

Winnipegjets.com

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/three-things-lowry-line-gets-jets-off-to-quick-start>

***Three things - Lowry line gets Jets off to quick start
Niederreiter scores 82 seconds in; Jets now 17-3-0***

By Jamie Thomas

The Winnipeg Jets began their season long six-game road trip beating the Pittsburgh Penguins 4-1 on Friday night. Winnipeg matched the 2022-23 Bruins, 2012-13 Blackhawks, 2005-06 Senators and 1925-26 Senators for the second-most wins by any franchise with 17 in their first 20 games of a season. The 1929-30 Bruins hold the record with 18. Nino Niederreiter, Vladislav Namestnikov (on his 32nd birthday), Gabe Vilardi and Kyle Connor scored for the Jets. Josh Morrissey had an assist and now has 20 points in his first 20 games, joining Cale Makar as the only defencemen to have 20 or more points this season. Connor Hellebuyck made 17 saves for his 14th win in 16 starts. The Jets will head to Nashville to play the Predators on Saturday.

DIDN'T WAIT LONG

The Jets made sure to get down to business early at PPG Paints Arena, as Adam Lowry's line forced Evgeni Malkin into a turnover. The Penguin forward bobbled the puck around the Pittsburgh net, Nino Niederreiter pounced on the loose puck and backhanded in his eighth of the season for a 1-0 lead at 1:22. The Jets are 10-0-0 when scoring first and are one of two teams this season who have yet to lose when scoring first (also NYR: 10-0-0).

You knew Pittsburgh was going to come out and they were going to get after us. Thought we did a great job," said Scott Arniel.

"That's a great start. Gets them back on their heels, some negative thoughts, whatever it may be."

TOOK OVER IN SECOND

Winnipeg didn't let up in the middle frame suffocating Pittsburgh from the drop of the puck, the Pens only had 47 seconds of offensive zone possession time compared to the Jets 3:27. Vladislav Namestnikov cashed in his sixth of the season on a Jets odd-man rush, Nikolaj Ehlers carried the puck into the Penguins zone and waited until his linemate joined the rush, Namestnikov scored on his own rebound at 4:53. Then the NHL's best power play scored at 19:01, Kyle Connor set up Gabe Vilardi and his one-timer beat Tristan Jarry for a 3-0 Jets lead. Connor became the third player in Jets team history to record at least 25 points through 20 games in a season, joining Mark Scheifele (2020-21 & 2017-18) and Blake Wheeler (2018-19 & 2017-18).

GORDIE HOWE HAT TRICK FOR CONNOR

Because the Penguins are loaded with a lot of experience in their dressing room, the Jets expected Pittsburgh to come out in the third period with some zip. They did just that, 38 seconds in, Sidney Crosby took exception to a hit, cross checked and dropped the gloves with Kyle Connor. It was Connor's first NHL fight, and with a second period assist and empty net goal, the 27-year-old also records his first Gordie Howe hat trick.

"When I got the empty netter, they let me know, and obviously I was aware of it, and it was cool moment to share," said Connor.

“And happy we were able to get the win.”

NHL.com

<https://www.nhl.com/news/winnipeg-jets-pittsburgh-penguins-game-recap-november-22>

Connor helps Jets defeat slumping Penguins Has goal, assist; Pittsburgh drops 7th in past 9 games

By Wes Crosby

PITTSBURGH -- Kyle Connor had a goal and an assist, and the Winnipeg Jets scored the first three goals in a 4-1 win against the Pittsburgh Penguins at PPG Paints Arena on Friday.

Nino Niederreiter, Vladislav Namestnikov and Gabriel Vilardi scored, and Connor Hellebuyck made 17 saves for the Jets (17-3-0), who have won two in a row after losing their previous two.

“You knew that Pittsburgh was going to come out and they were going to get after us,” Winnipeg coach Scott Arniel said. “I thought we did a great job. That’s a great start, puts them back on their heels. Some negative thoughts, whatever it might be.”

Sidney Crosby, one goal from 600 in the NHL, was held without a shot on goal for a second straight game, and Michael Bunting scored for the Penguins (7-11-4), who have lost five of six and seven of nine. Tristan Jarry made 26 saves.

“I’d say every loss is a little different,” Jarry said. “Obviously, this one, they play a hard game. They’re a good team. They defend well. They don’t give up a lot. I think we saw that tonight. We didn’t get many shots. ... We were defending a lot, I think, and it was hard to get out of our zone.”

