

Winnipegjets.com

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/three-things-champs-hand-jets-second-straight-loss>

***Three things - Champs hand Jets second straight loss
Sergei Bobrovsky made 26 saves in 5-0 Panthers win***

By Jamie Thomas

The Winnipeg Jets have lost two in a row for the first time this season as the Florida Panthers beat them 5-0 at Amerant Bank Arena. The defending champions took over in the second period scoring three times and Winnipeg allowed more than four goals for just the second time in 2024-25. It also marked the first time this season that Winnipeg had been shut out. The Jets and Panthers will face each other again in Winnipeg at Canada Life Centre on Tuesday.

CHAMPS CAPITALIZE

Winnipeg had some great chances to open the scoring, but Sergei Bobrovsky shut the door on Nikolaj Ehlers a couple of times to keep the game scoreless. Florida would open the scoring at the 14:59 mark of the first period, Gustav Forsling's shot would go off of Dylan DeMelo and then hit Mackie Samoskevich and bounce past Connor Hellebuyck. Florida added to their lead at 2:07, Hellebuyck made a routine save off a Sam Bennett backhand, but former Jet Nate Schmidt pounced on the rebound and made it 2-0. At 12:21, Evan Rodrigues also scored off a rebound opportunity beating Hellebuyck for the three-goal advantage.

JETS HAD THEIR CHANCES

The Jets quickly responded after giving up the second goal of the night, but Colin Miller's point shot hit the post. Not long after Miller's close call, Kyle Connor was sent in on Bobrovsky and his attempt went off the post and over the glass. Mark Scheifele also had a glorious scoring chance but had his backhand shot was shut down by Bobrovsky.

"I still think that we had some good chances, but also think that he was able to see a lot of the pucks tonight. And the same with Bucky on a goalie like Bobrovsky, you give him a clean view of the puck, they're going to stop it," said Nikolaj Ehlers.

"So, first of all, we got to get the pucks deep. We got to work their defenseman create the turnovers, like we're really good at and that's the that's the way we will then get our chances."

PANTHERS POUR IT ON

The Jets came in with the top ranked power play and had yet to give up a shorthanded goal but that all changed with just over five minutes left in the middle frame. Sam Reinhart rang a wrist shot off the post and Barkov was in the right place at the right time to put in the shorthanded goal giving Florida a 4-0 lead after 40 minutes. Former Jet Dmitry Kulikov scored his third goal of the season to round out the scoring.

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/morrissey-still-pushing-for-more>

***Morrissey still pushing for more
Jets defenceman's drive to improve and compete key to hitting 600 games***

By Mitchell Clinton

FORT LAUDERDALE – In the hierarchy of National Hockey League individual milestones, Josh Morrissey says the 1,000-game mark is one of the most sought after.

That doesn't mean a number like 600 games – which the Winnipeg Jets defenceman will reach on Saturday against the Florida Panthers – means any less, though.

“Every time you get another 100 games it's a cool moment,” said Morrissey after the team's 35-minute skate on Friday. “It's cool to be coming up on 600. It goes by fast, you hear everybody say that. A lot of great memories and it feels like I'm just getting going.”

The 29-year-old product of Calgary, AB has 17 points this season, tied for second in points by a defenceman (with teammate Neal Pionk) behind only Cale Makar's 25. Since the beginning of the 2022-23 campaign, only three defencemen (Makar, Quinn Hughes, and Erik Karlsson) have more points than Morrissey's 162.

Of course, points only tell part of the story when it comes to Morrissey.

He leads the Jets in average ice time per game (24:22), often going up against the opposition's best, and isn't afraid to put his body on the line either. His 31 blocked shots also leads the team, and with number 44 on the ice at five-on-five, the Jets are outscoring their opponents 11-9.

He's been fifth and seventh in Norris Trophy voting the last couple seasons, and feels he's unlocking more parts of his game as his career continues.

“I love the game and love the pursuit of getting better, the pursuit of finding ways to improve and be more consistent,” said Morrissey. “I think a lot of that comes from my dad. As a kid he instilled that mindset in me to never be satisfied.”

Morrissey, an avid golfer, referenced 15-time major winner Tiger Woods when talking about the pursuit of consistency.

“He could hit all the shots at 18-years-old, but when he was in his prime in his 20s or 30s - whenever that was - he could just do that more consistently,” said Morrissey. “So if you feel you've acquired a skill, and can do it three out of 10 times, is there a way you can get it to seven, eight, or nine out of 10? I think the best players in the league are able to do that on a night in and night out basis consistently.”

Two seasons ago, it was Rick Bowness who had the off-season conversation with Morrissey about unleashing the 2013 first round pick's offensive instincts. Bowness told Morrissey that when the long-time head coach was in Dallas, Morrissey's name was circled on the board as someone Bowness wanted his teams to get after.

Through that speech, working with then associate coach (now head coach) Scott Arniel, and the reps he puts in during the off-season, Morrissey took off and put himself in the conversation of elite defencemen in the NHL – a place he certainly belongs.

Perhaps it's fitting, then, that game 600 comes against the Florida Panthers, and Morrissey's first head coach in the NHL – Paul Maurice.

After Morrissey's first five games in the NHL, he remembers being called into Maurice's office. Morrissey had one point in the first handful of games in that 2016-17 season, and had made his NHL debut the season before, on March 5.

"He kind of had a smirk on his face, as he often does, as you see in media as well. He was laughing that day and said 'you know we're not sending you down. You can go try something with the puck, make a play, do things that you do,'" Morrissey recalled. "As a defenceman, I think it takes a little longer before you start to really settle into your game - whether that's a couple hundred games, whatever that may be. As I said, I still feel at 600 games in I'm still looking at ways to improve, ways to get better."

Arniel sees that too. As a coach, though, what he loves isn't just the point production. It's the fact there hasn't been a drop-off in Morrissey's defensive game.

"There's a lot of defenceman that are extremely good offensively and don't get the opportunity to defend. But he takes a lot of pride in that part of it," said Arniel. "He wanted to have on his plate and he does. He sees the top lines and he and (Dylan DeMelo) have done a great job of eliminating those top players' opportunities. Obviously, the offensive side of his game is elite. That's part of the success that he's had the last couple of years."

Morrissey's inner drive isn't going anywhere, and he'll certainly be a big part of helping the Jets get back to where they want to be in the spring. But part of what makes an athlete like Morrissey so successful is the ability to take things one day at a time, and not get too wrapped up on the future or the past.

"I just love the game. I love the compete element. When I'm playing my best, that's what drives me," said Morrissey. "the guys that continue to get better and enjoy the game as they age, they enjoy the compete, they enjoy being around the guys and trying win games in pursuit of the Stanley Cup. Also the individual play of trying to continue to grow as a player. Hopefully I'm only about halfway there."

NHL.com

<https://www.nhl.com/news/winnipeg-jets-florida-panthers-game-recap-november-16>

***Panthers score 5, Bobrovsky makes 27 saves in shutout win against Jets
Barkov, Reinhart each gets 3 points for Florida; Winnipeg drops consecutive games after best start in NHL history***

By George Richards

SUNRISE, Fla. -- Sergei Bobrovsky made 27 saves, and Aleksander Barkov and Sam Reinhart each had three points for the Florida Panthers in a 5-0 win against the Winnipeg Jets at Amerant Bank Arena on Saturday.

"I thought the guys did a great job," said Bobrovsky, who earned his 45th NHL shutout and 12th with the Panthers. "It was a complete game. All four lines were rolling. It was fun to be a part of."

Barkov had a goal and two assists, Reinhart had three assists, and Gustav Forsling had two assists for the Panthers (12-5-1), who had lost consecutive games to the New Jersey Devils on Tuesday and Thursday.

Florida coach Paul Maurice, who coached the Jets for parts of nine seasons before resigning in 2021, got his first win against Winnipeg after going 0-3-1 the past two seasons.

"We finally did not play terrible," Maurice said. "In the four games we played against these guys, we have not been very good. This was not about Winnipeg for us; it was about our past two games and righting the ship."

Connor Hellebuyck made 26 saves for the Jets (15-3-0), who have lost consecutive games after the best start to a season in NHL history (15 wins in 16 games).

"What we did was make mistakes against the Stanley Cup champions," Winnipeg coach Scott Arniel said. "They're a team that's lost two games at home here in their building against New Jersey. We knew they weren't going to be giving us any freebies. We made mistakes and they put them in the back of the net."

Mackie Samoskevich gave the Panthers a 1-0 lead at 14:59 of the first period, redirecting Forsling's shot through traffic in front of the net.

