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[\*\*Three things - Fourth line with huge performance  
Barron, Iafallo and Namestnikov combine for six points\*\*](#)

By Jamie Thomas

The Winnipeg Jets extended their win streak to three games with a 4-2 win over the Minnesota Wild at Xcel Energy Center. The Jets (47-24-6) reach 100 points for the second time in franchise history (2017-18) and are now just two points back of Colorado for second in the Central and five back of Dallas for first. Vladislav Namestnikov, Kyle Connor, Alex Iafallo and Morgan Barron scored for Winnipeg who swept the season series from the Wild (4-0). The Jets will return home and practice Monday in Winnipeg before heading out to Nashville.

**FOURTH LINE MAGIC**

The Jets need all four lines going as they head to the postseason and the line of Morgan Barron, Vladislav Namestnikov and Alex Iafallo came up huge on Saturday afternoon. It was that trio that delivered the important first goal of the game when Namestnikov converted on a perfect pass from Iafallo at 2:33 of the opening period. Iafallo would record the eventual game winning goal when he tipped a Brenden Dillon shot in the middle frame. Then in the third period with the Jets up a goal, Barron redirected a Dylan Samberg over Marc Andre Fleury's glove to make it 4-2 at 9:46. Namestnikov equalled a career-high with three points, Iafallo had a goal and an assist and Barron had a goal and finished 6-for-9 (67%) in the face-off circle.

"They did a great job. They got three goals, right. And they just know how to play the game the right way. Vladdy was outstanding, Morgan in front of the net got a tip," said Rick Bowness.

"Alex, you know what you're going to get from him every shift. He just goes out there and he works. That line was a big difference maker."

**20 POINTS (AGAIN) FOR DILLON**

Brenden Dillon had already set a career high in goals (9) and game winning goals (2) so far this season. This afternoon he was initially given the third goal of the game, but that turned was awarded to Iafallo. Dillon is now up to 20 points (9G, 11A) and has now done that three straight seasons with the Jets. The BC product has 63 points (14G, 49A) during his time in Winnipeg, the most points he has recorded over a three season span in his NHL career.

**MONAHAN STILL STREAKING**

Sean Monahan continues to produce for the Jets as the team's second line centreman and he assisted on Kyle Connor's goal in the first period, extending his point streak to six games. Per NHL Stats, only five other players in Jets team history have recorded as long of a run in their first season with the club: Drew Stafford (9 GP in 2014-15), Mathieu Perreault (8 GP in 2014-15), Nino Niederreiter (7 GP in 2022-23), Patrik Laine (6 GP in 2016-17) and Nikolaj Ehlers (6 GP in 2015-16).

"Every game he plays the same, he's very reliable, plays in all situations, and he just makes our team that much deeper," said Namestnikov.

"So, he's been a hell of an addition, and he's been great for us."

**NHL.com**

***Jets defeat Wild, move up in Central Division race  
Namestnikov has 3 points in win; Kaprizov scores twice for Minnesota, which  
fails to gain in wild card***

By Jessi Pierce

ST. PAUL, Minn. -- Vladislav Namestnikov had a goal and two assists for the Winnipeg Jets in a 4-2 win against the Minnesota Wild at Xcel Energy Center on Saturday.

"These are big, big games," Namestnikov said. "Big points, much needed. Yeah, we've been talking about all year if we wanted to be successful we've got to have all four lines contribute and look the same, and tonight we did that."

Alex Iafallo had a goal and an assist, and Kyle Connor and Morgan Barron also scored for Winnipeg (47-24-6), which has won three straight after a six-game losing streak. Connor Hellebuyck made 25 saves.

The Jets, who have clinched a Stanley Cup Playoff berth, moved two points behind the Colorado Avalanche for second place in the Central Division.

"That's a good hockey club over there," Winnipeg coach Rick Bowness said. "We held them to very few chances again. I know the first period they had a lot of shot attempts, but not a whole lot of ... I thought we did a good job managing the puck a lot better as the game went on, going through the neutral zone and you saw a couple of shifts where we had them hemmed in their zone pretty good.

"They had us hemmed in there pretty good one play in the second, but overall it was a very good team effort."

Kirill Kaprizov scored twice, Mats Zuccarello had two assists, and Marc-Andre Fleury made 21 saves for Minnesota (36-31-9), which has lost two in a row and three of four.

"We needed more from the depth in our lineup tonight, for sure," Wild coach John Hynes said. "I mean, I thought our top two lines were going. Some of our [defensemen] were going. But I think our, the depth in the lineup wasn't good enough tonight."

The Wild are 11 points behind the Nashville Predators for the second wild card into the playoffs from the Western Conference.

"Disappointed. That's for sure," Fleury said of the likelihood missing the playoffs. "I think we've been battling since [the] All-Star break. ... We don't have a bad record lately the last, I don't know how many games, but we haven't moved really in the standings. Everybody else is winning around us. Yeah. Just frustrating to be in this position."

Namestnikov gave Winnipeg a 1-0 lead at 2:33 of the first period. Iafallo picked up the puck off a turnover by Alex Goligoski behind Minnesota's net and fed Namestnikov in front for the finish.

Kaprizov tied it 1-1 at 8:46 with a spinning backhand from between the circles off a pass from Zuccarello.

Connor put the Jets back on top 2-1 at 11:44, finishing a 2-on-1 off a pass from Sean Monahan.

Kaprizov tied it 2-2 on a power play at 15:42 after Zuccarello fed him in the right circle for a slap shot to the far side.

"We go hard every game and work hard," Zuccarello said. "No one can take that away from us. Some games I think our skill has not been there in terms of scoring ourself and just creating. You're working super hard, but you don't get rewarded and that's hockey sometimes. But no one can take away from this team that we go out and we try and do our best every night and work hard, but sometimes that's not enough."

Fleury kept it tied by denying Adam Lowry on a short-handed breakaway at 17:20.

lafallo gave the Jets a 3-2 lead at 13:39 of the second period, deflecting Brenden Dillon's shot that got through traffic.

Barron increased the lead 4-2 at 9:46 of the third period, tipping in Dylan Samberg's point shot.

"The puck just bounced our way a little bit more tonight than it has the last few games," Barron said. "Always fun when you can do that. I saw they changed [the third goal to be credited to lafallo] and Alex had the goal there. Feel bad for 'Dilly,' but everyone on our line (with Namestnikov) gets one, so that's pretty cool."