Niederreiter scored on the first shot of the game to put Winnipeg ahead 1-0 at 1:22 of the first period. He collected the puck just outside the crease off a turnover by Evgeni Malkin, who couldn’t control it after it bounced off the corner boards, and tucked a backhand around Jarry’s left pad. Niederreiter ended a six-game goal drought with his eighth of the season.

Jarry has allowed a goal on the first shot faced in four of six starts this season.

“It happens a million different ways,” Pittsburgh coach Mike Sullivan said. “For example, the first goal tonight, how do I explain that? Can you explain that? Because I can’t.”

Namestnikov, on his 32nd birthday, made it 2-0 at 4:53 of the second period. After dragging the puck around a sliding Bryan Rust, he took a wrist shot from the left face-off circle and followed the rebound to score with a backhand in the slot.

“Everyone started rolling, all four lines,” Namestnikov said. “I thought we played pretty good for 60 minutes and we got the win.”

Rickard Rakell had a chance to make it a one-goal game at 10:58. He took a pass from Crosby on a 2-on-1 for a wrist shot from the right circle, but Hellebuyck slid over for a glove save.

Vilardi then extended it to 3-0 on the power play at 19:01 with a one-timer from the slot off a pass from Connor.

Bunting cut it to 3-1 with a power-play goal at 5:49 of the third period when he tapped in a pass from Rust at the left post.

"They're top of the League for a reason," Bunting said. "They play the right way. They play fast, and they make a lot of offensive plays to create chances. I thought we were in it for a lot of the night and we pushed back a lot. We could have given up there, but we didn't."

Connor scored into an empty net with 1:11 remaining for the 4-1 final.

"They definitely came out a lot harder in the third," Connor said. "Whether that was a message that the coach sent in between periods, I'm sure it was, whether it was the leadership group. They obviously came out and felt they needed to prove something, playing physical. Give them credit, they played hard there in the third.

"Whatever it was, I think for us to weather that storm and persevere and kind of get contributions from everybody up and down, it was a full team win."

NOTES: Connor, who had a Gordie Howe Hat Trick with a fight against Crosby early in the third period, has 26 points (13 goals, 13 assists) in 20 games this season. ... The Jets are 10-0-0 when scoring first. They and the New York Rangers (10-0-0) are the only teams yet to lose after scoring the first goal. ... Winnipeg defenseman Josh Morrissey had an assist on Vilardi's goal to reach 20 points (two goals, 18 assists). He is the second defenseman this season with at least 20 points, joining Cale Makar of the Colorado Avalanche (28 points; eight goals, 20 assists). ... Penguins defenseman Kris Letang had one blocked shot and one hit in 20:46 of ice time after missing the previous three games with an illness.

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/11/22/connor-leads-jets-past-pens-with-gordie-howe-hat-trick>

Connor leads Jets past Pens with Gordie Howe hat trick

By: Mike McIntyre

PITTSBURGH — Of all the surprising things the Winnipeg Jets have done so far this season, the sight of leading scorer and former Lady Byng winner Kyle Connor dropping the gloves and throwing haymakers here on Friday night — with Sidney Crosby of all people — has to be right at the very top of the list.

"We're not taking s—t from anybody," Connor told the Free Press inside the visiting locker room at PPG Paints Arena.

This team is something else, folks.

A 4-1 victory over the Pittsburgh Penguins to kick off a season-long six game road trip improves Winnipeg's record to a ridiculous 17-3-0. But the biggest jaw-dropper was Connor using his

hands for both good AND evil in recording what might be the unlikeliest Gordie Howe Hat Trick (goal, assist, fight) in NHL history.

“Something that you don’t go in the game really achieving or looking for,” said Connor, who won the league award for most gentlemanly player in 2021-22 for taking just two minor penalties in 79 games while posting career highs in goals (47), assists (46) and points (93).

“The guys were calling back, obviously, hooting and hollering, and when I got the empty-netter they let me know,” said Connor, who is on pace for an even better offensive campaign with 13 goals and 13 assists through 20 games.

“It was cool a moment to share. And happy we were able to get the win.”

He can kiss that trophy goodbye this year, given that he’s already up to 11 penalty minutes (three minors, one major).

“Guys won’t come near him now that they can see that he he’ll drop them,” joked head coach Scott Arniel, who hopes Connor’s first fight is also his last.