Florida scored three goals in the second period to take a commanding 4-0 lead into the third.

Nate Schmidt, who spent the past three seasons with the Jets, made it 2-0 at 2:07 when he put in a rebound off Sam Bennett's shot.

"I disconnected for a second," Schmidt said of the goal. "I was watching Bennett as a fan. I stopped skating for a second, thought 'Wow! Nice play! Oh, I should probably be on there.' But it felt good, especially at that time of the game. It was still a tight game at that point. To get something like that feels good, and it really feels good after our past couple of games."

Evan Rodrigues pushed it to 3-0 at 12:21, finishing off a rebound in front of the net.

Barkov tucked in a backhand at the top of the crease off a short-handed 2-on-1 rush to make it 4-0 at 14:36.

"Winnipeg got off to a great start, and there is a reason they are the first team in the League right now," Barkov said. "They showed us that in the first period. But we stuck with it. [Bobrovsky] made some unbelievable saves, kept us in the game. Then, we took over in the second."

Dmitry Kulikov tapped in a centering pass from Barkov for the 5-0 final at 3:23 of the third period.

The series between these two teams now heads to Winnipeg, where the Jets will play host to the Panthers on Tuesday (8 p.m. ET; TSN3, SCRIPPS).

"I think we got away from certain aspects that make us good," Winnipeg defenseman Dylan DeMelo said. "I think you've got to give them a lot of credit, too. I thought they played a really strong game. Nothing that we were surprised about but I think things that we'll definitely be aware for next time, a good blueprint for us to see what we can expect on Tuesday. We need to bring it. Now it's our turn, in our building, so I think we're excited to get home and play them again."

NOTES: Reinhart extended his point streak to 10 games (eight goals, eight assists) for the second time in his career with the Panthers. He had a 13-game point streak last season. ... Barkov extended his assist streak to eight games (13 assists) and tied the second-longest such stretch in franchise history (Jonathan Huberdeau in 2021-22 and Olli Jokinen in 2005-06). Huberdeau's 10-game assist streak is the franchise record. ... Barkov's 13 short-handed goals are second in franchise history behind Radek Dvorak (16).

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/jets-takeaways-execution-lacking-in-latest-losses/>

Jets Takeaways: Execution lacking in latest losses

By Jacob Stoller

The "O-VER-ATE-D" chants in the third period were fitting.

You'd think a marquee matchup between the Winnipeg Jets and Florida Panthers — the NHL's hottest team versus the reigning Stanley Cup champions — would make for a high-pace, back-and-forth duel. You'd think the Jets would've brought their best coming off Thursday's 4-1 loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning. But for the second straight game, Winnipeg didn't resemble the version of itself that got off to an NHL-best start.

"I think we (beat) ourselves," Nikolaj Ehlers told reporters after Winnipeg fell 5-0 to Florida.

Besides a deflected shot that banked off Mackie Samoskevich's body and in, each of the Jets' goals against was caused by a self-inflicted wound.

A defensive zone breakdown left Nate Schmidt wide-open to capitalize on a rebound. 2-0.

Mark Scheifele failed to seal off Evan Rodrigues in front of the net. 3-0.

Poor puck management on the power play led to Aleksander Barkov and Sam Reinhart generating a shorthanded rush chance. 4-0.

Adam Lowry, uncharacteristically, made a poor defensive read and let Dmitry Kulikov sneak into the low slot. 5-0.

"These are the Stanley Cup champions. No matter what, if you're going to come into this building (and) you're going to make mistakes, they're going to capitalize," Scott Arniel told reporters post-game.

The results were one thing. But the process was arguably more concerning. It wasn't like the Jets built any momentum before mistakes did them in.

They were suffocated by the Panthers — who Dylan DeMelo referred to post-game as “the best forechecking team in the league” — in all three zones. The Jets were smothered in their defensive end, struggling to generate quick and efficient exits. Time and time again, they were forced to chip the puck off the wall on breakouts, only for the Panthers to intercept it in the neutral zone and transition into their attack. Florida outwilled them.

“Whenever there was a battle, they had another guy in there. They came up with a lot more than we did all over the ice. That was evident,” DeMelo said.

Florida generated 13 high-danger shot attempts during even-strength play. Winnipeg had just three. One team crashed the net hard. The other didn't.

“On a goalie like Bobrovsky, (if) you give him a clean view of the puck, they're going to stop it,” Ehlers said.

While it's premature to push any panic button, the Jets can't rest on their laurels after this not-so-sunny two-game stretch. We're starting to see a theme develop. Winnipeg struggles to generate and maintain possession against hard-forechecking teams that can also generate off the rush. That was their downfall in all three of their losses. It's not a structural issue as it is an execution one.

In those types of games, plays need to be made quicker under pressure. They can't give opponents so much real estate to gain speed against them in the neutral zone. And, on the other side of the coin, they need to be more assertive when operating with the puck in the middle zone. When there's not room to skate it through, you've got to transition to a chip-and-chase style.

“We turn it over. We don't change our game. We keep turning it over. We keep trying to get through,” Ehlers said of the team's neutral zone play. “It's our mistakes.”

So, now what? It's easy to suggest a knee-jerk “bring out the line blender” reaction. However, shaking up the lines isn't going to make those troubling trends disappear. Their response on Tuesday, when they host the Panthers at Canada Life Centre, will be telling.

Other Takeaways

- One positive from this game: Nikolaj Ehlers. He generated four scoring chances — three of which came in the first period — and had a magnificent play in the second period where he stripped the puck from Barkov and set up Scheifele for a Grade-A rush chance. I'm not sure we've ever seen the pending UFA play with the level of confidence and poise he's displayed this year.
- Things got feisty in the third period — Scheifele dropped the mitts with Aaron Ekblad, while Vladislav Namestnikov, Neal Pionk and Colin Miller were given game misconducts — but it was too little too late. Now, the game misconducts were done out of precaution, as the referees were trying to bring the temperature down, but the overall chippiness we saw came after the game was long-gone. It would've been more meaningful to see that kind of push-back when the game wasn't out of reach.

- Neal Pionk delivered another one of his signature hip-checks and sent Jesper Boqvist flying. While Pionk seemed to connect with Boqvist's knee, it was still a clean hit.

“(Boqvist) didn't miss a shift,” Arniel shrugged when asked about the hit.

- Vladislav Namestnikov won nine of 12 faceoffs. The 31-year-old has a 50 per cent faceoff win percentage — a huge uptick from his last two seasons with the Jets, where he won just 36 per cent of his draws.

Associated Press

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/bobrovsky-gets-shutout-panthers-roll-past-nhl-leading-jets-to-snap-2-game-slide/>

Bobrovsky gets shutout, Panthers roll past NHL-leading Jets to snap two-game slide

By Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 27 shots for his 45th career shutout, Aleksander Barkov had a short-handed goal and two assists, and the Florida Panthers beat the NHL-leading Winnipeg Jets 5-0 on Saturday night.

Sam Reinhart had three assists for Florida, which snapped a two-game slide and became the first team to take a five-goal lead on the Jets this season. Mackie Samoskevich, Evan Rodrigues, Nate Schmidt and Dmitry Kulikov also scored for the Atlantic Division leaders.

Winnipeg goalie Connor Hellebuyck came into the night with an NHL-best 1.92 goals-against average. It rose to 2.14 after the Panthers beat him five times on 31 shots, and he took the loss for just the second time in 14 games this season.

Reinhart now has points in 10 straight games, had his fourth three-point game of the season and his first three-assist game in the regular season since he had four against Columbus on Dec. 10, 2023.

Takeaways

Jets: Despite going 0-2-0 in Florida — Winnipeg lost in Tampa Bay on Thursday — a 15-3-0 record is, by far, the best start in team history. Since hockey returned to Winnipeg in 2011, no Jets team ever had more than 11 wins through a season's first 18 games.

Panthers: Samoskevich was back in the lineup after not playing Thursday in a loss to New Jersey and made immediate impact with the game's opening goal — his third in his last seven games.

Key moment

Bobrovsky made a big stop on a backhand by Mark Scheifele midway through the second period to keep Florida up 2-0. Rodrigues and Barkov added goals not long afterward to blow the game open for Florida.

Key stat

The Panthers already have five short-handed goals this season (in 18 games). They had eight in the 2023-24 regular season (in 82 games).

Up next

The teams play again Tuesday in Winnipeg.

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5923368/2024/11/16/winnipeg-jets-free-agents/>

Jets free-agent stock watch: Can Winnipeg keep its No. 1 roster together long-term?

