play the way we should be playing," he said. "They came out better out of the gates than we did and that's something we need to change."

The Jets did make some changes Sunday to the forward lines. Axel Jonsson-Fjallby, recalled from Manitoba of the American Hockey League on Saturday, came into the lineup, touted for his speed and penalty killing. He didn't play any short-handed minutes.

Nikolaj Ehlers, usually left wing on the second line with center Sean Monahan and right wing Tyler Toffoli, moved to the third line with center Adam Lowry and right wing Mason Appleton. Niederreiter moved up to Ehlers' spot. The Jets still struggled to generate much.

The Jets may have to add another forward to the lineup in Game 5 for Vladislav Namestnikov, who had to be helped off the ice after he was hit in the face by Jets defenseman Nate Schmidt's shot at 6:57 of the third period.

"Vladdy is at the hospital being looked at right now," Bowness said. "That's all I have until we get a report from what they see, what is wrong."

Goalie Connor Hellebuyck was replaced by Laurent Brossoit to start the third period, but Bowness said that had nothing to do with his starter.

"(To) give him a break. Give him a break," he said of Hellebuyck, who made 26 saves on 30 shots through two periods.

"There's just too much time (he is) having to make save after save. Just giving him a break. It's not on him whatsoever. It's on the players in front of him."

The Jets are in danger of repeating the 2023 Stanley Cup Playoffs, when they won Game 1 against the Vegas Golden Knights before losing the next four in their first-round matchup. But last year the Jets were the second wild card from the West. This season they won their final eight regular-season games and took second in the Central Division.

Scheifele said there isn't a comparison there but if the Jets don't find their game soon, there unfortunately will be.

"Completely different teams on both sides of the coin," he said. "We had a good regular season against them and they made adjustments and we haven't. We've got to bring a different game come Tuesday. We've got to fix some things. We've got to change some things up. That's about it."

### **[Nichushkin has hat trick, Avalanche take Game 4 to push Jets to brink](#) [Lehkonen, Makar each has goal, assist for Colorado in Western 1st Round](#)**

By Ryan Boulding

DENVER -- Valeri Nichushkin scored his first NHL hat trick, and the Colorado Avalanche won 5-1 against the Winnipeg Jets in Game 4 of the Western Conference First Round at Ball Arena on Sunday.

The Avalanche lead the best-of-7 series 3-1. Game 5 is at Winnipeg on Tuesday (9:30 p.m. ET; , ESPN, ALT, CBC, TVAS, SNW).

Artturi Lehkonen and Cale Makar each had a goal and an assist, and Nathan MacKinnon had two assists for Avalanche, the No. 3 seed from the Central Division. Alexandar Georgiev made 26 saves.

"I've really liked all four games from our group," Colorado coach Jared Bednar said. "We made some mistakes in Game 1. We made less in Game 2. We made less in Game 3. We probably

made less here tonight on the defensive side of things. But our compete level and the intensity that we're playing with, the speed and pace we're playing with, the commitment that the team has playing with, has been great in all four games."

Nate Schmidt scored for the Jets, who are the No. 2 seed from the Central. Connor Hellebuyck allowed four goals on 30 shots before being replaced by Laurent Brossoit at the start of the third period. Brossoit made four saves.

"The problems are self-inflicted," Winnipeg coach Rick Bowness said. "Wanna take penalties? Wanna play a three-quarter ice game? You're playing right into their hands. Our issues are self-inflicted. You saw us play the right way for 10 minutes in the second half of the first period. You take four penalties, you turn the puck over. That's exactly how they want to play. The issues are self-inflicted.

"First thing is you have to stay out of the penalty box, and then the penalty kill has to do their job. Second thing is we have to stop turning the puck over. Again, those things are self-inflicted. You want adjustments? Stay out of the box. Manage the puck better and go from there."

Lehkonen scored to make it 1-0 Colorado when he one-timed Casey Mittelstadt's backhand pass from behind the net at the right hash mark at 8:10 of the first period.

"If you really watch video and dissect video and look at how many plays that 'Lehky' makes on any given night, on the offensive side, on the defensive side, he doesn't get anywhere near enough credit for what he does for our team," Bednar said. "And he's so valuable to our team in every aspect: power play penalty, kill 5-on-5, down goals, up goals, scores big goals. I mean, this guy is a relentless worker. This guy's a warrior."

Schmidt tied it 1-1 at 13:56, skating into a pass from Mason Appleton above the right circle and scoring on a wrist shot top shelf far side. The Avalanche challenged for offside, but video review upheld the original call.

"There's clear differences in their game compared to the regular season. They're playing fast. Their [defensemen] are moving pucks. They're moving to areas quicker than we are," said Jets forward Mark Scheifele. "It seems like it's almost like endless, over and over and over, and we're not able to get that puck stopped. We've got to find ways to change that.

"Obviously they're a fantastic team. They've shown that shift in and shift out. They battle hard. They make it hard to get to their net, and we've got to change our game a little bit."

Nichushkin scored a power-play goal to make it 2-1 at 11:36 of the second period when he redirected Makar's initial shot downward and through Hellebuyck.

"He's been awesome for us. Obviously, he's a train driving that front end right now," said Makar. "So whether it's being in front of the net or just being in the corners, I think especially for us as a D-core, we want to reward guys that are going to the net. So [we] try and get pucks there for them or put it in their hands so they can make plays."

Makar extended the lead to 3-1 at 15:03 with a wrist shot from above the right dot that went far side. He started the rush behind his own net and took it coast to coast before the shot.

“I think our forwards had pushed back their [defensemen] so much, and I think my first option I was looking at was kind of kicking that out to, I think, Mikko [Rantanen] on my right,” Makar said. “And then once I saw that [defense] backed off quite a bit, I just tried to throw it to the net and just get it far side.”

Nichushkin made it 4-1 with a power-play goal at 19:36, snapping the crossing pass from Lehkonen into the open net from atop the crease.

“He’s a huge part of our squad. We all know what a great player he is, and it’s hard to stop the big man,” said Lehkonen. “We started off well, got a good start. I felt like the first two periods, we played really great, and then in the third, I think it was a mature third period from us.”

Nichushkin scored into the empty net at 19:47 of the third period for the 5-1 final.

“He’s available for you and rock solid in almost every area of the game as a 200-foot player,” said Bednar. “Players like that, you can’t even describe what they bring to the team because it’s like competitive, hard-working skill, and they can play with anybody.”

*NOTES:* Jets forward Vladislav Namestnikov left the game at 6:57 of the third period after Schmidt’s shot from the blue line hit him in the face. “‘Vladdy’ is at the hospital being looked at right now,” said Bowness. “That’s all I have until we get a report from what they see, what is wrong.” ... Nikolai Kovalenko was recalled from Colorado of the American Hockey League on Sunday and made his NHL debut. He finished with four hits in 7:17 of ice time. ... Makar tied Sandis Ozolinsh (18) for the most postseason goals by a defenseman in Avalanche/Nordiques history.

## **The Athletic**

### **[The Winnipeg Jets’ Game 4 bets didn’t pay off. Now their season could go bust](#)**

By Murat Ates

DENVER — Rick Bowness sized up the Winnipeg Jets’ 2-1 deficit in their first-round series, calculated his options and made a calculated series of bets.

The Jets had been outshot 118-77 and outscored 17-11 over three games. They’d been pushed around at five-on-five, frustrated by the Colorado Avalanche’s work rate and dominated on special teams. With a pivotal Game 4 matchup ahead — and the opportunity to even the series — Bowness made his moves.

With Brenden Dillon hurt, Logan Stanley stepped in. The penalty kill had been outworked so Saturday morning AHL call-up Axel Jonsson-Fjallby would get his shot, too, while Nikolaj Ehlers and Nino Niederreiter traded spots on the forward lines. Through these tweaks, Bowness bet that Winnipeg — the top defensive team in the NHL this season — would find a way to play its own game, taking the play to the Avalanche instead of playing on its heels.

Instead, the Jets were utterly dominated in Game 4. They were outmatched, out-chanced and outclassed at five-on-five. The Avalanche forechecked in waves, recovering every dumped puck, shooting every chance they had and recovered so many pucks in a row by out-positioning and outbattling the Jets.

The domination was so thorough early on that Colorado had taken four shots on goal in 20 seconds or less — twice — in the first six minutes of the game.

From there, Bowness' bets backfired. Eight minutes into the game, Stanley shoulder-checked, thinking that Alex Lafallo would give him an outlet on the left wing boards, and then spun the puck to Zach Parise to set up Artturi Lehkonen's game-opening goal. Later on, Stanley's breakout pass led in part to Nate Schmidt's equalizer, but his two second-period minor penalties helped take the Jets out of the game.

The Jets killed both of Stanley's penalties and then took two more, giving up two power-play goals — Colorado's fifth and sixth of the series — to put the game out of reach heading into the third period. That's when Jonsson-Fjallby, who didn't take a shift on the penalty kill, was promoted to the second line — a desperate line shuffle that called for a superior offensive player. To put Jonsson-Fjallby — a player with 23 points in 99 NHL games — in a feature role in a must-win game was to put an exclamation mark on a bet that didn't pan out. Cole Perfetti wouldn't have turned the flow of play on his own but his 19 goals were missed in that moment and again during late-game power plays with Sean Monahan and Gabriel Vilardi unavailable for their shifts.

Bowness has said many times that he coaches by feel, trusting his gut, and that he's happier to lose coaching his way than changing his approach to the game.