“Great that he got a Gordie Howe hat trick but I do not want to see my top goal scorer dropping the gloves. But that’s just the compete in KC. It was one of those things that nobody expected and it’s just part of the game.”

Let’s break this one down further.

1) *Tale of the tape*: It all began with a play in the opening minute of the third period, as Connor was trying to protect the puck from Crosby and braced himself for contact. It was essentially a reverse hit, which has become a staple in hockey lately, and Crosby was knocked to the ice and clearly frustrated.

On a night when he entered play one goal away from 600 in his career, the Jets held him without a shot on goal as his punchless Penguins were on their way to a 15th loss in 22 games (7-11-4).

“Sid’s trying to fire his group up and drag them into the fight. For KC, he’s just trying to create space,” is how Arniel saw it.

Crosby, who began the night with nine career fights, was clearly the aggressor and given the additional minor for roughing on top of the majors, and to Pittsburgh’s credit they looked a lot more competitive from that point on including a Michael Bunting power play goal a few minutes later that made it a 3-1 game and spoil Connor Hellebuyck’s bid for a fourth shutout of the year.

“They obviously came out and felt they needed from something, playing physical and give them credit they played hard there in the third,” said Connor, who both landed and received a solid blow.

“Whatever it was, I think for us to be able to weather that storm, and persevere and kind of get contributions from everybody, up and down. I think it was a full team win. That’s kind of been the story of this team the whole year.”

Connor was asked if he’s ever been in a fight of any kind in his life.

"I've got a couple of brothers, so if you count that," he replied.

2) *Fast start from a familiar trio*: With six games in six cities (and three different time zones) over the next 10 nights, the Jets were looking to get off on the right foot. Or skate.

That's no problem for the trio of Adam Lowry, Nino Niederreiter and Mason Appleton, who always start on time and put Winnipeg up 1-0 just 82 seconds into the game. An aggressive forecheck by Appleton and Lowry created a turnover which Niederreiter pounced on for his eighth goal of the year.

"You knew that Pittsburgh was going to come out and they were going to get after us. I thought we did a great job. That's a great start," said Arniel.

"It gets them back on their heels and maybe some negative thoughts, whatever it might be, but I just liked the way the first couple of periods went. We actually played a pretty good road game to get things started."

3) *Birthday boy*: Turning 32 felt pretty good for Vlad Namestnikov, who decided to light the lamp rather than blow out any candles.

His goal early in the second period gave Winnipeg a 2-0 lead, coming after a nice stretch pass from Nikolaj Ehlers and then a rebound created by his own initial shot.

"Usually not my best games on my birthdays, so that was good," said the versatile forward, who is now up to six snipes on the season.

"Not the best shot on the first one but kind of continued my momentum and just land there. Kind of whacked at it and it went in."

Namestnikov, who never shies away from physicality, said the Connor scrap was the icing on the proverbial cake.

"We have a bunch of guys that are feisty and just want to win and set the tone and get dirty and fight sometimes," he said. "We all stand in for each other and fight for each other."

4) *Is something up with Scheifele?*: The top line of Connor, Mark Scheifele and Gabe Vilardi were on the ice for 18 faceoffs on Friday. Scheifele, the centre, took just two of them (going 1-1). Vilardi, who played some centre in junior and with the Los Angeles Kings but has been used as a winger, took the other 16 (going 11-5).

It's worth noting that Scheifele, who had a hat trick in Tuesday's 6-3 win over the Florida Panthers, missed Wednesday's practice due to what was described as maintenance.

Is it possible he's battling an injury that prohibits him from taking most draws, especially since he's still otherwise playing the centre position in all other aspects?

"Gabe's really good at faceoffs," is all Arniel would offer up post-game, with a bit of a smirk.

Alrighty then.

Vilardi made it 3-0 Winnipeg with 59 seconds left in the second period as he one-timed a beautiful Connor pass for his eighth of the year. Josh Morrissey had made a stellar play at the blue-line to keep the puck in the offensive zone with the Jets on the power play.

5) *Afterburner:*

Key play: Nino Niederreiter's tally on the first shot of the game made it crystal clear the Jets had come to play and immediately put the fragile Penguins in a hole.

Three stars:

1. Winnipeg LW Kyle Connor: Goal, assist, fight
2. Winnipeg LW Nino Niederreiter: Goal
3. Winnipeg D Josh Morrissey: Assist

6) *Extra, extra:* Both teams went 1-for-3 with the power play.