By Murat Ates

The Winnipeg Jets were underrated by most national pundits this offseason, including right here at The Athletic.

“The 2024-25 Jets look a lot weaker than the one that bowed out of the first round after just five games,” wrote Dom Luszczyszyn on July 10.

The next day, only 75 percent of our writers picked the Jets to qualify for the 2025 playoffs.

I’m not sure whether you’ve noticed, but the Jets are 15-2-0 now. They have a 4-point lead over the New Jersey Devils for the top spot in the NHL, despite playing three fewer games. Things are going pretty well for a team accused of “running it back” as though that was supposed to make them a lottery team.

But what happens next summer?

Winnipeg has five pending unrestricted free agents playing key roles in its early season success. Nikolaj Ehlers, Neal Pionk, Mason Appleton, Vladislav Namestnikov and Alex Iafallo are scheduled to become UFAs this summer, and Gabriel Vilardi and Dylan Samberg are heading toward big raises as restricted free agents.

Can the team that ran it back on its way to the top of the NHL standings afford to do it again now that all of its free agents are on pace for a career year?

Today, we take a long-term view of the Jets, projecting cap hits for their 2025-26 team, and assessing Winnipeg’s future based on next year’s salary cap.

The Jets’ salary-cap outlook

Winnipeg has \$51 million committed to the following players in 2025-26:

Kyle Connor
Mark Scheifele
Cole Perfetti
Adam Lowry
Nino Niederreiter
David Gustafsson
LD
RD
Josh Morrissey
Dylan DeMelo

Logan Stanley
Colin Miller
Ville Heinola
G
Connor Hellebuyck
Eric Comrie

Kind of a sparse roster, isn't it?

This table skips Winnipeg's restricted free agents — Vilardi, Samberg, Rasmus Kupari and Morgan Barron. Those players will have arbitration rights and are likely to remain under team control, regardless of their eventual contract figure or their long-term future.

Winnipeg's pending UFAs are the players who provide the most questions.

The Jets are likely to retain a few of Ehlers, Appleton, Lafallo, Namestnikov, Pionk, Fleury and Coghlan — as well as minor-league UFAs such as Dominic Toninato and Axel Jonsson-Fjallby. But which ones? And for how much money?

The Jets will have ample cap room from which to make a series of difficult decisions. The cap maximum is projected to increase to \$92.5 million, and the Jets are aided by the end of Blake Wheeler's \$2.75 million buyout and a reduction in the cost of their Nate Schmidt buyout.

All told, Winnipeg should have about \$40 million to commit to building out the rest of its roster. The biggest counteracting pressure to this boost will be raises due to Vilardi and Samberg, but the Jets are still in a strong position concerning the cap.

One little "problem" though. Led by Ehlers, Vilardi, Pionk and Appleton, many of Winnipeg's top free agents — both restricted and unrestricted — are playing themselves toward a substantial uptick in cost.

Winnipeg's two biggest cases for its two biggest raises

Ehlers has scored nine goals and 11 assists for 20 points in 17 games. He's second only to Mark Scheifele (\$8.5 million) and Kyle Connor (\$7.14 million) in points, adding top-unit power-play duties to his traditionally strong five-on-five scoring rates, and is playing on a contract with a cap hit of \$6 million.

Ehlers' power-play promotion is a particularly big deal. Players get paid predominantly based on the points they produce and the minutes they play. Ehlers is the same player he's always been, but now he's on pace for 96 points, thanks to a power play scoring more often than the best one in NHL history. As long as Ehlers keeps his job on that unit — and he should, given how much he contributes to its success — a point-per-game season seems like a conservative outcome. (He's scoring at an unsustainable, career-best 20.5 percent of his shots, so some drop-off from his 96-point pace should be expected.)

There are factors working against Ehlers when he signs his next contract. He's stayed healthy for an average of 63 out of 82 games, based on the three seasons before this one. He doesn't come with first-line clout the same way Connor will next year; multiple coaching staffs have used Ehlers as a secondary scoring option at even strength without ever committing to him on the top line. The market might conclude a long-term deal is a risk for an oft-injured player whose hallmark is his footspeed or short him for subpar playoff point totals.

Barring a midseason extension, Ehlers will hit the UFA market at 29 years old. The Jets will likely get more value out of the deal he's been on for the last several years than on an extension, particularly if it comes close to the \$7.5 million AAV I'm forecasting. My guess is he covers the bet for three or four seasons before his footspeed starts to flag; a long-term deal is not without risk.

And all that's if Ehlers signs in Winnipeg, not when. He's on pace for a career season and, despite his love for the city and his teammates, a reunion is not guaranteed.

Gabriel Vilardi is on pace to play the first fully healthy season of his career. That sentence might be the only thing holding him back from an enormous payday.

Vilardi plays top-line minutes with Connor and Scheifele, earning their praise and admiration. He plays top-unit power-play minutes, earning leaguewide adulation for his size, hands and decision-making wizardry. Vilardi always seems to make the right read to exploit his coverage, making him last year's de facto power play quarterback and one of several assets at the Jets' disposal now that the power play is the class of the NHL.

The two-year, \$3.4 million AAV contract Vilardi signed in 2022 expires next summer. He'll still be two years away from UFA eligibility, meaning one of Winnipeg's options would be to sign him to a one-year deal and try again the next season. He'll also have arbitration rights, which he could use to ensure a short-term deal if he wants to bet on an even bigger season next year.

I'd put wide error bars on any long-term contract projection. Vilardi is on pace for 68 points by season's end but has been prone to dizzying swings in production. Still, it seems reasonable that a long-term deal could cost Winnipeg anywhere between \$7 million and \$8 million. If either party is unwilling to make that long-term commitment, a one-year bridge deal (through arbitration or otherwise) could save Winnipeg in the short run while exposing both parties to long-term risk. Vilardi's health is a valid concern, as is the risk of his scoring his way to another contract tier when everything clicks.

A player's "platform year" — the year before their contract — has the biggest impact on their payday, but teams are more willing to spend on players who chain together multiple great seasons in a row. The Jets have options here — as does Vilardi. The best-case scenario involves his continued development, consistent health and a long-term deal that neatly consolidates Winnipeg's success trading PL Dubois.

A third, early case for a substantial raise

There is a world in which Ehlers and Vilardi take up \$15 million in cap space between them, reducing Winnipeg's budget from \$40 million to \$25 million.

It would be awfully convenient if Winnipeg found ways to sign important depth players to value contracts.

Mason Appleton's early-season performance isn't making that easy. The 28-year-old is delivering supreme value for his \$2.17 million cap hit and is on pace to follow last season's career high of 36 points with 48 points this year. He's not playing the role of some run-of-the-mill bottom-six forward, either: Appleton plays key minutes on Winnipeg's shutdown line and is fourth among Jets forwards in five-on-five ice time per game.

It does seem reasonable to predict regression for Appleton's offensive output, but his role on this Jets team is beyond question. He'll turn 29 in January and, if I were his agent, I'd be pointing at Nino Niederreiter's \$4.0 million and saying: Why not me? I'm not saying the Jets should pay that if it's the ask, but I wouldn't think of a request like "pay me like you pay my linemates" as unreasonable. We will use an AAV of \$3.5 million for our estimate in this piece.

A redemption story in the making

I fully expect the Jets to re-sign Neal Pionk this summer. The only thing that gets complicated for me is Pionk's price point. He's been playing a top-four role in Winnipeg since arrival, following early excellence with a couple of injury-addled seasons that suggested a pay cut from the \$5.875 million he earns now.

But Pionk's foot injury is behind him. He's moving well again, gapping aggressively at the Jets blue line and joining the rush to add offence — 17 points in 17 games, at that. I don't think anyone would have predicted Pionk matching Josh Morrissey point for point prior to the start of the season, but here we are.

The Jets' job is to look beyond the raw point totals, not getting fooled by Pionk's shooting percentage or the enormous impact of their second power-play unit. He's having a great start to the season — and was justifiably ranked by The Athletic as one of the top bounce-back players of the year — but some of his eye-catching offence comes from circumstance.

I should acknowledge that I've been preaching patience with Pionk for so long it seems strange to offer a "pump the brakes" opinion now. My caution comes from a sense of risk: Winnipeg's value proposition with the 29-year-old defenceman swings wildly for me if it pays him for his peak production. There's a sizable distance between Pionk at his best and Pionk when he's struggling and another contract near (or above) \$6.0 million would seem like a big bet on his best self.

