

Winnipegjets.com

Three things - Missed opportunity
Jets get goals from Connor, Morrissey and Toffoli but lose Game 5 6-3

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG – The Winnipeg Jets season came to an end on Tuesday night thanks to a 6-3 loss to the Colorado Avalanche in Game 5 of their opening round series. Colorado wins the best-of-seven affair 4-1 and will face the winner of Dallas and Vegas in the next round. Kyle Connor, Josh Morrissey and Tyler Toffoli scored for the Jets and Connor Hellebuyck made 27 saves for Winnipeg. It was the Jets best game of the series, but it comes too late as they bow out in five games for the second straight postseason.

PERFECT START

With Canada Life Centre amped up, the Jets gave their fans the start they were hoping for when Kyle Connor opened the scoring at 1:15 of the first period. Josh Manson fired a clearing pass that went off the shin pad of teammate Artturi Lehkonen and into the net, Connor was given credit. Per NHL Stats, the goal was the fourth-fastest goal from a start of a playoff game in Jets 2.0 history. The only others faster are Adam Lowry(0:12 into Game 5 of 2019 R1), Jacob Trouba (0:31 into Game 5 of 2018 R1) and Dustin Byfuglien (1:05 into Game 1 of 2018 CF). Unfortunately, the Avs would respond 2:03 later when Valeri Nichuskin would tie the game with his seventh goal of the series.

BAD BOUNCE IN 2ND

Yakov Trenin gave the Avalanche their first lead of the night at 5:42 of the middle frame but the Jets would tie it up on Josh Morrissey's third goal of the series with Winnipeg on the power play to make it 2-2. Colorado then got a couple of fortunate bounces when Lehkonen would take a shot that went off Mark Scheifele's stick and then off Neal Pionk's stick and in behind Connor Hellebuyck to restore Colorado's one goal lead.

AVS STARS TAKE OVER IN THE THIRD

Tyler Toffoli scored his second goal of the series to tie it up at 3-3 at 2:06 of the third period. But Mikko Rantanen would score his first and second goals of the series at 4:11 and 8:01 to open up a two-goal advantage for Colorado. Josh Manson put their final goal of the series into an empty net to make it a 6-3 final. Afterwards, Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey said it feels like a missed opportunity for the Jets.

"The only way that this is going to there's any good from this is that we learn from it," said Morrissey.

"And we actually look at how we can improve as individuals and as a group because like I said they brought that Stanley Cup winning class to this series and we didn't return it for three or four of those games."

Jets head coach sees growth in his group
Bowness: "You compare this team to last year, honestly there's very little comparison."

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG – Just like that the Winnipeg Jets season is over.

After tying a franchise record with 52 wins, winning the William M. Jennings trophy (for the team that gives up the fewest goals) and finishing fourth overall in the NHL, the Jets fell in five games to division rival Colorado.

Obviously, Game 5 was the best the Jets played in this series, but it was too little, too late. Winnipeg just couldn't get to their game fast enough in order to slow down the Avalanche attack.

"Right now, it's just disappointing and frustrating. It feels like a missed opportunity. But the only way that there is any good from this is that we learn from it, and we actually look at how we can improve as individuals and as a group," said Josh Morrissey who scored three times in the five games.

"Because they brought that Stanley Cup-winning class to this series, and we didn't return it for three or four of those games. We have levels that we need to find this offseason. I hope it stings for all of us into the summer and we use it as motivation."

Winnipeg went out in five games last spring as well, but while there are similarities in how their seasons ended in 2023 and 2024, Jets head coach Rick Bowness sees growth from his group this time around.

"Now, why it took until the fifth game to get there – we'll have to answer those questions. But we will. And we'll grow from it. We grew a lot. You compare this team to last year, honestly there's very little comparison," said Bowness.

"This year's team is much better. Much tighter. And we made a lot of huge strides. We did. It didn't show itself in the first four games. I know that. I get that. So that's something we all have to live with. That's something we all have to answer to. But, again, it's growth. And we'll take it from there."

Connor Hellebuyck was announced as a Vezina Trophy finalist on Monday and will more than likely win his second Vezina in June. For those who didn't watch this series, they will look at the 30-year-olds numbers (1-4, 5.23 GAA and .864 SV%) and will believe that Hellebuyck was part of the problem. But they couldn't be more wrong.

"I'm not going to put any blame on Helly, that's for sure. You know, we wouldn't be where we're at right now if it weren't for him. The way he's played all year, go through a lot of those goals and tell me if he could have stopped them," said Morrissey.

"I certainly don't put any onus on him or any individual player on our team. We win as a team we lose as a team, and we all need to look internally this summer and find ways that we can get better. We just played a recent Stanley Cup winning team, a lot of those same pieces there."

Even with all the championship pedigree on the other side, Winnipeg had won eight straight heading into the postseason. They had added Sean Monahan, Tyler Toffoli and Colin Miller to amplify their roster. They were four lines deep and had a solid defence group. Everything just felt different when the playoffs began.

“There are no moral victories in this league. I think we got back to the foundation of being a real solid defensive team and we thought we were going to give ourselves a great chance with that identity to go on a long run. Unfortunately, we couldn't play that game consistently enough. It's not for a lack of trying or a lack of effort,” said Jets captain Adam Lowry.

“I think everyone in this room shows up and they put their best foot forward. The Avs did a really good job forcing us to try and play their game. We weren't able to kind of impose our will and impose our style. It's definitely a disappointing result. I think with the pieces we added we felt we could play with any team in this league, and with the goaltending we have. So, it's going to be a long summer, a disappointing one. This one's going to sting for a while.”

NHL.com

[Rantanen scores twice in 3rd, Avalanche eliminate Jets with Game 5 win](#) [Georgiev makes 34 saves for Colorado, which will play Dallas or Vegas in 2nd round](#)

By Darrin Bauming

WINNIPEG -- Mikko Rantanen scored two goals in the third period, and the Colorado Avalanche eliminated the Winnipeg Jets with a 6-3 win in Game 5 of the Western Conference First Round at Canada Life Centre on Tuesday.

Rantanen scored his first of the playoffs to put Colorado back in front 4-3 at 4:11, redirecting a Devon Toews point shot past goalie Connor Hellebuyck.

“Overall, the series was really good for us,” Rantanen said. “I thought we got better. After every game we looked at things we could do better, and I think we wrapped it up after each game. So, really happy with the performance and we'll keep moving now from here.”

Rantanen made it 5-3 at 8:01, finishing off a cross-crease pass from Nathan MacKinnon on a 2-on-1 rush.

“Over the years, you just learn there's going to be highs and lows and it's how you react to it along the way, and just super happy with how we worked, how hard we battled this series,” MacKinnon said. “It was amazing. Before the series, I think we became really humble. We weren't playing well. These guys (Winnipeg) just beat us 7-0 (in Colorado on April 13), so it was a big wakeup call to how hard it takes to even win a series in this league. Super proud of the guys and a lot of work left to do here.”

Josh Manson scored an empty-net goal at 19:58 for the 6-3 final.

Valeri Nichushkin, Yakov Trenin and Artturi Lehkonen also scored for the Avalanche, who won four straight games after losing Game 1. Alexandar Georgiev made 34 saves. MacKinnon and Toews each had two assists.

Colorado will play the winner of the series between the Dallas Stars and Vegas Golden Knights. That series is tied 2-2 and continues with Game 5 in Dallas on Wednesday.

"I just think everyone's on the same page," MacKinnon said. "A lot of similarities to the year we won (the Stanley Cup in 2022), I think. We just know everyone in that room is going to give everything they have, that's the standard, and obviously whether you score or don't, some of that stuff is out of your control, but you can control your effort and how hard you work... whether we win or lose, we just want to go out swinging."

Kyle Connor, Josh Morrissey and Tyler Toffoli scored for the Jets, who were the No. 2 seed from the Central Division. Hellebuyck made 27 saves.

"We brought our best game in the series, but obviously at this point we were a desperate team," Morrissey said. "We didn't get to our game soon enough in the series. That's the way I see it, I'm proud of the way the guys competed but... you work all year to give yourself an opportunity. We had a great regular season and out in five, it's pretty disappointing."

Connor gave the Jets a 1-0 lead 1:15 into the first period. Manson attempted to clear Connor's rebound from the crease, but it deflected off Lehkonen and in.

"They're an elite team over there, they have high-end talent and I think when we look back at the series, special teams, especially our penalty kill, that really hurt us in a couple of big moments and in a couple of games," Winnipeg captain Adam Lowry said. "(And) just our inability to get to our 5-on-5 game until tonight. Those will be the two keys that you take away. Credit to the Avs. They played a [heck] of a series and they've got a great team. They're going to be a tough out."

Nichushkin tied it 1-1 at 3:18, taking a seam pass from Toews and scoring with a one-timer from the bottom of the right face-off circle.

"That's by far the best playoff game we've played -- it didn't go our way tonight," Winnipeg coach Rick Bowness said. "Couple goals went in off of us. We had some chances that we didn't score. Where was that in the first four games? That's a question we're going to have to answer ourselves over the course of the summer. But we're way ahead of where we were at this point last year when we lost. Way ahead."

Trenin pushed it to 2-1 at 5:42 of the second, collecting a loose puck at the net front and beating Hellebuyck.

"You could say it was maybe the hardest game of the series," Trenin said. "We all put all in and we defended hard in the second and [we] eventually break their momentum and score some big goals in the third."

Morrissey tied it 2-2 at 6:48 on the power play with a one-timer from the point.

"You know, when I watch this series, they were faster most of the games," Morrissey said. "They were aggressive, that was clearly their game plan. Like I said, I think we just never brought our best game until today, where I think we played our best game we've had in the series, but I still don't think it's our best game. It's disappointing. There is going to be a time of reflection, where there always is, which [stinks]. But we need to figure out a way to all get better this offseason because we just saw what it looks like to play against a team that knows how to win."

Lehkonen gave the Avalanche a 3-2 lead when his centering pass went in off Jets defenseman Neal Pionk's stick blade at 13:45.

"I thought the first couple periods we were maybe a little bit too cautious," Georgiev said. "But in the third we knew they would try to open it up we scored a big goal, the fourth one, and kept playing smart. Very, very solid effort."

Toffoli tied it 3-3 at 2:06, taking a drop pass from Nikolaj Ehlers as he entered the offensive zone and beating Georgiev under his blocker with a wrist shot.

"There's no moral victories in this league," Lowry said. "I think we got back to the foundation of being a real solid defensive team and we thought we were going to give ourselves a great chance with that identity to go on a long run. Unfortunately, we couldn't play that game consistently enough. It's not for a lack of trying or a lack of effort. I think everyone in this room shows up and they put their best foot forward. The Avs did a really good job forcing us to try and play their game."

NOTES: The Avalanche became the fourth team in NHL history to record at least five goals in each of their first five games of a playoff run. The 1985 Chicago Black Hawks (seven) and the 1994 New York Rangers (six) are the only teams with a longer run. ... Nichushkin scored in all five games of the series, tying Michel Goulet for the longest goal streak to start a postseason in Avalanche/Quebec Nordiques franchise history. His seven goals in the series tied Rantanen, Joe Sakic and Réal Cloutier for the most in a series in franchise history.

[Jets frustrated by another early playoff exit Winnipeg was eliminated in 5 games in Western 1st Round for 2nd straight season](#)

By Tracey Myers

WINNIPEG -- Josh Morrissey didn't need many words to describe the feeling, the frustration of another early exit from the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

"Terrible," the Winnipeg Jets defenseman said after a 6-3 loss to the Colorado Avalanche in Game 5 of the Western Conference First Round at Canada Life Centre on Tuesday.

"It's disappointing."