Avalanche coach Jared Bednar made tweaks to Colorado's forecheck — tweaks he acknowledged to The Athletic but declined to detail when asked. Colorado modified its forecheck, changing its dump-in strategy, and subsequently dominated Winnipeg on rebounds and puck recoveries. Those two first-period four-shot flurries were the direct product, helping the Avalanche set a dominant tone in a critical game.

Winnipeg needed answers for that in Game 4 — answers it didn't get from its head coach, its power play, its penalty kill or its ability to adapt to Colorado's relentless pressure. Instead, the Jets got modest tweaks at the edges of the roster — bets that they were good enough to come back without sweeping adaptations. Now the Jets are on the brink of elimination and players are calling out Winnipeg's inability to adapt.

"They made adjustments," Mark Scheifele said in the aftermath of the 5-1 loss. "We didn't."

Scheifele repeated that statement in his answer to a subsequent question and doubled down on his answer when asked about it by The Athletic.

"There's clear differences in (Colorado's) game compared to the regular season," he said. "They're playing fast. Their D are moving pucks. They're moving to areas quicker than we are, and it almost seems like it's almost like endless, over and over and over and we're not able to get that puck stopped. We've got to find ways to change that. Obviously they're a fantastic team, they've shown that shift in and shift out. They battle hard. They make it hard to get to their net, and we've got to change our game a little bit."

This was honest expression and candid venting from the Jets' alternate captain who had a lengthy on-ice discussion with Bowness toward the end of Saturday's practice. Head coach and star centre stood together at centre ice, with Bowness doing most of the talking during a lengthy meeting of the minds.

“We’ve got to bring a different game come Tuesday,” Scheifele said. “We’ve got to fix some things. We’ve got to change some things up. That’s about it.”

Scheifele’s message was echoed by Niederreiter, whose second-period roughing penalty led to Colorado’s fourth goal.

“We’ve got to change our game plan. There’s certain areas that we have to change. We have to make sure we don’t feed into their game. I think that’s what’s happening.”

The Athletic asked Bowness why two veteran players were talking about Colorado’s adjustments and Winnipeg’s lack of them.

“Well, first thing is you have to stay out of the penalty box and then the penalty kill has to do their job. Second thing is we have to stop turning the puck over. Again, those things are self-inflicted,” Bowness said.

“You want adjustments? Stay out of the box. Manage the puck better and go from there.”

Bowness’ passion is evident. At this stage of his career, his love of the game and his desire to win the Stanley Cup are enormous, driving motivations. There’s a chance this series is it for him, with a club option as to whether he returns for the third year of his contract. Bowness is also an emotional person who wears his heart on his sleeve and his frustration seethed through the answer to questions about Winnipeg’s game.

“Wanna take penalties? Wanna play a three-quarter ice game? You’re playing right into their hands,” Bowness said. “Our issues are self-inflicted. You saw us play the right way for 10 minutes in the second half of the first period. You take four penalties, you turn the puck over. That’s exactly how they want to play. The issues are self-inflicted.”

It must be acknowledged that Winnipeg’s parade of penalties was a turning point in the game. The Jets killed two from Stanley but were scored on with Vladislav Namestnikov and then Niederreiter in the penalty box. The Jets were frustrated by some of the calls they received, with Namestnikov’s holding penalty being a source of confusion, but there are two things to keep in mind. For one, Winnipeg barely had the puck in Game 4, making it difficult for calls to go in the other direction. Second, Colorado’s special teams have been dominant, with the Jets’ 21st-ranked regular season penalty kill now clicking at 60 percent, the fourth-worst rate of the playoffs.

That falls upon the players’ execution and on coaching, too. Bowness has done a lot of work to improve the team’s defensive structure over his two years in Winnipeg — work worth remembering, even as his Game 4 decisions backfired as they did. In a series that’s largely been about Colorado’s ability to stay two steps ahead of the Jets on the ice, it seems clear that part of the Avalanche advantage comes from Bednar behind the bench.

Even Bowness’ most minor moves — sensible things, like sending Monahan out to take multiple defensive-zone draws for other lines, didn’t work. Monahan went one-for-five (20 percent) in the defensive zone and was one of the biggest misfires on Cale Makar’s end-to-end, highlight-reel 3-1 goal. In the third period, when Monahan was hurt after taking a butt end to the face on a power-play faceoff, Lafallo took his spot on the bumper — a job for which even Perfetti’s biggest critics must admit he is well suited. The Jets’ power play struck iron late in the game but was

otherwise ineffectual, going 0-for-4, failing to take control of the game when Colorado missed an offside challenge on Schmidt's 1-1 goal.

Dig into the stats and you'll see that Winnipeg's top two pairs — Josh Morrissey with Dylan DeMelo and Dylan Samberg with Neal Pionk — finished the game with just over 50 percent of the shot attempts. It was Stanley and Schmidt who were the most severely outshot, two left-handers trying to make the best of Colorado's suffocating pace while veteran right-hander and trade deadline pickup Colin Miller sat out once again.

The Jets aren't playing to their strengths. This much is clear in their overwhelmed appearance even when they do have the puck in transition. They're making a lot of disjointed plays, seemingly not used to having any time and space at all. Kyle Connor and Monahan had four shots each and Ehlers had three, but the Jets' lack of offence is mostly a story about being unable to get into the Avalanche zone. When they're there, which is rare, some scoring chances do emerge, but Colorado's secondary scorers are outplaying Winnipeg's stars and its depth while the Jets' deployment decisions chip away at a non-existent margin for error.

In a series that started as a coin flip, the self-inflicted wounds go beyond what happens on the ice.

What of Winnipeg's resilience, then? What of the pushback Bowness so vocally accused the Jets of lacking against Vegas when Winnipeg won Game 1 last year and then lost four straight to end the series? We've seen the Jets take strides this season. We've seen the maturation of Scheifele and the stable, calming leadership of Adam Lowry and Morrissey help stem previous losing streaks.

But Winnipeg hasn't followed a playoff loss with any number of playoff wins since the qualification round against Calgary in 2020. The Jets have shown a tendency to get pushed out of a series instead of finding solutions as the games slip away. They've now burned two strong games from Hellebuyck, who was hung out to dry by poor defending and who Bowness took out of the game heading into the third period.

"Too much time in there having to make save after save," Bowness said. "That's not on him whatsoever. That's on the players in front of him."

The Jets are reeling. Now they have to win three games in a row in the face of a relentless Avalanche forecheck that's worn them down shift by shift, game by game, and brought them to the brink of elimination. Dillon is day to day and Namestnikov could be missing, too, after leaving the game in the third period when struck in the face by a puck. He was still in a Denver hospital being evaluated after the game.

"The only thing that matters is winning Tuesday night," Bowness said. "There's your pushback: See how hard we go. We win Tuesday, we go from there. That's all our focus right now is that."

It sounds good. It's passionate. It's true. Bowness even said there would be roster changes for Game 5.

What Winnipeg needs the most — and what its players are saying it doesn't have — is a game plan.



## [Connor Hellebuyck, Thatcher Demko, Sergei Bobrovsky named NHL's Vezina Trophy finalists](#)

By Julian McKenzie

Winnipeg Jets goaltender Connor Hellebuyck, Vancouver Canucks goaltender Thatcher Demko and Florida Panthers goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky were named finalists for the NHL's Vezina Trophy, awarded "to the goalkeeper adjudged to be the best at this position." Boston Bruins goalie Linus Ullmark was last year's recipient.

This is Hellebuyck's fourth Vezina Trophy nomination, having won the honor in 2019-20. The 30-year-old goaltender tallied 37 wins for the second consecutive regular season, one fewer than Colorado Avalanche goalie Alexandar Georgiev. Hellebuyck had a 37-19-4 record with a .921 save percentage, a 2.39 goals-against average and five shutouts in 60 games played. Hellebuyck's season was worthy of this year's William M. Jennings Trophy, given to the goalie who plays for the team that allowed the fewest goals. The Jets achieved that by allowing only 199 goals in the regular season.

Vezina Trophy candidates breakdown: Connor Hellebuyck leads an impressive group

Despite being placed on long-term injured reserve with a knee injury in March that forced him to miss the rest of the regular season, Demko's statistics still place him among the NHL's best. Demko finished the season with a 35-14-2 record, a 2.45 goals-against average, a .918 save percentage and five shutouts — the most he's ever had in one season. This is Demko's first-ever Vezina Trophy nomination. He finished seventh in Vezina voting during the 2021-22 season.

Florida Panthers goalie Sergei Bobrovsky is seeking his third Vezina Trophy, having won each time he's been nominated. Bobrovsky finished the season with a 36-17-4 record, a .915 save percentage, a 2.37 goals-against average and six shutouts. Those six shutouts put him in a four-way tie atop the NHL leaderboard alongside Washington's Charlie Lindgren, Arizona's Connor Ingram and Pittsburgh's Tristan Jarry.

The Vezina Trophy finalists are the first of many award nominees to be unveiled through May 8. Calder Trophy finalists for Rookie of the Year will be revealed Tuesday while Norris Trophy finalists for best defenseman will be known Wednesday.

### **Global Winnipeg**

## [Winnipeg Jets pushed to brink with 3rd straight playoff loss to Avalanche](#)

By Russ Hobson Global News

The Winnipeg Jets continue to spend too much time in the penalty box and the Colorado Avalanche continue to make them pay. Now the Jets are on the ropes.

The Avalanche scored a pair of power play goals in a 5-1 Game 4 victory for a commanding 3-1 series lead to push the Jets to the brink of elimination.

Valeri Nichushkin had a hat trick as the Jets were dominated for the third straight game. Winnipeg has been outscored 18-5 since the third period of Game 1.