An ideal part of Winnipeg's long-term core

Dylan Samberg's growth has been a big part of Winnipeg's season success. He and Pionk are playing tough minutes regularly and beating them, despite occasional wobbles in coverage or breakout passes gone awry.

We took a longer look at Samberg's contract future in a recent mailbag, wondering about a \$3.5 million AAV. We'll use that figure for the purposes of this piece.

Veteran forwards who shouldn't break the bank

The only time Namestnikov has ever signed with a team for longer than two years, he was a recently drafted rookie signing his entry-level contract with the Tampa Bay Lightning. The versatile forward who centres Winnipeg's secondary scoring line has played to a series of one- and two-year deals since then, including the two-year, \$2.0 million AAV he has now.

Namestnikov has played his best hockey in Winnipeg, establishing himself as a chemistry fit with Ehlers and Cole Perfetti and delivering a career high of 37 points one year ago. He has 12 points in 17 games so far, giving himself plenty of opportunity to improve upon that number.

Winnipeg's fourth line is an underrated part of the Jets' overall success. No, Lafallo won't live up to his \$4.0 million AAV this season from his spot on the depth chart, but he remains a quality player with a great defensive stick, a little bit of offence and plenty of trust from coach Scott Arniel. I'm not sure whether there's a long-term fit available but believe the Jets would be more

than happy to retain Iafallo at a reduced rate, more suited to his role. Would you be content with Namestnikov and Iafallo returning at \$2.5 million AAV each?

Kupari and Barron have shown themselves to be key contributors this season but aren't risks for raises too far beyond the \$1.0 million and \$1.35 million AAVs they carry now. We will use \$1.5 million each as nice, round numbers for this piece.

Honourable mentions

Haydn Fleury, Dylan Coghlan, Kaapo Kahkonen, Jonsson-Fjallby and Toninato are all pending free agents. These aren't the players who will break the bank or cause cap hell, but Jonsson-Fjallby and Toninato have long track records with the Jets at this stage. I could see Winnipeg looking to extend their relationships.

What happens if everyone cashes in?

Do you want to know the wild thing about what happens if the Jets pay all of these projected contracts to Ehlers, Vilardi, Pionk, Appleton, Samberg, Namestnikov, Iafallo, Barron and Kupari?

It's also worth noting that Brad Lambert, Nikita Chibrikov, Elias Salomonsson and the rest of Winnipeg's top prospects will still be on their entry-level contracts. The Jets could keep them in Manitoba if they deemed fit, or promote them at the expense of a pricier veteran. Winnipeg will have much more clarity about Lambert, Salomonsson, et al's NHL readiness by the end of this season and can make decisions based on those more accurate projections.

What does it all mean?

If there's a will, there's a way. Winnipeg does have room to pay all of its free agents market value for their work — and that includes Ehlers, whose future seems to be the most in doubt. It probably has room to retain all of those players while giving Connor a raise in 2026-27.

The Jets' cap outlook gives them flexibility and strength regardless of the tough decisions and big contracts on their plate next summer.

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5921369/2024/11/16/nhl-prospects-pipeline-top-risers-player-stars/>

NHL future watch: Who's the fastest-rising prospect in each team's pipeline?

By The Athletic NHL Staff

It's what every NHL organization wants to see in its prospect pipeline: the player who takes the next step and shows they're ready for more responsibility and a look at a higher level. Now, a month-plus into the 2024-25 hockey season, these rising-stock prospects have started to emerge.

Who's rising the fastest for each team?

The Athletic posed that question to its NHL staff, stipulating that while very recent call-ups are eligible, the prospects should not be current full-time NHLers.

In response, we heard about top picks ready to make the leap, hidden gems earning bigger opportunities and players on the precipice of making an NHL impact. Here are the picks.

Winnipeg Jets

Kevin He, LW: He caught my eye at training camp, earning praise in multiple reports. He played with an intriguing combination of feistiness, fearlessness and skill in high-traffic areas that instantly made the 2024 fourth-round pick a player of interest. But even his good training camp didn't prepare us for what followed: 17 goals, 12 assists and 29 points in his first 19 OHL games for Niagara. He scored 31 goals last season and could obliterate that total by Christmas at this rate. — Murat Ates

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5920770/2024/11/15/nhl-new-coach-effect/>

NHL new coach check-in: Analyzing 8 teams' early returns and changes

By Shayna Goldman

The coaching carousel spins the fastest in the NHL. Eight teams made changes behind the bench heading into the 2024-25 season. The average tenure for an NHL coach stands at 2.4 years, which is the shortest of the four major North American professional leagues.

Just over a month into the season, let's look at the impact of a new voice behind the bench for each of those eight teams.

Winnipeg Jets

The Jets are off to a record-setting start. With a plus-39 goal differential, no one comes close to Winnipeg right now.

The team didn't have a splashy offseason. The most notable changes came behind the bench, with Scott Arniel taking over as head coach. Promoting from within has its pros and cons, and with Arniel specifically, one of the biggest benefits is his familiarity with the team's defensive system that brought them so much success last season.

Another is his willingness to use all the available information to take a deeper dive into how the team can improve — especially after a tough Round 1 exit to Colorado last spring.

After underwhelming last season, the power play has emerged as one of the Jets' best strengths under Arniel and assistant coach Davis Payne. Winnipeg has incorporated more movement into their play on the advantage to become a more lethal threat. The penalty kill is also trending in the right direction to give Winnipeg a special teams advantage most nights.

Between Connor Hellebuyck's excellence, their defensive structure, Cole Perfetti's growth, and a lot of scoring from their star players, there is a lot to like about Winnipeg's start. But now comes the real work from the coaching staff to keep the Jets operating at this level and beyond. The five-on-five play has been solid, but there is room for improvement on both ends of the ice. Not every team finds ways to improve on the fly and instead gets stagnant during winning streaks.

After dominating in New York, Winnipeg will go on to face the Lightning and Panthers and then the Wild, Kings, Golden Knights and Stars a few games later. How the coaching adjusts to keep the Jets flying high will be the biggest test for this new-look staff yet.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/corrado-panthers-physical-game-proves-too-much-for-jets~3031008>

Corrado: Panthers physical game proves too much for Jets (VIDEO)

Both the Florida Panthers and Winnipeg Jets were coming off tough losses, and it was the Florida Panthers that pushed back in this one, with a physical effort that TSN Hockey analyst Frankie Corrado says was the difference that saw the Jets drop back-to-back games for the first time this season.

Daily Faceoff

<https://www.dailyfaceoff.com/news/how-the-jets-long-term-commitment-to-their-core-has-allowed-them-to-be-successful-in-2024-25>

How the Jets' long-term commitment to their core has allowed them to be successful in 2024-25

By Steven Ellis

The Winnipeg Jets are still seeking their first Stanley Cup – but if they get that in the near future, it'll likely be because they stuck to their guns.

GM Kevin Cheveldayoff has never really blown things to the ground since becoming the team's first boss. Much of the group's core has been with the team for years – including some, like Mark Scheifele, since the team's first draft in 2011.

In a recent chat with Daily Faceoff's Frank Seravalli in an episode of Frankly Speaking, Cheveldayoff talked about how having familiar faces in the dressing room has allowed the team to remain competitive:

Frank Seravalli: "You mentioned the continuity and how that's been important, not just from a coaching staff perspective, but a lot of the faces that are the faces of this team have been there for quite a while. How much do you think that's helped just in terms of the overall success that you guys have had year in and year out?"

Kevin Cheveldayoff: "Well, I think one thing that in this league, it's tough to change 180-degree directions too often. I've seen over the course of time when you study teams and you study when they make changes, whether it's at the coaching level or the managerial level or ownership level, and they try to shift the philosophy too fast, it's almost like a whiplash. You can't bring it around fast enough for everyone's expectations, and sometimes then, you overcorrect, or you overcompensate for different things.

"So I think that for us, it's been fortunate. Our philosophies haven't changed, but we have had to tweak things. We've been fortunate that over a period of time in our early years when we were drafting in the teens or the tens, that we were able to get some very good players that have developed over the course of time. But even more importantly, committed to us through their prime years. Whether they all commit like Scheifele and Hellebuyck into their career years, we'll wait and see.

“The thing that has happened organically is most of those players grew up together and are trying to win together. That was a real common theme when I sat down with Mark Scheifele and Connor Hellebuyck before we got their contracts done. First and foremost, they wanted to win, and they wanted to win with this group. Mark Scheifele was our very first pick in the draft. Some people say maybe we stepped up to take him, but for us, there was a strong desire if he was there, he was going to be our guy. But even more understated is Adam Lowry was our second pick. Even though it was a third-round pick, he was our second pick of that draft, and now here he is, the captain. Josh Morrissey, who again has just worked so hard to put himself into the situation that he is as a player in this league. You can go on and say Kyle Connor, we drafted him. Nick Ehlers, Cole Perfetti, Dylan Samberg, all good players.”