Indeed, it was disappointing for the Jets, who lost the final four games of the series, getting outscored 22-8 in that span.

"We brought our best game of the series, but obviously, at this point, we were a desperate team," Morrissey said. "We just didn't get to our game soon enough in the series. That's the way I see it. I'm proud of the way the guys competed, but nothing to show for it."

Although this is the second straight season the Jets were eliminated in five games in the first round, coach Rick Bowness, who last year said he was "disappointed and disgusted" by their performance against the Vegas Golden Knights, was much happier with the effort this time.

"It took too long, but listen, in the two years I've been here, that's by far the best playoff game we've played," he said. "It didn't go our way tonight. Couple goals went in off of us. We had some chances that we didn't score (on). Where was that in the first four games? That's a

question we're going to have to answer ourselves over the course of the summer, but we're way ahead of where we were at this point last year when we lost. Way ahead."

The Jets did perform in Game 5 closer to how they needed to for the entire series. It was better, but still not their best. It wasn't enough, and it came too late.

In the final analysis, the Jets entered the playoffs as the stingiest defensive team, having allowed 2.41 goals per game during the regular season, which was tied with the Florida Panthers for first in the NHL. They are exiting as the team that has allowed the most goals per game (5.60) this postseason.

Would the series be heading back to Denver if the Jets could have gotten to their identity quicker?

"I don't have a crystal ball. I think it would've given us a better chance to push the series longer," Jets captain Adam Lowry said. "They're an elite team over there. They have high-end talent, and I think when we look back at the series, special teams, especially our penalty kill, that really hurt us in a couple of big moments and in a couple of games. Just our inability to get to our 5-on-5 game until tonight. Those will be the two keys that you take away. Credit to the [Avalanche]. They played a [heck] of a series and they've got a great team. They're going to be a tough out."

The Jets know that firsthand.

On Tuesday, there were at least two times when the Jets were able to turn the momentum their way only to have the Avalanche quickly take it back. It started with Kyle Connor, who was credited with the goal that gave Winnipeg a 1-0 lead at 1:15 of the first period after Avalanche defenseman Josh Manson's clearing attempt hit teammate Artturi Lehkonen and deflected into Colorado's net. Just 2:03 later, though, Valeri Nichushkin scored on a one-timer to tie it 1-1.

When Jets forward Tyler Toffoli tied the game 3-3 at 2:06 of the third period, the arena was buzzing again. That lasted for all of 2:05, until Mikko Rantanen scored his first goal of the playoffs by redirecting a shot from defenseman Devon Toews to put the Avalanche back in front 4-3.

In the end, the fight was there for the Jets, but the Avalanche, who aren't that far removed from their Stanley Cup championship in 2022, were ultimately too much for them.

"When I watch that series, they were faster and most of the games they were aggressive. That was clearly their game plan," Morrissey said. "Like I said, I think we just never brought our best game until really today, when we played the best game we had in the series. I still don't think it's our best game.

"There's going to be a time of reflection as there always is, which [stinks], but we need to figure out a way to all get better this offseason because we just saw what it looks like to play against a team that knows how to win."

Canadian Press

Jets Eliminated from NHL Playoffs with Loss to Avalanche

By Judy Owen, The Canadian Press

WINNIPEG — Adam Lowry and Josh Morrissey both spoke in quiet voices about missed opportunities after the Winnipeg Jets were knocked out of the opening round of the NHL playoffs Tuesday for a second straight season.

Mikko Rantanen's first two goals of the NHL playoffs propelled the Colorado Avalanche to a 6-3 victory over the Jets that clinched their Western Conference best-of-seven series in five games.

"Disappointing, disappointing way to end the year," said Lowry, who became Winnipeg's captain this season. "I think everyone in this room is upset with our level of play in the series."

The Jets became the first Canadian team eliminated from the playoffs after they lost the final four games of the series, duplicating their exit in last season's opening round against the Vegas Golden Knights.

It was the first time Colorado and Winnipeg met in the Stanley Cup playoffs. The Jets had finished the regular season in second place in the Central Division, three points up on the Avalanche. Winnipeg had swept their season series 3-0.

"You work all year to give yourself an opportunity," said Morrissey, who scored one of Winnipeg's goals. "We had a great regular season. Out in five, it's pretty disappointing."

Jets players stayed on the ice after handshakes and saluted their whiteout crowd at Canada Life Centre with raised sticks.

Kyle Connor and Tyler Toffoli also scored for Winnipeg. Vezina Trophy nominee Connor Hellebuyck stopped 27 of the 31 shots he faced for Winnipeg.

"In the (last) two years, that's by far the best playoff game we've played," Jets coach Rick Bowness said. "It didn't go our way tonight."

"Couple goals went in off of us. We had some chances that we didn't score (on). Where was that in the first four games? That's a question we're going to have to answer ourselves over the course of the summer."

Rantanen, who also picked up an assist, scored twice in a span of just under four minutes early in the third period to snap a 3-3 tie.

Valeri Nichushkin, Yakov Trenin, Artturi Lehkonen and Josh Manson, with an empty-netter, also scored for the Avalanche. Nathan MacKinnon and Devon Toews each picked up a pair of assists.

"That's the best hockey we've played for five games in a row all season long, and that's what it takes this time of year and that's partly our experience, I think," Colorado coach Jared Bednar said.

Alexandar Georgiev made 34 saves for the 2022 Stanley Cup champions, who play the winner of the Dallas Stars and Golden Knights series in the second round.

“I thought the first couple periods we were maybe a little bit too cautious,” Georgiev said. “But in the third, we knew they would try to open it up (and) we scored a big goal, the fourth one, and kept playing smart. Very, very solid effort.”

The game was tied 1-1 after a fast-paced first period. Colorado led 3-2 heading into the third.

Connor’s first goal of the game had unofficial assists by the Avalanche.

After the Jets winger shot the puck at Georgiev, Manson tried to clear it out of the crease, but it bounced off Lehkonen and into the net at 1:15.

The Avalanche didn’t feel bad for too long.

Toews sent a pass across the slot to Nichushkin, who fired a one-timer past Hellebuyck for his team-high seventh goal of the series at 3:18.

The visitors outshot the Jets 13-7 in the opening period.

Trenin recorded his first goal and point of the series when his shot hit the post and he got the puck and flipped it into the net at 5:42 to go ahead 2-1.

Winnipeg went on its first power play a minute later and cashed in on Morrissey’s one-timer from the point that blew by Georgiev 14 seconds into the man advantage.

Lehkonen made it 3-2, but this time it was Jets defenceman Neal Pionk who unofficially tallied the marker after the puck hit his stick and went in with 6:15 left in the middle period.

The period ended with the Jets ahead on shots 26-24.

Toffoli tied it 3-3 at 2:06, but Rantanen recorded his first goal at 4:11 and added his second marker at 8:01.

Manson shot into the empty net with two seconds left in the third.

DUBIOUS MARK

The Jets are the first team in NHL history to allow five or more goals in each of their first five games to begin a post-season, according to Sportsnet stats.

The Avalanche outscored the Jets 28-15 during the series, including four empty-netters.

The Athletic

[How Avalanche ended series vs. Jets in 5 games: 5 takeaways](#)

By Sean Gentille and Murat Ates

The Colorado Avalanche made it through most of their series against the Winnipeg Jets without much from Mikko Rantanen, but their All-Star winger helped them punch their ticket to the second round, scoring two third-period goals in Colorado’s 6-3 Game 5 win.

The Avs were in a clinching position thanks largely to a lethal power play, dialed-up production from players like Valeri Nichushkin and Artturi Lehkonen and improved goaltending from Alexandar Georgiev. Rantanen took them over the edge, breaking a 3-3 tie with a net-front tip past Connor Hellebuyck at 4:11, then converting a rush feed from Nathan MacKinnon less than four minutes later.

Georgiev finished with 33 saves on 36 shots. Colorado's goal scorers were Nichushkin, Yakov Trenin, Lehkonen, Rantanen and Josh Manson (on an empty net). They await the winner of the Stars versus Golden Knights series.

The Jets, meanwhile, lose in the first round for a second consecutive season. Hellebuyck allowed five goals on 29 shots. Kyle Connor, Josh Morrissey and Tyler Toffoli were the goal scorers for Winnipeg.

Jets can't match Avalanche again

There are moments in a game when championship-caliber teams assert themselves. In Game 5, as in the series, every Jets push was met with a successful Colorado counter.

When Manson gifted Winnipeg a 1-0 goal, banking his clearing attempt off Lehkonen and into his own goal, the Jets could only keep the lead for two minutes and three seconds. When the Jets killed off Neal Pionk's cross-checking penalty in the second period, momentum theirs to seize, Trenin bullied his way past Pionk to the net for the go-ahead goal.

Morrissey's 2-2 goal kept the game tied for less than seven minutes. Toffoli's equalizer tied things for 2:05. The Avalanche's resilience was the stuff you see from championship teams, while Winnipeg's inability to get out of its own way, returning Colorado's own goal with one of its own, then getting beaten in front of its net and off the rush, is what sank the Jets in the game and in the series. They're going home because, try as they might, they couldn't quell Colorado's unrelenting pressure.

Nichushkin punctuates monster series

We know Colorado's elite players can get the job done; the Avs are in this spot because of regular-season greatness from MacKinnon, Rantanen, Cale Makar and Devon Toews. Heading into the series, though, and the playoffs at large, it was fair to wonder whether their second layer was good enough to carry its share of the load.

Question answered, if only due to Nichushkin's play. His first-period goal was his seventh of the playoffs thus far and sixth on the power play, tying franchise records for the most goals in a single series (Joe Sakic in 1996, R al Cloutier in 1982) and longest goal streak to start a playoff year.

Colorado did plenty to augment its secondary scoring during the season, adding Casey Mittelstadt, Zach Parise and a handful of relevant bottom-sixers but none of that is on track to be quite as impactful as getting Nichushkin back to top form after his time in the Player Assistance Program. He's got skill, size, defensive ability and a knack for finding the net in plenty of different ways, and he's doing it with a frequency that should concern the rest of the league.

Bowness goes down swinging

Rick Bowness waited until Game 5 to dress Cole Perfetti or give trade deadline acquisition Colin Miller his Jets playoff debut. He reunited Nikolaj Ehlers, Mark Scheifele and Gabriel Vilardi —

the line Winnipeg rode to the top of the NHL standings when Connor was hurt — and gave himself his most balanced lineup of the playoffs.

It led, in part, to the closest game of the series through 40 minutes. Connor, Scheifele and Ehlers were all dangerous. Perfetti's second-period net drive nearly yielded Connor a go-ahead goal. The Jets' breakout looked improved, too, with aggressive stretch pass options looking like a smart adjustment.

Then, with the Jets down 3-2 on a bad bounce heading into the third period, Bowness went back to what we've always known was his Plan A. Perfetti sat, Connor joined Scheifele and Vilardi, and Ehlers set up Toffoli's goal. It looked like the right play when Toffoli tied it — and, to be clear, it was Adam Lowry's line that gave up the Avs' fourth and fifth goals. Bowness was always better prepared to go down swinging with his aces than commit to his changeups. If ever there was proof that Jets management lets its coaches coach, this series was it.

Winnipeg maintains a club option on Bowness' contract heading into next season. One imagines the Jets' decisions will be made slowly and perhaps even in consultation with their respected veteran coach. For now, it remains possible Bowness has coached his final game.

Georgiev rises to the occasion

One game and change into this series, it didn't seem like Georgiev would be up for the task. Game 1 was a catastrophe for the Avs goalie; he allowed seven goals on 23 shots and more than five goals more than expected, almost single-handedly putting his team in a 1-0 hole. Sometime during the second period of Game 2, though, he found himself, and he spent the rest of the series showing that he is, in fact, playing well enough for Colorado to do real damage.

