

Winnipegjets.com

Practice Report - One period at a time

Lowry: "We know we need to play better than we've shown the last couple of games."

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG – It was a much-needed day off from the ice for the Winnipeg Jets on Monday.

Neal Pionk said it was an opportunity for a mental reset for the team.

After losing 5-1 to the Colorado Avalanche to fall behind in their opening round series 3-1, the Jets are hoping the mental reset will be the starting point of getting back on track.

Winnipeg finds itself in the exact same place as they were in a year ago, winning Game 1 and then losing three straight to face elimination in Game 5. This time though, the Jets will be on home ice and hoping to use their crowd to start chipping away at the Avs.

"Little victories and shift by shift. We can't look at the big picture right now," said Pionk.

"We just gotta win the first period, second period, third period and go from there."

Following the loss on Sunday, Jets head coach Rick Bowness said discipline and puck management is what cost his team Game 4. The veteran coach added that those factors will need to improve if his group is going to extend the series with a win on Tuesday.

"First and foremost, it's got to start with each individual's intensity and battle level. When you start losing those battles on the boards or net front, you end up chasing them and we're chasing them too much right now. It does start with that. It starts with our puck management, they're getting way too many chances off the rush because of our turnovers," said Bowness.

"So, those are individual mistakes that we have to clean up. Clearly, the discipline is (an issue). Taking four penalties in the second period (of Game 4) took us out of the game. We were happy with what we did at the end of the first and we did have some momentum going and then (took) back-to-back penalties and then a late one that took us right out of the game."

The Avalanche power play has taken over as well scoring two more big goals in Game 4 and is operating at 40% so far through 240 minutes.

"Kind of the little things like blocking shots, winning puck battles, too," said Pionk when asked about what needs to be tightened up on the PK.

"I'm sure we'll talk about some strategic things tomorrow morning but when it comes down to it, we got to work outwork their power play. They've been clicking pretty good right now."

Winnipeg won nine straight games (eight to close out the regular season and Game 1) and now has dropped three in a row. Jets captain Adam Lowry feels this is a tight knit group and they have to believe in one another.

"We know we need to play better than we've shown the last couple of games. There've been spurts where we've played better," said Lowry.

"You look at kind of Game 3, the first 40 minutes I thought we played a pretty solid game. But two-thirds of a game or a third of a game, that's not going to get it done against an elite team like the Avs."

HELLEBUYCK VEZINA FINALIST

For the second straight year, Connor Hellebuyck will be a Vezina Trophy finalist along with Sergei Bobrovsky of the Panthers and the Canucks Thatcher Demko. A four-time finalist, Hellebuyck won the Vezina in 2019-20, was runner-up in 2017-18 and finished third last season.

"He's been tremendous for us all year and I've said it before. I think he should be in the Hart conversation, he's so valuable to our team. Him and (Laurent Brossoit) are the backbone of our team, so they both had tremendous years," said Lowry.

"It's a nice nod to Connor to be recognized for the amount of work he puts in, (and) his stellar play all year. Maybe that's just the boost our team needs to go into Game 5 with a little optimism and a little positivity."

VLADDY UPDATE

Vladislav Namestnikov was hit in the face with a puck in Game 4 and went to hospital for treatment. He did not travel back with the Jets on Sunday.

"He has a fractured cheekbone. There's no orbital damage but they kept him overnight and he's on his way back," said Bowness.

"I sent him a text last night and he answered this morning and said he's feeling better."

Bowness added that Morgan Barron has yet to resume skating and Brenden Dillon is unlikely to play in Game 5.

"You know what a competitor Dilly is. We're not going to put him in harm's way, let's put it that way. He'd play with two broken hands if he could, if we let him. We'll make the right decision based on what's best for him," said Bowness.

"We're not going put him out there unless we're 100% sure there can be no more damage done."

NHL.com

**[Makar's play in Western 1st Round no surprise to Avalanche teammates
Defenseman has 8 points in 4 games; highlight-reel goal in Game 4 helped put
Jets on brink](#)**

By Tracey Myers

DENVER -- Cale Makar took control of the puck behind his net, the Colorado Avalanche defenseman losing it before quickly regaining control near Winnipeg Jets forward Tyler Toffoli.

He never broke stride, skated to the right circle and beat goalie Connor Hellebuyck on a jaw-dropping goal at 15:03 of the second period.

"I mean, it was a little bit of a lucky one. It was kind of bobbing around the net. They got a couple sticks on it, and I was lucky enough that it hit my shin pad or my pants," Makar said after the Avalanche's 5-1 win against the Jets in Game 4 of the Western Conference First Round at Ball Arena on Sunday.

"Our forwards kind of pushed back their [defensemen] pretty far, so gap-wise I just tried to carry it over the line and just tried to throw it at the net. A little bit lucky."

OK, maybe a tad lucky. But at the same time, Makar pulling off highlight-reel goals has become commonplace. His goal in Game 4 that gave the Avalanche a 3-1 lead was just the latest installment in a young NHL career full of memorable moments.

His work has helped put the Avalanche on the verge of the second round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs. They hold a 3-1 lead in the best-of-7 series and get their first chance to advance in Game 5 at Canada Life Centre in Winnipeg on Tuesday (9:30 p.m. ET; CBC, TVAS, SNW, ALT, ESPN).

Makar leads the Avalanche with eight points (two goals, six assists) in four games; only Edmonton Oilers captain Connor McDavid has more (10 points; one goal, nine assists). Makar is the second defenseman in NHL history with eight points through four playoff games multiple times (also in 2022), joining Hall of Famer Bobby Orr, who did it in 1971 and 1972.

He's been a big part of Colorado's production, which leads the NHL in the playoffs with 5.50 goals per game. The Avalanche led the League in the regular season with 3.68 goals per game.

"I don't think many of us are surprised anymore," Colorado defenseman Sean Walker said. "You kind of see him getting a head of steam and starting to attack guys, you know something special could happen every time. So, you're just kind of waiting for it to happen, right?"

"But I don't think there's really anyone else in the League that does it the way he does. Just such a good skater, such good hands, and then the way he can shoot the puck is with the best of them. So, it's really fun to watch."