<https://www.dailyfaceoff.com/news/the-jets-have-always-believed-in-mark-scheifele-and-its-paying-off>

The Jets have always believed in Mark Scheifele – and it's paying off

By Steven Ellis

The Winnipeg Jets made Mark Scheifele the team's first draft pick when they took him seventh overall in 2011.

He has spent his entire NHL career – over 800 games – with the club, and even signed a seven-year extension to remain in Manitoba last season. Scheifele is now on pace for his best season ever, coming at a time where the Jets are dominating the rest of the NHL.

In a recent chat with Daily Faceoff's Frank Seravalli on Frankly Speaking, Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff looked back at Scheifele's early days with the organization and the type of player he has ultimately become:

Frank Seravalli: “You mentioned a bunch of players there, but I want to go back to Scheifele because I distinctly remember that draft and then the conversation that followed. Different fan bases around the league – they watch their players and get super excited. Sean Couturier, look at what he was doing in the NHL at 18. If I remember correctly, the same area that Scheifele was taken in, but Mark just took a little bit longer. Then he burst onto the scene and got to such an elite level. As a manager, how do you block out the noise and have you gotten better at that over the course of now 14 years?”

Kevin Cheveldayoff: “Well, it comes down to really the very first conversation that I had with (team owner) Mark Chipman when we were fortunate to talk about him coming into the organization. We said there's going to be times here where we're going to have to make tough decisions, but it's all about development and it's all going to be about what's in the best long-term interest of the team. And he was perfectly fine with that. It wasn't about having to put our shiny new toy out in the public eye there to say, look what we drafted. And very well, we could have.

“(Scheifele) came in and had an exceptional training camp and played very, very well when it came to that. But when you look at the development, and certainly even in his case there, he burst onto the scene into junior hockey a little later than others. But he was going back to a Dale Hawerchuk-coached team (Barrie Colts) where we knew what we were getting on the development side there. We knew that we wanted him specifically to be put into situations

where the pressure is on his shoulders to lead a team and do those kinds of things. And I think it is important for young players to have success amongst their peers in order for them to truly have the foundational pieces in place for right now, like what we're asking Scheifele to do and be for our organization. So he's got a memory bank of doing that now, and he's had a great start and has been a big part of why we are what we are right now."

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/11/17/jets-look-to-regroup-in-rematch-with-panthers-after-pair-of-losses>

Jets look to regroup in rematch with Panthers after pair of losses

By: Ken Wiebe

SUNRISE, Fla. — Tension was going to be arriving at the doorstep for the Winnipeg Jets sooner than later.

It was merely a matter of when, not if.

By rattling off 15 wins in 16 games to start the NHL season, in some ways the Jets had set the bar so high that some fans actually believed they might be capable of winning every single game among the 82 scheduled for the regular season.

Earlier in the road trip, Tampa Bay Lightning head coach Jon Cooper had cautioned that keeping up the ridiculous pace was going to be nearly impossible.

After praising the Jets for their ability to not beat themselves following the morning skate, Cooper put a game plan in place that forced the opponent to make some uncharacteristic mistakes in what turned out to be a 4-1 loss.

Two days later, it was Paul Maurice's turn to try and devise a plan that would keep the Jets off-balance.

Thanks to a furious forecheck, a commitment to clogging up the neutral zone and getting into shot lanes during the rare times the Jets were able to generate zone time in the offensive zone, the Panthers dominated in nearly every facet of the game in a 5-0 thumping.

Sure, there were some self-inflicted wounds that were inflicted by the Jets.

But some of the damage was also due to the Panthers finding a level of play that was impossible for the Jets to match — at least on Saturday night.

Losses are going to happen in the marathon that is an NHL season, but getting outscored 9-1 in a two-game swing through Florida after the Jets opened the road trip with a decisive 6-3 win over the New York Rangers certainly raised a few eyebrows around the NHL.

The Jets didn't suddenly forget how to play, nor is this necessarily a harbinger of things to come.

The early-season success wasn't built on a house of cards and the Jets aren't heading for a freefall.

Two losses doesn't mean the roof is about to cave in.

The Jets stubbed their collective toe in consecutive games and now it's time to get back to the level of commitment they had shown for the better part of the 16 games that led to putting 30 points in the bank.

This wasn't the Jets cheating for offence and springing a leak on the defensive side of things.

This wasn't a matter of suspect goaltending either, as both backup Eric Comrie and Connor Hellebuyck were probably the least of the Jets' concerns in those losses to the Lightning and Panthers.

This had way more to do with poor puck management and not winning enough races to pucks or battles for those that fall into the 50-50 range.

Before training camp had even began, Jets head coach Scott Arniel was talking about the importance of raising the compete level this season as his team looked to take the next step in their evolution.

This wasn't a matter of the Jets mailing it in either.

They knew they would be facing a pair of hungry teams, especially since the Lightning had dropped four consecutive games (0-3-1) and the Panthers were smoked in consecutive games by the New Jersey Devils to the tune of 10-3.

What the Jets didn't do is reach the level of urgency that either the Lightning or Panthers brought to the table.

Getting outplayed and even outworked is going to happen on occasion.

But now that the Jets have dropped consecutive games for the first time this season as they slipped to 15-3 overall, it's their turn to show that they can quickly regroup and turn the tables as they welcome the Panthers to Winnipeg for a rematch on Tuesday.

"A good blueprint for us to get another crack at them," said defenceman Dylan DeMelo. "That's the exciting thing about it, is that we get these guys again, and hopefully we can put in a better effort, (with) better execution, and a better game overall."

In order for the Jets to prevent being in the midst of a season-high three-game losing skid before heading out on a six-game road trip, the Jets are going to need to be better in all three of those areas.

One of the other things the Jets have done is recognizing that given the historic nature of their start that the entire league has noticed what they've been doing.

That means they simply won't be sneaking up on anyone and other teams are going to be bringing their best each and every game — knowing that's probably what is going to be required to beat the Jets.

“I can’t tell you if that’s them or if it’s us,” Jets forward Nikolaj Ehlers said on Saturday when the theory was broached. “We’ve played two really good teams but we’ve also not played our game and the way that we want to play, so that’s something that we will need to get better at.”

As the Jets got off to their ridiculous start, another thing they’d done a fantastic job of was ensuring they were ready for the next opponent.

It meant sorting through the positives from the previous outing and identifying areas that needed to be cleaned up.

“We get to go home and put a little bit better product out on the ice here and be better about what we do,” said Arniel. “We will digest this. We will do some video. We will work at it and hopefully make ourselves better.”

Although much of the Jets’ early-season success was built on the foundation of playing sound defensively in all three zones, being limited to just one goal over two games and recording six or more in seven of the first 16 was an unexpected development.

Of course goaltending was a factor, as the Jets didn’t make life hard enough on either Andrei Vasilevskiy or Sergei Bobrovsky.

There wasn’t enough traffic around them, nor did the Jets spend enough time creating havoc around the blue paint.

The greater concern was that the Jets only managed three high-danger chances at five-on-five in Saturday’s game — and that was compounded by the fact the power play created zero high-danger opportunities.

The Jets have been money with the man-advantage this season and a lull was going to hit at some point after getting off to a start that included a lengthy run at north of 40 per cent efficiency (and is now at 36.5 per cent).

But after going zero-for-seven (one of which lasted only 1.7 seconds and another was abbreviated) during the past two games, getting back to having an attack mentality on the power play is another area the Jets can take a step forward.

Panthers’ fans were as ruthless as some of the Jets’ faithful have been this season when they dropped an “over-rated” chant during the third period.

The quickest way to snuff out that narrative before it has an opportunity to gain any traction whatsoever would be to earn a split in this two-game series with the Panthers and get back to playing the type of hockey that led to the Jets’ getting off to an exceptional start in the first place.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/11/16/jets-fall-flat-in-florida-with-5-0-loss-to-panthers>

***Jets fall flat in Florida with 5-0 loss to Panthers
NHL's top team loses consecutive games for first time this season***

By: Ken Wiebe

SUNRISE, Fla. – As much as he chose to downplay it, you can be sure that Paul Maurice was tired of answering questions about how he hadn't beaten the Winnipeg Jets since stepping away in December of 2022.