A series of saves late in the second period on Tuesday night is a great example of how things have changed. With 1:49 remaining, Georgiev stopped Nino Niederreiter twice on an odd-man rush. On an ensuing power play — Sean Walker took a penalty on that same trip up ice — Georgiev made a sparkling glove save on Sean Monahan. If Georgiev were playing at his Game 1 level, or at the level he'd shown in the last month of regular-season games, we'd be having a wholly different conversation. He held up his end of the bargain, though, and his team is advancing as a result.

Jets' effort not lacking

The loss means the Jets still haven't won a playoff game after losing even once in a series since 2020. Their last win in a do-or-die game was back in 2018 — a Game 7 win over Nashville. This one was different, with a distinct shortage of ghosts.

Scheifele had jump from his first shift. Connor, who was one of the biggest absentees in the Game 5 loss to Vegas last season, played one more strong two-way game in a long line of them — dynamic with the puck, committed off it. In the second period, when Pionk took a cross-checking penalty, Lowry and company were all over the penalty kill to get the Jets through the storm. Then, when Miles Wood held up Miller for a penalty in Winnipeg's zone, Morrissey made the Avalanche pay: It was a power-play rocket, set up by Scheifele and Vilardi. Ehlers assisted the third period's tying goal and made tough plays at both blue lines, while Hellebuyck kept the Jets in the game until the very end.

Winnipeg's players looked in the mirror before Game 5 and asked how they could be better. The core pieces delivered as best they could. It wasn't enough to extend the series but this particular loss contained plenty of pushback.

The Winnipeg Jets are out in Round 1 again: What went wrong and what needs to change

By Murat Ates

Step by step, the 2023-24 Winnipeg Jets climbed to what felt like the top of a mountain. It took five playoff games for the Colorado Avalanche to show them the difference between base camp and Everest.

Nathan MacKinnon, Mikko Rantanen and Cale Makar outshone Winnipeg's brightest stars in Colorado's series win. Valeri Nichushkin, Casey Mittelstadt and Artturi Lehkonen did the same, overwhelming a beleaguered Jets defense with pace, determination and physicality. Alexandar Georgiev finished the series with better numbers than Connor Hellebuyck and Winnipeg largely struggled to get out of its own zone, turning it into a shooting gallery for four out of five games.

"They brought that Stanley Cup-winning class to this series, and we didn't return it for three or four of those games," Josh Morrissey said, visibly distraught after Game 5. "We have levels that we need to find this offseason. I hope it stings for all of us into the summer and we use it as motivation."

Given the heights the Jets hit this year — and the ground the franchise has covered between last year's five-game loss to Vegas and now — it feels too soon to be talking about summer workouts, offseason pain and the push to be better all over again. But this season's pain isn't about whether or not Winnipeg got better in 2023-24; the Jets improved by six wins, 15 points, 12 goals for and 26 goals against.

It's about the enormous difference between the level Winnipeg found and the one Colorado showed was possible.

"The Avs did a really good job forcing us to try and play their game. We weren't able to kind of impose our will and impose our style," Adam Lowry said. "I think with the pieces we added we felt we could play with any team in this league, and with the goaltending we have, so it's going to be a long summer, a disappointing one. This one's going to sting for a while."

These Jets had known failure. They had fallen apart against Vegas, a team full of absentees and ghastly performances. They had also put in the work — digging themselves out of last season's abyss, climbing the standings on the back of the stingiest defense in the NHL. They'd convinced themselves they were Stanley Cup contenders and showed enough of the hallmarks to enter that conversation with legitimacy.

Thus Colorado's five-game dismantling does not undo Winnipeg's progress. It reveals how much further the Jets still need to go.

"We're way ahead of where we were at this point last year when we lost," said Jets coach Rick Bowness, who one year ago called out the team's lack of pushback. "Way ahead. The team made a lot of great strides during the course of the season."

How Avalanche ended series vs. Jets: 5 takeaways

So what went wrong — and what comes next?

The Jets' offseason begins early — exactly as Colorado dictated — but without the spectre of star departures. Mark Scheifele's and Connor Hellebuyck's seven-year contract extensions begin next season. Morrissey is signed for four more seasons, while Lowry and Kyle Connor have two years left on their current deals. The Jets' unrestricted free agents include Brenden Dillon, Dylan DeMelo and Laurent Brossoit as well as trade acquisitions Sean Monahan, Tyler Toffoli and Colin Miller. Cole Perfetti and David Gustafsson will need new contracts, too.

Anyone who's ever moved homes will tell you one of the hardest decisions is what to throw away and what to keep. The same must be true for NHL teams in a state of transition, making this offseason as tricky as any that have come before it. The Jets got better but still fell far short of their goal — they were outmatched, outplayed, outcoached.

In a lot of ways, Bowness' future is the biggest question. Winnipeg has a club option on his contract this summer and, when asked about it after Game 5, Bowness demurred. "We just lost in the playoffs," he said. "We'll figure that out."

To understand where the Jets will go with the pain of this year's playoff loss, consider how they got to Game 5 at all.

Remember where this all started: A lack of pushback, an ex-captain on the way out, and PL Dubois in the process of demanding a trade.

General manager Kevin Cheveldayoff made sure the Jets got their way, bringing Gabriel Vilardi, Alex Iafallo and Rasmus Kupari back for Dubois in a pre-draft blockbuster. He bought out Blake Wheeler, clearing the air for Lowry to step forward as captain. The Vilardi trade, plus Cheveldayoff's brand new playbook — transparency in contract negotiations — brought back two franchise cornerstones in Scheifele and Hellebuyck.

There was an immediate resurgence: Vilardi got hurt but Connor stepped up, briefly leading the NHL in goals. When Connor got hurt, Vilardi formed a new top line with Scheifele and Nikolaj Ehlers — a line that dramatically outscored its opponents as the Jets pushed up the standings. Perfetti scored 19 points in his first 23 games as top prospects Brad Lambert and Nikita Chibrikov produced similarly in the AHL.

There were spots of concern — Bowness' apparent disregard for Ehlers' and Perfetti's quality — even as the Jets' position in the standings soared. But Winnipeg kept winning and the buy-in began to snowball: Nino Niederreiter signed a multiyear contract extension, speaking to his love of the organization and the city. The Jets acquired Monahan, whose power-play impact was instantaneous, before adding Toffoli and Miller. Cheveldayoff had made a series of franchise-defining moves that re-established Winnipeg's competitive window.

Bowness talked openly with his players about their lack of pushback against Vegas. The Jets doubled down on defensive structure, getting even better results in Bowness' second year. There was midseason talk of the Jack Adams Award, given to the NHL's top coach. By January, Bowness was an All-Star and Winnipeg led the league in points. After 82 games, they'd produced the single-best defensive and goaltending performances in the NHL. Lowry will receive Selke votes. Morrissey could be a Norris finalist. Hellebuyck has already won the Jennings Trophy and will likely win the Vezina.

Winnipeg sputtered, but only for a moment. The club was better on paper with a higher floor than last season, and it erased a six-game losing streak with eight straight wins. Bowness would wait until Game 5 to dress a 19-goal scorer in Perfetti and the right-handed veteran defenseman they traded for in Miller, but the Jets arrived at the playoffs with home-ice advantage and a torrid stretch of wins. The Jets were full value for the miles put in between last year's devastation and this year's peak. Their process was good; their habits had earned them the right to dream big.

"When you talk to guys that have won Cups, a common theme I've heard is you don't always know," Morrissey told *The Athletic* before Game 1. "You don't go into the playoffs, 'This is the year we're going to win.' You don't always know when it's going to come. But the more opportunities you give yourself, if you do it the right way and have good teams, you also never know when it might come, too. So why couldn't it be our year this year?"

We now know the answer. Colorado showed it to us, achieving a level of individual and team performance that made dominance look commonplace. What moments Winnipeg conjured — Josh Manson scoring on himself, Tuesday's enormous second-period penalty kill, Morrissey's goal to make it 2-2 in the second, Toffoli tying it 3-3 in the third — the Avalanche had the answers.

MacKinnon laid out the formula for their relentlessness.

"Everyone's on the same page. A lot of similarities to the year we won," he said. "I think we just know everyone in that room is gonna give everything they have and that's the standard, whether you score or don't. Some of that stuff is out of your control, but you can control your effort and how hard you work and we've got everyone on the same page right now battling. Whether we win or lose, we just want to go out swinging, and we had a great series in that sense."

Winnipeg is a step behind on that front and, if it's going to win a championship without a MacKinnon or a Rantanen on the roster, it's going to need to close that gap. MacKinnon isn't going anywhere. Jack Eichel, Mark Stone, Roope Hintz, Jason Robertson, Connor McDavid ... it's easy to see a talent gap between Winnipeg's top players and those of the Western Conference elite standing in their way.

But you don't throw Scheifele out because he's not MacKinnon, just like you don't move on from Hellebuyck because he couldn't steal a series Colorado utterly dominated. You build around them, looking for other advantages up front while trusting that the best goaltender in the world will put up playoff numbers to reflect that. Niederreiter and Namestnikov were great additions because they make Winnipeg harder to play against. They're not Nichushkin or Lehkonen; Winnipeg's top-end still favours offence-first players who don't win as many battles.

During the regular season, Connor fit that description. During the playoffs, it was more apt for Ehlers, who set up Toffoli's 3-3 goal in Game 5 but was otherwise unable to overcome a lack of speed and chemistry on the Jets' second line. Meanwhile, Connor was playing some of the best 200-foot hockey of his career — a level of play that would help him outscore his minutes if he maintained it in the regular season.

Colorado isn't spending any time guessing which of Rantanen, Nichushkin, Lehkonen or MacKinnon are going to show up at both ends of the rink. Winnipeg's future depends on guessing right — up front and on defense, where DeMelo has been Morrissey's best partner for years and Dillon's absence left a gaping hole. Dylan Samberg stepped up in Dillon's absence, but veteran Neal Pionk — Winnipeg's No. 3 in minutes — appeared outmatched.

To that end, it's time to discuss the impacts of Winnipeg's coaching.

The Jets don't have a great read on Miller's ability to round out their defense corps, as they only dressed him for five regular-season games and one more in the playoffs. Ehlers is scheduled to become a 2025 UFA and immediately becomes a trade target; it's difficult to project an extension after so much time on the second line under Bowness and his predecessors alike. Perfetti was among team leaders in goals and primary assists per minute of ice time but was limited to 1:34 in the third period of Game 5. During the regular season, the lack of ice time saw him fall one goal short of a performance bonus that would have paid just over \$200,000. Teammates noticed and so have rival clubs.

Bowness has had a very positive impact on Winnipeg's defensive structure. He's among the most respected coaches in the game, known for carving out tremendous interpersonal relationships. His personnel decisions have also served to undercut his own immediate goals while creating longer-term concerns about the Jets' ability to retain young players. Lambert, Chibrikov and Rutger McGroarty are getting closer to challenging for NHL minutes. Elias Salomonsson just won an SHL championship at 19 years old while Ville Heinola is still in the AHL.

Much more pressing: Two of Bowness' veterans called out for the need for adjustments four games into the series. He countered by discussing individual execution — and he was right — but Winnipeg's coach was a step behind Colorado, just like his players. The Avs' series-long advantage was its forecheck taking away outlets from an outmatched Jets defense faster than Winnipeg's players could cope with it. Game 5 was Winnipeg's best game of the series partly because the Jets addressed their breakout, relying heavily on instant and aggressive stretch pass outlets — often two at once.

Bowness was asked after Game 5 if he would have done anything differently in the series.

