

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/11/11/hellebuyck-performing-at-elite-level>

Hellebuyck performing at elite level

Winnipeg Jets' all-world goalie Connor Hellebuyck leading NHL in several categories

By: Ken Wiebe

NEW YORK — Just over a week ago, Connor Hellebuyck stood inside the Winnipeg Jets dressing room and calmly detailed why he felt a clear goalie interference call had been missed.

The frustration was evident and it sounded like Hellebuyck had a few things he wanted to get off his chest.

At the end of that session with reporters, Hellebuyck fielded a question about all of the offensive support he had been getting and he emphasized the need to stay ready for when he was going to be called upon to be a little busier.

In the three games after Hellebuyck's session with reporters, he posted two shutouts and was 82 seconds away from posting a third.

For his efforts, Hellebuyck was named the NHL's first star on Monday morning.

It took a perfect high-slot redirection from Roope Hintz at the end of a Dallas Stars' power play to push the puck through a five-hole that likely would have been covered had Hellebuyck not lost his goal stick earlier in the sequence.

"We would like to have that one back, but sometimes they go in," said Jets forward Vladislav Namestnikov. "Stuff happens."

If turning aside 88 of 89 shots on goal he faced wasn't impressive enough, the cumulative impact on his stats for the season is enough to leave plenty of experienced observers scratching their heads.

"It's awesome what he does every night. You almost take it for granted at times," said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. "He's elite."

Heading into Tuesday's matchup with the New York Rangers at Madison Square Gardens that opens a three-game road trip, Hellebuyck is leading the NHL in most categories — including wins (11), shutouts (three), save percentage (.935) and he's second in goals against average (1.83), though he's first among starters.

He's also tied for second in goals saved above average, according to Money Puck, with Rangers puck-stopper Igor Shesterkin at 7.2.

Those two all-world netminders should be on the marquee on Broadway for what should be a fun battle between Vezina Trophy winners.

Hellebuyck remains one of the busiest goalies in the NHL, but there have been a few blocks of rest available for him to stay fresh.

The Jets are about to open a stretch that will see them play eight of the next 10 games on the road, with the first back-to-back appearing at the end of next weekend.

Eric Comrie could see his fourth start of the campaign as early as Thursday against the Tampa Bay Lightning, then he will either get the Pittsburgh Penguins or Nashville Predators when the Jets play on consecutive days the following weekend.

Getting Comrie to five starts before the Jets hit the quarter mark is smart business. It's essential, actually.

While there could be some temptation to keep riding Hellebuyck, that could prove to be problematic in the long term.

The 4 Nations Face-Off will place another 4-6 games into Hellebuyck's plate and those are high-leverage games, so keeping him around 60-63 starts with the Jets is probably the optimal number goalie whisperer Wade Flaherty has in mind.

Along with the incredible numbers Hellebuyck has been posting, his ability to stay sharp even on the nights he hasn't faced a lot of high volume or high-danger chances is turning heads.

The Jets haven't subjected Hellebuyck to many outings where he's simply had to steal the show, with one glaring exception coming last Thursday in the 1-0 win over the Colorado Avalanche.

That one was all Hellebuyck, all the time — especially over the final two periods when the Avalanche held a decisive edge in shots on goal and high-danger chances.

Hellebuyck is no stranger to being under siege during his time with the Jets, but one of the reasons the Jets are off to the best start in NHL history at 14-1 is their commitment to defending over the past several seasons has helped make life a lot easier for their No. 1 netminder.

When Hellebuyck knows where the puck is coming from, it significantly reduces the chances of pucks getting past him.

"He's making incredible saves," said Jets forward Alex Iafallo. "It's pretty fun to watch."

There was a time not long ago when Hellebuyck flourished in high volume games — he showed on Thursday he can still deliver under those circumstances when called upon.

The Jets don't want to revert to their old ways of playing without the puck. They've worked hard to become a stingy team to play against.

That Hellebuyck has been able to thrive under these new circumstances is a compliment to him and his ability to evolve.

By recording the 40th shutout of his career against the Avalanche, Hellebuyck has now secured two-thirds of the goalie triple crown — having hit 500 games earlier this season.

The final piece of that triumvirate could be achieved later this season as he needs 14 wins to hit 300 for his career.

Hellebuyck recognizes the ultimate legacy building moments occur during the Stanley Cup playoffs, but what he's doing to pad his resume in the regular season is something to behold.

Since becoming the full-time starter early in the 2016-17 season, Hellebuyck has provided top-notch goaltending the bulk of that time.