Hellebuyck finished with 17 saves on 18 shots, while Jarry — who has now given up a goal on the first shot of the game in four of his six starts — stopped 26 of 29.

Defenceman Dylan Coghlan was a healthy scratch for the 20th straight game, while forward David Gustafsson was parked in the press box for the 19th time in 20 games.

The Jets flew to Nashville immediately after and will face the Predators on Saturday night at 6 p.m. CT. Backup goalie Eric Comrie is expected to make his fifth start of the year.

Associated Press

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/kyle-connor-records-gordie-howe-hat-trick-as-jets-down-slumping-penguins/>

Kyle Connor records Gordie Howe hat trick as Jets down slumping Penguins

By Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Kyle Connor had a goal and an assist and the Winnipeg Jets beat the Pittsburgh Penguins 4-1 on Friday night.

Connor also fought Sidney Crosby to complete the Gordie Howe hat trick and became the third player in Jets history to record at least 25 points through 20 games in a season. Gabriel Vilardi scored a power-play goal, while Nino Niederreiter and Vladislav Namestnikov also scored for the Jets, who built a 3-0 lead through two periods.

Winnipeg equaled the second-most wins (17) by any franchise through the first 20 games of a season. The Jets are 10-0 when scoring first.

Connor Hellebuyck, who stopped 17 shots, has a league-best 14 wins in 16 games. The reigning Vezina Trophy winner also ranks among the NHL leaders in goals-against average and save percentage.

Michael Bunting scored a power-play goal in the third period for Pittsburgh. Tristan Jarry made 26 saves.

Takeaways

Jets: The Jets have won 17 of 20 games to start the season. They won 15 of their first 16 games before a brief two-game skid against Tampa Bay and Florida in which they were outscored 9-1. It appears Winnipeg is back on track following wins against Florida and Pittsburgh.

Penguins: Lost for the fifth time in six games. Pittsburgh has dropped 13 of its last 17 overall.

Key moment

Niederreiter scored in the first 90 seconds of the game and Vilardi gave the Jets a 3-0 lead in the final minute of the second period. Niederreiter took advantage of a Pittsburgh turnover behind the net and Vilardi scored on a wide-open one-timer from between the circles.

Key stat

The Jets/Atlanta Thrashers franchise won for just the third time in 23 road games against Pittsburgh dating back to March 24, 2007.

Up Next

Jets visit Nashville on Saturday, and Penguins host Utah.

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/10883258/analysis-winnipeg-jets-mark-scheifele-flips-switch/>

ANALYSIS: Jets' Scheifele flips switch with stellar recent play

By John Shannon CJOB

More than 100 years ago, American President Theodore Roosevelt wrote about “The Man in the Arena.”

He said: “It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena.”

Well, this is one of those times where the critic has to stand up — stand up and say, maybe I was wrong. For the past few years, I have been critical, perhaps overly critical. And this week alone has probably changed my critical opinion of one member of the Jets.

I always wondered if he cared more about himself, rather than the team — you know, the name on the back rather than the name on the front? But Saturday’s team defeat in Sunrise, Florida showed me something different than that.

In the third period, Mark Scheifele challenged his former junior teammate Aaron Ekblad to a fight. Not that it was a barroom brawl or a heavyweight match. It was two skilled players, both angered, and one probably more frustrated by his team’s performance.

What Scheifele showed me was that this version of the Jets was not going to take this whipping lying down. He showed me that he cared. Then on Tuesday, he backed up his pugilism with one of the most impressive individual efforts of his career

Sure, the three goals were key in the rematch against the Florida Panthers. But it was his leadership, his drive, his passion for the logo on the front of the sweater that caught my eye. I would actually maintain that Scheifele's actions Saturday had a direct effect on Tuesday's result. And quite frankly, that's all any of us can ask for in any player who is expected to contribute, lead and win.

As Roosevelt said so eloquently, "The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds..."

Mark Scheifele did the deeds.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/10884918/jets-begin-six-game-road-trip-with-4-1-win-in-pittsburgh/>

Winnipeg Jets begin six-game road trip with 4-1 win in Pittsburgh

By Tyson Rewucki & Russ Hobson Global News

After a big win against Florida at home, the Winnipeg Jets started their longest road trip of the season with a bang.

The Jets improved to 17-3 on the season thanks to a 4-1 victory over the Pittsburgh Penguins Friday night.

The Jets scored just 82 seconds into the game to take the lead for good as they ended their short two-game road losing streak.

It's only the third time the Jets have won in Pittsburgh during the 2.0 era.