Makar is on a six-game point streak (three goals, eight assists) dating back to the regular season, which began when he had a goal and an assist at the Vegas Golden Knights on April 14.

The 25-year-old's goal Sunday not only had social media buzzing but Makar's teammates as well, even if they didn't see it live.

"Saw it after on replay, and then I realized how good it was. And I think 'Taser' (Avalanche defenseman Devon Toews) said it yesterday, he's the best in the world," Avalanche forward Casey Mittelstadt said. "So yeah, pretty self-explanatory."

Makar has been a strong playoff performer since making his NHL debut with the Avalanche in the 2019 postseason, when he had six points (one goal, five assists) in 10 games. He has 73 points (18 goals, 55 assists) in 65 playoff games, and his 18 goals tie him with Sandis Ozolinsh for most in a postseason by a defenseman in Avalanche/Quebec Nordiques history.

"It's a blessing, really, to get to watch the best player in the League, best [defenseman] in the League go out there every night and do the things he does," Walker said. "So, I'd like to say I wish I could bring some of that to my game, but I think it's something that some guys have, some guys don't. And he's one of the guys that's got it."

Makar is one of the most dynamic players in the League on a team that has its share of them. The Avalanche, with whom he won the Stanley Cup in 2022, are in a position to try and get back there again this season.

But they're not getting ahead of themselves. The first step would be eliminating the Jets.

"It just goes back to the mentality of our team. I feel like we've been really good lately just in working well and also just staying right in the moment and not looking too far ahead," Makar said.

"It's the hardest game of the season when you've got to end a team's year. We've got to go into it with the same mindset and make sure that everyone is on the same page, because obviously they're going to give us everything they've got."

TSN.ca

[7-Eleven That's Hockey: Do the Avs have Hellebuyck rattled? \(VIDEO\)](#)

Vezina Trophy favourite Connor Hellebuyck has allowed at least four goals in every game and 19 in total in the Jets' series with the Avalanche. Does Colorado have Hellebuyck rattled? TSN Hockey analyst Cheryl Pounder joins That's Hockey host Gino Reda to discuss.

[7-Eleven That's Hockey: What's wrong in Winnipeg? \(VIDEO\)](#)

What has been the issue with Vezina candidate Connor Hellebuyck? Is it solely the goaltender's fault, or is the rest of the team also to blame for the Jets' situation? TSN's John Lu joins 7-Eleven That's Hockey host Gino Reda with more on Winnipeg's struggles and updates the status of Vlad Namestnikov.

Sportsnet.ca

[Connor Hellebuyck must be in Vezina form to save Jets' season](#)

By Eric Engels

WINNIPEG — If it seems unfair to ask Connor Hellebuyck to be perfect in order to keep the Winnipeg Jets' season alive on Tuesday, that's because it is.

But it's not asking too much of him to be more like the guy who'll run away with the award he was officially nominated for on Monday than the guy who's allowed the most goals through four games of these playoffs.

Hellebuyck may not add the Stanley Cup to his trophy case in June, but he's going to have a hard time looking at the Vezina he's sure to collect then if he doesn't come up with the biggest

save he's made since October. He's the consensus best goaltender in the NHL—ahead of Thatcher Demko and Sergei Bobrovsky, who were also nominated for sterling regular seasons between the pipes—and he'll struggle to digest appearing like an average one when it mattered most if that's how his season ultimately wraps.

Heavy, we know.

We can only imagine how the 30-year-old feels about it right now—and that's also because he ignored multiple requests from media to speak on Monday.

We don't know if Hellebuyck feels solely responsible for his .870 save percentage through this series, or if he's justifiably irked by how little a chance the team in front of him has given him to put up better numbers.

Is it both? Probably.

Could Hellebuyck have come up with more saves than he has so far against the Colorado Avalanche? Of course.

We're talking about the NHL's leader in goals saved above expected from October through mid-April, who suddenly ranks last in the category among all 23 goaltenders who have played even a second of playoff hockey. He'd be the last person debating he can be better.

But when you look at the shots that beat Hellebuyck in—and eventually chased him from—Sunday's Game 4, for example, you can't help but wonder how he'd have stopped three of four of them.

To think that the one from Cale Makar, which completed arguably the best individual effort of the playoffs so far, was the one Hellebuyck might like to have back is to know just how helpless he had to have felt in the end. It wouldn't have mattered that much had he stopped it, with the Jets only scoring one goal themselves while leaving the other players who have hurt them the most in this series wide open in the slot for goals.

Of the 10 Artturi Lehkonen and Valeri Nichushkin have scored in this series, none were easier to come by than the three they combined for before Laurent Brossoit took Hellebuyck's net for the third period of Sunday's game.

Still, the expectation at Canada Life Centre on Tuesday will be for Hellebuyck to turn water to wine.

Fair or not, that's what it might take.

But Jets fans should also demand for Mark Scheifele to make his own adjustments before calling on the coaching staff to make theirs, as he did on Sunday night.

He may have led this team in scoring during the regular season after securing the same seven-year, \$59.5-million contract extension Hellebuyck did. He may have put up five points through the first three games.

But Scheifele also failed to record a single shot on net in a game the Jets lost by four goals and took no ownership of that before pointing the finger elsewhere.

Jets fans should also ask more of Nino Neiderreiter, who had the audacity to say, “I think we’ve got to change our game plan,” rather than owning the untimely—and completely unnecessary—penalty he took as part of a rash that cost Hellebuyck his net and Winnipeg Game 4.

Jets fans should know Hellebuyck can be even better than the best version he’s ever presented of himself at any point of his career, and it won’t matter if Scheifele and Neiderreiter and everyone else on his team fail to look inward and be much better than what they’ve shown so far in this series.

Coach Rick Bowness has to do his part to help them counter Colorado’s speed, to help them find better routes to more efficient puck movement, to help them have clearer minds about sorting out the rush and killing plays before they ultimately cost the Jets goals, and he has to put the right players in—here’s looking at you, Cole Perfetti—and combine them in the right order.

But Bowness is absolutely right when he says, “You can make all of the adjustments that you want, if the intensity and everything else isn’t there it’s going to go for naught.”