Hellebuyck wasn't happy with the way last season ended and he spent the summer working on ways to get better.

He's passed every test with flying colours so far and he's not the complacent type.

That's part of the reason the Jets signed Hellebuyck and fellow franchise cornerstone Mark Scheifele to matching seven-year contract extensions last October that are worth US\$59.5 million and carry an AAV of US\$8.5 million.

With Shesterkin reportedly looking for an AAV north of US\$11 million in his next deal, Hellebuyck is providing outstanding value right now.

Although Father Time remains undefeated, that's a potential concern for well down the road.

Hellebuyck, 31, still looks like someone in the heart of his prime.

His attention to detail was evident as he explained a save he made on Avalanche D-man Cale Makar after an initial chance for Devon Toews from the slot.

"I had my hands in front of me and my core was activated," said Hellebuyck. "When I made eye contact with that puck I had a really good jump and I had all my weight moving that way and was able to get my blocker down as well."

Hellebuyck doesn't really like letting reporters behind the velvet rope very often when it comes to his process, but when he does, the conversation can be quite revealing.

It's also a reminder what folks are witnessing is truly something to behold and wouldn't be happening without Hellebuyck's incredible commitment to the craft.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/video/domino-s-that-s-hockey-the-case-for-hellebuyck-as-nhl-mvp%7E3027377>

Domino's That's Hockey: The case for Hellebuyck as NHL MVP (VIDEO)

The Jets' historic and unexpected start to the season has been fueled by Connor Hellebuyck's sensational play in net. The Winnipeg goaltender leads all netminders in virtually every category and TSN Hockey analyst Bruce Boudreau joins Domino's That's Hockey to make the case for Hellebuyck to be considered the early favourite for league MVP and discuss why goalies don't get the love they deserve when it comes to Hart consideration.

New York Post

<https://nypost.com/2024/11/12/sports/rangers-face-tall-task-against-connor-hellebuyck-led-jets-top-dogs/>

Rangers face tall task against Connor Hellebuyck-led Jets: 'Top dogs'

By Andrew Crane

In the eyes of Peter Laviolette, this isn't a fortuitous tear. This is just who the Winnipeg Jets are — the "top dogs," he said.

The Jets have sprinted out to a scorching 14-1-0 start, the best 15-game opening act in NHL history, entering Tuesday night's showdown with the Rangers at the Garden.

Connor Hellebuyck's numbers — a 1.83 goals against average and a .935 save percentage — are somehow better, at least for now, than the goaltender's Vezina-winning season last year.

Their offense has accounted for the most goals in the NHL. Their blueline and Hellebuyck have anchored a defense that has surrendered the second fewest.

"I think it's justified," Laviolette said. "Their record, there's no fluke to that. So for us, it'll be a great test, great challenge. We're playing the best team in the league right now."

Just about everything has gone right for the Jets, starting with Hellebuyck. And despite a 9-3-1 record, plenty has seemingly gone wrong for the Rangers as they shuffle lines and defensive pairings and struggle to prevent their goaltenders from getting peppered with shots.

So when asked if Tuesday's game serves as a measuring stick, forward Mika Zibanejad told The Post "possibly."

Winnipeg will test the Rangers' work in areas they're aiming to improve, will challenge their quest to not deviate from core principles and will mark their latest chance for an early season statement win after they failed to secure one in an Eastern Conference Final rematch against the Panthers last month.

This time, the Blueshirts have a chance to help prevent history from continuing.

"Over the years as a player you've faced those types of challenges before," Zibanejad said after practice Monday in Tarrytown. "We had other teams with records that come into our building and obviously we don't want to add to it, so from there, it's just go play."

Just as Igor Shesterkin remains at the center of the Rangers' operation, Hellebuyck has filled a similar role with the Jets.

He won the second Vezina Trophy of his career last year, and through his first 12 starts this season, Hellebuyck has already shut out an opponent four times and allowed more than three goals in a game just twice.

Within his three starts across the last week, he recorded two of his shutouts, has saved 88 of 89 shots and set a Jets record for longest stretch without allowing a goal (191:47).

That will all collide with Rangers lines still searching for some fluidity.

There's Artemi Panarin, already up to 10 goals and 21 points through 13 games.

There's Chris Kreider, already with eight goals.

There are the promising strides and consistent scoring chances generated by the third line, too. But the Blueshirts have been outshot by their opponents in five of their past seven games.

Against Hellebuyck, the Rangers have to execute a smart shooting plan, Zibanejad said.