*NOTES:* Monahan's assist extended his point streak to six games (three goals, three assists). ... Kaprizov extended his home point streak to 10 games (10 goals, eight assists) and became the first player in Wild history with multiple double-digit home point streaks (14 games in 2022-23). He is one goal shy of scoring 40 for the third time in his four NHL seasons (2021-22, 2022-23).

## **Winnipeg Free Press**

### **[Jets tame Wild again](#)**

### **[Winnipeg's fourth line sets tone for series sweep](#)**

By: Ken Wiebe

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Make it a clean sweep.

The Winnipeg Jets wrapped up the four-game season series with the Minnesota Wild Saturday afternoon at Xcel Energy Center by handing their closest geographical rival a 4-2 defeat.

The Jets outscored the Wild 17-9 in the process.

"It's great," said Jets forward Morgan Barron. "Their team has changed a lot from the start of the year to now. To do it, the games have been pretty spread out. I feel like we've done it in every phase of our season as well. Not easy to do. A little chippy there at times. But to see it come out our way is great."

Jets head coach Rick Bowness wasn't about to kick sand in the face of a Wild team that's on the verge of being eliminated from playoff contention and has struggled mightily against Central Division opponents this season (8-12-3).

"We want the two points, it's nice to get the road wins," said Bowness, when asked about the importance of securing the series sweep. "We have a lot of respect for that team and organization. (Wild general manager) Billy (Guerin) and his staff have done a great job here. It's a good team, a great organization. If we can sweep them, great. We'll take the two points against anybody."

The Jets, who improved to 47-24-6, made their way back to Winnipeg Saturday night and will be back in action Tuesday against the Nashville Predators as this four-game Central Division road trip continues.

Let's take a closer look at what transpired:

*FOURTH-LINE MAGIC:* The Jets trio of Vlad Namestnikov (one goal, two assists), Alex Iafallo (one goal, one assist) and Barron (one goal) combined for three goals and six points to pace the offensive attack. The Jets depth has been praised all season long and this is the time of year when the fourth line must continue to shine.

"We've been talking about it all year (that) if we wanted to be successful we've got to have all four lines contribute and look the same and (Saturday) we did that," said Namestnikov. "I guess this is kind of a rehearsal. We've clinched, but we have to continue playing the right way and kind of bringing the momentum into the playoffs."

Barron felt this type of offensive eruption was inevitable, given how well they've been playing lately.

"We've kind of felt like we've been all around it and strung together some good games," said Barron. "The puck just bounced our way a little bit more tonight than it has the last few games. Always fun when you can do that."

"I'm a little biased, (but) I would like all four lines to be going, playing well and playing often. You see the recipe for success, those teams in the past who have won the (Stanley) Cup. You look at Vegas last year. Their fourth line was impactful in a lot of different ways throughout the whole playoffs. A dress rehearsal for everyone."

Winnipeg Jets defenceman Brenden Dillon, front right, and Minnesota Wild centre Jacob Lucchini, front left, battle for the puc

*THE RACE:* Combined with a 6-2 loss to the Edmonton Oilers Friday night, the Colorado Avalanche saw their lead over the Jets in the chase for second spot in the Central Division trimmed to two points.

"We want home ice," said Namestnikov. "That's the big advantage so that's why these five games left are very important. We've just got to keep going."

While the priority for the Jets is to be peaking at playoff time, having home-ice advantage in a series with the Avalanche is certainly a carrot worth fighting for.

The door seems to be open wider after the Avalanche lost forward Mikko Rantanen to an upper-body injury Friday.

“We have a tough schedule and I was actually peeking at their schedule (on Friday) night,” said Barron. “Theirs is as equally tough as ours. We have that head-to-head matchup coming up here in a few days. It’s exciting.

“This is where you want to be at this time of the year, in the hunt, trying to claw away some points from the teams above you and try and take their place.”

*THE STREAK:* Sean Monahan is on a roll.

Thanks to an assist on the 31st goal of the season for Kyle Connor, Monahan extended his point streak to six games. He’s up to 56 points in 78 games, including 11 goals and 21 points in 29 games since being traded to the Jets. This assist was a thing of beauty as he showed great patience on the two-on-one rush before finding a passing lane to deliver a crisp pass to Connor for the one-timer.

“Every game, he plays the same,” said Namestnikov. “He’s very reliable, plays in all situations and he just makes our team that much deeper. So he’s been a hell of an addition.”

*KNOCK, KNOCK:* Former Jets blue-liner Declan Chisholm has taken full advantage of his opportunity with the Wild after being claimed off waivers in late January.

A fifth round pick of the Jets in the 2018 NHL Draft, Chisholm spent time on the top pairing with Jonas Brodin on Saturday and finished with a career-high 23:49 of ice time. He’s averaging more than 17 minutes per game since joining the Wild.

Chisholm had a nice rush in the second period but his teammates couldn’t convert the rebound chance. His mobility was on display throughout the contest.

“He’s done a good job of playing to his strengths,” Wild head coach John Hynes told reporters this week. “He’s a good-skating defenceman. He brings an offensive element to the game. I think he respects the defensive side of the game. He’s shown that he has a willingness to be able to play hard in the defensive zone, end plays, (win) board battles, net-front battles. He’s done a nice job on the power play. When he first came, you knew that he had the power play element to his game.”

Although Chisholm couldn’t lock down a spot among the top-six with the Jets, he’s been used on the second power-play unit and on the penalty kill while the Wild are without captain Jared Spurgeon. Chisholm is a restricted free agent this summer and looks like he’s found himself a home.

“I thought he looked great,” said Barron. “Seems like he’s on the scoresheet a decent amount. Glad to see he is doing well. He deserves it. It’s not easy going through what he went through when he was here. Definitely felt bad for him at times, but it’s just good to see that for somebody who works hard, it’s good to see things work out in the end. He’s got a long way to go, but he’s in a good spot here now.”

*EXTRA, EXTRA:* The Jets made just one lineup change, inserting defenceman Logan Stanley for Colin Miller.

All of Stanley, Miller and Nate Schmidt have been in the lineup during the past three games, so it appears as though the competition to join Dylan Samberg on the third pairing for Game 1 of the Stanley Cup playoffs is ongoing. Schmidt remains the front-runner but Stanley is making a late push that has clearly caught the attention of the coaching staff.

“It’s not so much a competition as it is just (to) keep them all playing,” said Bowness. “No one’s playing themselves out of the lineup, but we have to keep everyone playing. When we get to that point, we’ll make the right decision.”

Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck made his 57th start of the season and finished with 25 saves, earning his 34th win of the season. He lowered his goals-against average to 2.41 and his save percentage sits at .920.

Special teams were not quite clicking on all cylinders for the Jets on Saturday. They were zero-for-two with the power play and gave up one goal on four opportunities on the penalty kill.

“It can be better,” Bowness said with a smile before taking a question about the struggles with zone entries. “An issue, yep. The whole thing. It wasn’t in sync, no.”

### **[Anhorn joins Moose on blue line](#)** **[Former St. Cloud State captain one of top undrafted college free agents](#)**

By: Mike McIntyre and Ken Wiebe

He’s the new kid in town, even if his birth certificate shows there’s already a bit more mileage than usual on the latest prospect.

Dylan Anhorn, 25, has joined the Winnipeg Jets organization after finishing his college career at St. Cloud State University, where he captained the Huskies. The left-shot defenceman, who was born in Calgary, signed an amateur tryout for the rest of this season with the Manitoba Moose, and a one-year contract with the AHL club that starts next year.

“I’ve been talking to them for a bit now. Over a year. Fortunate to be able to work it out, get down here, meet the guys and join the team. It’s been fun so far,” Anhorn said following his first practice with the Moose on Friday.

He had 33 points (six goals, 27 assists) in 38 games with St. Cloud this year and was one of the top undrafted NCAA free agents. He’s taken the long road to the pro ranks, having missed his sophomore season in 2020-21 when COVID wiped it out, then suffering two major injuries in 21-22 (ruptured spleen) and 22-23 (broken foot) that cost him half those years.

“It makes you grateful for the game that you play and for your health,” said Anhorn, who played two seasons at Union College before moving to St. Cloud and has previously faced off against current Moose players Jeff Malott and Parker Ford.

“It’s what I love, this sport, and I think that’s it a real character test when you have to go through challenges like that. It makes you better, you come out of it stronger. I’m just happy to have had

a full healthy year this season and be feeling great. And fortunate to be joining a great organization like the Jets.”

Although he had offers from other teams, signing with Winnipeg made the most sense. Having the Moose under the same roof as the Jets was a major factor.

“It’s always nice to get to see how the NHL guys are doing their thing to get to learn from them. Learn habits and stuff, and obviously the extra eyes on you is a benefit as well,” he said.

“If you perform well, hopefully get noticed and good things happen.”

Anhorn was a neuroscience major at Union College, and has been taking his sports management Masters through St. Cloud. He’s been described as a strong skater with a great hockey IQ and plenty of character.

“Try to play a two-way game. Contribute offensively as much as possible while playing smart,” he said. “Good stick, good feet, defensive game. Just going to do what I can to help this team win and hopefully get in the lineup at some point.”

Anhorn was asked which NHL players he might try to model his game after.

“There’s some great examples on the Jets. Josh Morrissey. Also Neal Pionk and Nate Schmidt, two other undrafted, average sized, good skating college defencemen,” said Anhorn.

“Those are for sure some guys I try to model my game after. Hopefully one day if things go well and I perform well, maybe I can get to that place.”

#### *AROUND THE GLASS:*

There’s been plenty of debate about the line brawl that took place after the opening faceoff at Madison Square Garden earlier this week.

Everyone figured New York Rangers enforcer Matt Rempe and New Jersey Devils tough guy Kurtis MacDermid would be dropping the mitts, but few could have predicted that the other other players on the ice would follow suit.

Fighting and its place in the game will continue to be a source of debate for years to come, but count us among those who found this example to be in the entertaining category.

There were definitely repercussions for both teams, as eight players were ejected for being involved in a secondary scrap leaving both clubs to play the remaining 59:58 with just 14 skaters.

We’re definitely not fans of staged fighting, but there is still a place for it in the game. Jets defenceman Brenden Dillon told us the melee brought back memories.

“Well, I was on that Washington Capitals team that had the big rumble at MSG in 2020 or 2021,” said Dillon.

“I think I was trying to fight (current Jets teammate Morgan) Barron that game when he was with the Rangers. You talk about the good and bad of fighting in hockey. There’s a time and a place

for it, of course. That's a big rivalry game (between the) New Jersey and the Rangers. So it's fun to watch. I'm glad nobody really got hurt or anything like that in the whole thing."

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Former Jets head coach Paul Maurice moved up to fourth place on the all-time wins list earlier this week, picking up No. 865.

Next up on that list is Dauphin product Barry Trotz at 914. Scotty Bowman tops the list with 1,244 wins, while Joel Quenneville sits second at 969.

While it's true that Maurice is first on the all-time losses list (736), his longevity is a testament to his passion for the game and his hockey mind.

"What hits me is sometimes I think back and I thought, 'If I could coach 500 games, that would be something else.' I think the average number is like 250 or 350," Maurice said Thursday after the win over the Ottawa Senators. "Then you hit it and you go, 'Oh, man, if I could win 500 games, that would be something.'

"Then you start getting older. I have more fun coaching the game now than I ever have in my life. I like the game, where it's at. I love these players and this organization. I've been lucky. I've worked with great teams and great people and that's kind of how I got here today."

Maurice has done an excellent job with the Florida Panthers this season and it's a bit surprising he hasn't generated more buzz when it comes to the Jack Adams Trophy.

There are a number of excellent candidates for the coach of the year award this season, but Maurice should be among them.

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The expectations for the Panthers going into the season were high after the eighth seed made a remarkable run to the Stanley Cup final before bowing out to the Vegas Golden Knights.

Many teams that win the conference final in this scenario have issues the next season and the Panthers were without Aaron Ekblad and Brandon Montour for a lengthy stretch.

Sam Reinhart is flourishing with the first 50-goal season of his career, Aleksander Barkov is a front-runner for the Selke Trophy, Matthew Tkachuk has been one of the most productive players in 2024 and goalie Sergei Bobrovsky is making a late push to contend for the Vezina Trophy with Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck.

This is one of the awards the Professional Hockey Writers' Association doesn't vote on, so our opinion on the potential winners doesn't reveal anything prior to the winner being announced in June.

### **[Up close: an in-depth look at Gabe Vilardi's goalscoring exploits](#)**

By: Mike McIntyre

Gabriel Vilardi couldn't help himself.



With a vacated Calgary Flames net in front of him and nothing but free ice, the Winnipeg Jets forward was staring down his first NHL hat trick Thursday night. Rather than take an easy shot from any kind of distance, Vilardi calmly skated into the crease and gently slid the puck across the line to cap off a 5-2 victory that clinched a playoff spot.