“The problems are self-inflicted,” said Jets head coach Rick Bowness. “You want to take penalties, you want to play a three-quarter ice game, you’re playing right into their hands. So, our issues are self-inflicted. You saw us play the right way for 10 minutes in the second half of that first period and then you take four penalties and turn the puck over. That’s exactly how they want to play.”

The Avalanche continue to use their speed to outplay and outchance the Jets. Winnipeg hasn’t looked anything like the defensive-minded club that closed out the regular season on an eight-game win streak. There is no question who has been the better team in the last three games of the series.

Forward Mark Scheifele pointed to the Avs’ adjustments that have made a difference in the series.

“We just got away from it a little bit,” said Scheifele. “We weren’t forechecking as five. We weren’t connected. They made adjustments and we didn’t.”

“Clearly, they made those adjustments from the regular season and we just let that get away from us and lost our composure a little bit in that second period, and it cost us.”

The Avs finished the night 2-for-4 on the man advantage and they’ve now scored six power play goals in the first four games of the series.

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“Just got to find a way to kill those penalties and go from there,” forward Nino Niederreiter said. “That’s the game right there, so, that’s the frustrating part about them.”

Jets forward Vladislav Namestnikov had to leave the game in the third period after being hit by a puck in the face by friendly fire. Nate Schmidt’s slap shot appeared to catch him just under the visor and he had to be taken to the hospital.

“He’s at the hospital being looked at right now,” said Bowness. “That’s all I have until we get a report from what they see is wrong.”

The Jets are hoping history doesn’t repeat itself. Last season they won Game 1 over the Vegas Golden Knights only to lose the next four straight to get eliminated.

After three straight playoff losses, the Jets’ season will be on the line in Tuesday’s do-or-die Game 5 back in Winnipeg.

“We got to wash this,” said Scheifele. “You got to flush it down the toilet and be excited to play in front of our amazing fans in Winnipeg and bring a better game, and a more complete game through and through.”

The Jets were under siege right from the drop of the puck. Colorado had 11 of the first 12 shots on goal and then Logan Stanley threw a blind pass up the boards that was intercepted by Zach Parise. He gave it to Casey Mittelstadt who spotted Artturi Lehkonen in front and he lifted it past Hellebuyck for his fourth goal of the series.

But the Jets found their legs later in the opening period and at the 13:56 mark, Mason Appleton dropped a pass off for Nate Schmidt and he picked the top corner on Alexandar Georgiev. The Avs used a coach's challenge to argue the play was offside. Kyle Connor was extremely close to entering the zone early but they concluded there was no clear cut video evidence, so the goal was allowed to count. The Avalanche were assessed a delay of game penalty but the Jets couldn't capitalize on the power play.

It was a much better finish to the period for Winnipeg as the Jets recorded seven of the last eight shots of the first and they went to the dressing rooms tied at one apiece. The shots were 13-9 for Colorado in the period.

The Jets started the second like they finished the first before getting into more penalty trouble. Cale Makar's long shot was tipped in by Nichushkin for the power play marker to give him a goal in every game in the series so far.

Less than four minutes later, Makar weaved into the Jets before firing it past Hellebuyck for a 3-1 Colorado lead.

Then the Jets took another penalty and the Avs scored another goal. In the final minute of the period the Avalanche scored a third straight goal as Nichushkin whacked in a loose puck and Colorado was in full control leading 4-1 after 40 minutes.

Colorado outshot Winnipeg 17-7 in the second stanza.

Laurent Brossoit replaced Hellebuyck for the final frame and stopped all four shots he faced.

The Avalanche killed off two penalties successfully in the third and Nichushkin scored into the empty net for the hat trick as the Jets suffered a third straight playoff loss.

Brenden Dillon did not play in Game 4 after getting cut on his hand by a skate at the end of Game 3. He was replaced in the lineup by Stanley.

The Jets used three new-look forward lines after dropping Nikolaj Ehlers down to the third line with Appleton and Adam Lowry. Nino Niederreiter was moved up to the second line with Sean Monahan and Tyler Toffoli, while David Gustafsson was scratched for Axel Jonsson-Fjällby on the fourth forward line.

The shots finished 35-26 for Colorado. Hellebuyck stopped 26 of 30 shots, while Georgiev made 25 stops.

The crucial Game 5 is scheduled for Tuesday back in Winnipeg at the Canada Life Centre with puck drop scheduled for 8:30 PM.

### **[ANALYSIS: One last chance for Jets to change the narrative](#)**

By Kelly Moore Global News

ANALYSIS: One last chance for Jets to change the narrative - imageView image in full screen  
Following a 5-1 loss in Colorado on Sunday afternoon, the legacy lives on for the Winnipeg Jets. And it's one this team and organization can't possibly be proud of.

Two-and-14. Nine consecutive losses. That's the Jets' record coming off a playoff defeat since the start of the 2018 Western Conference final versus Vegas.

The last time Winnipeg responded to a postseason setback with a victory was in the bubble, four years ago in Game 2 vs Calgary.

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And while players, coaches and GMs summarily dismiss year-to-year comparisons — at least in public — that lengthy run of futility has come with a core of players we like to refer to as “the central six”: goalie Connor Hellebuyck, defenceman Josh Morrissey, and the quartet of Mark Scheifele, Adam Lowry, Kyle Connor and Nikolaj Ehlers up front.

This talented group, along with a variety of supporting cast members, has not been able to solve the Rubik's Cube of successfully applying a tourniquet to stop the postseason bleeding, no matter how hard they have tried. And lord knows they have tried.

In Games 3 and 4 of this current series versus Colorado, it has been a parade of penalties, resulting in an Avalanche of power play goals — although the dagger Sunday afternoon was a Bobby Orr-esque end-to-end rush by Cale Makar, defended unsuccessfully by all five Winnipeg players on the ice.

So now, with Game 5 beckoning Tuesday night at Canada Life Centre, there is one final opportunity, for this spring, to at least alter the narrative about a team that hasn't been able to bump the slump for the past four postseasons plus.

Especially for the half dozen players who have suffered through every minute of that misery.

**Sportsnet.ca**

**[Jets once again running out of answers, facing elimination](#)**

By Eric Engels

DENVER — The Winnipeg Jets are down 3-1 in the playoffs, they're facing elimination in five games, and it all feels so shockingly familiar.

They meekly tucked tail and bowed out without a fight against the Vegas Golden Knights a year ago, and they appear to be doing it again now against the Colorado Avalanche.

Last spring, the Jets lost in four straight after winning Game 1, leaving head coach Rick Bowness disgusted.

“We have to push back,” he said once the Jets were eliminated. “There has to be a push back. There has to be pride. You have to be able to push back when things aren't going your way. We had no push back. Their better players were so much better than ours tonight. They deserved to win. They were the better team in the regular season, they were the better team in this series.”

It feels like we're a game away from hearing Bowness repeat himself.

It wasn't supposed to be this way this time around — with the Jets proving to be a 52-win juggernaut in the regular season and entering the playoffs on an eight-game winning streak — but here we are again.

The Jets did some good things but were essentially gifted Game 1 by Alexandar Georgiev. And since the Colorado goaltender steadied himself in Game 2, the Jets haven't done nearly enough good things to win.

In Sunday's matinee at Ball Arena, in which they had to come up with their very best, the Jets were at their worst. They surrendered 13 of the first 14 shots and an early goal to Artturi Lehkonen, and by the time Cale Makar morphed into the second coming of Bobby Orr to make it 3-1 Avalanche, they were down 27-13 on the shot clock.

Connor Hellebuyck kept them afloat up until that point of the game, but he couldn't walk on water to save them.

The Jets offered him no help. They were undisciplined — both in their structure and in avoiding penalties — and hung Hellebuyck out to dry and left him helplessly watching from the bench as the third period of Game 4 ended with Valeri Nuchushkin finishing off his first career hat trick to give the Avalanche a 5-1 win.

He took the shot that chased Hellebuyck from the game at the end of the second period, and he took the final one that officially sunk the Jets into a canyon in this series.

They lost hard after losing 6-2 in Game 3 and 5-2 in Game 2 and offered nothing to anchor hope to and reinforce belief that things will change in Game 5.

"The problems are self-inflicted," Bowness said. "You want to take penalties? Want to play a three-quarter ice game? You're playing right into their hands. Our issues are self-inflicted."

The Jets practically blew their own feet off with a shotgun last spring, and they've cut their own hands off so far during this one.

Things weren't supposed to go this way for this edition of this team. Before the series started, Nikolaj Ehlers fell a breath short saying the suggestion they didn't deserve to finish where they did in the regular season — fourth in the NHL, three points ahead of the Avalanche in the Central Division — was laughable.

"There's been some talk obviously that maybe we aren't where we're supposed to be, and we know that we are," he said. "We want to show ourselves and prove to each and every guy in here that we've got what it takes to be a Stanley Cup champion... There's a lot of belief in this room and we want to go out and show that."

Bowness believed the Jets were capable of doing exactly that. That they were capable of being different than the team he was so disappointed in after the Vegas series.

"We go back to the first day of training camp, our players came in with the right frame of mind and they knew they had something to prove, they knew they had to be better," he said before Game 3. "And that's the attitude we played the whole year with. When things didn't go our way, we lost a couple in a row, we bounced back pretty quickly because of that resiliency and because of that commitment. So the team's far more committed for 82 games, playing the right

way, how we want to play, than we were last year. Far more committed to that. And it showed, so that when we got into a couple of bad spells we came out of it, a little quicker than normal. And sometimes you come out of it but you're still not playing well, but we always came out of those bad spells playing well. So that goes back to the commitment the players have had from Day 1.”