“For sure. We lost. We didn't win. Hindsight is 20-20 but you do learn,” he said. “That worked, that didn't work, that was a mistake.’ You have to be honest with yourself. We will be very honest with ourselves as a staff, about what we did right and what we did wrong and what we have to do better.”

If Winnipeg isn't going to dress MacKinnon, McDavid or Eichel, then it's a team that can't afford to cut away at its own margin of error. If it's on the Jets' players to soak in the sting of their loss, challenging themselves to be better as Morrissey has said, then Winnipeg's coaching staff has to follow through on Bowness' commitment to soul searching, too.

For a look back at the standard Winnipeg needs to get to, consider Avalanche head coach Jared Bednar's view on the difference between where the Avalanche used to be and where they are today.

“Our group, it didn't happen immediately. We lost a handful of times in the second round and then they just really dialed into the commitment that it takes, and the pursuit of perfection that it takes, in order to try and win. Our team never shortchanges us on our effort. Sometimes we play better than other times. But they're committed to what we're doing,” Bednar said after the series. “Ultimately, it comes down to playing your best hockey at the right time. That's over two-week periods in the playoffs, and you've got to do it four times in a row in order to win. Our guys understand that.”

“Their mental toughness has increased every year for us,” Bednar continued. “We’ve got great leadership in there. I used to hate that saying, that you’ve got to lose before you win. But realistically, after we won in 2022, I know that was part of it. Losing the handful of years before when we thought we had a team that could win. They learned a lot of lessons from that. Those are tough lessons to learn when you really have a good team like Winnipeg does. ... I just thought our guys did a really nice job (and) I think that’s the best hockey we’ve played for five games in a row all season long. That’s what it takes at this time of the year.”

It’s encouraging that Morrissey and Lowry are challenging themselves and their teammates to sit in the pain, channel it and improve. It’s a step forward, in and of itself, considering last season’s exit interviews about pushback, the players’ frustration with Bowness’ Vegas news conference, and all of the sideshow frustration that came with it. The Jets need that kind of commitment at all levels of the franchise. Colorado showed them the standard in five dominant, relentless games. Even the Avalanche’s practices looked harder.

The Jets took several steps forward this season and deserve credit for them. The Avalanche also buried them in a cold, hard truth: Winnipeg still has a long way to climb.

Sportsnet.ca

Jets' season ends in familiar fashion, with many questions lingering

By Eric Engels

WINNIPEG — It was a wipeout in front of the whiteout. One more to flush a once-promising season down the drain.

For it to have all gone wrong for the Winnipeg Jets in front of these fans, who pushed the decibels to deafening levels at Canada Life Centre, felt ominous.

Will they continue to flood through the gates next season after this one ended in such disappointing fashion? You can’t help but wonder, with sellouts only coming late through a campaign that saw the Jets collect 27 of their 52 wins in this building but only one in the three games that mattered most.

For a second straight year, this team was dispatched from the Stanley Cup Playoffs in five games. It looked a little different against the Colorado Avalanche than last time against the Vegas Golden Knights, but the outcome was the same.

It left fans perplexed.

Why couldn’t their team assert itself? Why did its best players fall so woefully short? How did they — the best defensive team over 82 regular-season games — become the first team in NHL history to allow at least five goals in each of the first five games of a series?

This last one, which ended 6-3 for the Avalanche, plunged Jets fans deep into their seats — and into mourning.

To think they’ll only be brought back to the edges of them over an off-season that’s sure to once again be drama-filled is so heavy.

Josh Morrissey knows.

When the Jets' best defenceman was asked how he felt after this series, on the precipice of yet another summer that'll be longer than he and his teammates were anticipating, he said "terrible."

Morrissey didn't want to be too elaborate in dissecting it, but he was pointed in what the Jets should take from it.

"We win as a team and lose as a team and we all need to look internally this summer and find ways that we can get better," he said. "We just played a recent Stanley Cup-winning team. A lot of the winning pieces are there and they brought it, and it should be a learning experience for us. As much as it stings and kills right now, we have to be better, we have to find another gear as individuals. It's impossible for that to set in right now, but we need to take the lessons from what they did out there because they were the better hockey team and we need to find a way to get to that level."

Morrissey's was up all the way through, notching three goals and four points and matching the intensity he played with all season.

But the Jets needed more from him and everyone else.

They didn't play their best until this last game, and they still lost by three goals. It was a flop that put so much into question.

Sean Monahan and Tyler Toffoli were acquired to fill out a second line that was great down the stretch of the regular season but got crushed by the Avalanche's second unit of Artturi Lehkonen, Casey Mittelstadt and Zach Parise. They're both pending unrestricted free agents who'll be hard to replace if they don't end up signing with Winnipeg.

Nikolaj Ehlers, who started the series with them and ended it being shuffled around the lineup, finished with zero goals and two assists in five games after putting up 25 goals and 61 points in the regular season.

He's under contract for one more year at \$6 million, but you wonder if he'll be playing it with the Jets after once again not managing to show he has what it takes to succeed in the playoffs.

"It's the intensity," said head coach Rick Bowness, who pointed out he's been to four Stanley Cup Finals.

"The playoff intensity goes way up, and you can talk about it all you want," Bowness added. "The teams that have won know how to get there. They got there tonight, they got there this series. They flipped the switch..."

"At the end of a series, if you're not wearing an icebag, you're not playing hard enough. It's as simple as that."

Jets captain Adam Lowry probably needed one for his right hand, which was busted up earlier in the series, and Connor Hellebuyck probably needed one for his ego, which took a barbaric beating when all was said and done.

He declined an opportunity to address the media after allowing another five goals on Tuesday. The leading candidate for the Vezina Trophy didn't want to talk about how the Avalanche beat him 24 times in the series, leaving plenty of questions on the table.

Hellebuyck will have time to get to them before starting the first year of his seven-year, \$59.5-million contract, but he'll only be able to truly answer them next time the Jets are playing games as meaningful as these ones.

There are no guarantees it'll be next spring, with the second line perhaps needing to be completely replaced, with defencemen Dylan DeMelo and Brenden Dillon due new contracts and potentially leaving a defence that desperately needs them, and with Bowness possibly on the outs.

He coached them into tying their franchise record for wins during the regular season but couldn't quite coach them into finding their best game until it was admittedly too late.

Even if the Jets pick up the option on the 69-year-old's contract, he wouldn't comment on whether or not he'd return.

"We just lost in the playoffs," Bowness said. "We'll figure that out."

The Jets will have so much more to resolve as their fans, who stayed to cheer them off the ice, stew in the disappointment of this all-too-familiar ending and await the many changes surely on the horizon.

The players who remain have all of that — and much more — to ponder.

"The only way that there is any good from this is that we learn from it and we actually look at how we can improve as individuals and as a group," Morrissey said. "Because they brought that Stanley Cup-winning class to this series, and we didn't return it for three or four of those games. We have levels that we need to find this offseason. I hope it stings for all of us into the summer and we use it as motivation."

TSN.ca

[Lu: Jets ran into a buzz saw \(VIDEO\)](#)

The Jets dropped four straight games after winning Game 1 of the series and allowed five goals or more in every single one of them. John Lu joins SportsCentre to breakdown a tough series from Winnipeg and where they go from here.

[Jets eliminated after dropping four straight to Avalanche \(VIDEO\)](#)

After winning the first game of the series, the Jets lost four straight games to the Avalanche and were eliminated in the first round of the playoffs again. Frankie Corrado joins Jay Onrait to explain where Winnipeg went wrong.

Global Winnipeg

[Season ends for Winnipeg Jets with 6-3 Game 5 loss to Colorado](#)

By Christian Aumell & Russ Hobson Global News

The Winnipeg Jets said this year would be different.

But for the second straight season the Jets won Game 1, only to lose four in a row to make an early exit from the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

The Jets' season came to a close Tuesday night with a 6-3 home loss to the Colorado Avalanche as they were the fourth team to get eliminated.

Winnipeg has now lost 12 of 14 playoff games since sweeping Edmonton in the first round in 2021. The Jets have also lost six straight elimination games going back to the 2018 playoffs.

"In the two years that's by far the best playoff game we've played," said head coach Rick Bowness. "It didn't go our way tonight. A couple goals went in off of us. We had some chances. We didn't score, but where was that in the first four games, that's a question we're going to have to answer ourselves over the course of the summer."

While the Jets went out with a whimper last year, this time they outshot the Avs 36-32 and played arguably their best game of the series with their season on the line, but it still wasn't enough.

"I thought we played pretty well tonight, honestly," said Jets captain Adam Lowry. "I think the difference is our line gives up three against the (Nathan) MacKinnon line. Disappointing, a disappointing way to end the year. I think everyone in this room is really just upset with kinda, I think our level of play in the series."

"There's no moral victories," Bowness said. "There's growth. You got to grow. And we took a lot of strides as a group this year. We grew a lot. We did."

The Jets were outscored 24-8 since the third period of Game 1.

"We were a desperate team," said Josh Morrissey. "We didn't get to our game soon enough in the series."

"Obviously, we lose out in the first round, it's disappointing. You work all year to give yourself an opportunity. We had a great regular season, and out in five, it's pretty disappointing."

The Jets, who were the league's best defensive team in the regular season, became the first team in NHL history to allow five or more goals in each of their first five games to start the playoffs.

"They've won a Stanley Cup and it showed itself this series," Bowness said. "They raised their battle level more than anything."

"We have to be better," said Morrissey. "We have to find another gear as individuals and it's impossible for that to set in right now, but we need to take the lessons from what they did out there because they were the better hockey team and we need to find a way to get to that level."

And after having such a great regular season, this one hurts a little more for the Jets.

"It's going to be a long summer," Lowry said. "A disappointing one. This one is going to sting for a while."

The Jets were gift-wrapped a lead just 1:15 into the game. After a brief scramble at the side of the net, the puck squirted free in the crease in front of an open net. Josh Manson tried to clear it to safety but shot it right into Artturi Lehkonen a few feet away, sending the puck back into the net.

Kyle Connor was a part of the initial scramble and was given credit for his third goal of the playoffs.

Colorado responded quickly, leveling the score just over two minutes later. After gaining the zone fairly easily, the Avs' top line went to work with some crisp passing. Mikko Rantanen found Devon Toews coming into the zone late and as he skated up the ice, he sent a great cross-ice feed to Valeri Nichushkin who blasted it home to make it 1-1 with his seventh goal of the series.

Colorado held a 13-7 edge in shots on goal through 20 minutes but the game remained tied 1-1 until the fourth line came through for the Avalanche at the 5:42 mark of the second.

A shot from the point was steered aside by Connor Hellebuyck and the puck trickled behind the net. Neal Pionk was caught flat-footed and couldn't reach it before Yakov Trenin got to the puck, stepped in front of the net and roofed it past Hellebuyck to give Colorado the lead.

It didn't last long. Miles Wood was called for holding less than a minute after Trenin's goal and the Jets made him pay when Morrissey's shot from the point went off the post and in to make it 2-2 at the 6:48 mark of the second.

Colorado regained the lead with 6:15 left in the second thanks to an own goal off the stick of Pionk. A shot from Lehkonen glanced off the stick of Mark Scheifele as he released it, sending it sideways towards the corner. Pionk tried to corral the puck but it had too much velocity so after hitting the blade of Pionk's stick, the puck slid into the open net to make it 3-2 for the Avalanche.

According to the NHL, with Lehkonen and Nichushkin each scoring in every game of the series, it's the first time ever that two players on the same team have done that at the same time over the first five games of a postseason.

Winnipeg managed to outshoot Colorado 19-11 in the second but the visitors carried the one-goal lead into the third as they looked to finish off the series.