Kyle Connor had a Gordie Howe hat trick (1 goal, 1 assist, 1 fight). He fought Sidney Crosby in his first NHL fight in the third period after Connor made a big check on Crosby only moments earlier.

"He didn't like the hit apparently," said Connor. "He came up to me, a couple crosschecks, and it just kinda happened. And we're not taking s--t from anybody, so it's kinda what transpired and just kinda escalated."

"I do not want to see that," Jets head coach Scott Arniel said. "Great that he got a Gordie Howe hat trick, but I do not want to see my top goal scorer dropping the gloves, but that's just the compete in K.C."

After scoring once in the first, the Jets added two more in the middle frame. The Pens had a strong push in the third, but the Jets allowed only one goal before Connor sealed it with the empty netter.

Nino Niederreiter, Vladislav Namestnikov and Gabriel Vilardi had the other markers for Winnipeg, but it was the early game goal that gave the Jets the momentum as they hit the quarter way mark of their schedule.

“That’s a great start,” said Arniel. “Gets them back on their heels and maybe some negative thoughts, whatever it might be, but just liked the way the first couple periods went. Actually we played a pretty good road game to get things started.”

It was the start of a grueling stretch with six road games, in six different states over the span of just 10 days.

The Jets are still undefeated at 10-0 when scoring the first goal of the game. They’re also unbeaten when leading after two periods, now 13-0 for the season.

With two more points, Connor has 26 for the season, and now owns the second-highest point total through 20 games in franchise history behind only Mark Scheifele who recorded 28 points in 2020-2021.

Niederreiter opened the scoring almost immediately in this one after Evgeni Malkin turned the puck over deep in the Penguins’ zone, 1:22 into the game. The puck ricocheted to the Swiss winger for his eighth of the season, making a nice move on Penguins goaltender Tristan Jarry.

Jarry had to be sharp early, even after the first goal for the Jets, stopping three scoring chances before the game had even hit the five-minute mark.

Pittsburgh got their first power play of the game a little over the midway point of the first period. The Penguins had a few chances, one in front and one coming off a one timer from the point, courtesy of Erik Karlsson but Connor Hellebuyck stood tall.

After the Penguins powerplay, the pace of play started to stagnate a little bit until Jesse Puljujärvi took a holding penalty at the 16:47 mark. The best powerplay in the NHL had some troubles generating any chances up a man until Jarry made a nice save off a deflected Neal Pionk shot.

In the second period, Namestnikov added to the Jets lead on his 32nd birthday just before the five-minute mark on a developing odd-man rush. Nikolaj Ehlers dropped the puck to the trailing Namestnikov and he grabbed his own rebound on the backhand after the initial shot was stopped by Jarry for his sixth goal on the season.

Hellebuyck was tested a little bit more than he was in the first period, including an odd-man rush where Rickard Rakell ripped a wrist shot just over the pad, but the Jets goaltender snatched that shot out of the air with the glove. The Penguins looked sluggish and that play continued into the second with plenty of turnovers that led to a handful of Jet scoring opportunities.

Malkin’s rough game continued in the 2nd period after he tripped Vilardi along the boards with 75 seconds left in the second period sending the Jets to the powerplay. Vilardi wasted no time, ripping a one-timer in the slot thanks to a nice pass from Connor to quiet the Pittsburgh crowd and give Winnipeg a 3-0 lead.

It was a fiesty start to the third period, with two unusual suspects. Crosby and Connor dropped the gloves in a short scrap between one of the greatest of all time and a former Lady Byng

Trophy winner. The refs gave Michael Bunting a cross-checking penalty on the play as well, but the Jets were unable to make the Penguins pay despite some good puck movement.

The penalty parade continued early in the third with Alex Lafallo sitting in the box for two minutes due to a tripping penalty.

The Penguins ended Hellebuyck's shutout bid after Bunting buried a backdoor tap-in on the man advantage thanks to a nice feed from Bryan Rust. The penalty kill has struggled a little bit over the past two games, giving up three goals on their last six tries.

Up by two, the Jets gave the Penguins a chance to get within one after Cole Perfetti interfered Noel Acciari just after the halfway mark of the third. Despite some tense moments, the Penguins weren't able to generate anything this go around on the power play with boos raining down from the Pittsburgh crowd.

Pittsburgh pulled the goalie trying to narrow the lead, but they didn't generate much with the extra attacker and Connor got loose and potted home his 13th of the season to close it out.