Where was it on Day 200 of this Jets season?

Nowhere to be found in a third period that saw them notch just 10 shots on net in this crucial game.

That might seem like a good number over 20 minutes, but it's not nearly good enough when you have two power plays and a couple of extra minutes of six-on-five advantage to play with while chasing a three-goal deficit.

Over 60 minutes, Josh Morrissey had just one of Winnipeg's 26 shots on net. Ehlers and Kyle Connor each had three, though none of them were particularly threatening. And Mark Scheifele, who led the Jets in scoring during the regular season, had zero.

They are the Jets' best players, and all of them were held off the board in Game 4, just like three of four of them were in the game that saw them eliminated from the playoffs last season.

Scheifele insisted after this one that there were no parallels to draw between both experiences.

“It's completely different,” he said.

But it feels identical.

From top to bottom, the Jets are running out of answers.

Bowness didn't come up with any that made sense for this game. Inserting Axel Johnson-Fjallby to kill penalties but not using him for one second in that capacity was perplexing. Assembling his middle six in a way he hadn't at any other point this season was a head-scratcher, too. And Logan Stanley coming back in for injured defenceman Brenden Dillon certainly wasn't going to — and didn't — solve the Jets' puck-moving deficiency coming out of their own end.

Not even pulling Laurent Brossoit to give the Jets a six-on-four advantage when they were down by three goals and headed to the power play with 6:51 to go in the third period felt like something else entirely from Bowness. It felt like a lack of belief it would make a difference, even if he said he had hope at that point the players on the ice would score at five-on-four and give the team a better chance to come back without risking an empty-net goal against for any longer than they had to.

None of it matters now.

As Scheifele said, the Jets must take Game 4 and “flush it down the toilet.”

They have major adjustments to make and even if Dillon returns, it appears doubtful they'll have Vladislav Namestnikov available after a slapshot from the Jets' lone-goal scorer in the game, Nate Schmidt, hit him in the head and sent him to the hospital.

"Sometimes the adjustment is just be better at what you do," said Colorado coach Jared Bednar.

The Avalanche have done that and looked every bit like the team that won the Cup in 2022.

The Jets haven't, and they've looked exactly like the team that went gently into the night in 2023.

## **Canadian Press**

### **[Nichushkin's hat trick pushes Jets to brink as Avalanche leads series 3-1](#)**

By Canadian Press

Winnipeg head coach Rick Bowness referred to the term "self-inflicted" on six occasions Sunday after the Jets dropped a 5-1 decision to Colorado that left his team in must-win mode.

"You want to take penalties? You want to play a three-quarter ice game? You're playing right into their hands," a frustrated Bowness said in his post-game media availability.

The Jets have not had answers for the high-powered Avalanche offence, led by Valeri Nichushkin's hat trick in a playoff matinee at Ball Arena.

After outscoring Colorado 7-6 in the opener of the best-of-seven series, Winnipeg's big guns have essentially been silenced.

Now the team heads home looking to avoid elimination in Game 5.

"We've got to bring a different game come Tuesday," said forward Mark Scheifele, who was a minus-2 with one shot on net. "We've got to fix some things. We've got to change some things up."

Bowness confirmed lineup adjustments were coming for a team that has scored just five times over three straight losses. Defenceman Nate Schmidt had Winnipeg's lone goal Sunday.

Nichushkin, who iced the win with an empty-netter, scored twice on the power play in the second period. Nathan MacKinnon assisted on both goals.

"You take penalties and all of a sudden you lose all your momentum," Bowness said. "It's the penalties that took us out of the game again. It did. We lost our flow."

Artturi Lehkonen opened the scoring and Cale Makar, with a brilliant end-to-end rush, also scored for Colorado. Bowness pulled netminder Connor Hellebuyck after 40 minutes and replaced him with Laurent Brossoit.

"Just giving him a break," Bowness said of the decision. "That's not on him whatsoever. That's on the players in front of him."

There was a scary moment midway through the third period when Winnipeg forward Vladislav Namestnikov was hit in the head with a puck. Schmidt's slapshot from the point was deflected and caught his teammate in the side of the face.

Namestnikov was down for about a minute before skating off under his own power, trainers at his side and a towel pressed to his face to stop the bleeding. He was transported to hospital but no other details were available.

"It's scary," Scheifele said. "You never want to see that much blood, no matter what, no matter who it is. Especially a guy on our squad. That sucks. All you can do is hope and pray that he's OK."

With defenceman Brenden Dillon out after cutting his left hand at the end of a 6-2 loss in Game 3 on Friday night, Logan Stanley returned to the Winnipeg lineup. The Jets also added speedy forward Axel Jonsson-Fjallby for David Gustafsson.

The Avalanche made a change with AHL call-up Nikolai Kovalenko making his NHL debut. Forward Joel Kiviranta sat out.

Colorado came out flying in front of a vocal sellout crowd, firing nine shots at Hellebuyck over the first seven minutes.

The pressure was rewarded when Casey Mittelstadt won a puck battle over Stanley behind the net and slid it to an open Lehtonen, who fired in a wrist shot at 8:10.

The Jets seemed unsettled at the start and had difficulty moving the puck out of their own zone. Team rhythm improved after Schmidt picked the top corner on Alexandar Georgiev's blocker side to tie the game at 13:56.

Georgiev made a brilliant pad save to stone Namestnikov late in the first period.

Stanley's rough day continued early in the second period. He picked up a needless roughing penalty and was called for interference shortly after the Jets killed off his first minor.

The second call was negated a minute later as MacKinnon was penalized for knocking the stick out of Namestnikov's hands while driving to the net.

Colorado's top line of MacKinnon, Nichushkin and Mikko Rantanen was quiet over the first half of the game. That changed once Nichushkin tipped in a Makar point shot at 11:36.

Makar padded the lead moments later by weaving through the Winnipeg zone and beating Hellebuyck over the right shoulder at 15:03.

On Colorado's third goal of the period, Lehtonen deftly flicked a rebound across the crease for Nichushkin to tap in with 24 seconds left.

The Russian added his empty-netter with 12.4 seconds remaining for his first career hat trick.

"We've got to keep doing what we're doing," said Avalanche head coach Jared Bednar. "But the last (win) is always the toughest one to get. So we'll have to be better."

Colorado outshot Winnipeg 35-27.

*DILLON DAY TO DAY*



Bowness said he was hopeful that Dillon, who has three assists in the series, would be able to return for Game 5. He had 20 points (8-12) over 77 games in the regular season and three assists in the playoffs.

#### *COMING UP*

If Game 6 is necessary, it would be played Thursday in Denver. The series would shift back to Winnipeg on Saturday if it goes the distance.

#### **Denver Gazette**

### **[Avalanche's Valeri Nichushkin records first NHL hat trick in Game 4 win over Jets Avs lead series 3-1, travel to Winnipeg for Game 5 on Tuesday night](#)**

By Kyle Fredrickson

Valeri Nichushkin's redemption appears complete.

The embattled Avalanche forward scored his first NHL hat trick on Sunday in a Game 4 victory, 5-1, over the Jets in their first-round playoff matchup. Colorado, up 3-1, heads to Winnipeg for Game 5 on Tuesday night with a chance to clinch the series.

The quiet-spoken Russian declined to discuss his big performance — multiple times — in the Avs dressing room.

However, moments after the game ended, Nichushkin briefly took the microphone to address a sellout Ball Arena crowd.

"I feel amazing," Nichushkin said. "I want to say one thing. Thank you, guys. We love you."

He's entered the Avs record books this postseason.

Artturi Lehkonen and Nichushkin are just the third and fourth players in franchise history to score in each of their team's first four playoff games, joining Michel Goulet ('85) and Nathan MacKinnon ('22). Nichushkin amassed six goals over that span.

On Sunday, he scored twice on the power play, deflecting a Cale Makar rocket and a net-front wrister assisted by Lehkonen. Nichushkin closed the afternoon with an empty netter facilitated by Mikko Rantanen.

"Val is a beast," forward Casey Mittelstadt said. "Especially tonight, he's all over the puck and making big-time plays scoring big-time goals for us all series. He's been an absolute beast.

Lehkonen added, "We all know what a great player he is, and it's hard to stop the big man."

Nichushkin is a playoff catalyst just 12 months after being a playoff blunder.

Last year, he missed four games in the Avalanche's first-round series loss to the Kraken after a well-documented incident at the team hotel. Nichushkin declined to elaborate on why a severely intoxicated woman was discovered in his room by Seattle police. No charges were filed and the league did not investigate. Nichushkin returned to play this season but entered the NHLPA's

player assistance program in January to “address my issues and prevent any negative outcomes once and for all.”

Nichushkin spent 40-plus days in the program before returning to the lineup.

“He's doing great. He really is,” coach Jared Bednar said. “So, that's number one. You want guys to be in good mental health and taking care of themselves and he's doing that. To be fair, he was playing really well when he wasn't in great mental health. ... You want your guys feeling great and at ease away from the rink. You want them to be having fun when they're coming to (work), and they'll be more productive. And he's certainly doing that.”

Goaltender Alexandar Georgiev said, “I'm super happy for him. It feels like he's in a good place right now. Everybody has been supporting him the whole time. Just trying to get him back. He's an incredible player, awesome guy, and I'm really happy things are clicking for him. He always works so hard. Good to see him get rewarded.”

Nichushkin is living up to the eight-year contract extension he signed with the Avalanche following their magical Stanley Cup season. He's short on words, long on actions. The Avs are glad Nichushkin is back.

“I'm proud of him,” forward Yakov Trenin said.

