

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/11/18/first-place-jets-up-for-winning-return-to-home-ice>

First-place Jets up for winning return to home ice Practice intensity increases after back-to-back losses

By: Joshua Frey-Sam

The Winnipeg Jets understand bad games are bound to happen.

Such is the nature of an 82-game regular-season schedule.

Now the focus is ensuring the last two outings were just a speed bump, not the beginning of a concerning trend.

The Jets returned home after a three-game road trip that began with another solid performance against the New York Rangers and ended with a pair of stinkers against the Tampa Bay Lightning and Florida Panthers, where they were outscored 9-1 and dominated in consecutive losses.

After an off day on Sunday, head coach Scott Arniel ramped up the intensity in Monday's practice session by implementing a drill to stoke the competitive fire in his players and sharpen their skills around the net.

"We try not to waste a practice. There's stuff designed in every drill that we do that's going to have resemblance to what happens in the games," said Arniel. "Sometimes you just do a drill like that, it's twofold: one is the compete, the second part is scoring goals. We only got one in our last two games, so it means that it's those under-pressure, duress, rebounds, scramble moments — the greasy goals — that you got to score, and so that's why that drill is set up."

The response and the attention to detail, Arniel said, was exactly what he was looking for out of his players, who are amid their first losing streak of the season after a historic start to the campaign.

There is no panic from the group, nor do they feel a need to increase the urgency following a two-game slide this early in the season. There is, however, an agreement that everyone needs to improve on the little things that will lend to better execution in games.

"We didn't play our best, the Tampa game and the Florida game ... even the Ranger game we really didn't play our best," said Mark Scheifele. "That happens. You're gonna go through stretches in the season where things aren't going well, and things were going so well for us, so you just have to kind of take a step back and know that this league is hard.

"This league is good. You're gonna come up against good teams, and you got to be at your A-game at all times, and even when you don't have it, you got to find a way to make it hard on them."

The Jets (15-3-0) will look to do just that when they get another crack at the defending Stanley Cup champions today when they host the Panthers (12-5-1) at Canada Life Centre (7 p.m).

"I think it's the perspective and how you approach these games," captain Adam Lowry said about the importance of not letting their two-game slide reach three. "I think we lose two in a row, it's more about the process and how we got those results versus how we've gotten the results in a lot of the other games.

"There (are) areas of our game we want to continue to work on, there (are) areas of our game we want to continue to improve upon, so, I think if you get too focused on the results ... you put a little too much pressure on yourself. I think it's one of those ones where you kind of have to approach every game in a vacuum and then take the things you learn from it and put it into the next one."

The club's time at home will last just one game, making it all the more important to get back on track before it leaves for its longest road trip of the season: a six-game stretch that spans 11 days in Pittsburgh, Nashville, Minnesota, Los Angeles, Vegas and Dallas.

"I feel like we haven't been home a whole lot," Lowry said. "It's great, we love playing in front of the fans in Winnipeg. It's nice to be home for a few days, but you want to have a good feeling going into a long road trip, and you don't want to get too far ahead of yourself.

"But a lot of really good teams on that road trip coming up, and it's a tough part of the schedule, but so far we've risen to the occasion this year and we've got a lot of belief in this group, so look forward to coming to the rink (today), having a good morning skate and then getting out there and competing against the Panthers."

Injury report

Defenceman Logan Stanley was still not skating on Monday as he continues to nurse a mid-body injury that forced him to miss the club's recent road trip. There is no clear timetable on his return to game action.

"He's still going to be a little bit here," said Arniel. "He's gonna come on the road trip with us but he won't (be) skating here yet for probably another four or five days."

Meanwhile, fellow blue-liner Ville Heinola is getting closer to returning, Arniel confirmed. The 23-year-old has taken another significant step in his recovery by shedding the non-contact jersey and participating in five-on-five drills. He is working back from an infection in the ankle that he had surgically repaired last fall.

"He's coming. Ville, we finally got him into the heavy contact, we got a couple on the road — not that we practised a whole lot — but today I thought was a really good one," Arniel said. "We got a decision to make with him. We'll talk to him and see how we move forward here.

"We want to get him in some games sooner than later, we just got to find out what the best course of it is. If the docs are 100 per cent ready for us to move forward with them in the games and talk to him about the best scenario."

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/11/18/schmidt-right-fit-with-panthers>

***Schmidt right fit with Panthers
Former Jet happy in Florida***

By: Ken Wiebe

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Nate Schmidt was hoping for the best, but preparing for the worst.