No, it isn't personal either, since Maurice reiterated after the morning skate that he harbours no ill will toward the Jets and still roots for them when they're not playing the Florida Panthers.

But as the Jets arrived for their annual visit to south Florida on Saturday, the defending Stanley Cup champions had dropped consecutive games to the tune of 10-3 to the New Jersey Devils and they were in no mood to drop a third.

The Jets were also expected to be hungry after a rare off night against the Tampa Bay Lightning two nights earlier, but their response was nowhere close to where it needed to be.

The Panthers won nearly every race to loose pucks, displaying second effort all over the ice and the Jets simply had no answer, falling 5-0 on Saturday night at Amerant Arena.

"We got beat on a coverage goal. We got beat on a four-on-four goal. We got beat on a shorthanded goal. We got beat on a rush goal," said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. "So what we did was make mistakes against Stanley Cup champions.

"We knew they weren't going to be giving us any freebies. We made mistakes and they put them in the back of the net."

With the loss, the Jets have dropped consecutive games for the first time this season and they'll face the Panthers again on Tuesday night at Canada Life Centre in the return match.

"They outnumbered us all over the ice and whenever there was a battle, they had another guy in there. They came up with a lot more than we did all over the ice," said Jets defenceman Dylan DeMelo. "That was evident. They were for sure the better team tonight. There was no doubt about it.

"A good blueprint for us to get another crack at them on Tuesday. That's the exciting thing about it, is that we get these guys again, and hopefully we can put in a better effort, (with) better execution, and a better game overall."

This game was lopsided as the score suggested.

"I think we (beat) ourselves. We kept making the same mistakes," said Jets forward Nikolaj Ehlers. "Too many turnovers and not being ready on their odd-man breaks and so-on. We (fought) and all of that, but with no disrespect to Florida, they have a great team. But we need to be a lot better to beat teams like that."

Let's look a bit closer at this one:

TOP LINE WOES: It was a tough outing for the Jets top line of Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Gabe Vilardi, as they were held off the scoreboard for the second time in as many games after their offensive explosion against the New York Rangers.

The trio managed to combine for five shots on goal (two each for Connor and Scheifele one for Vilardi), with zero high-danger chances at five-on-five while allowing two of them, according to Natural Stat Trick.

By being on the ice for one goal against at even strength, the top line has now scored 11 goals at five-on-five and given up 12.

After doing such an impressive job to erase the early 9-2 deficit, Scheifele's line needs to stay on the plus side of the ledger and that's what they'll try to get back to during the coming games.

Scheifele showed his frustration in the third period, dropping the gloves with former Barrie Colts teammate Aaron Ekblad.

THE SHORTIE: After falling behind 3-0, the Jets had a glorious powerplay opportunity to get themselves back in the game, but things went from bad to worse when the Panthers forced a turnover and created an odd-man rush.

After Sam Reinhart rattled his shot off the post, Panthers captain Aleksander Barkov got to the loose puck and scored his third goal of the campaign.

It was the first shorthanded marker allowed by the Jets this season, but it was just another example of what went wrong in this one for the visitors.

THE HIT: Jets defenceman Neal Pionk caught Panthers forward Jesper Boqvist with one of his patented hip checks late in the third period.

Boqvist was shaken up but eventually made his way back to the Panthers bench under his own power and returned to finish the game.

"The guy didn't miss a shift," said Arniel, when asked for his thoughts on the Pionk hit.

A few shifts later, Panthers centre Sam Bennett got into a discussion with Pionk and eventually both players were given 10-minute misconducts.

On the ensuing shift, Jets defenceman Colin Miller and Panthers forward AJ Greer were given 10-minute misconducts after a brief tussle after the whistle.

Jets forward Vladislav Namestnikov rounded out those getting an early ejection as he was given a roughing minor and 10-minute misconduct after taking exception to a reverse hit from Boqvist.

Although it wasn't even close to a dirty game, the final penalty minute total of 74 minutes seemed a bit ridiculous, though that had more to do with the five 10-minute misconducts that were handed out.

SCHMIDT SCORES: Former Jets defenceman Nate Schmidt is settling in with his new team and was eager to face some of his old pals for the first time since joining the Panthers this summer in free agency.

It was much more enjoyable for Schmidt than it was for the Jets, especially when the veteran defenceman deposited home a rebound at 2:07 of the second period after a shot by Bennett, who made an impressive rush through the neutral zone to get the play started.

“I was watching Bennett as a fan. I stopped skating for a second, thought ‘Wow! Nice play! Oh, I should probably be on there,’” said Schmidt. “But it felt good, especially at that time of the game. It was still a tight game at that point.”

Schmidt is skating on the third pairing and is up to three goals and six points in 17 games this season, while averaging more than 14 minutes of ice time per game.

AFTERBURNER

The key play: Evan Rodrigues won a battle for a loose puck with Mark Scheifele and scored on the doorstep to make it 3-0 for the Panthers at 12:21 of the second period.

The three stars

Panthers C Aleksander Barkov, 1G, 3P

Panthers RW Sam Reinhart, 0G, 3P

Panthers G Sergei Bobrovsky, 27 SV, SO

EXTRA, EXTRA – Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck made his 14th start of the campaign and finished with 26 saves as he lost for just the second time this season. Bobrovsky recorded the 44th shutout of his NHL career in this one, though the Jets didn’t make it very difficult on him. “I still think that we had some good chances, but also think that he was able to see a lot of the pucks,” said Ehlers. “On a goalie like Bobrovsky, you give him a clean view of the puck, they’re going to stop it.” Jets forward Cole Perfetti left the game in the final minute of the second period after blocking a shot with his left hand, but he came out to play the third period and finished the game. The Jets scratches were defenceman Dylan Coghlan and forward David Gustafsson.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/11/15/bowness-praises-jets-chemistry-for-record-start>

Bowness praises Jets’ chemistry for record start

Former coach enjoying retirement, taking a few turns as TV game analyst

By: Mike McIntyre and Ken Wiebe

FORT LAUDERDALE — Rick Bowness is enjoying his retirement from coaching and isn’t second-guessing his decision, even after watching the Winnipeg Jets get off to the quickest start in franchise history.

The former Jets bench boss isn’t simply a casual observer as he enjoys this season off in Florida though.

He’s consistently been tuned in as the Jets exploded out of the gate with a 15-2 record as they prepare to face Paul Maurice and the Florida Panthers on Saturday to close out a three-game road trip.

Bowness was giving out hugs and handshakes after showing up for the Jets' workout on Friday afternoon at Baptist Health IcePlex, the Panthers' practice facility.

He was greeted warmly by players and staff members and went out for a meal with his former coaching staff after the on-ice session was over.

"It looks like he's rested and enjoying retirement," said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. "I know he's getting lots of golf in."

Bowness also took some time to shed some light on why he thought the Jets had been able to take the league by storm during the opening quarter of the season.

"I love the chemistry. You watch them and it's the same guys as last year," said Bowness, who coached the Jets for two seasons before stepping away after the Jets were eliminated in five games by the Colorado Avalanche.

"The lines are the same, the defensive pairings are the same. Samberg has moved up a bit. What you can see is that they keep pushing each other. We had a great year last year, we had a tough, terrible playoff but we keep pushing each other.

"Arnie and his staff are doing a fantastic job."

When the Jets had a quiet off-season on the free agency and trade fronts, there was plenty of skepticism surrounding whether or not the team could take a step forward, but they've quieted many of those critics with the strong start.

Bowness was responsible for putting together the trio of Adam Lowry, Mason Appleton and Nino Niederreiter and they continue to excel — as they've outscored opponents 11-2 at five-on-five this season.

"They're a dominant line and in my mind, they're the best third line in the league today and that's important. They're all big, they're all heavy. They're hard to play against and frustrating to play against, which is what you want.

"They read off each other well, they trust each other and they just go and play the game the right way."

Although the Jets need to break through during the playoffs to erase some of the past disappointments, Bowness sees a group that is taking the steps required to deliver when the stakes are highest.

"They've taken steps to improve that," said Bowness. "I can see that with the leadership of this team, they're doing a fantastic job. You're not winning in our league without that chemistry that this team has. They're going to keep doing it."

After winning eight consecutive games to open the season, the Jets won seven straight after losing to the Toronto Maple Leafs, so it will be interesting to see how they respond to Thursday's 4-1 loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning.

“There are going to be wins and losses. It’s all about how you respond,” said Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey.

“If you win a game, you can’t be too high. You lose and you can’t be too low. It’s the way the NHL works. The bigger mindset always has to be finding ways to get better, ways to recover and get back so you can be at your best and improve the next game.