His 19th goal of the year in his 41st game looked eerily similar to the previous 18, the only difference being that the goaltender was sitting on the bench in this case as the visitors looked for a six-on-five rally

If there's one thing we've quickly learned about Vilardi during his first year in Winnipeg, it's that the 24-year-old lives in the blue paint. Nearly all of his goals are just a foot or two out and, in most cases, being put into what is essentially an empty net. The majority of his 14 assists have come from his "office" as well, including ones that make you think he has eyes in the back of his head.

"That's unique. It is," said Jets coach Rick Bowness, who has been behind an NHL bench for 40 years and has seen very few players who can do what Vilardi does.

"We had Corey (Perry) in Dallas and he was so good around the net," Bowness continued. "You know you're going to get hacked and whacked and pushed and shoved and you've got to have the stamina and the courage to hang in there, which he does. And then you've got to have the ability to make plays when someone is all over back and you're strong enough and skilled enough to make those plays. Corey would be the closest I've come to that's like Gabe."

The Free Press re-watched every Vilardi goal from this season, and it's freaky how familiar they all look. Incredible hand-eye co-ordination and an imposing net-front presence make the 6-3, 216-pounder an absolute beast who is a nightmare to defend, especially when the Jets are on the power play.

There have been pucks taken off his skate directly into the net (his first goal Feb. 20 vs. Minnesota, his first goal Thursday vs. Calgary); pucks off his skate up to his stick and in (Dec. 16 vs. Colorado, Dec. 18 vs. Montreal, Jan. 9 vs. Columbus); and plenty of tips and tap-ins after getting himself wide-open and being spotted by his linemates (Dec. 20 vs. Detroit, Dec. 22 vs. Boston, Jan. 4 vs. San Jose, Jan. 11 vs. Chicago, Feb. 17 vs. Vancouver on two occasions, his second goal Feb. 20 vs. Minnesota).

What you won't find on his resume are sizzling slappers or wicked wristers. That's just not his M.O.

On a team with plenty of skilled shooters, Vilardi adds an entirely different element that is in short supply. Other than teammate Nino Niederreiter, who has 18 goals in 75 games, nobody else on the current roster can come close to what he's doing in terms of frequency and effectiveness.

He's provided a huge spark to the power play, and his seven goals lead all Jets scorers despite missing so much time (Tyler Toffoli and Sean Monahan, at 10 and nine respectively, did most of that damage with their previous teams prior to being acquired in separate trades).

"We all have our strengths and weaknesses, and that's his biggest strength. His ability to handle the puck and to create something in such a tight space," said Jets defenceman Brenden Dillon, who is happy he only has to try to stop Vilardi in practice, rather than game situations.

“He goes to the net, and he’s got such a good mind for where the puck can be going. It just seems like the puck sticks to his tape, too. It’s incredible. It’s tough to stop, that’s for sure.”

Vilardi would likely be pushing 40 goals had he not missed 36 games this season due to various injuries.

His first, scored Dec. 10 in Anaheim, was a net-front tip of a Josh Morrissey shot that broke a 2-2 tie with 102 seconds left in the third period and would be a harbinger of things to come.

Vilardi has 108 shots on goal this season. According to NHL advanced stat tracking data, 73 of them have come from either directly in front or to the left or right side of the net, which are deemed high-danger areas. Eighteen of his goals have been scored from there, too.

The only exception was his second of the year back on Dec. 13, against the Los Angeles Kings club that traded him to Winnipeg last summer, as Vilardi shovelled a backhand from the right faceoff circle to beat Cam Talbot.

“He’s got incredible hands for a big guy. Long reach, but he’s able to pull the puck into his feet and he can stick handle in a phone booth,” said Jets captain Adam Lowry.

“I think using his body to shield the defenders and still get his stick open and his hand eye is incredible. So it’s extremely difficult what he does. He’s got an elite skill set around there and it’s nice to see him contributing.”

Just listen to a few descriptions that have come on the Jets TV broadcast following Vilardi goals this year.

“It’s more of a magic wand than a stick,” said colour analyst Kevin Sawyer back on Jan. 16, as Vilardi re-directed a puck that was first tipped by Lowry.

“How is that for a sleight of hand?” said play-by-play man Dan Robertson on Feb. 25 after Vilardi scored perhaps his nicest goal of the year, where he took the puck at the right side of the net, spun, did a head fake to the right and then slid the puck in on the left side with the goaltender down and out.

“The hands of a surgeon!” Robertson said Thursday as Vilardi tipped a Morrissey shot, then batted the loose puck past Dustin Wolf from the crease area.

Following the win over the Flames, Vilardi was asked how he can make split-second decisions on what to do with the puck from such tight quarters, especially with teammates in constant motion.

“You think I don’t take a look, but I do. I scan before a lot of time. Sometimes I screw up,” he said.

“One time, I went between my legs, but a lot of the time it’s just pre-scanning. And then it’s just Mark (Scheifele) and a lot of the other guys creating more space for me and then looking off JMo at the point and just spending that extra second to make a move and make my play. But I’ve been in that position for a while now, so I’m comfortable there.”

That might be what's most impressive about Vilardi. He's still getting used to his new surroundings, and has missed half the season, to boot. What's he going to look like once he really gets comfortable?

"So we've got a tough road trip coming up. Four tough games. That's going to help him," said Bowness.

Indeed, the Jets will start things off Saturday afternoon in St. Paul against the Minnesota Wild, then move on to face the Nashville Predators (Tuesday), Dallas Stars (Thursday) and Colorado Avalanche (Saturday) in what very likely will be a first-round playoff preview.

"We're going into some tough rinks against some really good hockey teams. It'll give us a better gauge of where we are going into the playoffs," said Bowness.

"Certainly with Gabe he's always made the power play better. We saw it when he came back. And it's a totally different power play when he's not out there. It shows the importance of his presence on that power play and on that line."