He had to answer the tough questions reporters present at the Jets’ practice facility put to him on Monday.

Hellebuyck abstained and will have to let his play do the talking on Tuesday.

It won’t say enough if it resembles what it has so far—like it’s good but not nearly on par with how good it was to make him the Vezina favourite.

“Every great team has a great goaltender, and this guy is a great goaltender,” Bowness said. “He deserves (the nomination).”

Hellebuyck will have to be great to keep this Jets season going.

If they force him to be perfect, that might be asking too much.

[Jets' Vladislav Namestnikov suffered fractured cheekbone, not ruled out for Game 5](#)

By Associated Press

DENVER — Winnipeg forward Vladislav Namestnikov suffered a fractured cheekbone when a puck hit him on the left side of his face in Game 4 against Colorado, the team said Monday.

Jets coach Rick Bowness said that Namestnikov stayed overnight in Denver and was returning to Winnipeg on Monday. Bowness added there was no orbital damage to Namestnikov's eye. His availability for Game 5 on Tuesday was uncertain.

“I sent him a text last night and he answered this morning and said he’s feeling better,” said Bowness, whose team lost 5-1 on Sunday and trails the Avalanche 3-1 in the first-round series. “It could have been a lot worse.”

Bowness wasn’t ruling out Namestnikov possibly wearing a helmet with a protective cage.

“Listen, nothing would surprise me with Vladdy,” Bowness said. “Again, he’s a tough kid. That’s why we keep picking him up. He does a lot of good things. He’s a great teammate. His versatility helps, but it’s just toughness, mental toughness. I’ll never rule anything out.”

Namestnikov was trying to jump out of the way of a shot from teammate Nate Schmidt when the puck hit a stick and struck him. Namestnikov stayed down on the ice as trainers rushed out. He skated off with help and exited through the Avalanche bench in the third period. The 31-year-old Namestnikov had a towel pressed to his face.

“It’s scary,” Winnipeg teammate Mark 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. That’s a scary one. Just got to pray for him.”

Also Sunday, Nashville captain Roman Josi and Vancouver defenseman Tyler Myers each took pucks to the face in the first period of Game 4 of their first-round series.

Josi was struck near his right ear and skated only 4:53 of the first period. Nashville center Tommy Novak’s shot at the right circle hit Myers near his nose with 1:35 left. Myers dropped to the ice, and a trainer rushed out to put a towel to his face before going with him to the bench. Both players returned early in the second period.

For the Jets, it was the second scary situation against the Avalanche.

In Friday’s game, Jets defenseman Brenden Dillon suffered a deep cut on his hand that required stitches. Dillon was apparently cut by a skate blade during a scrum after the final horn. He skated toward the locker room holding his bleeding hand.

Dillon was ruled out Sunday and is considered day-to-day.

“We’re not going to put him in harm’s way, let’s put it that way,” Bowness said of Dillon’s possible availability for Game 5. “He’d play with two broken hands if he could, if we let him. We’ll make the right decision based on what’s best for him. We’re not going to put him out there unless we’re 100% sure there can be no more damage done.”

Game 5 between the Jets, who are down 3-1 in the series, and Avalanche is scheduled for Tuesday at 9:30 p.m. ET / 8:30 p.m. CT on Sportsnet and Sportsnet+.

[32 Thoughts Podcast | Discussing Winnipeg Jets & Colorado Avalanche series \(AUDIO\)](#)

Jeff Marek and Elliotte Friedman looked at the series which is currently 3-1 in favour of the Avs over the Jets. They looked at the results to date, the way the Avs have been able to gain the zone effortlessly, the post-game 4 comments, getting Cole Perfetti into the lineup and more. Starts at 23:32 and goes to 30:25.

[The Athletic](#)

[With Winnipeg Jets’ season at stake, Game 5 must be a story of pushback and pride](#)

By Murat Ates

To understand what's at stake for Winnipeg in Game 5 against Colorado, a single loss standing between them and another painful offseason, one must consider how far they've come.

It's easy to forget while watching Colorado dominate, but there's an alternate timeline in which the Jets aren't in the playoffs at all.

One year ago, the Jets were a captainless team with a new coach and a famously malcontent second-line centre. There was a realistic chance Winnipeg's offseason would end without its franchise goaltender Connor Hellebuyck or No. 1 centre Mark Scheifele. The idea of winning the Jennings Trophy as the league's top defensive team, finishing fourth in the NHL or dressing six 20-goal scorers was as outlandish as coming back from a 3-1 deficit.

Scheifele remembers the anxiety and stress he felt before signing his seven-year, \$8.5 million contract extension. He recently told *The Athletic* that it's difficult for him to reach back and feel the uncertainty of last summer's emotions.

"There's times I handled it well and there were times I didn't handle it very well at all," Scheifele said. "You get stuck in a thought and can't get out of it."

Scheifele explored new psychological approaches to his game while leaning heavily on his faith and family to process the anxiety he was carrying about his future. He's trying to tap into that same process now as the Jets' playoff lives are at stake.

"Every moment is a learning lesson in how to deal with it. When you change something up, that's when you show your maturity, you show you've actually learned from a mistake you made or the way you handled something," Scheifele said. "The biggest thing I've learned is to lean on people a little more — and not just keep it in and harbor it and just get angry. It's better to let it out and talk about it and talk about what's actually going through your brain. Then you're able to enjoy the moment that much more when the time comes."

Certainly, with the Jets down 3-1, Scheifele isn't feeling a ton of joy at the moment. He has let his emotions get the best of him in past press conferences, conveying a sense of tension that we've seen less of this season. His postgame comments after Game 4 were candid. He and Nino Niederreiter talked about the need for systemic adjustments, while Rick Bowness cited penalty trouble and poor individual execution — and all of these items ring true.

Winnipeg is being outplayed, outworked and outcoached, but the biggest issue is Colorado's quality — something it will take everyone working together to overcome.