### [Avalanche vs. Jets: 3 takeaways from Colorado's Game 4 win](#) [Avs lead series 3-1, travel to Winnipeg for Game 5 on Tuesday night](#)

By Kyle Fredrickson

The Avalanche defeated the Jets, 5-1, Sunday afternoon in Game 4 of their first-round playoff matchup.

Here are three takeaways from Ball Arena with Colorado taking a 3-1 series lead.

#### *One more victory*

The evidence is clear after four games: Colorado is the better team in this series. Now, the Avs need one more win to advance with Game 5 set for Tuesday night in Winnipeg. The Avalanche imposed their will in Game 4. They dominated the shots margin (34-26), scored two power play goals, and Alexandar Georgiev shined in net (again). It won't be easy to close this series out in a hostile road environment. But the Jets simply look out of gas.

#### *Makar's moment*

Cale Makar scored the most impressive highlight-reel goal of the series with an unassisted breakaway in the second period. Makar went coast-to-coast, swerved through multiple defenders, corralled the puck off his body in transition, and ripped a wrist on the move to beat Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck. Makar leads the Avalanche with eight points (two goals) this postseason. He might not win the Norris Trophy this year. But Makar is playing like the world's best defenseman right now.

#### *No. 62 & No. 13*

Artturi Lehkonen and Valeri Nichushkin are rolling this postseason with a goal in every game. Nichushkin scored a hat trick on Sunday (two on the power play, one empty netter) reaching six playoff goals. Lehkonen has always embraced the spotlight, including the Cup-winning goal in

Game 6 of the Stanley Cup Finals in Tampa Bay. The second line — Lehtonen, Casey Mittelstadt and Zach Parise — has been critical to the Avalanche's early success early this postseason. This team is deep.

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### *Avalanche 5, Jets 1*

*What happened:* Colorado rolled the Jets in all phases to sit one win away from advancing into the second round.

*What went right:* Artturi Lehtonen opened the scoring with a behind-the-net feed from Casey Mittelstadt. Colorado scored three unanswered goals in the second period — Nichushkin (twice) and Cale Makar — to lead 4-1. Nichushkin scored an empty netter with 12.4 seconds left for a hat trick.

*What went wrong:* Winnipeg tied the game, 1-1, with a Nate Schmidt wrister on the rush in the first period. Colorado challenged for offside the officials confirmed the goal.

*Between the pipes:* Alexandar Georgiev made 24-of-25 saves. Winnipeg's Connor Hellebuyck stopped 26 of Colorado's 30 shots on goal. He got pulled for Laurent Brossoit, who made 4-of-4 saves.

*Roster update:* Nikolai Kovalenko made his NHL debut and replaced Joel Kiviranta in the lineup. Kovalenko slotted on the third line beside Ross Colton and Miles Wood.

*What's next:* The Avalanche face the Jets, 7:30 p.m. Tuesday at Canada Life Centre for Game 5 of their first-round playoff series.

### ***Beaten and bruised: Jets players, coach reflect on falling behind 3-1 to Avalanche***

By CARSON FIELD

The Winnipeg Jets walked into the tunnel beaten, bruised and bummed after their 5-1 loss to the Colorado Avalanche on Sunday.

The four-goal loss was their third in a row. They are one game away from elimination, as the Avs lead the series 3-1.

"We always have some stretches where we play very well and then we get stretches where we don't play the way we should be playing," Jets forward Nino Niederreiter said. "They came out better out of the gates than we did and that's something we need to change."

Winnipeg had full control of the Avalanche in the regular season. The Jets went 3-0 against Colorado, winning two of those at Ball Arena.

The Jets were the Avs' kryptonite in the first three meetings. But they've been the Avs' fuel in the playoffs.

"They're a fast team," Winnipeg forward Mark Scheifele said. "They keep you on your toes, and clearly they've made those adjustments from the regular season."

Winnipeg narrowly won a high-scoring game in Game 1. But since then, the Jets have been outscored 16-5.

The team's frustration showed on the ice.

Winnipeg committed four penalties, and the Avs scored on two of them. This came after several players on both teams were involved in a helmets-off brawl to end Game 3 on Friday.

"You give them that many chances, we don't get those chances until later in the game, it's tough," Scheifele said. "We weren't forechecking as five, we weren't connected, and they made adjustments, we didn't.

"Obviously, some of them I don't think we like that much."

The fatigue was also noticeable. Connor Hellebuyck, the odds-on favorite to win the Vezina Trophy, was pulled in the third period.

Jets coach Rick Bowness said that decision was made to "give him a break" before Game 5.

"Just too much time in there having to make save after save," Bowness said. "That's not on him whatsoever. That's on the players in front of him."

The Jets were also beaten, physically. Defenseman Brendan Dillon missed Sunday's game due to a lacerated hand, which he injured in Friday's end-of-game brawl.

Forward Vladislav Namestnikov took a puck to the face in the third period Sunday, creating a pool of blood on the ice and forcing him to leave the game. Namestnikov visited a local hospital after the game, per Bowness.

"You never want to see that much blood, no matter what, no matter who it is. Especially a guy on our squad," Scheifele said. "All you can do is hope and pray that he's OK. That's a scary one."

The faces of Scheifele and Niederreiter were long as they approached the podium for postgame media availability. But that's not a demeanor they plan on keeping.

A loss in Game 5 on Tuesday — in Winnipeg — would end the Jets' season.

For the Jets to keep their season alive, their effort will have to be more like their three regular-season games against the Avalanche.

"We've got to wash this," Scheifele said. "Flush it down the toilet and be excited to play in front of our amazing fans in Winnipeg and bring a better game and a more complete game through and through and get excited for that one."

## **Winnipeg Free Press**

### **[They've come undone](#) [Jets losing their focus, taking dumb penalties](#)**

By: Ken Wiebe

To call it an unravelling might be too polite.

To say the Winnipeg Jets have come unglued and undisciplined in this opening round playoff series with the Colorado Avalanche is a massive understatement.

That the Jets had a parade to the penalty box in the second period on Sunday afternoon is a big part of the reason they've been pushed to the brink of elimination after a 5-1 loss to the Avalanche before a raucous crowd at Ball Arena.

Game 5 is set for Canada Life Centre on Tuesday, with a puck drop of around 8:50 p.m.

"Obviously, that power play is going to make you pay when you do that," Jets centre Mark Scheifele told reporters in Denver. "They're a fast team. They keep you on your toes and clearly they've made those adjustments from the regular season, and we just let that get away from us, and lost our composure a little bit in that second period, and it cost us."

With the contest tied 1-1, the Jets took four minors in the second period and the Avalanche scored on two of them — adding an unassisted end-to-end marker from Cale Makar to put an exclamation point on what has turned into a mostly one-sided affair against a Central Division rival.

The Jets' penalty kill has been a problem for much of the season, residing in the bottom third of the NHL for the majority of it.

That hasn't improved during the Stanley Cup playoffs, where the Jets have now allowed the Avalanche to score six times in four games — and another just after a penalty to Neal Pionk expired in Game 3.

Another issue for the Jets is that several of these minor penalties are of the undisciplined and avoidable variety.

"That's what I mean, self-inflicted," said Jets head coach Rick Bowness. "Listen, (the Avalanche) are playing great, coming at us with a ton of speed, no question. But we seem to be able to handle it fine in the second half of the first period. We play like that, that's the way we want to play. Penalties took us out of the game."

Sunday's list of minors included an interference call on Jets defenceman Logan Stanley for knocking down Valeri Nichushkin when he didn't have the puck and a roughing minor to Stanley for getting tangled up with Brandon Duhaime behind the net in the defensive zone.

A holding call on Vladislav Namestnikov just past the midway point of the second period and a roughing call against Nino Niederreiter for putting a headlock on Avalanche defenceman Sean Walker in the offensive zone with just over a minute to go in the middle frame led to power play markers for Nichushkin, who is up to six goals in the series after notching his first playoff hat trick.

"It's tough to say. You want to go in for a hit and obviously the elbow was a little too high and they made the call," said Niederreiter. "I mean, it sucks that they scored but we've got to look forward to the next game and that's what we've got to change."

The Avalanche are going to create enough opportunities for penalties to be taken with their speed, so giving them additional chances with the man-advantage isn't a recipe for success.

One of the reasons that Stanley was brought back into the lineup after the hand injury to Brenden Dillon was to assist on the penalty kill, but that's difficult to do when you're in the box serving a pair of minors.

Prior to the game, Bowness said that part of the reason he brought Axel Jonsson-Fjallby into the lineup up front for David Gustafsson was to assist with the penalty kill because of his speed, but he didn't see any time with that unit.

Bowness said after the game that had more to do with the Avalanche scoring on their final two opportunities and liking the way the Jets' handled the first two situations.

One of the ways to compensate for a leaky penalty kill is to even things out on the power play, but that hasn't transpired to this point.

Special teams are always important in a series and right now, the Jets are losing that battle by a significant margin (7-2), though the lone shorthanded marker was scored with the net empty in Game 3 when the Jets were on the power play and enjoying a 6-on-4 advantage late in the game.

The Jets scored once on the power play (1-for-2) in Game 1, then once in Game 3 but they were zero-for-four on Sunday afternoon and they didn't generate a whole lot of quality looks when they were trying to get back into the contest until their final man-advantage.

Through four games, the Jets are now 2-for-11 (18.2%) with the power play and operating at 57.1% efficiency while shorthanded.

Coaches are generally looking for the total of the power play and penalty killing efficiency to eclipse 100 and right now, the Jets are stuck at 75.3.

So while there are a number of areas the Jets will need to be better in if they hope to force another trip back to Denver, being more disciplined and doing a better job with both the man-advantage and while shorthanded would go a long way toward accomplishing that.