Just over two minutes into the third, the Jets drew level when Tyler Toffoli took a drop pass from Nikolaj Ehlers and beat Alexandar Georgiev from distance with a hard shot under the blocker.

The building was rocking, though not for long as Colorado regained the lead just 2:05 after Toffoli's goal.

Rantanen got on the board with his first of the series when he redirected a point shot from Toews past Hellebuyck, and he didn't have to wait long to score his second of the playoffs.

3:50 after making it 4-3, Rantanen and Nathan MacKinnon were sprung on a 2-on-1. MacKinnon sent a tape-to-tape pass across the ice that Rantanen buried past a sprawling Hellebuyck to make it 5-3 with 11:59 to go.

Winnipeg pulled Hellebuyck with two minutes to go as they tried to muster a last-ditch comeback effort but they couldn't find the back of the net as fans flooded for the exits before the final horn sounded.

Josh Manson added an empty-netter with two seconds left.

Hellebuyck, the likely Vezina winner, got saddled with the loss after stopping 26 shots.

The Jets are now 10-23 in playoff games (including the four-game loss to Calgary in the bubble) since beating Nashville in 2018.

Colorado advances to face the winner of the series between Dallas and Vegas.

ANALYSIS: Jets stayed on the ground while Avalanche elevated their playoff game

By Paul Edmonds CJOB

After dropping Game 1 of the series, Colorado Avalanche head coach Jared Bednar philosophically answered a question about his team needing to be better the next time out.

He said, "You get in the playoffs and you have no choice but to elevate your game." And from Game 2 until the conclusion of the five-game series with the Jets on Tuesday night, that's precisely what the Avalanche did.

Colorado's goaltending — an area of concern down the regular season stretch and certainly after Game 1 — never faltered again. Their best players levitated to the challenge for four straight games and the team's overall compete was just too much for the Jets to handle.

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In other words, the Avalanche, only two seasons removed from winning the Stanley Cup, rose to another level after the first game and deflected the many pushes the Jets tried in earnest to generate to get back in the series, including Tuesday night.

Winnipeg's star defenceman Josh Morrissey called the Avalanche the better team and spoke about how his club needed to learn and to improve from the disappointing experience of a playoff ouster in the first round for the second straight season

Upon departing downtown Winnipeg last night, Colorado left little doubt on where they currently sit as one of the league's heavyweight teams, a group that is well-informed in winning, and more importantly understands what it takes to win at this time of year.

The Jets, meanwhile, will prepare to review every facet of their team. Questions, assessment, and likely acute inspection will follow in the days, weeks and months ahead — despite the team posting one of its best regular seasons in franchise history.

And over that assessment, they'll probably note the one item that Colorado currently understands better than most, which is when it comes to the playoffs, you have no choice but to elevate your game.

Winnipeg Free Press

Jets go down fighting

Gritty effort not enough as Avalanche advance with road win

By: Ken Wiebe

A lack of pushback this was not.

An inability to find the structure that made them the best defensive team during the regular season proved to be the Winnipeg Jets' downfall as they were bounced from the Stanley Cup playoffs in five games by the high-flying Colorado Avalanche after a 6-3 loss Tuesday night at Canada Life Centre.

There will be plenty of time to dissect what comes next for the Jets, who face another long off-season of questions after they failed to advance past the opening round.

For the time being, the Jets are left to lament another missed opportunity.

"It doesn't feel like there is any right now but I mean, I'm proud of the way the guys brought their game today," said Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey. "That's a good hockey team over there. They're playing really well right now and but I don't think they saw our best really until today and I still think we have a better game to get to."

After finishing tied for fourth overall in the NHL with a record of 52-24-6 while giving up only 199 goals to win the William M. Jennings Trophy, the Jets didn't manage the puck well enough and never could solve the four-man attack often employed by their opponent.

The Jets allowed too many odd-man rushes, didn't defend the blue paint in front of the net well enough and were not nearly sharp enough when it came to coverage in the defensive zone.

Couple that with taking too many undisciplined penalties and not generating enough offensively and the Jets were no match for an Avalanche team that looked more like the 2022 Stanley Cup champions than an outfit that was swept in the three-game season series with the Jets and was outscored 17-4 in the process.

On the offensive side of things, the Jets managed only eight goals over the final four games.

"There's no moral victories in this league," said Jets captain Adam Lowry. "I think we got back to the foundation of being a real solid defensive team and we thought we were going to give ourselves a great chance with that identity to go on a long run. Unfortunately we couldn't play that game consistently enough. It's not for a lack of trying or a lack of effort. I think everyone in this room shows up and they put their best foot forward. The Avs did a really good job forcing us to try and play their game. We weren't able to kind of impose our will and impose our style."

The Avalanche advance to face the winner of the series between the Dallas Stars and Vegas Golden Knights, which is currently tied 2-2 going into Game 5 on Wednesday.

Let's take a closer look at what transpired.

1. The ugly numbers

The Jets became the first team in NHL history to allow at least five goals in each of the first five games of a Stanley Cup playoff series.

That is so far out of character that it's simply hard to explain.

Of course, the blazing speed of the Avalanche played a role in the Jets failing to find the lockdown style that was their bread and butter.

A perfect example was how the Jets allowed the equalizer in the first period.

After a high-speed zone entry by Nathan MacKinnon, he pushed the Jets back onto their heels and after he fed the puck over to Devon Toews, the Jets lost Valeri Nichushkin in coverage and he buried a one-timer for his seventh goal of the series — which led all players.

Speaking of numbers that shouldn't sit well, the Jets are now 0-6 when facing elimination since the Game 7 win in the second round of the 2018 playoff series with the Nashville Predators.

2. The masked men

There is little doubt that Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck didn't get enough support from his teammates in this series, but he never quite found the form that made him a Vezina Trophy finalist for the fourth time in his career.

Hellebuyck was serenaded with "Hel-ly" chants prior to the anthem and during the game and while he didn't let in any soft goals, he was the second-best goalie in this series, allowing 24 goals in five games.

"I'm not going to put any blame on Helly, that's for sure," said Jets defenceman Morrissey, who scored a power play goal and finished the series with three goals.

"You know, we wouldn't be where we're at right now if it weren't for him. The way he's played all year, you know, go through a lot of those goals and tell me if he could have stopped them. I certainly don't put any onus on him or any individual player on our team. We win as a team, we lose as a team and we all need to look internally this summer and find ways that we can get better."

At the other end of the ice, Alexandar Georgiev had his fourth consecutive solid outing to eliminate any fears Avalanche fans may have felt after he allowed seven goals on 23 shots on goal in Game 1.

Georgiev allowed only eight goals during the final four games.

3. The own goals

In a game that featured plenty of quality chances at both ends, it was odd to see a pair of own goals — with one for each team.

The Jets actually opened the scoring on a goal from Kyle Connor that Avalanche defenceman Josh Manson banked in off the shin pad of teammate Artturi Lehkonen as he attempted to clear the puck out of the crease.

Lehkonen was credited with the go-ahead goal for the Avalanche late in the second period when his back-door pass went into the Jets' net off the stick of Jets defenceman Neal Pionk.

Pionk had a tough series for the Jets as he was also stripped of the puck before Yakov Trenin scored to put the Avalanche up 2-1 at 5:42 of the second period.

4. Trade deadline acquisitions

Going into the series, this was supposed to be another area where the Jets held an edge. They brought in two-thirds of a new second line, adding centre Sean Monahan from the Montreal Canadiens and right-winger Tyler Toffoli from the New Jersey Devils.

Monahan was a fantastic fit during the regular season, providing a boost in virtually all areas of the game, from faceoffs to special teams.

His offensive production sputtered as Monahan returned to the Stanley Cup playoffs for the first time since 2019-20, when his Calgary Flames faced the Jets.

After generating 13 goals and 24 points in 34 games with the Jets, Monahan was limited to two assists in five games in this series.

Stats don't always tell the story, and Monahan still found a way to contribute in the faceoff circle, though the lack of points proved costly.

Things were tougher for Toffoli, who started Tuesday's game on the fourth line and was demoted in a similar fashion to Kevin Hayes in 2019 — and for a similar reason.

The decision to bring in a proven scorer with a championship pedigree was a sound one, but like Hayes, the fit didn't end up being as seamless as it was expected.

Toffoli had seven goals and 11 points in 18 games during the regular season, but he never truly found his peak form.

On Tuesday, Toffoli took a drop pass from Nikolaj Ehlers early in the third period and tied the game 3-3 after he was bumped back into the top six.

That gave him two goals and two points in five games in the series.

Defenceman Colin Miller, who was also acquired from the Devils, was limited to five games during the regular season and made his Jets playoff debut on Tuesday.

5. Extra, extra

Facing elimination, Bowness made three lineup changes, inserting centre David Gustafsson up front for Vladislav Namestnikov (fractured cheekbone), forward Cole Perfetti for Axel Jonsson-Fjallby and Miller for Logan Stanley on defence.

Perfetti was making his Stanley Cup playoff debut and started the game on the second line with Sean Monahan and Connor.

He had a solid outing, getting involved physically while finishing with three shots on goal, making several smart plays and showing few signs of nerves for a young player that hadn't been in game action since the regular-season finale.

Miller was used on the Jets' third pairing with Nate Schmidt and ended up with the shots on goal and five hits in just under 15 minutes of ice time, drawing an assist on the Toffoli marker.

Dejected Morrissey's words speak volumes after Game 5 defeat

By: Mike McIntyre

A one-word response: "Terrible." And then silence.

The normally chatty Josh Morrissey was direct and to the point when asked to describe how he was feeling, mere moments after his Winnipeg Jets just had their dream of a Stanley Cup championship crushed in swift, stunning fashion.

Speaking in hushed tones, his voice cracking at times, the pain was palpable as the alternate captain held court with the media late Tuesday night inside the otherwise empty Jets room.

You could tell this playoff exit, more than some of the others in the past, would leave a sizeable emotional scar.

"Another year that feels like a missed opportunity," Morrissey added.

Through no fault of his own, to be clear. The 29-year-old left it all on the ice and was, unquestionably, the best player on his team in this series. Unfortunately for the Jets, it wasn't nearly enough.

"Oh, we brought our best game in the series, but obviously at this point..." Morrissey said, pausing to collect himself after a fourth straight loss means a longer-than-expected offseason.

"We were a desperate team. We just didn't get to our game soon enough in the series. That's the way I see it. I'm proud of the way the guys competed but nothing to show for it."

The NHL's best defensive team in the regular season, which held opponents to a total of 199 goals through 82 regular season games, was torched for 28 goals (four into empty nets) in just five games by the Colorado Avalanche, who led the league in scoring.

The visitors posted a 6-3 triumph to oust the Jets from the playoffs.

And Morrissey, like all of his teammates and coaches, had no explanation.

"You know it's all just settling in right now to be honest with you," said Morrissey.

"You work all year to give yourself an opportunity. We had a great regular season and out in five it's pretty disappointing. So, you know not really gonna get in any depth answers right now but disappointment is there and it's frustrating."

Indeed, after tying a franchise record with 52 wins this season, the Jets managed just one — in the opening game of the series — before crashing and burning.

Yes, they threw everything they could at Colorado, including the third goal of the series by Morrissey, which tied Kyle Connor for most on the team.

But their best — if that's what this was — still couldn't come close to getting the job done.

"I don't know. I wish I had the answer to that. I think execution," Morrissey said, in trying to pinpoint areas they fell short.

"You know, when I watch that series, they were faster most of the games. They were aggressive, that was clearly their game plan. It's disappointing. There is going to be a time of reflection, where there always is, which sucks. But, we need to figure out a way to all get better this offseason because we just saw what it looks like to play against a team that knows how to win."

And that's where the chat with Morrissey took a most interesting turn, as he seemed to get worked up and essentially challenged everyone on the roster — himself included — to do more than just mope and sulk over what could have been.

