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<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/10/12/pionks-bold-move-pays-big-dividends-for-jets>

Pionk's bold move pays big dividends for Jets

By: Ken Wiebe

Neal Pionk was in no mood to spend any time patting himself on the back.

The Winnipeg Jets defenceman explained that he simply made a calculated gamble that paid off when asked to discuss the thought process of attacking Chicago Blackhawks forward Ilya Mikheyev in the neutral zone late in the third period of Friday's rally.

The Jets were down at the time and it looked like Mikheyev was going to have a clear path to shooting into the empty net.

But instead of allowing that to happen, Pionk made the alert decision to attack Mikheyev, preventing him from having the opportunity to get a shot off and setting the stage for a dramatic comeback that included a pair of goals from Mark Scheifele in what became a 2-1 overtime win.

"I just think it's an aggressive mindset," said Pionk. "If they're going to walk around you or make a chip play around you, that's fine. Don't let them cross into your own blue line and let them shoot it into the net.

"That's just too easy. If you make an aggressive pinch and they go around you, it is what it is. But make them make that play."

That's precisely what Pionk did and Scheifele recognized the importance of the play when he spoke to reporters after Friday's win.

"That saved it from being game over to, all of a sudden, winning in overtime," said Scheifele, who scored the 300th goal of his NHL career to help the Jets improve to 2-0.

Scheifele is set to hit another milestone on Sunday at 5 p.m., as he's scheduled to skate in his 800th NHL game during the first meeting of the season against the Minnesota Wild.

Facing one of your fiercest rivals this early in the campaign is beneficial for players and fans alike.

"It gets the adrenaline going, gets the juices going," said Pionk. "You almost get a playoff game in October, because you get that physicality and you get that emotion into the game. The crowd will be rowdy. It will be a fun one."

It could also be a spicy one, given Winnipeg's sweep of all four games the teams played last season.

The Wild were unhappy with star winger Kirill Kaprizov getting injured on two separate occasions, once when Jets defenceman Logan Stanley fell awkwardly on him and another time when he was on the receiving end of a cross-check to the ribs from Brenden Dillon.

The Jets, meanwhile, weren't thrilled with Wild forward Ryan Hartman catching Cole Perfetti with a blatant stick to the face after a faceoff.

"That's a two-way street," said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. "I think that they go after our top guys. If you look around the league, I think that if you let the opposition's best players just run free range, you're going to have a tough night. You've got to make it hard on those guys. You don't want them to get comfortable because once they get comfortable, then they start to become tougher to play against."

With the Jets playing a mostly spread out schedule during the month of October, Arniel was asked if he had a game circled on the calendar for Eric Comrie's first start of the season.

"Kind of, sort of," said Arniel, who wasn't ready to reveal that game just yet.

After Sunday's outing, the Jets don't play again until facing the San Jose Sharks on Friday and the Pittsburgh Penguins on Oct. 20 to wrap up a four-game homestand.

He got a vote of confidence on Thursday as he won the backup job when the Jets placed Kaapo Kahkonen on waivers.

Kahkonen was subsequently claimed by the Colorado Avalanche.

"Kaapo and I were very close. We talked the whole time," said Comrie. "I was never trying to battle him for a spot. I was trying to do the best I could for myself and that's all I could do at the end of the day. I don't really measure myself up against anybody.

"If you perform your best, you can earn a spot and they will make room for you."

Comrie said he was encouraged when he heard the news he had earned the No. 2 spot on the depth chart, but he's been around long enough to know he needs to perform at a high level to keep the job.

"I've got to earn that spot every single day," said Comrie. "It's not a given that I will hold it for the year. Just continuing the same work ethic I have, every single day, not taking everything for granted, and earning that spot. Every day."

Comrie signed a two-year, one-way deal with the Jets on July 1 and his familiarity with the organization, coupled with his relationship with Hellebuyck and Jets goalie coach Wade Flaherty, were major factors in his decision.

"Wade Flaherty is one of the best goalies coaches in the NHL and Connor Hellebuyck is the best goalie in the NHL," said Comrie. "For myself to be around that every single day, it's a special thing for myself. Like I said before, I'm a goalie nerd. I'm going to be a sponge and soak up as much as I can and try to be the best I can and learn from them."

Winnipeg Sun

<https://www.nhl.com/news/chicago-blackhawks-winnipeg-jets-game-recap-october-11>

How Mark Scheifele rose to the occasion, twice, to win a game for Jets

By Scott Billeck

Moments of next-level skill can happen so quickly that they are sometimes not appreciated for what they are.

Time to digest what just happened gets lost in the bigger picture: A game-tying goal quickly followed by an overtime winner, a team snatching victory from the jaws of defeat. Just how quickly fortunes can be reversed.

What occurred for that to happen — the details — tumbles down the ladder of immediate thought.

Sometimes, too, people just expect it. Elite athletes doing elite things.

Mark Scheifele had 48 game-winning goals and 14 overtime tallies coming into Friday's Winnipeg Jets 2-1 overtime win over the Chicago Blackhawks. Another tick in each column was just par for the course. That's what he does. He's made a career of it.

But there remains a simple question, at least in wording: How? How is it that Scheifele can have a knack for finding success in moments where the pressure is at its maximum?

Because as good as NHLers are, not every guy who plays in the league is built for its biggest moments.