### **[Jets hanging on by a thread](#)** **[Avalanche storm to 5-1 victory in Game 4](#)**

By: Mike McIntyre

DENVER — No structure. No discipline. No answers. No chance?

If they gave out a Stanley Cup for self-inflicted wounds, the Winnipeg Jets would be the heavy favourites, no question. But when it comes to the things that actually lead to winning meaningful hockey games, this group looks like pretenders, not contenders.

Take Sunday's disaster here in Denver, an ugly 5-1 loss that has them heading home with their season hanging by a thread.

“Wanna take penalties. Wanna play a three-quarter ice game? You’re playing right into their hands,” a frustrated and clearly perplexed coach Rick Bowness said in the media room at Ball Arena.

Sure, they talked a good game prior to puck drop about all the things they needed to be better at. Then they went out and did the polar opposite.

After taking the series opener last Sunday, Winnipeg has dropped three straight games by a combined score of 16-5. Now, a Jets team that looks overmatched and underprepared for a faster, smarter opponent must find a way to win three straight elimination games, starting Tuesday at Canada Life Centre.

*1) Pushing all the wrong buttons:* This was not Bowness’ finest hour behind the bench. Let us count the ways.

With Brenden Dillon unavailable due to suffering a skate cut to his hand, Logan Stanley was put back in the lineup in his place. Colin Miller, obtained at the trade deadline, continues to be passed over, appearing in just five regular-season games and no playoff games despite being a better skater and puck-mover than Stanley.

It’s safe to say this decision backfired. Stanley turned the puck over in his own zone during a first-period shift, handing it directly to Casey Mittelstadt who fed Arttur Lehkonen for the opening goal at 8:10.

After Nate Schmidt tied the game later in the frame, Stanley got the parade to the penalty box started by taking two straight minors in the second for roughing and interference. Vlad Namestnikov (holding) and Niederreiter (roughing) would follow later in the period, with Colorado’s potent power play converting on both.

Bowness inserted Manitoba Moose callup Axel Jonsson-Fjallby into the lineup, saying he wanted to utilize his speed on the penalty kill. Yet Jonsson-Fjallby played a total of zero seconds on the PK Sunday, which ultimately went 2-for-4 and played a big part in the loss, just as it did in Friday’s implosion.

Following the game, Bowness talked about the need to find more offence for his group, explaining why he shuffled everything up in the third period including Jonsson-Fjallby — who has 10 career goals in 99 games — up on the second line with Sean Monahan and Tyler Toffoli.

Yet Cole Perfetti, who had 19 goals during the regular season, was a healthy scratch for a third straight game.

Another head-scratcher came with the Jets trailing by three and on the power play with just under seven minutes remaining. For some reason, Bowness opted not to pull his goaltender for an extra attacker in what was essentially a must-score scenario, only doing that with just under three minutes to play when it was much too late.

In a playoff series filled with counter-measures, it would appear Colorado’s Jared Bednar, who won the Stanley Cup in 2022, is leaving Bowness in the dust.

2) *Troubling signs*: Not only do the Jets look like a group that doesn't have a clue, they sound like one, too. Bowness, Niederreiter and Mark Scheifele all spoke post-game, and nothing that came out of their mouths should inspire confidence that a comeback could be in the cards.

"Very far," was Niederreiter's blunt answer to a question about how close his team is to playing its best game. "We always have some stretches where we play very well and then we get stretches where we don't play the way we should be playing."

That would be troubling enough during the regular season, where there's plenty of time left to get back on track, but playoffs are the ultimate test, and the Jets are flunking big-time.

"I think we've got to change our game plan. We have to make sure we don't feed into their game. I think that's what's happening," said Niederreiter.

Scheifele made repeated references to a lack of adjustments from his team, which some might interpret as a veiled shot at the coaching staff. Asked about Scheifele's comments, Bowness responded with the following:

"Well, first thing is you have to stay out of the penalty box and then the penalty kill has to do their job. Second thing is we have to stop turning the puck over. Again, those things are self-inflicted. You want adjustments? Stay out of the box. Manage the puck better and go from there."

As for that lack of discipline, how can a team continue to burn itself so badly? It was the same story in the third period Friday when the Jets took five straight minors and gave up two goals (and a third right after a power play expired).

Bowness didn't seem to have a solution other than stating the obvious.

"Our issues are self-inflicted. You saw us play the right way for 10 minutes in the second half of the first period. You take four penalties, you turn the puck over. That's exactly how they want to play. The issues are self-inflicted," he said.

3) *Stars not getting it done*: Colorado's best and brightest keep coming up big. Valeri Nichushkin had a hat trick (the final one into an empty net) and now has six goals in the series. Defenceman Cale Makar scored a spectacular end-to-end goal and now leads the Avalanche in scoring with eight points (two goals, six assists). Lehtonen (four goals, three assists), Nathan MacKinnon (two goals, five assists), Mikko Rantanen (six assists) and Mittelstadt (one goal, four assists) have all produced big-time.

Unfortunately for Winnipeg, their best players were anything but. Go up and down the list — Scheifele, Toffoli, Monahan, Niederreiter, Kyle Connor, Nikolaj Ehlers and Gabe Vilardi can all be difference-makers, but were far too quiet for a game of this magnitude.

Debate who's on the fourth line and third defence pairing all you want, but if you're highest-paid players don't come through, you don't have much of a chance.

4) *Hellebuyck hung out to dry*: Goaltending has been a big storyline in this series, and not the way anyone imagined. While Alexandar Georgiev has rebounded nicely after a tough first game, Connor Hellebuyck has been lit up like a Christmas tree.



Hellebuyck was pulled after 40 minutes, giving up four goals on 30 shots.

“Give him a break,” Bowness said of the hook. “Just too much time in there having to make save after save. Just giving him a break. That’s not on him whatsoever. That’s on the players in front of him.”

He’s now been beaten 19 times on 146 shots through 11 periods of action, which are shocking numbers for the Vezina Trophy favourite.

Of course, the team in front of him hasn’t helped matters much with no sign of the tight defensive structure that earned them the William Jennings Trophy during the regular season for surrendering the fewest goals.

Laurent Brossoit stopped all four shots he faced in the final period, with Colorado content to sit back and nurse its sizable lead.

*5) Here we go again?* Puck drop for Game 5 Tuesday is set for 8:30 p.m. A loss and this would be the second straight year the Jets drop four straight to be ushered out of the first round.

“The only thing that matters is winning Tuesday night. There’s your pushback, see how hard we go. We win Tuesday, we go from there. That’s all our focus right now is that,” said Bowness.

If the Jets win, they would force a Game 6 on Thursday in Denver. Game 7, if necessary, would be held Saturday in Winnipeg.

“We’ve got to wash this,” said Scheifele. “Flush it down the toilet and be excited to play in front of our amazing fans in Winnipeg and bring a better game and a more complete game through and through.”

### **[Good thing Jets brought doc on trip Namestnikov leaves game after taking slapshot to face](#)**

By: Mike McIntyre

DENVER — The Winnipeg Jets brought their head team physician on the road with them to Denver, an extra precaution for the playoffs that doesn’t typically happen in the regular-season.

That turned out to be a good move, considering Dr. Peter MacDonald ended up being pressed into duty for both games over the weekend.

On Sunday afternoon, it was for veteran forward Vlad Namestnikov, who took a deflected Nate Schmidt slap shot directly in his face during the third period. He was motionless at first, a pool of blood forming beneath him, as players on both teams and officials frantically waved for medical help.

“It’s scary. You never want to see that much blood, no matter what, no matter who it is. Especially a guy on our squad,” said forward Mark Scheifele.

“That sucks. All you can do is hope and pray that he’s OK. That’s a scary one. Just got to pray for him.”

A stretcher was brought out but ultimately not needed as Namestnikov, clearly woozy and in distress, was helped off the ice and taken through the Colorado Avalanche bench and down the tunnel. Denver area paramedics then took him by ambulance to a nearby hospital as the game continued.

"Vladdy is at the hospital being looked at right now," coach Rick Bowness said following the game. "That's all I have until we get a report from what they see, what is wrong."

On Friday night, it was defenceman Brenden Dillon who needed urgent care after suffering a gruesome skate cut to his hand during a post-game melee. The injury ended up looking a lot worse than it was, with no damage to the muscle or tendons. However, Dillon was forced to miss Sunday's game.

"We're hoping that he plays (Game 5) on Tuesday," said Bowness.

"Fortunately, there is no damage at all. But unfortunately, there are a lot of stitches holding it together, so our doctors are a little hesitant to put him back in this quickly. If you asked him he'd play. He'd just tape the whole hand up and play. He has that much desire. But he's out today and we're hoping for Tuesday."

Seeing a teammate go down with a frightening injury is becoming the norm for this group in the playoffs. Who can forget the sight of forward Morgan Barron suffered a skate cut to his face last year against the Vegas Golden Knights. That's one of the reasons the Jets now take every precaution at this time of year

"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," said captain Adam Lowry.

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

Barron has yet to appear in this series due to a lower-body injury suffered late in the regular-season. He's now joined on the sidelines by Dillon and Namestnikov. That is forcing Winnipeg to use its depth, with some further tweaking likely necessary on Tuesday night.

Forward Cole Perfetti, who had 38 points (19 goals, 19 assists) in 71 regular-season games, would seem like the obvious choice to come in, especially with the Jets starving for offence. David Gustafsson, who played the first two games, and Rasmus Kupari were the other healthy scratches on Sunday.

"We'll make some lineup changes," is all Bowness would offer.