"We win as a team we lose as a team and we all need to look internally this summer and find ways that we can get better," said Morrissey.

"We just played a recent Stanley Cup winning team, a lot of those same pieces there. And they brought it and should be a learning experience for us as much as it stings and kills right now, we have to be better we have to find another gear as individuals and it's impossible for that to set in right now. But we need to we need to take the lessons from what they did out there because they were the better hockey team and we need to find a way to get to that level."

Spoken like a true leader.

Morrissey was asked about Colorado coach Jared Bednar's comments earlier in the series about "scar tissue" from previous playoff disappointments his group had prior to winning the Stanley Cup in 2022. Do teams sometimes have to take a step back before they can take the ultimate step forward?

"Well, clearly, they felt that way, and they did something about it in the offseason to raise their game as individuals, to raise their game for playoff time," said Morrissey.

"Right now, it's just disappointing and frustrating. It feels like a missed opportunity. But, the only way that there is any good from this is that we learn from it and we actually look at how we can improve as individuals and as a group. Because, they brought that Stanley Cup-winning class to this series, and we didn't return it for three or four of those games. We have levels that we need to find this offseason. I hope it stings for all of us into the summer and we use it as motivation."

Club battled, will learn from mistakes: Bowness

By: Ken Wiebe

There was no mic-drop moment this time around from Rick Bowness.

Rather, hurt feelings have given way to the gut-wrenching pain that comes with a missed opportunity.

For all of the comparisons people have made as the Winnipeg Jets were eliminated in five games in successive seasons, there was something decidedly different about the way this team went down.

Last spring, after winning the series opener and losing four consecutive games to the Vegas Golden Knights, the Jets head coach lambasted his team for its inability to push back, saying he was disappointed and disgusted.

That criticism wasn't well received by Jets players, who shared their dismay following exit meetings.

This time, there was no repeat performance on the ice, as these players went down swinging — playing their best collective game when the season was on the line — even in a 6-3 defeat to the visiting Colorado Avalanche on Tuesday night.

While that will serve as little consolation right now for a core group that has not enjoyed the postseason success it envisioned, two members of the leadership group exemplified what is required for the Jets to take the next step in the painstaking journey.

Jets defenceman and alternate captain Josh Morrissey was as emotional as he has been all season and he provided the type of answers you would expect from someone who was his team's best player in this series.

"We just played a recent Stanley Cup winning team, a lot of those same pieces there. And they brought it and it should be a learning experience for us as much as it stings and kills right now, we have to be better, we have to find another gear as individuals and it's impossible for that to set in right now," said Morrissey.

Earlier in the day, Avalanche head coach Jared Bednar discussed how his team overcame playoff disappointments to capture the Stanley Cup in 2022.

"I don't think you can (measure it), but I know this – the buy-in and the commitment from our team after we lost a couple years in the second round, from Day 1 in training camp in 2022, coming back with a lot of the same group, was off the charts," said Bednar.

"It would have been hard to measure the gain we got from the commitment standpoint, the focus on what it would take to win in the playoffs based on the previous year.

"You always think you're a team that can win. We felt that for years and went through the heartbreak and something needed to change. Structurally, tactically, we've learned some things as a staff and a team, but also the biggest change for me was attitudinal in our locker room and the standard we were going to set and what we discussed all year long. It had nothing to do with 82 games or wins and losses.

"It was a strict focus on what we would need to do to win at the toughest time of the year and we kind of kept that going throughout the course of the season."

Those comments seem fitting if the Jets are to follow in the footsteps of the Avalanche at some point in the near future.

“It’s definitely a disappointing result. I think with the pieces we added we felt we could play with any team in this league, and with the goaltending we have,” said Jets captain Adam Lowry, who kept both hands in his pockets, clearly hiding an injury that he brushed off when asked about it.

“So it’s going to be a long summer, a disappointing one. This one’s going to sting for a while.”

Bowness was asked how his group is going to ensure it takes the lessons learned from this painful defeat to get better next season.

“Well, we go into next season and you bring this up, how we played last year. We went into camp this year and we talked about how we looked at the end of the year last year. Now you go into training camp and you say, ‘That’s how it’s got to look, starting again from the playoff experience.’ You hope for growth,” said Bowness.

“Listen, this is a proud group and it’s a tight group and they’re hurting right now. That’s not a bad thing. They should hurt. Last year was a different hurt. We didn’t battle. Tonight we battled, so it was a different hurt.

“But you still have to learn, you still have to take that game to another level. You do. Playoffs are a whole different animal. If you can’t raise your game to that intensity, you don’t win the Stanley Cup. You know how hard it is to get there? I’ve been there four times. It’s hard and your players are beat up when you get there.”

As for his own future, Bowness — who has a team option for next season — didn’t answer a direct question about what his intentions are, though he left a few bread crumbs that he is definitely interested in returning for a third campaign if Kevin Cheveldayoff wants him to.

“We just lost in the playoffs. We’ll figure that out,” said Bowness.

He’s clearly invested in the strides this team has taken since he took over in the summer of 2022 and his passion to chase the Stanley Cup clearly remains.

“There’s growth. You’ve got to grow. We took a lot of strides as a group this year,” said Bowness.

“We grew a lot. We did. That’s why we (finished with) 110 points and lead the league in goals against. Now, is there still room for growth? Absolutely. It’s obvious when you compare tonight, to the previous four (games of this series), that, OK, this is what the playoffs are. Now, why it took until the fifth game to get there – we’ll have to answer those questions. But we will. And we’ll grow from it. We grew a lot.”

Note: The Jets will stay home Wednesday but will return to the downtown rink Thursday to clean out their lockers and meet one final time with the media.

Winnipeg Sun

Jets crash out of playoffs in five games

By Scott Billeck

There will be missing posters stapled and taped to electrical poles and lamp posts across Winnipeg on Wednesday.

“Missing: The Regular Season Winnipeg Jets,” they will read.

“Reward if found: A do-over in the Stanley Cup playoffs.”

The reality will set in not long after.

There are no second chances in this game. Nothing's left to uncover.

The best team in Canada, with 52 wins and 110 points, gone before the country's three other participants.

A team that was the best defensive squad in the NHL over 82 games, with the best goalie on the planet playing a starring role in winning the William M. Jennings, will ride off into the sunset, having failed to show themselves in either regard.

The Colorado Avalanche were the perpetrators of Winnipeg's disappearance, matching even their best game of the series in a 6-3 Game 5 win at Canada Life Centre.

The Avalanche were so good at neutralizing the Jets' defensive strengths and goaltending wonders that they forced them into some unsavoury pages of the NHL's history books.

Winnipeg became the first team in NHL history to surrender at least five goals in their first five games of a playoff series.

Hellebuyck ate 24 of them, and Colorado scored 28 total in the series.

You'd hardly blame the soon-to-be Vezina winner this season, but it's tough to match the heights of the bar Hellebuyck's set for himself.

Mikko Rantanen scored twice and had three points in the game, with his first breaking a 3-3 deadlock 4:11 into the third period.

Before that, the Jets were going shot for shot with the Avs, outshooting them for the first time in the series and battling back to a tie game when Tyler Toffoli levelled it with his second 2:06 into the final frame.

Scoring first proved fatal, with the team doing so losing four of the five games.

Kyle Connor, who had three in the series, opened Winnipeg's account on a goal that Josh Manson tried to clear, only to see it rebound off Artturi Lehkonen and into the net 1:15 into the first.

Valeri Nichushkin's goal two minutes later tied the game and an Avs franchise record for most goals in a series with his seventh.

Yakov Trenin would give Colorado its first lead of the game with his first 5:42 into the second before Josh Morrissey notched his third of the series on the power play 1:06 later.

Winnipeg's good fortunes on Connor's opener would come back to haunt them at 13:45 when Lehkonen's pass attempt was too much for Neal Pionk to handle as the blue-liner redirected it into his own net.

The Jets scored just 15 goals in the series, with seven of them coming in the opener, the only game they took off the 2022 champs.

Tuesday was just the second time the Jets held the Avs at bay on the power play, killing off their lone attempt in the second.

Colorado went 6-for-16 on the power play in the series, deciding the second, third and fourth games thanks to Winnipeg's discipline woes.

The Avs move on to face the winner of Dallas-Vegas, with that series knotted up at two apiece.

The Jets, meanwhile, head into an offseason knowing they were more than capable across 82 games, winning 52 times, but couldn't find another gear to elevate when it mattered most.

FRIESEN: Jets can't win a Cup the way they're built

By Paul Friesen

Regular-season success, first-round flop. Rinse and repeat.

For the second straight year, the Winnipeg Jets turned a modicum of accomplishment through 82 games into a heaping helping of underachievement when it mattered most.

Another series-opening win followed by a four-game boot out the door, this time by the Colorado Avalanche, this time on home ice.

Tuesday's 6-3 loss wasn't the embarrassingly meek exit of 12 months ago, but the result left the same feeling of failure that's permeated each of the last six seasons.

"Terrible," is how defenceman Josh Morrissey described it. "Another year that feels like a missed opportunity."

"It's going to be a long summer," captain Adam Lowry added. "This one's going to sting for a while."

This team remains stuck on one series win since reaching the 2018 conference final.

Safe to conclude it's not built for the postseason?

The only thing the Jet can hang their hat on this time is the fact they looked like they cared as they went under.

That's not a sturdy hook, it's a thin nail.

“In two years, that’s by far the best playoff game we’ve played,” is how head coach Rick Bowness saw the season’s swan song, a far cry from the disgust he showed in the “no push-back” finale of 2023.

In the next breath, he asked the obvious follow-up himself.

“Where was that in the first four games? That’s a question we’re going to have to answer ourselves over the course of the summer. But we’re way ahead of where we were at this point last year when we lost. Way ahead.”

If having a team that’s far more united and didn’t collectively mail it in is way ahead, sure.

But the Jets were so outclassed, they remain far below the standard required at this time of year.

Everything they did over the course of the season, they undid against the Mile-High Avs.

That Jennings Trophy they won for allowing the fewest goals?

They should give it back after becoming the most porous playoff team in NHL history.

You read that right: the Jets are the first team in league history to allow at least five goals in each of their first five playoff games.

Connor Hellebuyck, the soon-to-be reigning Vezina Trophy winner, finished the series with a 5.23 goals-against-average.

And he wasn’t at all bad. In fact, he was pretty darn good, and that might be the most damning indication of all.

No, he didn’t steal a game in this series, and we’re not sure the last time he did. In his last 14 playoff starts, Hellebuyck’s record is a mind-boggling 2-12.

But he wasn’t the problem.

When your goalie plays well and you’re still outscored 28-15, you’ve been schooled. Imagine if Hellebuyck hadn’t played well?

What the Jets lack is grit.

If the postseason is a sandpaper game, they’re about a 400, the stuff used for finishing, not removing layers.

This isn’t about adding a knuckle-dragger. It’s about getting your elite talent to raise the intensity a few notches.

Colorado’s did, Winnipeg’s didn’t. Or can’t.

Just compare that 7-0 Jets win down in Denver not so long ago to what we just witnessed.

“There’s no comparison to what we saw in the regular season,” Bowness acknowledged. “Their intensity and their speed went way up. They’ve won a Stanley Cup and it showed itself this series. They raised their battle-level more than anything.

“The teams that have won know how to get there. They got there. They flipped a switch.”

Some Jets may have that switch. Some definitely don’t.

Others don’t know where it is, yet.

Bowness turned to an old-school analogy.

“At the end of a playoff series, if you’re not putting an ice bag on, you’re not playing hard enough,” he said. “Simple as that.”