"First and foremost, it's got to start with each individual's intensity and battle level. When you start losing those battles on the boards or net front, you end up chasing them and we're chasing them too much right now," Bowness told reporters in Winnipeg on Monday. "It starts with our puck management, they're getting way too many chances off the rush because of our turnovers. So, those are individual mistakes that we have to clean up. Clearly, the discipline is (an issue). Taking four penalties in the second period (of Game 4) took us out of the game."

It's not a short list.

If Winnipeg can't check off each item, though, the Avalanche will end the Jets' playoffs — potentially as soon as Tuesday night. Winnipeg has given up scoring chances to the Avalanche at an alarming rate — a worse rate than the NHL's worst team gave up during the regular season.

Colorado has backed Winnipeg's defencemen off with its neutral zone pace. Nathan MacKinnon has curled back and found second-wave attacks. Cale Makar leads the series in points, while Colorado's secondary scorers are outscoring Winnipeg's stars and its depth alike. The Avalanche have been so fast when they have the puck and so effective at recovering it when they don't that the Jets defenders have often looked overwhelmed.

The Avalanche have recovered so many dump-ins and so many of their own shots to lead the playoffs in shots, goals and expected goals per minute. They've taken away Jets outlet passes faster than Winnipeg's players have been able to adapt.

It's enough to create a nightmare-on-loop for Jets fans, matching last year's playoff loss to the Vegas Golden Knights: Win one, drop four, go home early. The Jets haven't followed a playoff loss with any amount of wins since 2020 and have now been dominated by the Avalanche en route to their 3-1 deficit.

"Every playoff series is different and every playoff year is different, teams are different," Adam Lowry said. "There's certainly going to be a narrative that that has happened (before) and the history backs it up. We're focused on this series with the Avalanche and how we get out of this and how we get the win in Game 5. That's all we can focus on."

Lowry's line with Niederreiter and Mason Appleton had perhaps the best third-line season of Jets 2.0 history. At this time last year, Lowry was an alternate captain and Niederreiter was scheduled to become a 2024 UFA. Niederreiter's contract extension wasn't as impactful without Scheifele's and Hellebuyck's extensions before him but it helped solidify Winnipeg as hard to play against. Vladislav Namestnikov is doubtful to play in Game 5 with a fractured cheekbone but was also a key signing, adding versatility to Winnipeg's roster.

The Jets could have bought out Blake Wheeler, lost the P-L Dubois trade and failed to keep Scheifele and Hellebuyck in the fold. Now Lowry is captain; Gabriel Vilardi, Alex Lafallo and Rasmus Kupari are Jets; and Scheifele and Hellebuyck offer two of Winnipeg's biggest comeback hopes.

Winnipeg still might not have enough quality to beat Colorado. A loss would probably hit fans hard, given all that Winnipeg accomplished during the regular season.

The Jets built a playoff team out of a long series of offseason question marks. Scheifele, Hellebuyck, Vilardi and the other depth they've maintained have a much better shot of extending the series than anyone would have guessed a year ago. Cole Perfetti is likely to help, too, if Bowness puts him in the lineup. If the goal is to be competitive over the course of Scheifele's and Hellebuyck's extensions, then Winnipeg needs Game 5 to be a story of pushback and pride; these Jets will need reasons to believe in themselves, whether their next game is Game 6 of the playoffs or Game 1 of next season.

Have they learned enough about themselves and each other? Have they figured out the right balance between systemic tweaks and individual execution?

“Listen, we can all say all the words in the world and say all of the right things,” Bowness said. “Our play (on Tuesday) night will dictate everything. It will. We can say this and make all the correct comments and tell you all of the things that you want to hear, but everything will be decided on what our eyes tell us. Not our ears.”

Winnipeg Free Press

Jets' injuries, poor play spark impending lineup changes

By: Ken Wiebe

Rick Bowness wasn't ready to show all of his cards, but the hints he offered left little to interpret.

With his team pushed to the brink of elimination, the head coach of the Winnipeg Jets conceded there would be changes to both the forward group and the defence corps, regardless of whether Brenden Dillon (left hand) is ready to return to the lineup or Vladislav Namestnikov makes what would be a miraculous recovery after taking a deflected puck to the face in the third period of Sunday's 5-1 loss to the Colorado Avalanche.

“There will be lineup changes. Let's put it that way,” said Bowness, who was asked a follow-up question about whether the moves would be limited to the injuries sustained. “Performance related.”

With that in mind, the door is open for forward Cole Perfetti to jump into the lineup for the first time since the final game of the regular season against the Vancouver Canucks.

“Nothing really changes for me. I'm just going to try to keep the same mindset of always being ready,” Perfetti said before the series began. “You never know when your opportunity is going to come, you never know when you're going to be called upon.”

Perfetti had 19 goals and 38 points in 71 games this season and is set to make his Stanley Cup playoff debut.

David Gustafsson is also expected to draw back in as the fourth-line centre, while Colin Miller is a possibility to suit up on defence.

Miller was limited to five games with the Jets after being acquired from the New Jersey Devils, but has 40 playoff games on his resume and is known as a good puck mover.

Brenden Dillon, who suffered a cut on his left hand at the end of Game 3, sounds like he's going to be a game-time decision.

“You know what a competitor (Dillon) is. We're not going to put him in harm's way, let's put it that way,” said Bowness. “He'd play with two broken hands if he could, if we let him. We'll make the right decision based on what's best for him. We're not going to put him out there unless we're 100% sure there can be no more damage done.”

Seeing Namestnikov get hit with the slapshot was scary.

“Honestly, it's terrifying,” said Jets captain Adam Lowry. “You hear the sound being so close to it and he goes down instantly and then there's the pool of blood. First and foremost, you're hoping

that it avoids his eye. You know there's going to be some damage. From all the reports, we still haven't seen him, but from all the reports he certainly avoided the worst."

Namestnikov was scheduled to fly to Winnipeg on Monday afternoon.

"He has a fractured cheekbone. There's no orbital damage but they kept him overnight and he's on his way back," said Bowness, noting forward Morgan Barron hasn't resumed skating and remains sidelined with a lower-body issue.

Hellebuyck nominated for Vezina

Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck was revealed as a finalist for the Vezina Trophy on Monday morning along with Thatcher Demko of the Vancouver Canucks and Sergei Bobrovsky of the Florida Panthers.