The affable defenceman knew there had been some whispers about a potential contract buyout from the Winnipeg Jets and, with free agency just around the corner, Schmidt got a call from his agent that essentially had him standing at attention.

“You heard about it and this and that. You hear rumblings of it and your agent calls you and he says, ‘you never know what will happen, we have to be prepared for everything,’” Schmidt said during a conversation at the Florida Panthers rink.

“It happened at the last minute, right before free agency. It was such a (whirlwind).”

Ultimately, the Jets chose to buy out that final season of Schmidt’s contract on June 30, making him an unrestricted free agent.

Fortunately for Schmidt, his close friend and one-time defence partner Brenden Dillon had already got the lay of the land in terms of what the free agency market was looking like for defencemen. Although Schmidt and Dillon don’t play the same style, getting a feel for this high stakes game of musical chairs was helpful as free agency officially opened.

“(My agent) said you make a list of teams you would like and I’ll make a list of teams I think are a good fit and then we’ll match them up and see how it goes. Thankfully, a lot of the teams matched up,” said Schmidt.

“When you get a chance to go out and play and provide value wherever you can. You come here on the deal that you’re on and they just expect you to be what you are and that’s been a little bit freeing for me. It’s still a one-year contract and all of that, but it’s not like you have to come in and change what they’re doing. You can just jump on board and be part of the machine in here.”

Enduring a buyout can sometimes provide some additional motivation, but Schmidt actually provided the Jets steady minutes on the third pairing with Dylan Samberg last season.

Although Schmidt was occasionally a healthy scratch down the stretch, the buyout had more to do with salary cap considerations (with the US\$5.95 million AAV he was set to make) rather than a subpar level of play.

July 1 came and went and Schmidt was among the group of veteran free agents that were still available, but two days later, he had officially inked a one-year deal worth US\$800,000 to join the Panthers.

“I had never been through that process before. That was crazy,” said Schmidt.

"I can imagine that for some guys, it's an absolute heyday, for those guys that are chasing some big deals. But there's a lot going on with it. Here, there, everywhere. This is a place though that I've had (on my list). Anytime you can join a team that just won, there's a lot to like."

Schmidt was a healthy scratch for the opening game of the season, but he's been in the lineup for each one since and feels the transition of going back to the Eastern Conference for the first time since 2016-17 is going smoothly.

"It's new in the sense that you come into the Stanley Cup champions and they have a blueprint and a look and what it's supposed to be every night. There's nothing you can say or do because that works, so it's jump on board," said Schmidt.

"This is how we roll and this is how things are done around here. It actually makes your job a little easier. Sounds good. There's no tweaks to it. You evolve your game into what you need to be for the Florida Panthers."

While there is some familiarity with Panthers head coach Paul Maurice from their time in Winnipeg, Schmidt reminded a reporter that they were only together for a couple of months before Maurice decided to step away and resigned in early December of 2021.

"I didn't have Paul for an extended period of time, so there are still some things that you're learning about each other," said Schmidt.

"It's good in a lot of ways, there are still some surprises left for both sides. To at least have some familiarity with the coach and what he wants from you (helps)."

Schmidt is the latest veteran blue-liner who has joined the Panthers and seemed to receive a new lease on life — following fellow former Jet Dmitry Kulikov and Oliver Ekman-Larsson, who joined the Toronto Maple Leafs after winning the Stanley Cup last June.

"The defencemen here are asked to do a certain job and that's it. There's not a lot of one way or the other to it. It's pretty cut and dried what they want out of us," said Schmidt.

"Getting familiar with that system and getting into that type of role and understanding that's how we play, that's been really fun for me, to see how it works and weaves through each other. We have a little bit of fluidity on the back end and that makes it easy for a guy like me to come in and be part of it."

When the Panthers lost Brandon Montour in unrestricted free agency to the Seattle Kraken, not only did they lose a minute-muncher that ran the power play, they lost one of their biggest personalities.

Enter Schmidt, whose upbeat attitude has allowed him to fit in seamlessly.

"A little bit of that personality. We knew that when Brandon Montour (left), he was a little bit of a chatterbox in the room and we were looking for a little bit of that back," said Maurice.

"A new guy comes in, it takes him about a month to get everybody's nicknames right and then it's on. That's what he brings. He's enjoying playing here, his game for us, is improved. He wasn't in the lineup every night in Winnipeg and we play differently. So it took him a little while to

get over that transition in style of play, with the players that we have. We're just different teams. He's been really good for us. He's rounded into what we hoped he would be."