Hellebuyck represents the type of goaltender who can thrive and find a rhythm when he's getting peppered with low-quality chances, and while it's often smart to just get the puck to the net, Zibanejad said the Blueshirts need to ensure that they're also getting second and third chances.

"Some goalies actually get better from getting more shots," Zibanejad said, "and it feels like it becomes a warm-up for them and they feel like they're in the game. I'm not saying passing up on shots, but try to attack him. Not just shoot just to shoot."

The Rangers have their counter to Hellebuyck with either Shesterkin or Jonathan Quick.

They have their counter to the production of Nikolaj Ehlers and Kyle Connor and Mark Scheifele with the production of Panarin, Kreider and Alexis Lafreniere.

This is far from being a June overlap in the Stanley Cup Final, but it provides another chance for a litmus test — and a chance to avoid becoming a footnote in Winnipeg's historical run.

"Any time you play the top team in the league, it's a great challenge," fourth-line center Sam Carrick told reporters. "... We want to prove that we're up there with them."

The Hockey News

<https://thehockeynews.com/news/the-winnipeg-jets-are-off-to-the-best-start-ever-but-will-it-actually-matter>

The Winnipeg Jets Are Off To The Best Start Ever, But Will It Actually Matter?

By Janson Duench

In this modern NHL, parity has been the name of the game. Take the Atlantic Division for example. Just three points separate the third-place Boston Bruins from the seventh-place Detroit Red Wings. Creating separation from 31 other NHL teams has never been more difficult.

Yet here we are, with the Winnipeg Jets looking down at the rest of the league from the mountaintop with a 14-1-0 record and .933 points percentage.

Before the Jets walked all over the Dallas Stars on Saturday afternoon, no team had ever won 14 of its first 15 games to start a season.

Not only do the Jets have the best record, they also lead the NHL in several categories, including the best power play percentage through 15 games in NHL history (42.1 percent) and their plus-36 goal differential is 16 more than the next-closest team.

They've also received Vezina quality goaltending from Connor Hellebuyck, who is second in the league in save percentage (.935), first in goals against average (1.83) among goalies with six games played and is tied for second in goals saved above expected (7.2) with Igor Shesterkin. On top of that, backup Eric Comrie has won all three of his starts with sparkling numbers.

In terms of scoring, Winnipeg is getting it from everywhere. They boast the most total points by defensemen (46) and 11 players have at least 10 points through 15 games.

So things couldn't possibly be any better, and the Jets were already pretty good at hockey last year. It's easy to forget, but Winnipeg was a powerhouse last season, finishing fourth in the NHL with 52 wins and 110 points. For all that work, it landed them a first-round matchup with the 2022 champion Colorado Avalanche. Despite the tough draw, it was still stunning to see Winnipeg go out with a whimper in five games.

With new head coach Scott Arniel taking over from Rick Bowness, the 'True North' is clearly on a mission like we've never seen before. The Jets have a real chance to challenge the 2022-23 Bruins' NHL record of 65 wins and 135 points — with 28 points already in the bank, Winnipeg has 67 games to collect another 107 points. That would require a .800 winning percentage from here on out. Those Bruins of two seasons ago finished at .823.

But does any of this actually matter for the Jets' Stanley Cup aspirations? With that question in mind, let's take a look at the next-best starts in NHL history through 15 games, and what they accomplished in the playoffs.

The only other team to win 13 of its first 14 games, the 2007-08 Ottawa Senators returned from their crushing 2007 Stanley Cup Finals defeat with a 13-2-0 record. However, the team slumped shortly after Christmas and barely qualified for the playoffs, finishing seventh in the East. They became cannon fodder in a sweep against the eventual Cup finalist Pittsburgh Penguins, who were on the upswing. With that core of players, Ottawa never rebounded from that season.

The 2013-14 Colorado Avalanche weren't expected to be world-beaters after drafting Nathan MacKinnon first overall in the summer, but that's exactly what they looked like after 15 games, posting a 13-2-0 record. While the pace dropped off slightly, the Avs still clinched the Western Conference crown. But it didn't matter in the playoffs, where they lost in seven games to the last-seeded Minnesota Wild. Although Colorado eventually lifted the Cup in 2022, it took another rebuild after they failed to match their 2013-14 results.

In a rare example of foreshadowing future success, the 1994-95 Quebec Nordiques jumped out to a 13-2-0 record that seemed to justify their slow and steady collection of future Hall-of-Famers. However, it was too soon for the Nordiques, who lost in six games in round one to the New York Rangers that spring. But Denver would reap the rewards of Quebec's genius rebuild the next season with a championship, proving this hot start wasn't for nothing.