The award is voted on by the NHL general managers and will be announced later.

Hellebuyck was 37-19-4 this season while posting a 2.39 goals-against average and .921 save percentage and recording five shutouts in 60 starts. He also led the league in goals saved above expected, according to Money Puck and helped the Jets capture the William M. Jennings Trophy for allowing the fewest goals (199) in the NHL this season.

"I think we all kind of knew that was coming," said Lowry. "He's been tremendous for us all year and I've said it before. I think he should be in the Hart (Trophy) conversation, he's so valuable to our team."

Hellebuyck won the Vezina Trophy in 2019-20 and this is the fourth time he's been a finalist for the award.

"He's No. 1, for me. It's very well deserved," said Bowness. "Every great team has a great goaltender and this guy is a great goaltender. He deserves it. I just spoke with him about it and he's pretty excited. He's been outstanding all year long. Night in and night out, you know exactly what you're going to get from him. But in terms of the Vezina, there couldn't be a better nomination than him."

Jets' fate is in their own hands

Team on the brink needs to raise intensity and desire to keep season alive

By: Ken Wiebe

The Winnipeg Jets once again find themselves at the proverbial fork in the road where we'll find out if actions speak louder than words.

With the playoff undertaker lurking not-so-subtly around the corner, the Jets have an opportunity to stand up and be counted.

To take the first step in erasing the growing narrative that this core group can't get the job done when the lights are shining brightest.

Down 3-1 in this first-round matchup with a Colorado Avalanche club that is suddenly clicking on all cylinders, the Jets used Monday to lick their wounds and try to reset as they prepare for what is clearly the most important game of the season.

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

The Jets' lot in life is a difficult one, as no team likes to have zero margin for error.

Thanks to myriad issues, the Jets are in win-or-go-home territory for the first time this season and their resolve is about to be put to the ultimate test.

After capturing the first game of this best-of-seven by scoring seven times on 23 shots on goal against Alexandar Georgiev, the Jets haven't come close to putting together anything resembling a 60-minute game.

Their breakouts are disjointed and they've strayed so far from their structure that they have shown very few signs of being the team that allowed the fewest goals (199) in the NHL this season and won the William M. Jennings Trophy.

They've lacked discipline and it's come back to haunt them, with the Avalanche scoring six power play goals in 14 opportunities and scoring once more mere moments after a Jets' player came out of the penalty box but didn't have time to get back into the play.

Offensively, the Jets are having trouble getting to the blue paint and even worse, they're not generating many high-danger chances.

Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck, who received his fourth Vezina Trophy nomination Monday morning, hasn't been able to erase enough of the mistakes that are happening in front of him either.

Nobody had Hellebuyck allowing 19 goals through four games and sporting a goals-against average of 5.22 on their bingo card, though the support in front of him has been suspect.

It's been said countless times the Jets will have trouble having success if they don't receive above-average to elite netminding and clearly, Hellebuyck must find another level.

Plus, the presumed advantage in the depth department hasn't ended up being the case through four games either.

So, where do the Jets turn from here?

"Listen, we can all say all the words in the world and say all of the right things. Our play (on Tuesday) night will dictate everything. It will," Jets head coach Rick Bowness said Monday. "We can say this and make all the correct comments and tell you all of the things that you want to hear, but everything will be decided on what our eyes tell us (on Tuesday). Not our ears."

Truer words have never been spoken.

On a day when Bowness was left to answer again questions about adjustments and changing up the game plan, he reiterated his belief the most important battle the Jets are about to wage has a limited amount to do with Xs and Os and far more to do with intensity and determination.

“We’re not doing what we’re supposed to be doing and that’s not an adjustment. Let’s get back to doing what we’re supposed to be doing,” said Bowness. “The way we want to play, there are just certain areas of our game that are normally a strength and we’re not doing those things.”

While it’s true the Jets need to change some things Bowness is responsible for — whether that’s the lineup they deploy or the tactics they focus on — if his team doesn’t find a way to execute better and dig deeper, a long off-season is about to begin long before this group wanted it to.

“We’ve got to look in the mirror at ourselves as players and compete harder first and then we’ll go with the strategic things later,” said Jets defenceman Neal Pionk.

Jets captain Adam Lowry was asked about the season-long mantra of finding solutions, not looking for excuses coming in handy when faced with a daunting task like this one.

“Like I said, there’s areas of our game we need to clean up. There’s areas that we know need to be better. It’s not letting guys off the hook, it’s being accountable and finding ways to kind of stop some of their best players,” said Lowry. “Everyone in this room would agree that we all can play better and that’s what we’re going to look to do (on Tuesday).”

While it’s true this group doesn’t necessarily need to carry the weight of past playoff failures into Tuesday’s game, the problem with dismissing them outright is a good chunk of this core has been around for the majority of the disappointments that date back to the Western Conference final in 2018.

The odds of the Jets winning only one playoff series since that time would have been astronomically low, but here we are.

Five seasons later and the only time the Jets actually advanced past the first round was 2021, when they delivered three overtime wins in a four-game sweep over Connor McDavid and the Edmonton Oilers.

More concerning is the Jets haven’t won a single playoff game since suffering a loss in a series since 2020, when Winnipeg won Game 2 of the qualifying round matchup with the Calgary Flames after dropping the opener.

When facing elimination, the Jets are 0-5, dating back to the aforementioned Western Conference final.

Labels, while sometimes unfair, are often difficult to shed.

The truth is the Jets don’t have time to live in the past and lament the lost opportunities.

No matter how this series ends up, there’s one thing they simply cannot afford to do — and that’s go down without a fight.

A no-show when facing elimination is simply not an option.

Not if this group wants to stay together.

That's a part of the history the Jets need to learn from and if they don't, general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff is going to have no choice but to make some difficult decisions in the off-season.

"If you just live in the past, you lose sight of the present and what's going on," said Lowry. "Every playoff series is different and every playoff year is different, teams are different. There's certainly going to be a narrative that has happened and the history backs it up. We're focused on this series with the Avalanche and how we get out of this and how we get the win in Game 5. That's all we can focus on."