#### *TALE OF THE TAPE – A CLOSER LOOK AT ALL OF GABE VILARDI'S GOALS THIS SEASON:*

1. Dec. 10 at Anaheim – He tips a Josh Morrissey point shot as he stands in front of the Ducks net, just to the right, to break a tie with 102 seconds left in the third period.
2. Dec. 13 at Los Angeles – This is his furthest goal, in terms of sheer distance, as he takes a Dylan DeMelo pass in the right faceoff circle, then rips home a backhander against his old club.
3. Dec. 16 vs Colorado – Mark Scheife's pass hits him in the skate, which he quickly kicks up to his stick and shovels home from in tight with the goalie down and out.
4. Dec. 16 vs Colorado – His second of the game is again from close quarters as he shows off great set of hands to deke around the goaltender and score.
5. Dec. 18 vs Montreal – Once again, Vilardi takes a puck off his skate, this time behind the net, which he then quickly tucks in from the side.
6. Dec. 20 vs Detroit – A perfect pass from Cole Perfetti finds him wide open at the side of the Red Wings net for an easy tap-in.
7. Dec. 22 vs Boston – Nikolaj Ehlers throws the puck to net and Vilardi, who is causing havoc in front, taps home the loose puck.
8. Jan. 4 vs San Jose – He's standing at the left side of the net, takes a feed from Ehlers and scores "from about a foot away from the goal line", as TSN play-by-play man Dan Robertson put it.
9. Jan. 9 vs Columbus – A familiar scene as he takes a pass off his skate, this time from Adam Lowry, and puts the puck into what is basically an empty net.
10. Jan. 11 vs Chicago – Another great feed from Lowry, who is filling in as the top centre with Mark Scheifele out. This time Vilardi, standing alone at the right side of the net, shovels it home.

11. Jan. 16 vs New York Islanders – Parked in front of the net, Vilardi re-directs a point shot that is first tipped by Lowry. “It’s more of a magic wand than stick,” says TSN colour commentator Kevin Sawyer.

12. Feb. 17 vs Vancouver – Parked down low on the power play, Vilardi takes a pass from Scheifele, spins and scores on a beautiful backhand from in close.

13. Feb. 17 vs Vancouver – His second of the game is a rare off-the-rush goal, with Scheifele taking a huge hit to find Kyle Connor, who spots Vilardi directly in front for the tap-in.

14. Feb. 20 vs Minnesota – On the power play, he takes a pass off his skate, spins and shoots but is stopped, only to have a cross-ice feed deflect off his skate and in seconds later.

15. Feb. 20 vs Minnesota – Another power play tally, this time with Vilardi parked in front, then extending his stick to his left to tip a Morrissey point shot in.

16. Feb 25 vs Arizona – Arguably Vilardi’s nicest goal of the year, a power play beauty in which he does a head fake to the right, a deke to the left and the slides the puck into the net. “How is that for a sleight of hand” Robertson says on the broadcast.

17. April 4 vs Calgary – Vilardi pounces on the power play and, like so many others, takes a puck off his skate and/or stick while directly in front of the net, this time off a slap pass from Connor.

18. April 4 vs Calgary – Incredible coordination on display – the “hands of a surgeon” proclaims Robertson – as he tips a Morrissey shot, then bats home the loose puck in front of the Flames net.

19. April 4 vs Calgary – His first empty net goal of the year – at least in the sense of the goalie being pulled for an extra attacker – completes his first career hat trick. He takes a pass from Sean Monahan and has a clear path from just inside the blue-line, but opts to skate it directly into the crease and gently place it in the net.

## **The Athletic**

### **[Winnipeg Jets clinch playoff spot: 3 crucial storylines to track](#)**

By Murat Ates

Winnipeg’s 2024 playoff spot was unthinkable before it was inevitable.

“The Winnipeg Jets look a lot like a playoff team with Connor Hellebuyck and Mark Scheifele on the roster and a little bit like shambles without them,” we wrote in August.

Back then, Scheifele and Hellebuyck’s futures were up in the air, like Pierre-Luc Dubois’ and Blake Wheeler’s futures before them. The Dubois trade yielded Gabriel Vilardi, whose first career hat trick secured Winnipeg’s spot in the 2024 postseason. Wheeler was bought out, completing the change in leadership that saw Adam Lowry named Winnipeg’s third captain of the 2.0 era. Scheifele and Hellebuyck landed back in Winnipeg with long-term extensions at the outset of the regular season, feet planted firmly in Jets skates.

And now the Jets are headed to the playoffs for consecutive seasons under head coach Rick Bowness.

It's an opportunity Winnipeg has earned through improved team defence, great goaltending and smart acquisitions in the form of Vildardi, Sean Monahan and Tyler Toffoli. It's one that was never fully at risk, even during Winnipeg's disappointing February and March performance, because of the heights the Jets hit before their game went awry. They've endured defensive lapses, inefficient bench management and a horrible flu which still affects members of the team — Logan Stanley shared recently that he got through multiple days this week on a couple bowls of soup.

They know their game has slipped, just as they know they're capable of being a great team. The tone in the Jets room right now doesn't reflect a sense of mission accomplished, false bravado or unearned swagger. From Bowness behind the bench through the Jets' star players, the story of the moment is clear: Winnipeg has given itself an opportunity to have a playoff run. Winnipeg has six games left in the season to re-establish itself as a top-tier team. There's no raucous celebration to be had here: the Jets need to put in work.

I asked Vildardi about Winnipeg's to-do list on Thursday.

"I'm not the coach but I'd say we've got to clean up things," he said. "We are having breakdowns where I feel we're getting outworked for not a few shifts, but for the whole period and we can't have that. There's definitely parts of the game where we are dominating. You can see it. And then we just kind of lose it. We have to find a way to narrow that down."

Here are three focal points for the Jets with six games left in the regular season, including special teams, coaching and how Winnipeg stacks up against Nathan MacKinnon, Mikko Rantanen and the rest of its most likely first-round opponents.

#### *Will special teams cost Winnipeg?*

It's a treat to watch Vildardi work on the power play. While it's obvious that Vildardi has more ideas than penalty killers know how to deal with, his biggest gift is the way he scans the ice long before he gets the puck. With a quick turn of his head, Vildardi processes an enormous amount of information in an instant, sorting out the positions of defenders, the goalie, his teammates and the assortment of sticks and skates that stand in his lanes.

"He knows who's open and what he's doing before he gets the puck," Bowness said on Thursday. "And he sees what the options are when he gets it. He know exactly what he wants to do, he knows exactly where the guys are. He has that unique ability to see that. He's not ad-libbing out there. When he gets the puck he knows where it's going."

It's Vildardi's ability to make the most of his options that reduces my concern about Winnipeg's 22nd place in the power-play standings. With him in the lineup, Winnipeg's top power-play unit scores at 7.8 goals per 60 minutes of five-on-four time — the 11th-best rate in the league.