## **Winnipeg Sun**

### **[FRIESEN: Winter wonder, April also-ran: Jets not built for this time of year](#)**

By Paul Friesen

They said they had something to prove after what happened last year.

This was the game to prove it.

They wanted to force whatever anonymous player called them frauds late in the season to eat his words.

This was the game to do it.

And that “no push-back” they showed in surrendering to Vegas 12 months ago, the meek bowing-out that so disgusted coach Rick Bowness?

Game 4 against Colorado was the day for the Winnipeg Jets to push back.

The thing is, they did push. I didn't see a team that quit.

But the result, a 5-1 loss that has them on the brink of another early playoff exit, signals something that might be as disturbing as last year's meek response.

Watching the Avalanche win puck battles, footraces and actually play a more smothering and physical game leaves one growing realization: the Jets just aren't a team built for a Stanley Cup chase.

A winter wonder, an April also-ran.

Too many non-impact players. Their finesse needs more edge.

Centre Mark Scheifele, known more for providing offence in games than insight after losses, came through with some of the latter on Sunday.

“There's clear differences in their game compared to the regular season,” Scheifele said of the Avs. “They're playing fast. Their D are moving pucks. They're moving to areas quicker than we are, and it almost seems like it's almost like endless, over and over and over, and we're not able to get that puck stopped.”

Scheifele sounded as overwhelmed as his team has looked.

While Colorado has found a playoff gear, the Jets haven't. In fact, they've downshifted.

The team that won the Jennings Trophy for fewest goals against over 82 games has given up 22 in its last four – and scored just five in its last three.

“They battle hard,” Scheifele said.

His team, not hard enough.

“They make it hard to get to their net,” No. 55 pointed out.

The Jets don't make it nearly hard enough to get to theirs.

Through two periods, Colorado once again doubled them in shots, building an insurmountable lead.

Scoring chances were no closer, and for the second straight game penalties sunk them.

“We’ve got to make it a lot harder on them to get that much O-zone time,” Scheifele said. “Because when you get tired that’s when penalties happen.”

If the Jets can’t do it consistently through four games, there’s no reason to believe they can start now.

While players don’t usually critique their own team, you can usually tell what they feel is missing by how they describe the opponent.

Forward Nino Niederreiter described the Avs as a well-structured team that doesn’t panic.

Structure was supposed to be the Jets’ strength, panic a stranger.

Instead, the moment just seems too much, the penalties a symptom of their overwhelmed state.

The other interesting thing from Scheifele’s post-game thoughts: his team’s lack of adjustments.

“We had a good regular season against them and they made adjustments and we haven’t,” Scheifele said. “We’ve got to bring a different game come Tuesday. We’ve got to fix some things. We’ve got to change some things up.”

That sounded like a plea to his coach, one echoed by Niederreiter.

“We’ve got to change our game plan,” Niederreiter said. “We’ve got to make sure we don’t feed into their game.”

Presented with his players’ views, Bowness was blunt.

“You want adjustments? Stay out of the box,” he said. “Manage the puck better and go from there.”

None of that sounds like a team with a whole lot of hope.

Everything done in the regular season has come undone, while things that were always flaws continue to be.

Their penalty killing, for instance, was bad to start the season.

It’s been worse to finish it.

Bowness dressed Axel Jonsson-Fjallby to help with it, then didn’t play him for a single minute of it.

Those screaming that Cole Perfetti should have been in the lineup instead will likely get their wish for Game 5 back in Winnipeg on Tuesday.

But a small, young, 22-year-old isn’t going to be the answer, any more than the trade-deadline acquisitions have been.

The Jets need to find an ingredient within.

One that may not exist.

They can still prove the naysayers wrong, show they're not frauds, by forcing this series back to Denver, and beyond.

After the season they've had, they deserve that chance.

It doesn't bode well, though.

We'll leave you with a stat that perhaps says it all.

The last five times this team has faced elimination, it's buckled under each time.

### **[BILLECK: Jets' players shouldn't bear brunt of blame amid puzzling coaching decisions](#)**

By Scott Billeck

If the Winnipeg Jets had a third foot, they'd also fire a bullet point-blank into that.

Self-inflicted? Without a doubt.

But head coach Rick Bowness owns just as much of the blame as he levied onto his players following his team's 5-1 loss in Game 4 on Sunday afternoon.

He quickly identified the problems that led to Winnipeg's demise at Ball Arena, a third straight loss in the best-of-seven first-round series against the Colorado Avalanche.

Discipline, puck management and poor penalty killing have plagued the Jets in this series.

"You saw us play the right way for 10 minutes in the second half of the first period," Bowness told reporters in Denver. "You take four penalties, you turn the puck over. That's exactly how they want to play. The issues are self-inflicted."

But these issues are nothing new to this team, are they?

Aside from being a relatively tame team, averaging just over eight penalty minutes per game in the regular season, the Jets have gifted pucks and killed penalties inefficiently all year.

They didn't just suddenly start doing it against Colorado after beating up on them three times during their 82-game slate.

The Jets were way down the list in 21st place on the kill, allowing a goal nearly 25% (77.1%) of the time.

Against a team that scored on one of every four power plays they had (24.5%), the Avalanche have exploited one of the wounded parts of Winnipeg's game.

As the series has evolved, the Jets have remained stagnant while Colorado has adjusted.

Speaking of not adjusting, Winnipeg's power play is now 2-for-11, or 18.2%, down slightly from their 18.8% mark in the regular season.

Winnipeg was 0-for-4 in Game 4, generating just four shots.

Looking back, Winnipeg's 7-6 win in Game 1 has been the exception to the rule. The Jets went shot for shot with Colorado in that game, feasting on brutal goaltending.

Colorado has since grown quicker and more stout defensively, and their goaltending has improved.

"You want adjustments? Stay out of the box," Bowness said. "Manage the puck better and go from there."

Seems simple. But it's clear his players can't do that.

Perhaps a better question is, what is the coaching staff doing to fix it?

At the deadline, they received reinforcements, including a second-line centre, a top-six scoring winger, and a depth defenceman.

You have your pieces, and coming into the playoffs, minus Morgan Barron, the Jets had a healthy contingent to work with.

Losing Brenden Dillon to a gruesome hand injury in a melee after Game 3 ended and Vladislav Namestnikov to a puck to the head in Game 4 doesn't help.

Then again, Bowness sat Logan Stanley in favour of Nate Schmidt in Game 3 and didn't turn to Colin Miller, that depth deadline addition with his 40 games of playoff experience, in Game 4 with Dillon out, electing instead to go back with Stanley.

On that note, where is Cole Perfetti?

Too slow? Too small?

Toss out any excuse you want, but the kid sure knows how to defend and manage the puck. These are two things the Jets are finding very difficult at the moment.

"We'll make some lineup changes," is all Bowness would reveal when asked about Perfetti.

Bowness was once again trying to find consistency in his lines on Sunday. If you've been following along all season, it's been a problem from Day 1.

But he's still trying to bash a square peg through a round hole with his top line.

Mark Scheifele's had a good series, but the difference between him with Kyle Connor and Gabriel Vilardi and him between Connor and Nikolaj Ehlers was once again evident in Game 4.

The first iteration of the line had fairly even numbers across the board regarding possession, shots, chances, etc.

But once Ehlers was there, it was one-sided in favour of Winnipeg's adjusted top line.

"Just trying to find some consistency from the offence... trying to reignite the offence," Bowness said,

This came with the Jets down 4-1 and cruising toward being pushed to the end of the plank.

Now the Jets are there, one loss away from tee-time season. And no one will remember this team playing well for 10 minutes in a game they got slapped around in.

These changes could have come in Game 3, if not earlier. There is evidence to support their effectiveness.

Now, it might be too little, too late.

### **[JETS SNAPSHOTS: Another scary moment as Namestnikov takes puck to head; Games 2, 3 and 4 carbon copies; Time to give Perfetti a shot](#)**

By Ted Wyman

For the second straight game and the third time in the last two playoff series, the Winnipeg Jets had a player helped off the ice with a potentially serious injury on Sunday.

As though getting hammered by the Colorado Avalanche for the third straight game wasn't enough of a blow to the Jets, they also lost versatile centre Vlad Namestnikov after he was hit in the head by a teammate's slap shot.

It's not clear exactly where the puck hit Namestnikov, but he was taken to hospital and was still being evaluated when Jets coach Rick Bowness spoke after a 5-1 loss to the Avalanche in Game 4 of a first-round best-of-seven.

"That's all I have until we get a report from what they see, what is wrong," Bowness said.

Jets defenceman Nate Schmidt, who scored Winnipeg's only goal on Sunday, took the shot that wound up hitting Namestnikov. It may have deflected up off the stick of an Avalanche player.

The incident came just a couple days after Jets defenceman Brenden Dillon was cut on the hand during a post-game scuffle and was bleeding profusely as he left the ice surface. Dillon was stitched up and there was no structural damage to his hand, but he still missed Game 4 on Sunday at Ball Arena in Denver.

"It's scary," Jets centre Mark Scheifele told reporters in Denver when asked about Namestnikov. "You never want to see that much blood, no matter what, no matter who it is. Especially a guy on our squad.

"That sucks. All you can do is hope and pray that he's OK. That's a scary one."

Bowness said there's a chance Dillon will play on Tuesday as the Jets try to stave off elimination on home ice. Colorado now has a 3-1 lead in the series.

Last year Jets winger Morgan Barron left a large pool of blood on the ice after he was cut on the side of the face by a skate blade during a playoff game against the Vegas Golden Knights. He returned to play after receiving 75 stitches.