Narrowing that focus to finding a way to get the series back to Denver is Job 1.

"It's one of those things you can't look at the task as being so unmanageable you have to have some belief. And I believe we have a lot of belief in our group and our ability to get out of this," said Lowry. "We know we need to play better than we've shown the last couple of games. There've been spurts where we've played better."

"But two-thirds of a game or a third of a game, that's not going to get it done against an elite team like the Avs."

[Analysis: The NHL playoffs are off to an odd start, from the net out](#) (VIDEO)

By: Stephen Whyno, The Associated Press

The greatest goal-scorer of his generation was held without a point for the first time in a series in his nearly two-decade NHL career.

The best goaltender in the league this season has given up a first round-high 19 goals. Vancouver has lost a Vezina Trophy finalist, used three different guys in net and taken a 3-1 series lead anyway; the Canucks, in fact, won Game 3 at Nashville 2-1 while putting the puck on net just 12 times. Edmonton, with all of its scorers, won a game with just 13 shots — a 1-0 shutout behind the goalie everyone thought was their biggest liability to make a run at the Stanley Cup.

The start of the playoffs has been anything but predictable, which is exactly what hockey fans have come to expect this time of year.

Bucking the trend of recent Presidents' Trophy winners bowing out early, the New York Rangers swept Washington in the first round by keeping Alex Ovechkin off the scoresheet for the first time in his 15 trips to the postseason.

How did they do it? "It's a secret," MVP candidate and fellow Russian winger Artemi Panarin said.

Whatever secret sauce the Canucks are using, everyone in the league would take it. They lost Vezina Trophy finalist Thatcher Demko to injury after he won Game 1 against Nashville but Casey DeSmith bounced back from a loss to beat the Predators in Game 3. When he was unavailable, it was Arturs Silovs to the rescue in his playoff debut, backstopping a comeback overtime victory to put the Predators one loss from elimination.

"I don't think the moment's too big for him," coach Rick Tocchet said. "I'm proud of the goaltenders. It's a next-man-up mentality. Those guys know it's the next man up."

Connor Hellebuyck is unquestionably the man for Winnipeg, and he's the front-runner to win the Vezina after being the best goalie in the league during the regular season. In four playoff games against Colorado, Hellebuyck has allowed 19 goals for a save percentage of .870 — a far cry from his .921 over 60 starts from before the series began.

Hellebuyck allowed four goals to the Avalanche on 30 shots in a blowout loss Sunday that pushed the Jets to the brink of elimination. Coach Rick Bowness pulled him after two periods because he was under pressure the entire time he was in net.

"I don't think those goals are his fault," center Mark Scheifele said. "He's our backbone. He's our heart and soul. Just a change of scenery, I'm sure. He's our backbone."

The Edmonton Oilers didn't expect goalie Stuart Skinner to be their backbone, especially having reigning MVP Connor McDavid and longtime running mate Leon Draisaitl around to score a bunch of goals. So, naturally, they beat the Los Angeles Kings 1-0 in Game 4 thanks to one goal set up by McDavid and Draisaitl, and Skinner stopping every shot he faced.

"He was great for us," said defenseman Evan Bouchard, who scored. "He was the rock. When we made mistakes he was there to support us. When you're not letting in any goals, you're going to win the game."

The other Vezina finalist, Florida's Sergei Bobrovsky, gave up 13 goals through the Panthers' first four games against Tampa Bay. Yet he and the defending Eastern Conference champions are one win from moving on to face Boston or Toronto.

The Bruins are up 3-1 in that series and the Maple Leafs losing in the first round is a familiar stumble for Toronto fans. The team's core group led by Auston Matthews, Mitch Marner and William Nylander is 1-6 in the first round over the previous seven years.

[*Jets' Hellebuyck, Canucks' Demko among finalists for NHL's top goaltender award*](#)

By: The Canadian Press

NEW YORK – Connor Hellebuyck of the Winnipeg Jets, Thatcher Demko of the Vancouver Canucks and Sergei Bobrovsky of the Florida Panthers are the finalists for this season's Vezina Trophy.

The trophy is awarded each year to the NHL's top goaltender in the regular season.

Hellebuyck posted a 37-19-4 record with a 2.39 goals-against average, .921 save percentage and five shutouts. He won the Jennings Trophy as the goaltender (minimum 25 games played) on the team with the fewest goals allowed.

The Jets netminder won the award in 2020 and is a finalist for the second straight year and fourth time overall.

Demko, a first-time finalist, posted a 35-14-2 record and set career highs with a 2.45 goals-against average, .918 save percentage and five shutouts.

Bobrovsky had a 36-17-4 record with a 2.37 goals-against average and .915 save percentage. The two-time Vezina winner with Columbus (2013, 2017) tied for the league lead with six shutouts.

Winnipeg Sun

FRIESEN: All eyes on Jets' heart

By Paul Friesen

It's fitting a potentially fateful Game 5 for the Winnipeg Jets against Colorado will be in downtown Winnipeg on Tuesday.

Any paying customers wondering about making a commitment for next season will see first-hand what this team is made of.

After all, nothing reveals character like playoff adversity.

Has anything changed from a year ago, when in this same scenario the Jets folded like a lawn chair against Vegas?

That was enough to leave a couple thousand empty seats most games.

This team was different, we've been told. Not fractured. More committed.

Is this new-found team unity strong enough to produce their best game of the playoffs – or was it just lip service?

Players facing elimination will always say the right things.

Rick Bowness has no doubt heard more of the backs-to-the-wall cliches than most of us.

"We can all say all the words in the world and say all the right things ... tell you everything you want to hear," the coach said on Monday. "But everything will be decided on what our eyes tell us. Not our ears."

Through four games, the Jets have failed the eye test more often than not.

Our ears tell us the player-coach relationship might be starting to show signs of strain. Again.

It's not the full-out player uprising that marked the stormy end to last season, but it seems Bowness still has his hands full.

When your No. 1 centre, the franchise's first-ever draft pick and poster boy, says the other team is making adjustments and your own isn't, it's notable.

That was Mark Scheifele after Game 4.

Nino Niederreiter added: "We've got to change our game plan."