It's a small sample but put Vildardi and Monahan on the same Jets power play and the scoring rate soars to 11.2 goals per 60 minutes. There's some luck in that, with Monahan shooting the lights out, but it's a scoring rate that only trails the very best combinations in the league: Edmonton and Tampa Bay.

The penalty kill has been a mess, ranked 26th in the league — the worst among playoff teams, unless the Islanders make it — and shows no signs of improvement.

Winnipeg's defensive zone has been an absolute shooting gallery, with a ton of shots

I asked Bowness about the theory behind it. He said the Jets are fine with giving up the initial shot from the outside of the ice but also put emphasis on what happens after the initial shot.

“Just as important as all of that is that when there is a shot that everyone collapses and goes to the net,” he said. “We don't want you going to the shooting lane, ‘OK it gets by me’ and then you're just standing there. There's going to be two or three guys from the other team down by the net so, when the puck gets to our net, we've got to keep getting better at getting more bodies down there, getting control of the puck so they're not getting second and third whacks at it.”

The Jets have struggled with those boxouts and puck battles for most of the season, with Brenden Dillon and Dylan DeMelo generally having more success than Nate Schmidt and Neal Pionk. Bowness says the weak-side forward (the forward on the side of the ice that the shot didn't come from) needs to drop down into the slot and help out.

Perhaps most frustrating is the lack of successful clears.

“The goal against Ottawa is an example,” he said. “We got down there, we got it, we just didn't get it out of the zone and it cost us. So we did everything right there other than clearing the puck. And when you don't clear the puck in this league, it's usually going to end up in the back of your net.”

My opinion? The Jets are betting that Hellebuyck can make the first save on shots from the outside and that their defenders can win the battles that follow. I think Winnipeg is getting only half of that bet right and that its personnel is better suited to a more aggressive PK.

But those failures to clear are all about execution.

### *Is this Bowness' last dance?*

Bowness is coaching through the second year of a two-year contract with a club option for a third year. I'm certain that any decision about his future will be made collectively, out of respect, but there is a chance that this is Bowness' last dance as a head coach.

He'd already been considering retirement before the Jets called him in the summer of 2022. His son Ryan tells a funny story about Rick missing Winnipeg's first phone call while golfing, perhaps wondering if he was being asked for his opinion as opposed to being considered for a job. In the time since then, he has revamped the leadership group and made meaningful improvements to the five-on-five defensive game, charting the team's course back to the playoffs in two straight seasons.

But he's also stepped away from the team three times — first, due to complications from COVID-19, then to be with his wife Judy after she suffered a seizure and again for a minor medical procedure last month. At 69 years old, Bowness' career at this juncture is about chasing dreams. After everything he's gone through, it seems reasonable to wonder if this is his one last opportunity to chase the Cup. He's played it coy when asked about the idea directly, leaving his future up in the air. His love of the game endures.

Fans of his may want to treasure the Jets' playoff run, however long it lasts, a little extra sweetly — just in case.

#### *How the Jets stack up against Colorado*

It's mathematically possible for Winnipeg to win all six games it has left and overtake top spot in the Central to earn a first-round matchup with a wild-card team like Nashville, Los Angeles or even Vegas. It's slightly more likely — but still tough — for Colorado to catch Dallas, setting up a battle between the Jets and Stars.

The much more realistic scenario has the Jets headed for a first-round matchup with MacKinnon's Avalanche. The spread between Dallas in first, Colorado in second and Winnipeg in third gives an 87 percent probability of a Jets/Avalanche clash — enough to start writing matchups with MacKinnon, Rantanen and Cale Makar in pencil if not in ink.

We compared Winnipeg and Colorado in our Stanley Cup contender preview. On paper, it's a battle between Colorado's superior top-end talent and Winnipeg's superior goaltending, with both teams boasting more than their fair share of quality players from top to bottom of the lineup.

Hellebuyck and Josh Morrissey are the Jets' two biggest strengths, even compared to Cup champions of seasons past.

Colorado has MacKinnon and Rantanen, two of the world's best players on a line that few teams can match.

The Jets hold a 2-0 lead in the season series, but both of those games happened in December. The Avalanche have added Casey Mittelstadt, Sean Walker, Brandon Duhaime and Yakov Trenin since that time (at the cost of Bowen Byram) while Winnipeg picked up Monahan and Toffoli. Those are big changes on their own but, as Jets fans know well after Winnipeg's fall from first place, the quality of a team's play can swing wildly no matter who is in the lineup. Next Saturday's game with the Avalanche will go further in terms of how these two teams stack up right here, right now, and then its outcome will cease to matter if and when the series begins.

Matchup-wise, Colorado went after Winnipeg's top line of Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Nikolaj Ehlers with last change on Dec. 7 but Connor's second-period goal won the matchup 1-0 that night. At home in Winnipeg, Adam Lowry's line took most of the MacKinnon matchup, winning its battle 1-0, while MacKinnon and Valeri Nichushkin set up Jack Johnson for a goal against Scheifele, Ehlers and Vilaridi.

No matter which forwards were on the ice or which team had last change, Morrissey and DeMelo got the overwhelming majority of the MacKinnon minutes in both Jets wins.

#### **TSN.ca**

#### **[Having home-ice advantage would be ideal but Jets not solely focused on that](#)**

The Jets know there is a good chance they will face the Avalanche in the playoffs and would like to play at home to start the potential series, however, head coach Rick Bowness says working on the details of the game in the final stretch remains the focus.

## **Minneapolis Star Tribune**

### ***Wild lose to Jets again 4-2 despite Kirill Kaprizov's two goals***

By Sarah McLellan

They shouldn't have been, but the Wild were competitive.

Led by their best player Kirill Kaprizov, they had a chance to break through — more than once. But when they needed that decisiveness, they faltered.

"Too many passengers," John Hynes said.

The Wild coach was describing a 4-2 loss to the Jets Saturday at Xcel Energy Center, but he could have been reflecting on the entire season.

Beleaguered by injury, the Wild haven't had enough of a lift from their support players — especially at key times, like division games — and that's contributed to their current plight: they're on the brink of being mathematically eliminated from the playoffs with six games left on their schedule.

"It's a tough feeling, for sure," Mats Zuccarello said. "But at the end of the day, that's the reality right now. You reassess and have to be better."

Kaprizov supplied all the Wild's offense, twice answering back after Winnipeg secured the lead, but no one on the Wild had a reply for the Jets' third go-ahead goal from Alex Lafallo at 13 minutes, 39 seconds of the second period.

Another deflection, this time from Morgan Barron off a shot by former Minnesota-Duluth defenseman Dylan Samberg at 9:46 of the third, was unnecessary insurance.