Hellebuyck improved to 14-2 on the year, stopping 17 of 18 shots.

The Jets continue this six-game road trip on Saturday against the the Nashville Predators. The pregame show begins on 680 CJOB at 4 p.m., with puck drop just after 6 p.m.

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/jets-notebook-pionks-career-year-aided-by-aggressive-mindset/>

Jets Notebook: Pionk's career year aided by 'aggressive mindset'

By Jacob Stoller

WINNIPEG — A game-saving play in the season's home opener foreshadowed the impact Neal Pionk would have this season.

Chicago Blackhawks forward Ilya Mikheyev was inches away from having a clear lane to an empty net, which would've put the Jets down 2-0 with just under a minute and a half left. Mikheyev tried to chip the puck past Pionk but he responded aggressively, leveraging his stick, foot speed and body positioning to angle off his opponent. Mikheyev fell and bobbled the puck.

Attacking the puck carrier head-on — rather than retreating back and defending Mikheyev face-to-face — was a gamble. But it paid off 17 seconds later as Mark Scheifele tied the game and he'd also add the winner in OT. None of that would've been possible if it weren't for a play that Pionk says is a byproduct of his "aggressive mindset."

"Have I been burned on it? Absolutely," Pionk said one day after Winnipeg's second win. "But that's why the net is empty. You've got to make aggressive plays."

It's no secret that the 29-year-old is having a career year, sitting tied for sixth in NHL defencemen scoring with three goals and 17 points through his first 19 games. But Pionk's value stretches far beyond the box score.

“Points? They’re whatever,” Pionk told Sportsnet.ca during a one-on-one interview in early November. “I care about winning. If we lose, I’m pissed. If we win, that’s great — I really don’t care if I have a point or not. I care about helping the team win and being a driver.”

Pionk has been just that.

After a 2023-24 campaign where he struggled mightily amidst tragedy — his best friend Adam Johnson died from a freak accident in an EIHL game — Pionk has been one of Winnipeg’s most effective players during five-on-five play and on both special teams units. And it’s a direct result of his aggressiveness and hockey sense.

He’s been rock solid alongside Dylan Samberg on the team’s second pair — registering a 53.1 expected goals-for percentage during five-on-five play — while matching up against the opposition’s top-six. On paper, the six-foot defencemen may not fit the bill of a prototypical ‘shutdown’ defenceman but that notion gets thrown out the window once you watch him play.

He has a knack for killing plays.

“One-on-one, that’s where he excels,” Adam Lowry told Sportsnet.ca last month. “It’s one of those under-appreciated skills. It’s tough to gauge the quickness aspect of the read he makes when he steps up and closes the gap. He’s able to get in on you and take away your time and space earlier than you anticipate.”

Time and time again this year — be it how he’s nullified players like Evgeni Malkin and Leon Draisaitl off the rush, won puck battles, broke up countless 2-on-1s against and delivered two highlight-reel hip checks — we’ve seen Pionk play much bigger than he is.

“If you’re going to play at my size, you’ve got to be smarter than (your opponent),” Pionk explained. “You’re not going to be able to push them around or bully them, so you have to think a little bit.”

The naked eye may trick one into thinking that a solid defensive defenceman needs to be a big, mean, bruising body. But at the end of the day, it all boils down to taking away time and space from opponents.

“We always say, ‘get into the hands of people,’ whether they’re big or small, if you get your body close and get in tight on them, it’s harder for them to work. It’s harder for them to make plays,” head coach Scott Arniel said after the team’s Nov. 2 practice.

Pionk’s aggressiveness is also a big driver in how he’s producing points this season. He’s not shy to take gambles. He’ll oftentimes join the rush — even crashing the net, from time to time, if he sees an opening — and he’s not afraid to carry the puck deep into the offensive zone and facilitate a scoring chance.

“A lot of it has to do with how the game is flowing,” Pionk said. “Let’s say you’re down a couple goals, you have to take more risks. If you’re up a couple of goals, you’re going to hold back a little bit. There’s that period at the start of the game where you’re feeling things out. If the teams need a push, maybe you take a gamble. If the team’s pushing really hard and the forwards are working really well and creating lots of turnovers, maybe you don’t take that gamble.”

Pionk has registered 0.91 five-on-five high-danger shot attempts per 60 minutes, which ranks him in the 90th percentile among defencemen who have played at least 150 minutes, according to NaturalStatTrick.com. When Pionk's on the ice, the Jets produce 3.79 more five-on-five high-danger shot attempts per 60 minutes than they do when he's not on the ice.