Those may have been innocent enough comments not specifically directed at faulty Xs and Os. Heaven knows players say things that shouldn't always be dissected or taken literally without some follow-up context.

At the very least, though, the comments show this team, so confident in its game going into the playoffs, has quickly lost its way. It's a ship without a rudder in the middle of a storm.

The man at the wheel says all the Xs and Os in the world, like words, won't mean a thing if more players don't show more heart.

Bowness didn't use the word "heart," but he didn't have to.

"It's got to start with each individual's intensity and battle level," is how he put it.

He pointed to turnovers and discipline, too, but eventually came back to intensity.

"You can make all the adjustments you want," the coach said. "But if it comes down to the players and one-on-one and the battles and you're losing them, then that kind of defeats the purpose."

Strategy tweaks? Absolutely he'll make them.

He already tried, it turns out.

"We thought we did it before the game (Sunday)," Bowness said. "But that's okay. We tried to address them, and it didn't follow through. So we'll keep tweaking.

"If the intensity and everything else isn't there, again, it's going to go for naught."

The coach's words aren't all falling on deaf ears.

Defenceman Neal Pionk, who doesn't mince many, echoed them in his own economical way on Monday.

"Little victories start with the body check, start with compete level and go from there," Pionk said. "Things will fall into place once those things come back. We've got to look in the mirror at ourselves as players and compete harder first, and then we'll go with the strategic things later."

There's no arguing the Jets are being outworked. But that doesn't mean they aren't trying.

It just means the peak level of some players' effort isn't at the level of Colorado's.

That begins with the so-called star players.

Bowness didn't single anyone out, but he plans to shake up his lineup for Tuesday, and not just because of injuries.

"Performance related," he said.

So we may find out whom he's sending the strongest possible message to.

Which brings us back to the conclusion we've all but reached in this space: The Jets, with all their regular-season success, just don't have the makeup of a good playoff team.

The captain, Adam Lowry, insists they still believe, even if history would show there's little reason for anyone else to. The last five times they have faced elimination, they have been the lawn chair.

"There's certainly going to be a narrative," Lowry said. "And the history backs it up."

But it's just that – history.

"If you just live in the past," Lowry added. "You lose sight of the present."

The present arrives downtown, with bells on, Tuesday.

If the Jets are history, those will be alarms, yet again.

HORROR STORY: A look back at Jets' history in elimination playoff games

By Ted Wyman

Avert your eyes if you're the kind of person that doesn't like horror movies, because this story is full of gory details.

With the Winnipeg Jets facing the prospect of getting bounced — yet again — from the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs, we thought we would take a look back at their history in elimination games.

Warning: This is not for the squeamish.

Despite finishing second in the Western Conference with 110 points and recording the second-most regular-season points in their history, the Jets find themselves not only trailing the Colorado Avalanche 3-1 in their first-round playoff series but getting badly outplayed at every turn.

Game 5 is slated for Tuesday night at Canada Life Centre, but the way the series has gone so far doesn't offer fans a ton of hope.

Nor does history.

They have faced elimination seven times since the team moved from Atlanta in 2011 and they have won only one of those games.

That came in 2018, when the Jets beat the Nashville Predators in the seventh game of a second-round series and advanced to the Western Conference final for the first and only time in their history.

Let's take a look back at all seven elimination games.

April 22, 2015 — Anaheim 5 at Winnipeg 2

The Ducks completed a four-game sweep of the Jets, getting two third-period goals from Ryan Kesler and an empty-netter from Sami Vatanen to close things out. The Jets led at one point in every single game of the series, including three times in the third period, but their lead was short-lived in Game 4. Bryan Little scored at 16:26 of the first period but the Ducks equalized with a marker from Emerson Etem just 1:30 later. Andrew Cogliano put them ahead for good midway through the second. Ondrej Pavelec made 30 saves for the Jets, while Frederik Andersen stopped 25 shots for the Ducks, who went on to lose the Western Conference final to the Chicago Blackhawks.

May 10, 2018 — Winnipeg 5 at Nashville 1

The Jets capped a thrilling series with a dominant Game 7 win at Nashville's Bridgestone Arena. Tyler Myers and Paul Stastny scored the first two goals of the game, Mark Scheifele scored his 10th and 11th goals of the playoffs and Stastny added a second tally in the third period as the Jets ran away with it against the Presidents' Trophy winners. Connor Hellebuyck stopped 36 shots, and Pekka Rinne, who beat Hellebuyck out for the Vezina Trophy that season, was pulled after giving up two softies early in the first period.

May 20, 2018 — Vegas 2 at Winnipeg 1

The expansion Golden Knights took the series in five games and in the deciding match it was goalie Marc-Andre Fleury who made the most difference. Just as he did throughout the series, Fleury stymied the Jets repeatedly, making 31 saves in Game 5. Winnipegger Ryan Reaves scored the winning goal for the Knights, midway through the second period, while Alex Tuch also scored for Vegas and Josh Morrissey had Winnipeg's lone goal. Connor Hellebuyck stopped 30 of the 32 shots he faced. The Golden Knights went on to lose the Stanley Cup final to the Washington Capitals.

April 20, 2019 — Winnipeg 2 at St. Louis 3

The Jets finished second in the Central Division and had home-ice advantage for the series, but the Blues were a juggernaut that was just getting started. St. Louis won all three games in Winnipeg and lost the first two at home, but they were not to be denied in Game 6, jumping ahead 3-0 on a natural hat trick by Jaden Schwartz. The Jets got late third-period goals from Dustin Byfuglien and Bryan Little, but it wasn't enough. Winnipeg managed only 20 shots on Blues goalie Jordan Binnington, while Hellebuyck was forced to make 33 saves. The Blues went on to win the Stanley Cup.

Aug. 6, 2020 — Calgary 4, Winnipeg 0, at Edmonton

With the COVID-19 pandemic raging, the teams played in a "bubble" in Edmonton in the middle of summer and it didn't go well for the Jets as they dropped the best-of-five in four games to the Flames. The Jets were outscored 16-6 in the "qualifying round" series and couldn't even muster a goal in the deciding game. Cam Talbot stopped 31 shots for Calgary and the Flames got goals from Sam Bennett, Dillon Dube, current Jet Sean Monahan and Rasmus Andersson. The latter two were into an empty net. Hellebuyck stopped 30 of 32 shots. The Flames went on to lose 4-2 to the Dallas Stars in the first round of the playoffs.