As for the hot start for the Jets, Schmidt is among those who is impressed to see them at the top of the NHL standings.

"Anytime you start the year with the fastest to 15 wins in history, it catches anybody by surprise. It's a great team," said Schmidt.

"I've been there and I believed it. I believed it in the summer and I still believe it now. It's still a great team. They've got a lot of good players and they've got a world-class goaltender that can win you a lot of games. It's still a really good recipe for how you can win in this league and they still have it."

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/10874730/winnipeg-jets-analysis-losses/>

ANALYSIS: Jets need to handle recent turbulence to get back to winning ways

By Kelly Moore Global News

It has been a common refrain from Winnipeg Jets head coach Scott Arniel and his players during the team's incredible start to the season, and the past week and a half or so is exactly why the highs and lows have to be treated in the same vein.

Nine days ago, the Jets had soared to historic highs, becoming the first team NHL team to get to 14 wins in just 15 games following the 4-1 dismantling of Dallas. Connor Hellebuyck was named the first star of the week, and 24 hours later, some first-line magic at Madison Square Garden.

Could this Jet juggernaut ever be stopped? A couple of faceplants in Florida provided an answer.

And the nature of the 4-1 and 5-0 losses to three of the last five Stanley Cup champions have raised some questions from the other side of the script.

Was that record-setting start a mirage?

During that 16-game stretch, opposing players and coaches — like Tampa Bay's Jon Cooper — described Winnipeg's greatest strength as a team that doesn't beat itself.

And, of course right on cue, the Jets did the opposite — beating themselves with an almost season-high 23 giveaways. Poor puck management was certainly one of the major causes for a lack of sustained offensive zone time versus the Lightning.

Getting completely stifled in the middle of the ice resulted in the first shutout loss of the season, and equalled a season-high for "non-empty net" goals against, in Saturday's humbling setback at the hands of the Panthers.

So maybe it's a good thing Winnipeg gets a second chance to smooth out the ride against the Barkov bunch Tuesday night, before heading out on the road for the next six — and in places, just as tough on visiting teams as the previous three have been.

The Jets have given themselves a bit of runway to work with, so winning Tuesday's rematch might not be mandatory. But properly executing an adjustment or three, to better handle the turbulence they've encountered recently, certainly is.

The past week-and-a-half is evidence a significant change in altitude can happen quickly. Attitude has to remain constant.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/hot-or-not-panthers-vs-jets-on-tuesday-night-is-a-statement-game-for-winnipeg%7E3031578>

Hot or Not: Panthers vs. Jets on Tuesday night is a statement game for Winnipeg (VIDEO)

Panthers fans were chanting 'overrated' at the Jets during Florida's 5-0 romp on Saturday, but Winnipeg will get another crack at the defending champs Tuesday night. Is that matchup a statement game for the Jets? Bryan Hayes shares his thoughts on that and more in Hot or Not.

The Hockey News

<https://thehockeynews.com/nhl/florida-panthers/latest-news/returning-to-winnipeg-as-stanley-cup-winner-paul-maurice-speaks-fondly-of-great-hockey-town>

Returning to Winnipeg as Stanley Cup winner, Paul Maurice speaks fondly of great hockey town

By David Dwork

Florida Panthers Head Coach Paul Maurice is a popular guy in Winnipeg.

Maurice coached the Winnipeg Jets for nine years, from 2013 until 2021-22 season.

He joined the Panthers during the summer of 2022, after leaving Winnipeg and stepping away from hockey, unsure of his future in the game.

The fit between Maurice and the Panthers has been apparent from the beginning.

Still, the veteran coach has not forgotten his former team and the blood, sweat and tears he poured into them.

It was clear that Maurice still had quite a bit of love for the Jets franchise when he gave them the ultimate shout out in the moments after Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final.

After leading the Panthers to their first championship back in June, Maurice famously said, while standing on the ice at Amerant Bank Arena mid-celebration, "If I could have one thing more, it'd be for the Winnipeg Jets to win the next Stanley Cup."

Well now here we are, nearly a quarter through the new NHL season, and who is sitting atop the league standings?

Why, it's the Winnipeg Jets!

Clearly the blessing from Maurice has had an incredible impact, as the Jets have reeled off victories in 15 of their 18 games so far this season, with the most recent loss coming at the hands of Maurice and the Panthers on Saturday night in Sunrise.