“For us, even through all the wins we’ve had so far, the mentality has always been on to the next game.”

Around the glass

Praise for Scheifele: There’s been plenty of chatter around NHL circles about the strong start for Jets’ centre Mark Scheifele and what that could mean for his chances of suiting up for Team Canada at the upcoming 4 Nations Face-Off.

Before facing the Tampa Bay Lightning on Thursday, Team Canada head coach Jon Cooper was asked for his thoughts on how Scheifele has been playing.

Cooper was an assistant coach with Team North America at the 2016 World Cup of Hockey and also was the bench boss for Canada at the men’s world hockey championship when Scheifele was on the roster for both events.

He’ll also have input on the roster selection process, though Cooper made it clear he wasn’t going to weigh in on where Scheifele stands as of this moment.

“I can’t comment, obviously, on anything coming up,” said Cooper. “But for me, if you’re going to talk about somebody who is a student of the game, who follows everything and knows everything that’s going on, it’s Mark Scheifele and I really appreciate that about him.

“He really cares about the game and I think he would probably be known as an offensive player for most of his career and I would say the best two-way play of his career is going on right now. There’s no doubt about that.”

That’s quite an endorsement — and is probably a sign that if Scheifele can maintain that level of play for the next several weeks, he could hear his name announced with Morrissey when Team Canada is unveiled in early December.

On an unrelated note, Lightning centre Anthony Cirelli and Brandon Hagel both showed in Thursday’s game why they’re also in the discussion to wear the Maple Leaf in February. Cirelli and Hagel both scored a goal, while their tenacity and responsible two-way play also have them in the mix.

The next step? Bowness was always an insightful interview, so it’s no surprise that he is dabbling in being an analyst on TV, though he’s not ready to make that his post-coaching career.

“I did one game for TNT and I’m going to do a couple of games for Sportsnet at the end of the month,” said Bowness. “It’s not something I would want to do on a regular basis. It’s fun, it’s enjoyable and it keeps you around the game a little bit. But would I look to make a career out of it? No.”

Is Bowness watching games differently than when he was behind the bench?

“I’m not breaking down games. I’m watching a period here and a period there, other than our team,” said Bowness. “I’m enjoying that.”

Carrying the torch: Lightning defenceman Victor Hedman understood the enormity of the shoes he was being asked to fill and he also recognized that he wasn’t going to try and be Steven Stamkos after he was named captain of the organization.

“Obviously a big void to fill when Stammer left (to sign with the Nashville Predators), but it’s a great honour and guys have stepped up and taken the next step in their leadership as well,” said Hedman, who has spent his entire career with the Lightning and helped the organization capture three Stanley Cups since breaking into the league in 2009. “It’s been a process, but it’s been a lot of fun.”

Being part of the winning culture the Lightning have built reinforced the importance of authenticity for Hedman as he moved into the new role.

“One hundred percent. That’s why I got chosen, because of what I’ve done before,” said Hedman. “There’s a little bit more responsibility, but it doesn’t change who I am around the guys or anything like that. A lot of guys look to the captain to kind of steer the ship in the right direction and that’s what I’m trying to do every day.”

Necas flying: When it was unclear whether or not forward Martin Necas was going to ink a new deal with the Carolina Hurricanes as a restricted free agent, the Jets were one of the teams that reportedly had shown interest and it’s easy to see why.

Necas, who ended up signing a two-year extension with the Hurricanes worth US\$13 million (US\$6.5 million AAV) that takes him to unrestricted free agency, is off to the best start of his NHL career, tied for third in NHL scoring going into Friday’s action with nine goals (including three game-winners) and 25 points in 15 games.

Necas wanted more responsibility and Rod Brind’Amour wanted a more consistent effort and it looks like both sides have found common ground.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/11/15/morrissey-passing-another-milestone-with-600th-nhl-game>

***Morrissey passing another milestone with 600th NHL game
Jets star blue-liner always working to get better***

By: Ken Wiebe

FORT LAUDERDALE — Josh Morrissey feels like he’s just getting started with this hockey odyssey.

The Winnipeg Jets’ top defenceman was reflective as he gets set to hit another important milestone in this journey on Saturday against the Florida Panthers, skating in NHL game No. 600.

“Hopefully I’m only about halfway there,” Morrissey said after the Jets skated at Baptist Health IcePlex, the Panthers’ practice rink. “Every time you get another 100 games it’s a cool moment. As the hierarchy goes, 1,000 is the big one that guys go after. It goes by fast, you hear everybody say that. A lot of great memories and it feels like I’m just getting going.”

That’s the scary thing about Morrissey, who officially pushed himself into the upper-echelon of blue-liners during the past three seasons.

While it’s natural for players to improve — often dramatically — as they gain experience, to constantly be pushing the ceiling higher is a testament to Morrissey’s work ethic and passion to push himself.

“He keeps getting better and he knows how good he can be,” said former Jets head coach Rick Bowness, who attended Friday’s workout. “What you love about Josh, it’s not just the skill, but that inner drive that he has. He wants to be the best out there and he wants to keep getting better. That’s what makes him an elite player and an elite person. It’s not just his skills man, it’s his drive and that’s what I love about him.”

Morrissey, 29, says that inner drive dates back to his youth, when he was coached by his late father Tom, who passed away in August of 2021 after a battle with cancer.

“It’s something that has gotten me where I’m at in my career and hopefully continues to push me forward with the goals I have as a player and teammate,” said Morrissey. “I love the game and love the pursuit of getting better, the pursuit of finding ways to improve and be more consistent. I think a lot of that comes from my dad.

“As a kid he instilled that mindset in me to never be satisfied. I just love the game. I love the compete element. When I’m playing my best, that’s what drives me. So like I said, I want to be constantly improving for my teammates. That’s what it’s all about.”

When Bowness, who retired from coaching at the end of last season, arrived on the scene in Winnipeg, he told Morrissey that he had the ability to be someone to be in the top 10 in the Norris Trophy race for the NHL’s top defenceman.

Morrissey achieved that goal, but wasn’t satisfied in just being part of the discussion.

Now he’s pushing to be a finalist and eventually have his name engraved on the trophy.

“Absolutely. That’s what he’s capable of doing,” said Bowness. “He’s a big part of the team having the success that the team is having and that comes into play when you’re going after the Norris.

“That’s where he deserves to be and I hope that he gets there.”

Morrissey is certainly doing his part to be under consideration, as he is tied for second in the NHL for points among defencemen with teammate Neal Pionk and behind Cale Makar of the Colorado Avalanche, with 17 in 17 games.

“It seems like every year he adds a new layer to his game,” said Jets defenceman Dylan DeMelo, who has been Morrissey’s defence partner for the majority of time since he arrived in a trade from the Ottawa Senators. “He’s the heartbeat of our team, for sure. He’s a guy that works

tirelessly on his craft in the offseason and during the year, he's looking at how he can improve, on the ice, with recovery and in the gym. He's an amazing pro and a great leader for our group. I'm definitely not surprised to see him improve, but it's great to see it."

It's fitting that two of Morrissey's former head coaches — Bowness and Panthers' head coach Paul Maurice — along with the general manager (Kevin Cheveldayoff) who selected him 13th overall in the 2013 NHL Draft will all be in the building for the milestone moment.

Morrissey has also praised Arniel for the role he played in his development during the previous two seasons running the defencemen as an associate coach with Bowness.

When Morrissey was asked how long it took to feel comfortable at the NHL level, he recalled a conversation he had with Maurice roughly five games into his first full season in the fall of 2016.

"That's a good question," said Morrissey. "I remember going into his office. (Maurice) kind of had a smirk on his face, as he often does. He was laughing that day and said 'you know we're not sending you down. You can go try something with the puck, make a play, do the things that you do.'

That was a moment where I remember settling in a little bit."

Morrissey has run the gamut when it comes to defence partners, breaking in as the safety valve with Dustin Byfuglien and growing into a role on the shutdown pairing with Jacob Trouba before he was dealt to the New York Rangers.

He then went through a time when there was a revolving door on the right side of his pairing before DeMelo arrived in the trade with the Ottawa Senators in 2020.

He worked his way up to quarterbacking the top power play to growing into a top point producer who is still being asked to be responsible defensively and do his best to neutralize the most talented players.

"He really believes in his own abilities and his skillset. He's grown here in the last couple of years and you can see it every day," said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. "He's an extremely confident player when he has the puck. The thing for me that really jumps out, not really knowing him before I got here, is his play and his defending, his wanting to take responsibility of playing against the other teams top players.