It was to absolutely nobody's surprise in 2005 when the Red Wings kicked off the new era of the NHL with a 12-2-1 record. Their 2002 Cup win was still fresh in many people's minds, and Motor City seemed destined to pile up more Cups with their core of Pavel Datsyuk, Henrik Zetterberg and Nicklas Lidstrom. But the scrappy Edmonton Oilers put a pin in that when they stunned the

hockey world with a six-game victory over Detroit in round one. The Red Wings still had a few last gasps though, winning the Cup in 2008.

Similar to those Red Wings, the 1994-95 Pittsburgh Penguins were still relatively fresh off back-to-back Cups when they started the season 12-1-2. Surprisingly, that came without superstar captain Mario Lemieux and was instead led by Jaromir Jagr. After a strong regular season finish, however, the wheels fell off when the Pens suffered a shocking five-game defeat to the eventual champion New Jersey Devils.

So of the five aforementioned teams, four lost in round one after their record-setting starts, three fell to eventual Cup finalists and three won their division.

Not the worst news for Jets fans, but certainly not the best news for a team that has already been through its fair share of first-round defeats. Winning 14 games in October and November means nothing when it comes to claiming 16 wins in April, May and June.

But the first thing is getting there, and Winnipeg has a long runway ahead. The numbers underneath the hood are slightly worrisome, with middling 5-on-5 numbers for expected goals percentage, Corsi and Fenwick. The Jets also have the highest PDO at 107.16, which will likely come down at least a bit. However, the Jets also had the NHL's second-highest PDO last season, so what gives?

All in all, the Jets are a fantastic regular season team that simply hasn't shown it can make noise when it counts. Since 2018, they have the seventh-most wins in the NHL and only a single conference finals appearance to show for it.

Unless this is the start-to-finish masterclass that we rarely ever see in professional sports, the Jets might be in tough this season.

Daily Faceoff

<https://www.dailyfaceoff.com/news/the-jets-dont-spend-much-time-in-the-defensive-zone-for-a-good-reason>

The Jets don't spend much time in the defensive zone – for a good reason

By Daily Faceoff

The Winnipeg Jets continue to win this season, and now they are the first team in NHL history to win 14 of their first 15 games of the season after a 4-1 win over the Dallas Stars. But while their offense and Connor Hellebuyck have gotten the headlines, their defense has gone under the radar.

Colby Cohen talked on Daily Faceoff Live about the Jets defense and how well it's played this season.

Colby Cohen: I want to start by giving credit to Scott Arniel because this was a decision that I questioned when they made that hire. I just didn't think it was enough, and I think the internet agreed. The internet's always right, I think we know that.

When I look at the way that this team is playing, I look at the details, and there's one area that just glaringly sticks out to me. Watch how hard they go back on pucks. Their breakout is so efficient. You watch, no matter what the circumstance is, no matter if the team they're playing has an aggressive 2-1-2 or an aggressive 1-2-2 or if it's a passive 1-2-2 forecheck that's coming their way, you watch the way they retrieve the puck, their defensemen's habits of getting hard back on the puck, not just first defensemen on the strong side, but the weak side, and that allows them to get their feet up ice and play north faster than any other team in the National Hockey League.

And we hear "play fast, play fast". That is probably the biggest buzzword in the National Hockey League. You don't hear everybody say, "Think fast, think fast, think fast"., right? Everybody can skate in the National Hockey League. You've got to have the mind to keep up with it, and the habits to keep up with it.

And you watch how they get back on pucks. I'm going to give all the credit in the world of their d-core for the success because they're not having to defend. Their forwards are scoring a lot of goals. Their power play has been tremendous, the puck movement is absolutely tremendous. But to me, a lot of this credit goes to Scott Arniel and the details in which this team is playing early in the season.

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/jets-not-just-winning-but-improving-with-every-game/>

Jets not just winning but improving with every game

By Ryan Dixon

At this point, the Winnipeg Jets' record-setting start to the season has outstripped the scope of words like 'stellar' and 'impressive.' It's downright mad what Manitoba's team is up to right now, and the cool part is, the Jets aren't just winning — they're getting better as the W's stack up.

Let's face it, life was already pretty good when Winnipeg was 9-1-0 out of the gate. Of those nine wins, though, three came in extra time and eight of them were against squads that did not make the 2024 Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Since their lone loss of the season, though — a 6-4 setback to the Toronto Maple Leafs three nights before Halloween — Winnipeg has six straight 60-minute wins. In five of those outings — including Saturday's 4-1 win over Dallas — the Jets have held opponents to two goals or fewer and, overall, they've outscored them by an outlandish 27-9 in that stretch.