June 7, 2021 — Winnipeg 2 at Montreal 3 (OT)

The Jets were slightly favoured in the series, having finished ahead of the Habs in the regular-season and having swept Connor McDavid and the Edmonton Oilers in the first round. But in the second round, they were the ones getting swept. Montreal took the best-of-seven in four straight games, winning the clincher in overtime on a goal by current Jets' winger Tyler Toffoli. The Jets managed only 16 shots in the game and got two past Montreal goalie Carey Price — both off the stick of rookie defenceman Logan Stanley — while Hellebuyck was forced to make 38 saves. Artturi Lehkonen and Erik Gustafsson also scored for the Habs, who went on to lose the Stanley Cup final to the Tampa Bay Lightning.

April 27, 2023 — Winnipeg 1 at Vegas 4

In the infamous “No pushback” game, the Jets were humiliated by the Golden Knights as they bowed out in Game 5 of the first-round series. Chandler Stephenson scored twice, Mark Stone, and William Karlsson had singles as the Golden Knights build up a 4-0 lead. Kyle Connor broke the shutout for current Jets' netminder Laurent Brossoit with a late third-period marker. Brossoit stopped 29 of the 30 shots he made and outplayed his current teammate and mentor Hellebuyck, who had 21 saves on 25 shots. While the Jets were lambasted by head coach Rick Bowness for their lack of fight, Vegas went on to win the Stanley Cup.

SNAPSHOTS: 'He's a tough kid:' Namestnikov not ruled out despite fractured cheekbone

By Ted Wyman

Winnipeg Jets centre Vlad Namestnikov spent the night in hospital in Denver with a fractured cheekbone after taking a puck to the face on Sunday afternoon.

The versatile forward was hit with a slap shot fired by teammate Nate Schmidt, which appeared to deflect off a Colorado Avalanche player's stick before rising up during Game 4 of a first-round Stanley Cup playoff series at Denver's Ball Arena.

“There's no orbital damage but they kept him overnight and he's on his way back (to Winnipeg),” Jets coach Rick Bowness said Monday.

“I sent him a text last night and he answered this morning and said he's feeling better.”

Asked if Namestnikov could even play in Tuesday's Game 5 at Canada Life Centre, in which the Jets will face elimination from the post-season, Bowness sounded hopeful.

“He's a tough kid,” said Bowness, who previously coached Namestnikov when he was coaching in Tampa Bay and Dallas. “I never rule anybody out. Vladdy's a tough kid.

“Nothing would surprise me with Vladdy. That's why we keep picking him up. He does a lot of good things, he's a great teammate, his versatility helps, but it's just toughness, mental toughness. I'll never rule anything out.”

Bowness also provided updates on defenceman Brenden Dillon, who missed Game 4 after suffering a deep cut on his left hand at the end of Game 3, and winger Morgan Barron, who has been out since the second-last game of the regular season because of a lower-body injury.

Barron has not yet started skating and likely will not participate in this series, while Dillon is questionable for Game 5.

“You know what a competitor Dilly is,” Bowness said. “We’re not going to put him in harm’s way, let’s put it that way. He’d play with two broken hands if he could, if we let him. We’ll make the right decision based on what’s best for him. We’re not going put him out there unless we’re 100% sure there can be no more damage done.”

PERFETTI TIME?

Those who have been clamouring to see young forward Cole Perfetti get an opportunity in the series with the Avalanche just might get their wish on Tuesday.

Bowness said changes are coming to the lineup for Game 5, with the Jets trailing the best-of-seven series 3-1.

He said there will be changes on offence and defence and asked if they were injury-based, he said they were not.

“Performance-related,” Bowness said.

Perfetti, who had 19 goals and 19 assists in 71 regular-season games, was in the press box for the first four games of the series, getting passed over for grinding fourth-liner David Gustafsson and minor-league call-up Axel Jonsson-Fjallby.

The Jets need an infusion of offence as they struggle to keep up with the high-flying Avalanche, and it’s certainly worth a try to get someone such as Perfetti into the lineup.

Another player who could come in is veteran defenceman Colin Miller, who has a right shot and has played in 40 playoff games with Boston, Vegas and Dallas over his career.

Logan Stanley struggled mightily on Sunday in Game 4 and Dylan Samberg has had his struggles as well.

Nate Schmidt sat out the first two games of the series, but he scored the only Jets goal on Sunday and his offensive upside could be beneficial in an elimination game.

LOWRY LAMENTS MAKAR GOAL

One of the most pivotal moments in Game 4 was when Colorado’s star defenceman Cale Makar made an end-to-end rush and rifled a shot past Connor Hellebuyck to give his team a 3-1 lead in the second period.

The goal doesn’t happen if Jets captain Adam Lowry makes a better play on Makar when he was still in the Colorado zone.

Lowry knocked the puck off Makar’s stick near the Winnipeg blue-line, but it bounced right back to the Colorado D-man, who took it in stride, deked out Sean Monahan in the neutral zone, backed the Jets defence in and ripped a shot over the blocker of Hellebuyck.

“He goes to make the play, it comes up and hits me, I think it’s that split-second thing where you’re now trying to decide where the puck is, and then bounces back,” Lowry said Monday at the IcePlex in Winnipeg.

“And at that point two linemates had changed and I was kind of coming over top to make the change, too

“Obviously looking back, yeah I would have liked to have finished the check and stopped the play there. So I can wear that one. That one’s on me.”

Of course Lowry would own it, because that’s just the kind of player he is. It’s what good captains do.

But he’s certainly not been alone in not finishing off the fine details in this series.

“That’s kind of been what’s hurting us, it’s little things like that, that are so critical at this time of year,” Lowry said. “Every mistake gets magnified, and you let a superstar player off the hook like that and they certainly make you pay. That was a pivotal goal for them in that game.”