Winnipeg, which is playoff-bound and still jostling for seeding at the top of the Central Division, swept the four-game series vs. the Wild, who wrapped a six-game homestand by dropping two in a row. They start a season-high five-game road trip Sunday afternoon at Chicago.

"Just frustrating to be in this position," said goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury, who made 21 stops.

Before he assisted on the Jets' last two goals, Vladislav Namestnikov sent a rolling puck behind Fleury just 2:33 into the first period.

Kaprizov responded for the Wild with a spinning backhand, a highlight-reel goal considering he capitalized with his back to the net.

His second goal was a torrid one-timer on the power play at 15:42 after Winnipeg's Kyle Connor buried a 2-on-1 rush 3:58 earlier.

Overall, the Wild went 1-for-4 on the power play; Winnipeg was 0-for-2.

Mats Zuccarello set up both Kaprizov goals, the longtime linemates reuniting after mostly being on different lines since the All-Star break.



"It feels good to play together again," Kaprizov said.

Not only is Kaprizov one goal shy of reaching 40 for a third consecutive season, he's on a six-game point streak and has a 10-game point streak at Xcel Energy Center to become the first player in Wild history with multiple double-digit home point streaks; the winger also had a 14-game run in 2022-23.

But as has been the case throughout the season, the Wild couldn't deliver the next game-altering play.

They didn't pry the lead away from the Jets, nor did they make another rally after Lafallo's final tiebreaker.

"We worked hard, and it's not enough," Zuccarello said. "We've been playing good teams. We work hard. But like I said, it's not enough right now."

Winnipeg goalie Connor Hellebuyck stopped all 10 shots he faced in the third period en route to a 25-stop showing.

"You just need more," Hynes said, "whether it's depth scoring or energy or physicality, ending shifts in the offensive zone."

This is unusual territory for the Wild to be so close to elimination with a week-plus left in the regular season. They've missed the playoffs just once since 2013.

"It's always tough," Kaprizov said. "It's not fun. Just finish season early after regular season. It's where we are now."

But to call the games still on their calendar meaningless would be incorrect.

Hynes still wants to see improvement — and soon — with a problem the Wild haven't been able to fix.

"Right now, we're at a point now where we need everybody going in the lineup, from a competitive aspect of the game, to give ourselves a chance to win," Hynes said. "We've done that, but I'd like to see a better performance from numerous people in tomorrow's game."

## **Winnipeg Sun**

### **[Jets' fourth line lifts Winnipeg to third straight win](#)**

By Scott Billeck

First place in the Central Division may be within reach after all.

Buoyed by their fourth line, which opened the scoring, notched the game-winner and added the insurance marker in the third, the Winnipeg Jets moved five points back of the Dallas Stars for the top spot in the tight divisional race after taking a 4-2 decision over the Minnesota Wild in St. Paul on Saturday afternoon.

Coupled with a Chicago Blackhawks 3-2 win against the Dallas Stars six hours east down the I-94, the door cracked open slightly for the third-place Jets, who moved two back of the idle Colorado Avalanche for second place.

The Jets, who hit the 100-point plateau at Xcel Energy Center with their 47th win of the season (47-24-6), face Dallas and Colorado as part of their four-game road trip, which kicked off on Saturday and concludes next Saturday in Denver.

Connor Hellebuyck helped Winnipeg to their third straight win, winning for the 34th time this season after making 25 saves.

A quality fourth-line forecheck got Winnipeg on the board 2:33 into the first.

Morgan Barron was first in, separating his man from the puck, allowing Alex Lafallo to pick up the biscuit and find Vladislav Namestnikov in front for his 11th and first in seven games.

A couple of self-inflicted errors followed for Winnipeg, with Kyle Connor failing to keep ahold of a puck on a turnover that resulted in Kirill Kaprizov's first of two in the opening frame.

Connor notched his 31st just past the midway mark of the period to put the Jets back in front, but he was in the box for a lazy tripping call when Kaprizov rocketed his second past Hellebuyck to make it 2-2 heading into the intermission.

From there, the Jets steadied themselves, with Lafallo capping off his two-point night at 13:39 of the second after redirection of Brenden Dillon's point blast.

Barron would ensure all three of Winnipeg's fourth-liners ended with a goal after he got a stick on Dylan Samberg's point shot with 9:46 remaining in regulation.

Namestnikov led the Jets with three points, and the fourth line combined for six total in the game.

The win ensured Winnipeg swept the season series against the Wild.

The Jets are making a quick pitstop back home before heading to Nashville on Tuesday.

### **[BILLECK: Fourth line magic recipe for Jets playoff success](#)**

By Scott Billeck

If Rick Bowness has said it before, he's said it a thousand times — maybe more, given how long he's been behind a bench in the NHL.

"You want to win the Stanley Cup? You have to have all four lines going and playing at their best," Bowness told reporters after Saturday's game in St. Paul.

They were flying at Xcel Energy Center in Winnipeg's 4-2 win over the Minnesota Wild, which led to the Jets' sweep of the season series against their Central Division rivals.

Vladislav Namestnikov, who centres Bowness's fourth trio and scored a goal and two assists in the win, said the game was akin to a dress rehearsal for a line that appears to be hitting its stride at just the right time.

The Jets will be just fine later this month if Namestnikov and linemates Morgan Barron and Alex Iafallo combine for three goals and six points with any regularity.

But more realistically, they'll give themselves a competitive edge most Stanley Cup contenders have their arsenal if they can regularly impact the game.

"You see the recipe for success, those teams in the past who have won the Cup," Barron told reporters post-game. "You look at Vegas last year, their fourth line was impactful in a lot of different ways throughout the whole playoffs."

Bowness praised the line's ability to play the right way, which was plainly evident in Winnipeg's opener early in the first period.

Barron barrelled into the zone and separated his man from the puck behind Wild netminder Marc-Andre Fleury, allowing Iafallo to latch onto the loose biscuit and find Namestnikov, who had worked his way into some soft ice in the slot.

Both goals from Barron and Iafallo came from getting to the front of the net and providing a helping hand via a tip from points shots.

"Vladdy was outstanding, Morgan in front of the net got a tip, he's responsible for (Iafallo's) goal because he's right in front of the goalie," Bowness said. "Alex, you know what you're going to get from him every shift. He just goes out there and he works. That line was a big difference maker."

Barron said after the game that he felt like his line had been on top of their game over the past few games.