There was no sign of an ice bag in the Winnipeg room. Then again, there were no players in it, either.

Only two came out to take questions, the captain and one of his assistants.

Both looked and sounded devastated.

Morrissey says if the Jets don’t spend the summer finding a way to reach another level, it’s all been a waste of time.

“I hope it stings for all of us into the summer,” he said. “And we use it as motivation.”

The coach echoed that, saying if you can’t find that next level, “you don’t win the Stanley Cup.”

I had one last question for him.

How does he know the Jets even have the kind of players to do it?

“Well,” Bowness said. “Those are questions we have to answer over the course of the summer.”

It seems they’ve already been answered.

SNAPSHOTS: Jets put in historically bad defensive performance in five-game loss to Avalanche

By Ted Wyman

Get your head around this.

The Winnipeg Jets, the best defensive team in the NHL during the regular season, became the first team in league history to allow at least five goals in the first five games of the playoffs in their five-game series loss to the Colorado Avalanche.

This is a league that has been around for 107 years.

It didn't happen to any losing teams in the Gretzky, Lemieux or Orr eras, nor during the New York Islanders, Edmonton Oilers or Montreal Canadiens dynasties.

No team has ever had quite the run of defensive ineptitude to start a post-season.

That is quite the dubious accomplishment for a Jets team that entered the playoffs with supposedly the best goaltender in hockey (Connor Hellebuyck) and a stifling defensive squad that allowed just 2.43 goals against per game over an 82-game season.

They allowed 5.6 goals per game against in the playoffs, and Hellebuyck, the anticipated winner of the Vezina Trophy for his play this season, finished with a 5.23 GAA and .870 save percentage.

It defies logic and boggles the mind.

The Jets won Game 1 7-6 — only because Colorado goalie Alexandar Georgiev was awful in that series opener — then lost four straight by scores of 5-2, 6-2, 5-1 and 6-3.

How could such a thing happen?

“First of all, give (the Avalanche) credit ... they played great,” Jets coach Rick Bowness said after Tuesday's series-clinching game for Colorado at Canada Life Centre.

“Their intensity and their speed went way up in the playoffs from what we saw (in the regular season) and we knew that. The biggest difference from the regular season to this right now is the pace and their intensity which they played with.

“They've won a Stanley Cup and it showed itself this series. They raised their battle-level more than anything. They raised their battle level in races, in battles. In the playoffs, that's what it's going to come down to.”

Whichever anonymous NHLer called the Jets frauds must have somehow known what was coming, at least regarding their vaunted defensive game.

The Jets never once were able to play their own game in the series, at no point looked like the better team, got goaltending that simply wasn't good enough and managed to give up 28 goals in five games of the series.

Why couldn't they get to their game?

“I don't know ... I wish I had the answer to that,” Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey said.

“I think execution. You know, when I watch that series, they were faster most of the games. They were aggressive, that was clearly their game plan.

“It's disappointing. There is going to be a time of reflection, where there always is, which sucks. But, we need to figure out a way to all get better this offseason because we just saw what it looks like to play against a team that knows how to win.”

Despite winning 52 games in the regular season, finishing second in the Western Conference with 110 points and having home-ice advantage in the first round of the playoffs, the Jets were once again an easy out in the playoffs, just as they were last season.

They had more points than any other Canadian team during the regular season, but they are the first team out.

It's hard to imagine a more disappointing finish to the season for a fan base that just wants something — anything — to celebrate.

WILL BONES BE BACK?

Not long after the end of the game, Bowness was asked if he intended to stay on as the Jets' coach.

"We just lost in the playoffs," he said. "We'll figure that out."

While he's done an excellent job with this Jets team during the regular season, taking them to the top of the overall standings at points in both of his seasons at the helm, Bowness has not been able to get them going in the playoffs.

At age 69, and with his wife having had serious health problems during this season, you'd have to think Bowness will give some thought to retirement.

He'll inevitably relinquish the reins within a couple years, with Scott Arniel waiting in the wings.

Bowness is a great man, and overall, he's done a solid job with the Jets. But these kinds of crushing playoff losses can't be easy to overcome.

Going through it all again next season will seem even more like a daunting task than it usually does.

TRADING OWN GOALS

This one might be remembered as the "Own-Goal Game."

First it was Avalanche defenceman Josh Manson giving the Jets the first goal of the game by pulling a puck off the blue-line and trying to clear it, but firing it right into the leg of teammate Artturi Lehkonen and back into the net. Jets winger Kyle Connor got credit for that goal.

Then it was Neal Pionk's turn. The Jets defenceman tried to clear or stop a shot that was going wide from Lehkonen, but slowly directed it into his own goal behind a helpless Hellebuyck. That gave Colorado a 3-2 lead in the second period.

But Jets captain Adam Lowry was pointing the finger more at himself and his linemates Nino Niederreiter and Mason Appleton than at Pionk.

"At 2-2, they get a lucky bounce, it goes off (Pionk)," Lowry said.

"That's one of those ones you don't see go in very often. And then (Tyler Toffoli) scores a huge goal, gets us right back in the game, gets the building going again.

“And we go out there and we give up a couple of quick ones to the (Nathan) MacKinnon line and before you know it that’s a tough hole to come back and they’re able to sit back.”

Here are some more observations from Tuesday’s Game 5 loss to the Avs.

— The Jets are now 8-19 all-time at home in the post-season, are 1-7 in elimination playoff games and are 2-9 in their last 11 games in front of the Whiteout in their home barn.

—Two players on the Avalanche — Val Nichushkin (7) and Lehkonen (5) — had more goals in this series than Jets winger Nikolaj Ehlers (4) has scored in 39 career playoff games. Ehlers did have two assists in the series, including a beautiful drop pass to Toffoli to set up a goal that tied the game at 3-3 in the third period.

— Even less productive than Ehlers was centre Sean Monahan, who played well down the stretch after being acquired in a trade on Feb. 2, but couldn’t make anything happen offensively in the playoffs. Monahan had just one assist and couldn’t connect on any of his 13 shots. He seemed prone to hanging on to pucks for too long, something you cannot do against the Avalanche.

—Mikko Rantanen was so frustrated after missing a chance to score in the second period that he snapped his stick in half with his arms. Up to that point, he had no goals in the series. Perhaps the stick snap will be his signature move because he went on to score the winning goal and an insurance goal for the Avalanche in the third period.

BILLECK: Jets brought regular-season game to playoff battle

By Scott Billeck

The Winnipeg Jets were built for the regular season. They won 52 games, amassed 110 points and finished as the league’s fourth-ranked team through 82 games. They prided themselves on top-notch defence, world-class goaltending and a reliance on a team structure not seen around these parts for years.

And when the playoffs came, there was hype — earned hype. The type that comes from allowing a league-low 199 goals.

The Colorado Avalanche had its own credentials. Despite lacklustre goaltending, it boasted the league’s best offence and was the only team to score more than 300 times.

Hype only matters if you can live up to it. Colorado did, earning the right to move on to the second round with a swift five-game series win following Tuesday night’s 6-3 decision at the Canada Life Centre.

Winnipeg came nowhere close, failing to shift out of the lower gears in a series that was mostly played in sixth. Winnipeg brought a Toyota to a race against a Ferrari. It wasn’t built for this drag strip and it showed.

“We have levels that we need to find this offseason,” Josh Morrissey said. “I hope it stings for all of us into the summer and we use it as motivation.

“The only way that there is any good from this is that we learn from it and we actually look at how we can improve as individuals and as a group. Because they brought that Stanley Cup-winning class to this series, and we didn’t return it for three or four of those games.”

Salient words from the alternate captain.

Head coach Rick Bowness addressed the elephant in the room — his team’s inability to mash the clutch and then the gas pedal without stalling the car.

“The playoff intensity goes way up and you can talk about it all you want, but the teams that have won, know how to get there,” he said. “They got there. They flipped a switch.

“They raised their battle level more than anything. They raised their battle level in races, in battles. In the playoffs, that’s what it’s going to come down to. Who’s willing to go to the net harder? Who’s willing to take a hit to make a play? Who’s willing to win battles in the corners on the boards? That’s what it comes down to.”

Bowness shares his part of the blame for his team’s inadequacies. Game 5 included the umpteenth example of his impatience with his line combos.

His team put up 18 shots in the second period and trailed by one heading into the third on a fluke own-goal from Neal Pionk. The lines he trotted out were finding chances and, to that point, had guided the team to its best performance yet in the series. The adjustments that Mark Scheifele asked for after Game 4 were working.

But instead of letting it breathe for more than two periods, he searched for more. Sure, Tyler Toffoli made it 3-3 in his return to the second line, but the sustained offensive spark this team craved and even experienced, trailed off.

“We were doing OK,” Bowness said. “Just trying to generate some offence. You could tell some guys were a little bit on. [Some] were a little bit off. So I switched them up.”

It is hard to find consistency — and chemistry — when time isn’t afforded to foster either. This was a season- long illness, not one that cropped up over the past couple of weeks. So was his team’s brutal penalty-kill.

“Hindsight is 20-20, but you do learn,” Bowness said. “You have to look back. That worked. That didn’t work. That was a mistake. You have to be honest with yourself. We will be very honest with ourselves as a staff, about what we did right and what we did wrong and what we have to do better. We will be very, very honest about that. We always are.”

Bowness’ future remains unclear. The team has an option, which can be exercised on his two-plus-one contract that he signed in the summer of 2022.

“We just lost in the playoffs,” he said when quizzed about what’s next. “We’ll figure that out.”

What’s next for the team is just as much of a mystery.

The Jets have veteran blue-liners Brenden Dillon (gruesomely injured at the end of Game 3) and Dylan DeMelo set to become free agents at the end of the season. Dillon, particularly, stepped up his game, bringing physicality to a series that needed more of it.

Does this team shake up its core? Scheifele and Connor Hellebuyck aren't going anywhere. Nor is Morrissey.

Does the team look to move a guy such as Kyle Connor, a supremely talented goal-scorer, or Nikolaj Ehlers, an analytical darling with speed in droves?

More will be deciphered on Thursday, when the Jets are expected to hold their exit interviews, including with general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff.

For now, another early playoff exit is left to linger.

If this season is going to be considered a step forward, then the next step has to be taking a direction that focuses on building a team that can take its game to another level when it matters most.

"Now you go into training camp, and you say, 'That how it's got to look, starting again from the playoff experience,'" Bowness said. "You hope for growth."

The Avs may be a good case study in that regard. They failed and failed again, doing a lot of good things as the Jets have. Then, they built a team capable of getting the job done, and they did — in 2022, when they won it all.

[GOALTENDER REPORT: Hellebuyck's last two playoff performances far from Vezina-like](#)

By Ted Wyman

There's room for debate about how much blame falls on goaltender Connor Hellebuyck after the Winnipeg Jets were ousted in the first round of the playoffs in five games for the second straight year.

Whether you're on the "Hellebuyck needed to be much better" side or the "He did all he could with no help from his teammates" side, it's an indisputable fact that Hellebuyck's numbers were atrocious, much as they have been for the last few years in the post-season.

The 30-year-old, widely expected to win the Vezina Trophy as the NHL's best goalie for his performance this season, got torched for 24 goals in five games as the Jets lost 4-1 to the Colorado Avalanche in the first-round best-of-seven.

He finished with a 5.23 goals against average and an .870 save percentage as the Jets gave up at least five goals in each and every game against the high-flying Avalanche.

Hellebuyck has not been the best goaltender in a series since the Jets swept the Edmonton Oilers in Round 1 of the playoffs in 2021.

Since then, he has a 2-12 record and has been outplayed by Carey Price of the Montreal Canadiens, Laurent Brossoit of the Vegas Golden Knights, and Alexandar Georgiev of the Avalanche.