Speaking on Monday before they left South Florida for Manitoba, Maurice reflected on the amazing people and overall hockey community that made Winnipeg what it was.

"It's all the people, and it's the connection to the sport and the game, and having had really good teams, even not in the National Hockey League, in the World Hockey Association, some really important players come through there too, so there's a bond there," Maurice said. "It probably has to lead the league in outdoor rinks, I would think. It's a real thing, right? It's that connected to the game. And then to have a team and to lose a team and get their team back, there's an understanding of how special it is to have an NHL team in your town. So there's a connection to the game there that I think it is cultural, but it's also geographic. A lot of people spend a lot of time outdoors playing hockey up there, and you can, right? You're pretty sure you can build a rink every year."

For someone who grew up with the game of hockey and has dedicated his life to the sport, it's clear Maurice genuinely appreciated his time in Winnipeg.

Between the fans, the city and the team's history, he felt the importance of hockey while he was there.

It's not lost on Maurice how special and important it is for the current Winnipeg Jets to have the same name and colors as the original NHL team.

For so many people up there, attending and watching those games was like a religious experience.

"I think you meet a lot of people up there that remember those games, that went to those games," Maurice said. "My first year, we played in the (Winnipeg Arena) with the big picture of the Queen at the end. There are a lot of people that it's generational, right? It's the grandfather went to the games, and now the great grandson is going to the games, so that connection was pretty important. Love the crest, right? It's just a great story of the roots of hockey in Canada."

As for his return to Winnipeg, Maurice isn't expecting anything special.

This will be his third time there as Panthers head coach, and while it's first time as a Stanley Cup winner, he isn't looking for any special treatment.

At least not from the fans.

"I don't know, maybe just you're humbled and would kind of like to do it quietly if you could," Maurice said. "It's different the third time you're going back. Now I'm excited to see my daughter, so that's what I'm looking forward to on this trip."

<https://thehockeynews.com/nhl/winnipeg-jets/latest-news/the-sky-is-falling-jets-drop-two-straight-amid-lengthy-stretch-on-road>

The Sky is Falling - Jets Drop Two-Straight Amid Lengthy Stretch on Road

By Carter Brooks

The Winnipeg Jets are amid their first losing streak of the 2024-25 season.

Yes, you read that right. We are well into the second half of November and the Jets have finally lost two games in a row. No, it's not a four or five-game skid, but rather back-to-back losses.

For a team that opened the year with 15 wins in 16 games, dropping two contest in a row is certainly big news.

It isn't, however, time to panic... is it?

No, there is no reason to sound the alarm.

Winnipeg was simply outplayed by two great hockey teams: one, a Stanley Cup regular over the past five season, and two, the reigning Cup champion and back-to-back Finals attendee.

The Bolts and Panthers handed the Jets their first two road losses of the season last week, and the games really weren't all that close. Did Winnipeg play the same style of hockey it had all season? Not really. Did Tampa and Florida show up ready to give the top dog runs for its money? Most definitely.

According to Money Puck's 'Deserve to Win O'Meter', which is based on advanced analytics over the course of each NHL game, the Jets had only a one-in-three success rate over the course of Thursday's game to walk away a winner (based on the way the team played) and a much worse one-in-eight chance on Saturday.

Taking the team's hot start, goaltending situation and recent lack of power play success, the inevitable was coming. Winnipeg needed to lose, and needed to lose pretty heavily in order to snap out of the fairy tale, history-making start to the season.

Sure, it happened against former friend Paul Maurice's Panthers, but luckily the Jets have another shot at making it right on Tuesday evening in the second-half of the elongated home-and-home with Florida.

Winnipeg still owns the league's most wins, points, points percentage, regulation wins, goals for and best power play percentage of the 32 clubs.

Sure, the Jets could follow the mold of the 2007-08 Ottawa Senators (previous record holders for best start to an NHL season) and just coast to a postseason appearance by playing .500 hockey here out, but that likely will not grant much playoff success.

With over three-quarters of the season left to be played, now is not the time to take the foot off the gas pedal. Having already set the NHL record for the best start, Winnipeg will need to

extend its abilities over the course of the next six months to retain its title of the league's top team.

Currently in a stretch featuring nine of 10 games on the road, Winnipeg returns to Canada Life Centre on Tuesday in hopes of picking up its first win in three contests within the friendly confines of its home rink.