The puck luck was with them in St. Paul.

"Nothing really changed in our game," Namestnikov said. "Got a deep cycle and tried to get pucks to the net, they're going in (on Saturday). So, hopefully, we can continue.

"We've clinched, but we have to continue playing the right way and kind of bringing the momentum into the playoffs."

They've earned more ice time, if nothing else.

They limited their opposition to just one attempt (9-1) and no shots on goal (6-0) in the game. They created four scoring chances, three of them high-danger.

A 90% share of the attempts and a 100% share of both shots and goals? That's pretty damn good.

- Bowness wasn't happy with Winnipeg's still-struggling power play after they went 0-for-2 against the Wild. "It can be better," he said. And when pressed about what could be better, he

agreed that just gaining the zone needs improvement. “An issue, yep. The whole thing. It wasn’t in sync.”

- The power play over the three previous games shows a decent run, going 3-for-10. Zoom out, however, and you see just three goals in their past 29 attempts in nine games, including Saturday’s. The fourth line going will be important, for sure. But the power play needs to be scoring if the Jets are really going to make noise in the playoffs.
- Bowness liked the play of his defensive pairs in the game, tandems he switched up a couple of games ago. After watching the first goal against — a turnover by Kyle Connor and some suspect play in front from Neal Pionk — one wonders if moving Dylan DeMelo back with Josh Morrissey would better suit the team’s top pairing.
- Staying on the blue-line, Logan Stanley put forth another solid effort. He was on the ice for 16 attempts and just five against in the game. Stanley has found his game over the last little while, channelling some of his frustrations of sitting for large swaths this season into an effective, impactful play. It’s given the coaching staff something to think about heading into the playoffs, with Stanley, Nate Schmidt and Colin Miller all vying for a spot on the Game 1 roster.
- The final nod takes us back to the fourth line, where Barron went 7-for-9 in the faceoff dot. He’s been a really solid stand-in for Namestnikov.

### **JETS NOTEBOOK: Home-ice is nice but consistency is the focus**

By Scott Billeck

Home-ice advantage for the first round of the playoffs is something the Winnipeg Jets, without question, would like to own when the quest for the Stanley Cup kicks off later this month.

But after clinching a playoff berth on Thursday night with a 5-2 win over the Calgary Flames, the focus has shifted to the team’s details.

If they get those details down pat over the next six games, they might achieve both the desire to start that quest at Canada Life Centre and the need to play a brand of hockey that could extend their season well into May, if not longer.

“If we get home ice, great,” head coach Rick Bowness said Friday. “If not, then it’s just as important that we’re playing our game and comfortable with our game at that point.”

The Jets produced large swaths of that game against in their win on Thursday, but, as hat-trick hero Gabriel Vilardi pointed out in the game’s aftermath, there is still much to do.

Winnipeg can’t be sagging the way they did in the second period, for instance, where Calgary went on a 15-4 run on the shot clock and tied a game the Jets appeared to be comfortably leading.

“That’s when we look our worst is when we’re not moving,” captain Adam Lowry said.

As they did in their win Monday against Los Angeles, the Jets could reel themselves in, bending rather than breaking.

A team like Colorado won't be as forgiving as a lowly Flames squad.

"That's the biggest thing in the playoffs," Lowry said. "You can't give other teams free offence. You can't give other teams opportunities because we are not managing the puck or losing battles.

"We get ourselves into trouble when we get a little stubborn, or when we aren't getting pucks out at our own blueline, and when we can't get pucks in at their blueline. When we get away from our forechecking game, it's about doing it consistently throughout the game, not just for a period of time.

"That's what these last (games) are going to be about, the last six here. Firing on all cylinders, having complete efforts, being really sharp so that when playoffs come, whether it's the Avalanche, who whomever we get – it's most likely the Avalanche – we will be ready to go."

The Jets are entering a gauntlet of Central Division matchups over their next four games, including dates with Nashville, Dallas, and Colorado.

"We got some very tough games here against some tough opponents and we want to see where our game stacks up against them," Bowness said.

Don't expect a lot of load management here, either.

Bowness warned of the idea of resting guys, except when they are banged up.

"I've seen teams that have rested guys and you lose the edge," he said. "You do. And it kind of backfires."

Bowness would prefer to keep his team on top of their game.

"If they're rested and they're fresh and they want to play then they will keep going until we get to the last couple (of games) and we will figure it out from there," he said.

Lowry quiet on headshot

While much of the anger on Thursday was toward Flames pivot Martin Pospisil and his hit on Josh Morrissey, which led to a five-minute major and a game ejection, Lowry, too, was on the receiving end of a questionable blow.

Lowry was rocked behind the goal line during the third period by Flames forward Kevin Rooney. There was no call on the play, but the hit knocked Lowry out of the game after being pulled by the concussion spotter.

The 30-year-old was fine after passing the tests and wasn't interested in saying much on Friday about it.

"I think you need the puck to get hit," he said. "It's all good. I'm good.

"I'm not worried about my head. That play happens. I think there could be a minor penalty there, but that one's fine."

Lowry did have a comment on the Pospisil hit, however.

“(That) one’s an entirely different category,” he said. “He leaves his feet, drives up right into J-Mo’s head. I think it’s his third major penalty in two months. So at some point, the league needs to do something.”

As of Friday afternoon, no hearing was scheduled by the NHL’s department of player safety.

Pospisil was suspended for three games just last month after boarding Seattle’s Vince Dunn. In preseason action, Pospisil was tossed after clipping Cole Perfetti in the head on a blindside hit.

Moose sign college standout

On Friday, The Jets welcomed another left-shot defenceman to the mix, signing 25-year-old Dylan Anhorn out of St. Cloud State University following the end of his NCAA season.

Anhorn, a Calgary native, was captain of the Huskies, who were bounced from the National Collegiate Hockey Conference semifinal late last month to the University of Denver. Denver advanced to the Frozen Four later this month.

“Fortunate to be able to work it out, get down here, meet the guys and join the team,” Anhorn said Friday, noting he had been talking with the organization for the past year or so.

Anhorn was one of the top-ranked free agents coming out of the college ranks this season and joins the Moose on an amateur tryout contract for the remainder of the 2023-24 season.

He signed a one-year deal for the 2024-25 campaign.

Anhorn’s path to the pro ranks included losing his sophomore season to the COVID-19 pandemic and the first half of his junior year to a ruptured spleen at Union College before transferring to St. Cloud State. A foot injury ended his season with the Huskies, but he was healthy during his senior season.