And the Jets have an unfortunate history with players getting hit in the head with pucks.

Centre Bryan Little's career was cut short after a slap shot caught him in his ear in 2019.

### *SAME STORY IN 3 STRAIGHT GAMES*

We'd spend a bunch of time telling you what happened in Game 4, but if you watched Games 2 and 3, you already know.

The Jets were overmatched again, were badly outshot, left their goaltender to fend for himself, took way too many penalties, and couldn't kill them off.

They also allowed three goals in an eight-minute span in the second period, turning a 1-1 game into a 4-1 lead for the Avalanche.

That should sound familiar, since they allowed three goals in six minutes in Game 3 to go from a 2-1 lead to a 4-2 deficit and gave up three 5:37 in Game 2 to go from a 2-1 lead to a 4-2 deficit.

In all three games, the Jets were in the fight until they suffered those devastating lapses, brought on by the relentless offensive attack of the Avalanche.

A reporter in Denver asked Jets forward Nino Niederreiter how close or how far his team is from the way it wants to play right now and the answer said it all.

"Very far," Niederreiter said. "We always have some stretches where we play very well and then we get stretches where we don't play the way we should be playing. They came out better out of the gates than we did and that's something we need to change."

The best defensive team in the NHL during the regular season, the Jets have allowed at least five goals in every game of this series, have given up 22 in total and have allowed 5.50 goals per game.

During the season they gave up a league best 2.42 goals per game.

It got so bad on Sunday afternoon that Bowness pulled Vezina Trophy frontrunner Connor Hellebuyck in favour of backup Laurent Brossoit, just to give his No. 1 goalie a rest.

Most people were surprised when the Jets allowed six goals in Game 1 of the series. The only difference between that game and the rest of the series was that the Jets won.

Otherwise, in terms of how the poorly Jets have defended and killed penalties, and how they've paraded to the box, all of the games have been carbon copies.

Here are some other observations from Game 4.



— It's time for the Jets to give Cole Perfetti a shot in this series. The young forward had 19 goals and 38 points in 71 games this season and has been a healthy scratch for four playoff games. Minor-league call-up Axel Jonsson-Fjallby even got in ahead of him on Sunday. The Jets need an infusion of offence, their power play could use a boost and, at this point, what do they have to lose? Give the kid a chance.

— Some stats that illustrate just how dominant Colorado has been in this series. Colorado's power play is working at 40%, the Jets at 18.2%. Colorado's penalty kill is at 81.8%, the Jets at 60%. The shots on goal in the series are 153-104 for the Avalanche and the shot attempts are 293-231 for Colorado. It has truly been a one-sided series.

— Some people didn't like it recently when I said Cale Makar is being compared to Bobby Orr around the NHL. Sacrilege, they said. Well, watching this series you can sure see why people are saying it. His end-to-end rush goal in the second period of Game 4 was the most convincing evidence yet. Makar also leads the Avs in playoff scoring with two goals and eight points and it seems everything he throws toward the net is a threat to either go straight in or get tipped in.

— Nathan MacKinnon (140 points in regular season) and Mikko Rantanen (104 points) have combined to score exactly two (two for MacKinnon, none for Rantanen) of Colorado's 22 goals in this series. They're not the reason Winnipeg is losing. The forwards who are killing the Jets are Val Nichushkin (six goals), and Artturi Lehkonen (four goals). Other players with two or more goals include Miles Wood, and Zach Parise. And people said Winnipeg's depth would be an advantage in this series.

— Can't imagine it would have made that huge of a difference with how the Jets were playing, but the refs missing a stick to the face of Sean Monahan just as Winnipeg was starting a power play was a tough blow. A full two-man advantage might have been just what the Jets needed to get back into the game in the third period.

— Even the Jets only goal of the net was contested by the Avalanche who challenged for off-side when Nate Schmidt beat Alexandar Georgiev over the blocker in the first period. It likely could have gone either way because Kyle Connor was so close to being offside, but since it was ruled to be onside on the ice, the NHL command centre upheld the goal. And the Jets got a power play, which they squandered at a time when they had a chance to grab some real momentum.

— Logan Stanley had an awful game, taking two penalties and showing that his footspeed is not there for a battle against a team like Colorado. Dylan Samberg had a tough time with the puck, Tyler Toffoli was invisible, and Sean Monahan takes way too long to make plays when he has the puck on his stick. There's no time for patience against a team like Colorado.

### **[GOALTENDER REPORT: Hellebuyck gets a rest amid Colorado low, Georgiev remains rock solid](#)**

By Ted Wyman

Finally, someone had mercy on Winnipeg Jets goaltender Connor Hellebuyck on Sunday.

After getting bombarded yet again by the Colorado Avalanche in Game 4, with his supposedly stellar defensive team crumbling in front of him, Jets head coach Rick Bowness finally decided to give him a rest.

“Give him a break,” Bowness said. “Just too much time in there having to make save after save. Just giving him a break. That’s not on him whatsoever. That’s on the players in front of him.”

Laurent Brossoit came in to play an uneventful third period as the Jets fell 5-1 to the Avalanche and now trail the first-round NHL playoff best-of-seven 3-1.

Hellebuyck has made some great saves in this series and the scores would surely be even more lopsided without him, but his reputation as a playoff goaltender is taking a beating.

Likely to win the Vezina Trophy as the NHL’s best goaltender after an outstanding regular season, Hellebuyck has been constantly under siege in the playoffs and has not been able to hold the fort.

He now has a 5.22 goals against average and .870 save percentage through four games of the series. His GAA is 17th among all goalies who have started games during the post-season and his save percentage is 15th. Considering there are only 16 teams in the post-season, those numbers look pretty awful.

He does lead the league in shots faced (147) by a wide margin (next most is 119) and his 127 saves are 20 more than any other goalie.

Like we’ve said throughout this series, it’s not all his fault because his team is playing an atrocious defensive game, but you can’t hide from the numbers either.

Simply, they are not good enough. The 19 goals allowed in this series ties a career-high for the most goals surrendered in any four-game span in his career, including regular season and playoffs.

At the other end, Alexandar Goergiev was thought to be an Achilles Heel for the Avalanche coming into the series, with a 3.04 GAA and .896 save percentage during the regular season.

But after stinking the joint out in Game 1 in Winnipeg, he’s been rock solid. Over the last three games he has a .938 save percentage and has allowed five goals for a 2.16 goals against average.

Georgiev stopped 26 shots on Sunday in earning his third straight win and has the Avalanche just one more victory away from advancing to the second round of the playoffs.

“It helps a lot when we are playing so well, spending so much time in the O-zone, less chances for me to need to make that big save,” Georgiev told reporters in Denver. “Just staying sharp and whenever the shots come, you’re sitting there waiting. When they come up with a good opportunity, just try to be sharp and be there.”

If only Hellebuyck had a similar luxury.

He’s almost sure to be back between the pipes as the Jets try to stave off elimination on Tuesday at Canada Life Centre and it would nice for him if just once the Jets could cut down on the crazy number of Colorado chances.

## ***PLAYER SPOTLIGHT: Ehlers makes his presence felt a little more but still not producing***

By Ted Wyman

There have been times during the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs when you would say Winnipeg Jets forward Nikolaj Ehlers has been invisible.

Sunday's Game 4 was not one of those times.

The veteran winger made his presence felt more than he did in the first three games of the series after finding himself with new linemates.

Ehlers did not record a point while starting on a line with Adam Lowry and Mason Appleton and finishing with Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor but he did have three shots on goal and a whopping 12 shot attempts. Five of those attempts were blocked and four more missed the net.

He also recorded five hits in the game and led the team in Corsi (72.2%) — he was on the ice for 13 shot attempts by his team and just five against at 5-on-5 — although the Jets had most of their consistent possession time when trailing by three goals in the third period.

With the Jets behind in the game — what else is new — Ehlers played 5:07 five-on-five time with Scheifele and Connor and the trio dominated in terms of possession, putting up nine shot attempts to one for the opposition.

With so much on the line in Tuesday's elimination game at Canada Life Centre, perhaps that line should stay together and see if it can keep generating offence.

Ehlers certainly seemed more engaged and offensively dangerous than he has while playing with Sean Monahan and Tyler Toffoli on the second line.

Ehlers, who had 25 goals and 61 points during the regular season, has just one assist in four playoff games. He's a minus-2, while averaging 15:32 of ice time per game and has 12 shots on goal in total in the series.

He also has just four goals and 13 points in 36 career Stanley Cup playoff games.

He has scored goals in just three of those 36 games, with two of his tallies coming in one game.

In talking to Ehlers, you can hear that he wants to prove himself badly in the playoffs, wants to win, wants to contribute to getting his team on a roll.

But so far in his career, the proof just hasn't been there.

He's not having much of a series so far (overall, it's a C-minus), but he gets a B-minus for his performance against the Avalanche on Sunday.

**TSN.ca**

***How much of the Jets' struggles can be blamed on Hellebuyck? (VIDEO)***

Connor Hellebuyck was pulled after just two periods in Game 4 and has now allowed 19 goals in the series. TSN Hockey analyst Martin Biron joins SportsCentre to explain how much of the Jets' struggles can be blamed on Hellebuyck and assess Valeri Nichushkin's impressive hat trick performance.

***Could there be some disconnect in the Jets' room about how to fix their issues? (VIDEO)***

After head coach Rick Bowness and the players offered differing sentiments in their post-game comments, could there be some disconnect in the Jets' room about how to fix their issues? What could Winnipeg's lineup look like heading into a must-win Game 5 at home amid injuries to some key players? TSN's John Lu joins SportsCentre to discuss.