"To me, those are the most fun moments in the game," defenceman Josh Morrissey said.

Morrissey is no stranger to coming up big at crucial times.

"My dad would always talk to me about Kobe Bryant and how he always wanted the ball late in the game, to hit the last shot or have the opportunity to take the last shot," Morrissey said. "It changes your perspective. You can be on your heel, so to speak. It can be a big moment, and you don't want to mess up. Or you can want the puck and want to hit the shot or make the play or whatever it is."

Morrissey has wanted to be in those moments since he was 12 when his dad shared that mindset with him. He sees the same thing in Scheifele.

"Just not being afraid of big moments, and also wanting to have the puck on your stick in big moments," Josh Morrissey explained. "Those are things he possesses as traits and skills."

Morrissey spoke of a will factor that's often involved.

"There's no way that I'm going to be denied," he explained.

Scheifele began taking over Friday's game earlier than with 64 seconds left when he popped in the game-tying goal to force overtime.

He nearly scored earlier in the period off a one-timer that produced an incredible kick save from Blackhawks netminder Arvid Soderblom.

The lead-up to his tying goal came with a pair of faceoff wins, and then he beat his check to the puck to ensure his stick was the one to get the puck back on goal after a rebound. Scheifele wouldn't be denied.

"It's recognizing situations," head coach Scott Arniel said. "How do you get to the right side of the defender? Where is the hole? Where is the next play going to be made?"

"That's the biggest thing, probably. Usually, those guys are one step ahead. You often hear talking to a player, it seems like they knew that was coming. They know what's coming, and they get to the spots to get ready for what's going to happen next."

The overtime winner from Scheifele was perhaps even more impressive because he managed to elevate again, setting a pick and then rolling to the middle of the ice where Connor would find him to end the game 38 seconds into the extra frame.

Morrissey called it a flow state, a mental state in which a person is completely focused on a single task or activity.

Scheifele's focus was taking both points. There was no settling for just one.

"A never-be-denied, I'm-going-to-will-this mindset," Morrissey said.

There's also a practical component at play.

It's not all just superhuman spidey senses to see what's coming before it happens or a movie-like time-standing-still moment amid a frenzy.

"He's been around a while, been in a lot of situations," Connor said. "A lot of his training and his practice habits, so when a situation comes, it's not too big for him, not something that's unfamiliar. It just becomes second nature. Executing and do it at a high level. He'd done that for a long time."

Arniel shared a similar sentiment, pointing to Scheifele's 799 games of experience.

"Going through it, being in a leadership role, playing in a top-six role, those guys all have a different mindset," Arniel said. "Elite players have more of a calming influence in themselves. Where everybody else's heart rate might be running at a 200, those guys are in those moments — last minute of a game — and they're just normal. It's crazy.

"You often hear about Michael Jordan. He [was] at his calmest when the game is on the line. You hear about Tom Brady. They get in the moment and that's how they react. It's because they've been through that. They know that they need to be calm in those situations and let their skills take over and their hockey sense take over and pretty much what Scheif did (on Friday)."

National Post

<https://nationalpost.com/news/video-shows-what-an-nhl-team-brings-with-them-in-an-air-canada-jetz-aircraft>

Video shows 'what an NHL team brings with them' in an Air Canada Jetz aircraft

By Chris Knight

The Winnipeg Jets have taken to Instagram with a behind-the-scenes look at how a hockey team travels. More specifically, how do they get all that stuff in the plane?

“Ever wonder what an NHL team brings with them on a road trip?” asks Tyler Esquivel, the team’s manager of digital content, as he rides a conveyor belt into the belly of an Airbus 320. “Come with me! Let me show you.”

The video then introduces Kevin Polonuk, an Air Canada “ops rep” whose job is basically traffic control (but not air traffic control), coordinating two other workers who move the team’s equipment from a truck into the plane’s rear cargo hold and then, at the other end, back out again.

The process takes all of 15 minutes, he notes, “but it’s got to come off the truck in a specific order.”

He tells Esquivel: “It is like Tetris,” adding: “It took a little bit to perfect it but I think we’ve got her down to a science.”

Polonuk says the team carries about 2,100 kilos of equipment, or 4,700 pounds. Given that the Jets currently have 26 players on their roster, and the average NHLer tips the scales at a little over 200 pounds, that means the equipment weighs almost as much as the team.

A recent video tour inside the aircraft reveals that the Airbus 320 has been heavily modified — no economy class here, just row after row of extra-wide reclining leather seats with plenty of legroom and massive cupholders.

It’s all part of Air Canada’s subsidiary Air Canada Jetz, whose fleet of four Airbus aircraft provides flight services to all seven Canadian NHL teams and one American one, the Seattle Kraken. The planes have also been chartered by musical acts including Phil Collins, Bruce Springsteen, U2, the Rolling Stones and the Spice Girls — and, during the 2021 federal election, by party leaders Justin Trudeau and Erin O’Toole.

As to what constitutes more than two tonnes of luggage, another behind-the-scenes video from the Jets explains that a three-day road trip might include two game jerseys per player plus multiple practice jerseys, two full sets of laundry, five new sticks per player for a total of about 125, two skate-sharpening machines and a sewing machine.

And, as Esquivel adds in the Instagram post, a host of audio and video equipment, including batteries and chargers. “Don’t forget those,” he cautions. “I have before. It’s not fun.”