Over the last two post-seasons, Hellebuyck has only had a save percentage above .900 once in 10 games. His goals-against average last season was 3.44, and his save percentage was .866. It got even worse this year.

Still, Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey was firmly behind Hellebuyck despite the shocking numbers.

"I'm not going to put any blame on Helly, that's for sure," Morrissey said. "You know, we wouldn't be where we're at right now if it weren't for him. The way he's played all year, you know, go through a lot of those goals and tell me if he could have stopped them."

For sure Hellebuyck could have made at least a few more saves, which would have given the Jets a bit more of a fighting chance. He cost his team a goal in Game 2 by mishandling the puck behind the net and a lot of momentum swung at that moment.

But a lot of goals were tipped in front as the Jets couldn't find a way to move Colorado players out of the way. And he was left to fend for himself on numerous occasions.

But you know who did make some of those saves? Georgiev.

After having a brutal save percentage of .896 during the regular season, Georgiev gave up seven goals on 23 shots in Game 1, which was a major reason why Colorado lost.

But he was rock solid the rest of the way, allowing eight goals in four games and posting a stellar save percentage of .931.

Colorado had the better goaltending in this series, something no one predicted before the playoffs started.

CBC Manitoba

***'I hope it stings': Winnipeg Jets' Morrissey, fans lament another early playoff exit
'We need to take the lessons from what they did out there. We need to find a way to get to that level'***

Darren Bernhardt · CBC News

Josh Morrissey expects this to hurt for a while. He's counting on it.

"I hope it stings for all of us into the summer, and we use it as motivation," the defenceman and alternate captain for the Winnipeg Jets said Tuesday night, moments after his team was shoved out of the NHL playoffs.

"It should be a learning experience for us, as much as it stings and kills right now. We have to find another gear as individuals."

The Jets were given a first-round exit for the second consecutive season. They bowed out of a best-of-seven series last year against the Vegas Golden Knights in five games, then repeated it this year against the Colorado Avalanche.

The difference is, last year the Jets squeaked into the playoffs as a wild card team and faced the eventual Stanley Cup-winning Knights. This time the Jets were considered a favourite, finishing fourth in the 32-team NHL's regular season with 110 points — second most in franchise history.

Expectations were high and the usually garrulous Morrissey struggled initially to put his thoughts together after Tuesday's 6-3 loss.

He stared down, contemplating a reporter's question about the feeling before offering one word: "Terrible."

"It's all just settling in right now, to be honest with you," he said. "Another year that feels like a missed opportunity."

"There's going to be a ton of reflection, as there always is, which sucks, but we need to figure out a way to all get better this off-season, because we just saw what it looks like to play against a team that knows how to win."

A crowd of people stare blankly up at a screen that is not in view.

Jets fans stare blankly at one of the big screens set out for the street party on Tuesday night. (Jeff Stapleton/CBC)

Last season ended in tension, with head coach Rick Bowness calling out the players for having "no pushback" in the playoffs.

Captain Adam Lowry thought this year would be different.

"We got back to the foundation of being a real solid defensive team and we thought we were going to give ourselves a great chance with that identity to go on a long run," he said. "With the pieces we added, we felt like we could play with any team in this league, and with the goaltending we have."

"It's going to be a long summer, a disappointing one."

The Jets added Gabriel Vilardi, Alex Iafallo and Rasmus Kupari in the off-season and then picked up Sean Monahan and Tyler Toffoli before the trade deadline, seeing them as the added scoring power to push them deep into the playoffs.

Winnipeg filled the net in the first game of the post-season series, winning 7-6, but then their offence — and defence — vanished. Jets ended up being outscored 28-15, allowing the most goals of any team through five games.

"I think everyone in this room is really just upset with our level of play in this series," said Lowry, who had two goals in the series.

Both he and Morrissey cited Tuesday's game as the closest the Jets came to the team that put up 52 wins, tying a franchise best.

"But obviously at this point we're a desperate team. We just didn't get to our game soon enough in the series," said Morrissey, who scored three goals, including one Tuesday, and an assist during the series.

Both players tipped their helmets to the Avs, calling them an elite team that was faster, hungrier and more aggressive. Morrissey noted they won the Cup in 2022 and still have many of those pieces in place.

"They brought that Stanley Cup-winning class to this series and we didn't return it for three or four of those games," he said. "We need to take the lessons from what they did out there. We need to find a way to get to that level."

The scrutiny from fans following Tuesday's loss piled up as heavy as Colorado's goals.

"A rebuild's in place. We're not good enough. We don't have pieces to put it in place [to go all the way]," said Dylan Hess, standing in a rapidly emptying street party outside the arena. "Hellebuyck's just not a playoff goaltender."

"They couldn't get pucks in deep. They couldn't score. The Avalanche is just a completely better team," said Calan Duchart.

"I don't know where our offence was. We choked," said Shasta Chartrand. "It's a sad ending to a great season and I really feel for Hellebuyck, I really do. He's the one I cried for the most."

Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck let in at least five goals in each of the five games in the series.

"I certainly don't put any onus on him or any individual player on our team," Morrissey said about his netminder, who's a finalist once again for the Vezina Trophy as the league's best goaltender.

Hellebuyck also won the Jennings Trophy in the regular season after the Jets allowed the fewest goals of any team. But the Avalanche had the league's most firepower, scoring the most goals through the regular season.

"We wouldn't be where we're at right now if it weren't for him, the way he's played all year," Morrissey said about Hellebuyck.

"We all need to look internally this summer and find ways that we can get better."

The Hockey News

Frauds? The Winnipeg Jets Aren't That Bad — But They Aren't As Good As They Should Be

BY JACOB STOLLER

WINNIPEG — For the second straight year, Rick Bowness peeled back the curtain and revealed where the Winnipeg Jets truly stand when addressing reporters following their first-round playoff exit.

This time around, the coach's comments were nothing like last year's infamous minute-long "pushback" rant – where Bowness said he was "disgusted" with his team's lack of response.

However, what Bowness said less than an hour after the Jets lost 6-3 to the Colorado Avalanche in Game 5 on Tuesday evening was telling in its own right.

“In the (last) two years, that’s by far the best playoff game we’ve played,” Bowness said.

The best? Well, it's not like the Jets have necessarily set a high bar for themselves.

While the 69-year-old bench boss made it clear there are no such thing as a moral victory in the NHL, the way in which he spoke about Jets sounded more like he was referring to an up-and-coming rebuild — not a roster that was supposedly vying for a Stanley Cup.

“We grew a lot,” said Bowness. “You compare this team to last year, honestly, there’s very little comparison. This years team is much better. Much tighter. And we made a lot of huge strides.”

Make no mistake, Bowness and his staff should be proud of finishing the 2023-24 regular season with the second-best record in the Western Conference. But in a results-oriented business like professional sports, it’s hard to find solace in those silver linings when you’re a team like the Jets, which have made it clear they want to contend for a Stanley Cup now — not two years from now.

Given the way the first round unfolded, those “fraud watch” comments are ringing loudly. And that’s a massive problem for an organization like the Jets, given the struggles they’re facing and may encounter in the not-so-distant future.

Let’s revisit what former NHL player and Spittin Chiclets Podcast co-host Ryan Whitney said nearly two months ago.

“I had a player in the NHL, on a team currently sitting in a playoff spot, tell me that the Winnipeg Jets are the biggest frauds in the league and that they’ll lose in the first round,” Whitney said. “He goes, ‘They’re not nearly as good as anyone says.’ ”

Unfortunately for the Jets, who used Whitney's comments as bulletin board material, we saw signs of them not being as good as their position in the standing suggests against the Avalanche. And that player’s prediction was right.

After being the NHL’s best defensive team in the regular season – thanks in large part to Vezina finalist and William M. Jennings Trophy winner Connor Hellebuyck — Winnipeg became the first team in NHL history to allow five-plus goals in each of their first five playoff games.

After priding themselves on being a stingy defensive team during 5-on-5 play, the Jets were outshot 152-116 and out-chanced 140-107 by Colorado in those situations, according to naturalstatattrick.com.

After an 82-game season where they seldom got away from their identity as a well-structured team in all three zones – the Jets’ effectiveness in their first four games of the series was a shell of the team they had tried to tell us they were.

“We need to figure out a way to all get better this off-season because we just saw what it looks like to play against a team that knows how to win,” Jets defenseman Josh Morrissey said.

Give the Avs credit. They were a force to be reckoned with. Colorado looked nothing like the team that was bounced from the first round by Seattle a year ago. Instead, they looked more like the team that won the Stanley Cup in 2022.

Colorado was leaps and bounds better than Winnipeg. And the Avalanche are not going anywhere. Neither are the Dallas Stars. For the Jets, who play in arguably the toughest division in the NHL, it means that the next few years are going to be a challenge.

The Jets have made it clear that they intend to vie for a Stanley Cup. It was part of their pitch to re-signing cornerstones Hellebuyck and Mark Scheifele. And it's something they've tried to sell to a once rock-solid season ticket base that has evaporated in recent years.

But let's be honest: the Jets must be better to reasonably contend for a Stanley Cup.

Up front, they've got depth and talent, albeit no true superstars. Josh Morrissey is an elite No. 1 defenseman. But after him, the back end is bleak. For instance, Avalanche defenseman Sean Walker – a player the Jets were in on ahead of the deadline – would be Winnipeg's second best. He's currently playing on Colorado's third pairing.

Connor Hellebuyck remains one of the best — if not, the best — goaltenders on the planet, but he hasn't stolen a playoff game for the Jets in quite some time. And even if he had, his efforts alone aren't enough to prop a team like the Jets into Stanley Cup contention.

Given that Winnipeg was having trouble filling their arena in the fall, when they sat atop the league's standings, what would things look like for the NHL's smallest market if they were a bottom-feeder team? The Jets are crossing their fingers they don't need to weather that inevitable dilemma anytime soon. That said, they need additional playoff revenue.

But is this group of players capable of going on a legitimate Cup run? Or does something need to change for Winnipeg to become more fearsome?

"Well, those are questions we have to answer over the course of the summer," Bowness said.

It's as strong as an indicator that this off-season could be one of the biggest for Winnipeg.

Daily Faceoff

The Winnipeg Jets beat themselves in series against Avalanche

By Sam Nestler

The Winnipeg Jets fell in five games to the Colorado Avalanche in their first-round series.

The Jets were the higher seed, had home-ice advantage and were one of the more surprising teams all season after a dramatic summer.

While the Avalanche were certainly flying in this series, as they usually are, the Jets also did plenty to beat themselves.

Goaltender Connor Hellebuyck was 1-4 with a .870 save percentage and 5.23 goals-against average. This came after a stellar season that earned him a nod as a Vezina Trophy finalist for the NHL's best goaltender.

Winnipeg did not get a ton of help below the stellar performances of Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor. They allowed 5.60 goals per game, completely eliminating any advantage from scoring 3.00 goals per game, were mediocre or worse on special teams and could never get the key play in the big moment.

They also had no answer for Cale Makar, Mikko Rantanen or Nathan MacKinnon. Each had nine points (two goals, seven assists), including a bunch of multipoint games and Rantanen scoring twice in Game 5.

Looking back at the series, this was more how many expected the Jets' season to go. They looked sloppy and inconsistent, and there was a definite disconnect within the organization about what they were trying to accomplish and the style they wanted to play.

The results speak for themselves.

Frank Seravalli: In some ways, the Jets, it feels like they beat themselves. It feels like there was a bit of a clash between players and coach, in terms of how to execute what they are trying to do. Part of that might just be that the Avs attack you by brute force and overwhelm you. The other part is the effort and compete. I thought this Jets team would be dogged competitors. And we got the opposite end of that. That part surprised me.