In addition to beating Dallas, they've also pinged off wins over the Tampa Bay Lightning and the struggling — and, by extension, desperate — Colorado Avalanche. Of course, Winnipeg didn't just beat Colorado, it blanked them 1-0. In fact, Connor Hellebuyck established a new franchise record on Saturday night by going 191:47 without allowing a goal and nearly made it out of that contest with another whitewash. Only with Winnipeg up 4-0 and under 90 seconds to go in the third period did Dallas' Roope Hintz get one by him.

With the win, the Jets became the first team in NHL history to rack up 14 victories in 15 games to start a year. And, as you'd expect, their team stats positively sparkle. Winnipeg ranks first in

goals for (4.47 per game), goals against (2.07) and power-play percentage (41.9 per cent). Its plus-36 goal differential is the best in the league by 16 goals ahead of plus-20 Carolina.

Individually, Hellebuyck is your wins (11), goals-against average (1.83) and save percentage (.935) leader among goalies with at least five starts, and the Jets are the only team in the league to have four players — Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor, Nikolaj Ehlers and Nino Niederreiter — with at least seven goals.

Josh Morrissey, with 16 points, is second in scoring among defencemen behind Cale Makar, which is basically like saying you have the No. 2 album on the pop charts behind Taylor Swift. Not really any shame in that.

If you want to nitpick, the Jets have average underlying numbers (18th in the NHL in Money puck's expected goals-for percentage at 50.07 per cent) and the second-best shooting percentage in the league at 14.3 per cent. As a guy who always ends with 20 to 25 tucks, Niederreiter is probably going to cool at some point, and it's hard to imagine Neal Pionk will remain a point-per-game defenceman (14 in 15 contests).

Still, none of that should stop the jig Jets fans are doing. Especially when you consider Cole Perfetti's production (13 points in 15 outings) and Gabe Vilardi's offence (seven-game point streak), both of which seem like very real improvements over last year, when Perfetti's wheels were still spinning and Vilardi couldn't stay healthy.

If nothing else, this scorching start has all but assured Winnipeg a playoff spot. That might not seem like much for a team that finished with 110 points last season, but — hilarious as it is to recall — we spent September wondering if Dallas, Colorado and the loaded-up Predators were all destined to finish ahead of Winnipeg in the Central after an off-season when 2C Sean Monahan, strong backup goalie Laurent Brossoit, hired gun Tyler Toffoli and longtime D-man Brenden Dillion all departed as UFAs.

With this start, though, there's no way Winnipeg misses the big dance now. That means, at the absolute baseline, the Jets are guaranteed another chance to show us they can be this good when it really counts.

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/cheveldayoff-samberg-perfetti-among-jets-early-season-standouts/>

Cheveldayoff: Samberg, Perfetti among Jets' early-season standouts (VIDEO)

Winnipeg Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff joins Kyper and Bourne to discuss his team's early-season standouts amid their record-breaking 14-1-0 start, mentioning Dylan Samberg and Cole Perfetti, among others, as those who have excelled so far.

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/does-jets-defence-corps-fit-recent-blueprint-for-stanley-cup-success/>

Does Jets defence corps fit recent blueprint for Stanley Cup success? (VIDEO)

NHL insider Elliotte Friedman joins FAN Hockey Show to weigh in on how real he thinks the Jets are, after their best start in NHL history, whether he thinks it's somewhat sustainable, and whether he views them as Stanley Cup contenders.

<https://illegalcurve.com/real-kyper-bourne-conversation-with-winnipeg-jets-gm-kevin-cheveldayoff-on-historic-start-to-season/>

Real Kyper & Bourne | Kevin Cheveldayoff on historic start to season (VIDEO)

Video Description:

GM Kevin Cheveldayoff joined Nick Kypreos and Justin Bourne for a chat about his team's historic start to the 2024-25 season. The conversation starts at the 53:26 and runs until 1:10:27.

Topics:

- 1) How does he explain this start? (54:16)
- 2) Who stands out as a player(s) that's stepped up (55:58)
- 3) Decision to bridge Cole Perfetti vs signing him to a long-term deal (57:55)
- 4) Does he feel this group is ready for playoffs? (1:00:15)
- 5) What team chemistry can do for a hockey club (1:02:12)
- 6) Josh Morrissey's emergence as a top pairing D man/4 Nations consideration (1:04:18)
- 7) Biggest challenge to come out of the West (1:05:33)
- 8) Third line defining the Jets (1:07:35)