Pionk's play driving has not only shored up the team's second pair but it's also helped alleviate concerns regarding Winnipeg's top-four as a whole.

Fourth Line Flourishing

Winnipeg's bottom-six has been excellent all year and it's not just because of Adam Lowry's line.

The Jets' fourth line of Morgan Barron - Rasmus Kupari - Alex Lafallo has been exceptional.

According to MoneyPuck.com, that trio ranks second in five-on-five expected goals against per 60 minutes (2.8) among lines that have played at least 100 minutes together. They also rank 15th in expected goals for percentage (58.2 percent), one spot below the team's third line (58.5 percent).

"It's a modern-day fourth line," Alex Lafallo told Sportsnet.ca after Wednesday's practice. "We're working our tail off but (Kupari) and (Barron) have incredible skill. Those guys can make plays and when you're flying around the ice and forechecking like we are, we're going to get the puck back most of the time."

Kupari has added an interesting dimension to that line.

Acquired in the Pierre-Luc Dubois blockbuster, the 24-year-old played just 28 games for the Jets last year. Kupari was an enigma, displaying his lightning-fast speed but not bringing much else to the table. However, right from the get-go of training camp, Arniel made a point of giving Kupari lots of runway to earn that fourth-line centre role. And it's paid off.

Kupari has evolved into an excellent 4C.

He's become a faceoff specialist, winning 54.6 per cent of his faceoffs — a massive increase from last year (46.7 per cent) — and he's been called upon to win draws beyond his regular shifts. He's also weaponized his speed on the forecheck and in transition.

"He's always pushing the pace and it does a lot to back other teams off and it gets us the first touch on the forecheck when we do dump the puck in," Barron said Wednesday.

Will Ville Be Freed?

Ville Heinola was reassigned to the Manitoba Moose for a conditioning loan on Monday. Arniel said Heinola won't be in the AHL for the full two weeks and he should be back with the club in short order. With Logan Stanley on IR, it would appear there's a prime opportunity for Heinola to display his talents once he's recalled.

"I'm his biggest fan. I want to see him in games," Arniel said on Monday.

But one ought to wonder what the long-term plan is here. How much leash will Heinola have, coming off an injury? Better yet, say Heinola plays well, are they going to allow him to put together a string of games like they've allowed Stanley to? One would hope so.

While Heinola may not, stylistically, fit the mould of a prototypical sixth defenceman — compared to Stanley or Fleury — the Jets, especially with the cushion they have in the standings, need to see what they have in their 2019 first-round pick. Whether they see him as a lineup regular or not.

The longer he's in the press box, the more his trade value will decline.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/stingy-jets-earn-commanding-win-over-penguins%7E3033589>

Stingy Jets earn commanding win over Penguins (VIDEO)

The Winnipeg Jets allowed only 18 shots against the listless Penguins, which Connor Hellebuyck had mostly no trouble turning away, and TSN's Dan Robertson and Kevin Sawyer break down a game where the Jets played "Jets hockey" against the Penguins.

Pittsburgh Post Gazette

<https://www.post-gazette.com/sports/penguins/2024/11/22/winnipeg-jets-losing-streak-sidney-crosby-fight-mike-sullivan-malkin-kyle-connor/stories/202411220010>

Penguins dominated by Jets from start to finish, and their steep descent continues

By Matt Vensel Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Maybe the one positive thing you could say about the latest loss from the Penguins was that at least they didn't blow a two-goal lead to the Winnipeg Jets on Friday.

For that to happen, they would have had to be competitive for at least a little while.

Instead, the Penguins fell behind on the second shift and never really showed much interest in making it a game after that, losing 4-1 at PPG Paints Arena. The dominant Jets, who have the NHL's best record, handed them their second straight defeat.

It dropped them to 7-11-4 and kept them in last place in the Metropolitan Division.

"Right now, a loss is a loss," Bryan Rust said. "And we've got to right the ship. Fast."

The free-falling Penguins knew they would have their hands full with the juggernaut Jets, who have outscored their opponents 84-47 this season while starting 17-3-0.

A good starting point for the Penguins would have been not beating themselves.

"They're a great team and they don't make mistakes," Matt Grzelcyk said. "They kind of wait for you to make your own mistakes. I think that's what happened tonight."

The Jets didn't have to wait long for the Penguins to oblige — and it was a doozy.