"That's something we talked about a couple of years ago. He wanted to have it on his plate and he does. He sees the top lines and he and (DeMelo) have done a great job of eliminating those top players' opportunities."

Growing as a player, a person and a leader is part of the process Morrissey enjoys.

"I had a chance to play with (Byfuglien) my first 35 games. That was a lot of fun and kept me loose and excited every day on the ice in the NHL playing next to a guy like that," said Morrissey. "As a defenceman, I think it takes a little longer before you start to really settle into your game – whether that's a couple hundred games or whatever that may be.

"I still feel at 600 games in, I'm still looking at ways to improve, ways to get better."

Sports Illustrated

<https://www.si.com/onsi/breakaway/news-feed-page/analyst-winnipeg-jets-connor-hellebuyck-not-lock-vezina-trophy>

Analyst: Jets Star Goalie Not Lock for Vezina Trophy

By Nick Horwat

Among the active goalies in the NHL, none of them have won the Vezina Trophy on three occasions, but Winnipeg Jets star goalie Connor Hellebuyck is making a good case. Through their first 17 games of the season, the Jets have only lost twice with Hellebuyck holding a 12-1-0 record.

As the reigning Vezina winner, the expectations were high for Hellebuyck, but it's safe to say he and the Jets are exceeding what everyone thought was possible. Just because he's off to a hot start, however, does not mean Hellebuyck will defend his title.

According to TSN analyst Mike Johnson, Hellebuyck isn't yet a lock to win his third Vezina Trophy.

"That's probably a fantasy to say it's a lock," Johnson said. "If it ended today, yes, absolutely give it to him. And he's the favorite for sure... But a 'lock' means he's going to get it no matter what."

Johnson's argument stems from there still being so much time left in the season, and a number of different factors could play into Hellebuyck losing out on the Vezina this year. Either an unexpected goalie could steal the show for the year and carry their team to the playoffs, or a key face in the league could go on a huge run.

"An upstart goaltender like Filip Gustavsson or maybe Anthony Stolarz go on a great run and leads their team to a really high spot in the standings," Johnson said. "Or if [Igor] Shesterkin goes on a great run with the Rangers and leads that team to maybe a division title."

If it's not Hellebuyck as the best goalie in the league right now, it's Shesterkin. Playing for the biggest contract in NHL history at the position, he has a 7-4-1 record with a .914 save percentage and 2.78 goals against average.

The Rangers are holding down a wild card spot right now, but are a Shesterkin hot streak away from climbing the rankings and putting up a fight to defend their President's Trophy.

On top of Hellebuyck's 12-1-0 record, he has a .934 save percentage and 1.93 goals against average with three shutouts. Those numbers are outstanding and worthy of a Vezina Trophy, but there is still a lot of season to play.

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/panthers-feast-as-jets-drops-consecutive-games-for-first-time>

Panthers feast as Jets drops consecutive games for first time this season

By Scott Billeck

The Florida Panthers reminded the Winnipeg Jets that there's another level to reach.

The reigning Stanley Cup champions asked a lot of questions the Jets couldn't answer in a 5-0 loss on Saturday night at Amerant Bank Arena.

"I think we (beat) ourselves," Nikolaj Ehlers told reporters in Sunrise. "We kept making the same mistakes. Too many turnovers and not being ready on their odd-man breaks and so-on. We (fought) and all of that, but with no disrespect to Florida, they have a great team. But we need to be a lot better to beat teams like that."

The Paul Maurice-led Panthers scored three times in the second period, including a shorthanded marker to add insult to injury, as Winnipeg (15-3-0) dropped consecutive games for the first time since March.

The Jets rarely won a puck battle, struggled when they had possession, and generated very little zone time—far from the bounceback they were looking for after their 4-1 loss to Tampa Bay on Thursday.

Former Jets Nate Schmidt and Dmitry Kulikov scored for the Panthers, as did Mackie Samoskevich, Evan Rodrigues and Aleksander Barkov.

"We got beat on a coverage goal," head coach Scott Arniel said. "We got beat on a four-on-four goal. We got beat on a shorthanded goal. We got beat on a rush goal. So what we did was make mistakes against Stanley Cup champions.

"They're a team that's lost two games at home here in their building against New Jersey. We knew they weren't going to be giving us any freebies. We made mistakes and they put them in the back of the net."

Sergei Bobrovsky made 26 saves for his first shutout and ninth win of the season.

Connor Hellebuyck was at the mercy of the play in front of him, eating all five goals on 31 shots for just his second loss in 14 starts this season.

"I don't think we've been very good so, and I can't tell you if that's if it's them or if it's us," Ehlers said. "We've played two really good teams but we've also not played our game and the way that we want to play. so that's something that we will need to get better at.

Samoskevich scored the only goal during a Panther-dominated first period, banking home his third off his arm at 14:59.

Schmidt banged in a rebound at 2:07 of the second, followed by Rodrigues's fifth at 12:21 with a similar effort after the Jets failed to clear the zone.

Barkov, who had three points in the game, scored shorthanded at 14:36 to make it 4-0.

Kulikov's third of the year came at 3:23 from Barkov.

Florida's forecheck proved too difficult to handle.

"Pretty simple recipe for them," Arniel said. "They got pucks to the D at the top and they just pounded away and got them down to the net front and put pressure on us that way."

The game devolved into some goonery late in the third. Mark Scheifele fought Aaron Ekblad in a fight just as poor as Logan Paul vs. Mike Tyson. Neal Pionk, meanwhile, drilled Jesper Boqvist with a nice hip check, a hit that led to a pair of 10-minute misconducts.

The Jets will take Grey Cup Sunday off before welcoming the Panthers to Canada Life Centre on Tuesday night.

The one-off at home proceeds Winnipeg's season-long six-game road trip beginning next Friday in Pittsburgh.

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/jets-mark-scheifele-deserves-team-canada-spot-at-4-nations-face-off>

Jets' Josh Morrissey just getting started as he hits 600 career -games milestone

By Scott Billeck

Six hundred games into his NHL career, Josh Morrissey feels he's just getting going.

It's tough to argue, especially with his offensive renaissance over the past few years.

"I love the game and love the pursuit of getting better, the pursuit of finding ways to improve and be more consistent," Morrissey told reporters in Florida. "I think a lot of that comes from my dad. As a kid he instilled that mindset in me to never be satisfied."

Saturday's game against the Florida Panthers was No. 600 for Morrissey, a milestone that never seems to get old.

"Every time you get another 100 games it's a cool moment," he said. "It's cool to be coming up on 600. It goes by fast, you hear everybody say that. A lot of great memories and it feels like I'm just getting going."

Ever since Rick Bowness unlocked Morrissey's offensive potential, the 29-year-old has been on a tear, putting up 76- and 69-point seasons in 2022-23 and 2023-24, respectively.

This year, he's on pace to eclipse both, playing a point-per-game pace with 17 points in 17 contests heading into Saturday's action against the Panthers.

"I just love the game," Morrissey said. "I love the compete element. When I'm playing my best, that's what drives me. The guys that continue to get better and enjoy the game as they age, they enjoy the compete, they enjoy being around the guys and trying win games in pursuit of the

Stanley Cup. Also, the individual play of trying to continue to grow as a player. Hopefully, I'm only about halfway there."

Morrissey's ascension to the perennial Norris conversation hasn't meant sacrificing his defensive play, something that impresses head coach Scott Arniel.

"There are a lot of defencemen that are extremely good offensively and don't get the opportunity to defend, but he takes a lot of pride in that part of it," Arniel said. "He wanted to have (that) on his plate and he does. He sees the top lines and he and (Dylan DeMelo) have done a great job of eliminating those top players' opportunities. Obviously, the offensive side of his game is elite. That's part of the success that he's had the last couple of years."

Saturday was also special for Morgan Barron, who suited up for his 200th game.

Barron arrived from the New York Rangers in the Andrew Copp trade a few seasons ago and is now a fixture in Winnipeg's bottom six.

"Those are always great accomplishments," Arniel said. "Maybe we'll shortly be talking about him playing Game 500."

He also holds the distinction as the only Jet to have not scored this season.

"He's trying so hard," Arniel said. "Everybody's trying to get him that goal. But I just like the fact that he's not cheating at all and trying to create it by not playing the way he needs to play.

"He's playing heavy. He's getting to the net. He's getting a lot of opportunities, a lot of looks. I really liked the empty net, the pulled goalie situation where he hit the cross-bar. We were hoping the one would have went. But he knows that when he plays the right way, chances come from that."