The visitors grabbed the lead just 1:22 in. It was the fourth time in his six starts that Tristan Jarry let in the first shot he faced, although he was hardly at fault for this one. Evgeni Malkin turned it over in front of his net, and Nino Niederreiter capitalized.

“How do I explain that?” Mike Sullivan said. “Can you explain that? Because I can’t.”

It was encouraging that Jarry shrugged off that early goal. In the next 90 seconds, he made two outstanding saves on Kyle Connor and Rasmus Kupari to keep it close.

Jarry held down the fort as the Penguins failed to generate scoring chances of their own. But a few minutes into the second period, the Jets scored to double the lead.

Sidney Crosby and a few of their other top players were on the ice as the Jets casually skated in on a 4-on-2 rush. Vladislav Namestnikov slalomed through a pair of sliding Penguins and followed up his own rebound to increase their lead to 2-0.

“They’re top of the league for a reason. They play the right way,” Michael Bunting noted. “They play fast and they make a lot of offensive plays to create chances.”

Gabriel Vilardi scored on a Jets power play late in the second period to make it 3-0.

That was more than enough cushion for the Jets and star goalie Connor Hellebuyck to leave town with two points. With the win, he improved to 14-2-0 on the year.

Hellebuyck didn’t have to work up a sweat in this one. The Penguins mustered just 18 shots, nine high-danger chances and a trio of odd-man rushes, per Sportlogiq.

“We didn’t get many shots, and I think when they moved the puck well in our end, we were defending a lot,” Jarry said. “It was hard to get out of our zone, and when we did, we were changing [lines] and it was kind of putting us behind a little bit.”

The Penguins showed a little life in the third period. They could thank their captain for that. Crosby woke up his team and a disinterested crowd when he dropped the gloves with Connor early in the period. It was his first fighting major in five years.

“Whenever you see someone like Sid step in there, it obviously gets the attention of everyone. I thought he kind of dragged us into the fight there,” Grzelcyk said. “We probably shouldn’t put him in position to have to do that. But he is a great leader, and I think he sensed a great time to do that. Guys stepped up after that.”

Shortly thereafter, the Penguins got on the board with a Bunting power-play goal. But at no point was the outcome in doubt. Connor iced it with an empty-netter.

The Jets swept their two matchups against the Penguins, outscoring them 10-4.

Ice chips

- Crosby is stuck on 599 goals. He failed to get a shot for a second straight game.
- Connor weighed in on his scrap with Crosby after the game. Connor knew he was engaging with Crosby and refused to back down. “It just kind of happened,” he said. “We’re not taking [crap] from anybody. ... There’s nobody different out there.”

- With a goal, assist and that fighting major, Connor had a Gordie Howe hat trick.
- Kris Letang returned to action Friday after he missed three games due to illness.
- Grzelcyk was in some pain after he blocked a Colin Miller blast with his boot. The blue-liner was eventually able to get up, help the Penguins get a clear and skate to the bench. He returned to the game. After the loss, he reported he was OK.
- Vilaridi's power-play goal in the second period made it six goals against in the last six games for the slumping Penguins penalty kill, which is 15 for 21 over that span. They left Vilaridi alone in the slot, and he whipped a one-timer past Jarry's glove.
- Vasily Ponomarev and Ryan Shea stayed in the lineup. Kevin Hayes was labeled as a game-time decision but didn't take part in pregame warmups and didn't face his former team. The other scratches Friday were Ryan Graves and Jack St. Ivany.
- Forwards Cody Glass and Blake Lizotte, who are working their way back from concussions, joined the group for Friday's optional morning skate in Cranberry.
- Penguins defense prospect Harrison Brunicke will be sidelined for a while after he fractured his wrist while playing for his team in the Western Hockey League.
- Tanner Howe, the other player the Penguins took in the second round of the 2024 draft, was in a WHL trade Thursday. The winger moved from Regina to Calgary.

Stat n'at

2-6-1 — the Penguins' record against the Western Conference after Friday's loss

They said it

"I thought we got some juice after Sid's battle, and then we scored and we got some juice. But we've got to manufacture that more consistently if we're going to be harder to play against," Sullivan said. "I think physicality is a fundamental element of hockey, and we've got to engage more consistently in all three zones."

Coming up

The Penguins will get right back at it Saturday in Pittsburgh when they host West Mifflin native Logan Cooley and the Utah Hockey Club — previously the Arizona Coyotes.