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***Three things - Hellebuyck puts on a show in St. Paul
Hellebuyck makes 43 saves, lafallo scores twice in 4-1 win***

By Jamie Thomas

The Winnipeg Jets leaned heavily on the defending Vezina Trophy winner Connor Hellebuyck on Monday night in a 4-1 win over the Minnesota Wild at Xcel Energy Center. Hellebuyck was outstanding through the first 35 minutes of the game and ended up making a season high 43 saves for his 15th win in 17 starts. He tied the NHL mark for fewest games to 15 wins in a season. Only three other goaltenders have posted 15 wins in 17 games: Evgeni Nabokov (w/ SJS in 2008-09), Brent Johnson (w/ STL in 2001-02) and Tiny Thompson (w/ BOS in 1929-30). Alex lafallo scored twice, Nino Niederreiter and Adam Lowry added singles for Winnipeg who beat Minnesota for a seventh straight time, which is their second-longest active streak against a single opponent behind the Ducks (8-0-0). Neal Pionk had a multi-point night, the Jets now head to the Pacific time zone and will face the Los Angeles Kings on Wednesday night.

FOURTH LINE AND HELLEBUYCK

The Jets fourth line of Rasmus Kupari, Alex lafallo and Morgan Barron have played well as of late. Monday night, they were rewarded for their efforts. Jake Middleton opened the scoring for the Wild at 8:37 of the first period but it wasn't long after that lafallo evened the score. Kupari made a tremendous play to set up his winger and the New York product did the rest beating Filip Gustavsson for his third of the year. After that tying goal, Hellebuyck made three stellar saves on a Wild power play and was busy throughout the opening frame with 21 stops. The Jets struggled in the opening 20 minutes with Minnesota's speed and pressure.

"Ras and Bear did a great job getting there and getting it deep. So, it's a nice play. I just had to shoot it," said lafallo.

"So, we're gonna keep doing that and keep being in the right spot. Got to help out Bucky some pretty, pretty big saves out there. So, we'll work on that for sure."

RESPONSE IN THE SECOND

Hellebuyck held the fort for the first half of the second period with the Wild continuing to press. The Jets goaltender came up huge during a Minnesota power play with Haydn Fleury in the penalty box as the Wild would generate five shots. About two minutes after they killed that off, the Jets would take their first lead of the night. Jake Middleton was sent in alone and was stopped not once but twice by Hellebuyck, Winnipeg would race back the other way with Neal Pionk spotting Nino Niederreiter all alone in front of Gustavsson and the Swiss forward backhanded in his ninth of the season.

HELLEBUYCK AND THE POWER PLAY FOR THE WIN

Minnesota came close to tying the game when Kirill Kaprizov sent a perfect pass to Matt Boldy at the side of the net and Hellebuyck made a shoulder save to keep the one goal Jets lead. Then at 13:18, the Jets would score on the power play with Pionk walking in from the point and his shot was redirected by lafallo past Gustavsson giving Winnipeg some breathing room at 3-1. For lafallo, it was his 100th career goal.

“That’s a great shot from up top, because we’re just talking about getting pucks to net on power play right there, especially at the end,” said lafallo.

“We need a goal to keep the momentum going. So, Neil had a great, good break in from the start there. And Neil just had a great shot.”

NHL.com

<https://www.nhl.com/news/topic/game-recaps/winnipeg-jets-minnesota-wild-game-recap-november-25>

Hellebuyck makes 43 saves, Jets defeat Wild lafallo scores twice, Pionk has 2 assists for Winnipeg

By Jessi Pierce

ST. PAUL, Minn. -- Connor Hellebuyck made 43 saves for the Winnipeg Jets in a 4-1 win against the Minnesota Wild at Xcel Energy Center on Monday.

"I thought they did everything they could," Hellebuyck said of the Wild. "I thought the guys in front of me ... we were feeling out our game a little bit and making a few mistakes. Not getting the puck deep enough. We righted our wrong in that third period and were just phenomenal. We got right back to our game. You've got to give credit to [the Wild]. They played a hard game, and they threw everything on net and created a bunch of rebounds, and that's why the shot total got so high."

Alex lafallo scored twice, and Neal Pionk had two assists for the Jets (18-4-0), who have won three of their past four.

"In the first period, it felt more like a feeling-out (process)," Winnipeg coach Scott Arniel said. "They probably had the upper hand. In the second, I thought we started to get going. ... They were going to get some looks, but I thought we did a good job of every time we got the puck below the goal line, our offense got going and we got some zone time. That game was a heavy-lifting game for everybody. It was hard off of rushes to get clear chances or real opportunities that way. I like the way the guys kind of felt that if they get the puck down low, we went to work from there."

Jake Middleton scored for the Wild (13-4-4), who have lost two in a row. Filip Gustavsson made 28 saves.

"I think there's more good than bad out of the game, but you've got to take lessons out of everything," Minnesota coach John Hynes said. "Each game is an opportunity to test yourself in different situations. I thought we did lots of good things. There's some things we can grow from the game. We've got a lot of hockey this week, too, so we've got to put this one behind us."

Middleton gave Minnesota a 1-0 lead at 8:37 of the first period when he one-timed a rebound from the left side.

lafallo responded to tie it 1-1 at 10:03 with a low backhand from the left face-off circle after Rasmus Kupari won the puck in the corner and fed him.

Minnesota outshot Winnipeg 22-7 in the period.

“Yeah, disappointing. But we threw a lot at him,” Middleton said of Hellebuyck. “That was probably the best first period we played all year, as far as not giving up shot opportunities and funneling pucks to the net. Tip your cap to Connor. He played really well, but we didn't play the same game in the third (outshot 12-5).”

Nino Niederreiter put the Jets ahead 2-1 at 12:05 of the second period. Wild forward Joel Eriksson Ek passed ahead to Middleton for an odd-man rush, but Middleton fanned on the close-range shot, resulting in a Winnipeg rush. Niederreiter then took a pass from Pionk before going forehand to backhand and scoring with a high backhand.

Iafallo extended the lead to 3-1 on the power play at 13:20 of the third period with his second of the game, tipping a Pionk point shot. It was Iafallo's 100th NHL goal.

“I barely touched it,” Iafallo said. “That's a great shot from up top, because we're just talking about getting pucks to the net on power play right there, especially at the end. We need a goal to keep the momentum going. So, Neal had a great, good break in from the start there. And Neal just had a great shot. So like I said, barely tipped it there.”

Adam Lowry scored into an empty net at 18:57 for the 4-1 final.

“Yeah, it's a big, big step, but obviously we've got to work on some things,” Iafallo said. “But going forward, I think it's a big win for us, and especially on the road. Finishing off that third period is huge for us. And building that momentum of hard plays and doing it right to the end.”

NOTES: Hellebuyck (15-2-0) tied the NHL record for fewest games to reach 15 wins. Three other goalies have had that many wins in their first 17 games: Evgeni Nabokov (San Jose Sharks, 2008-09), Brent Johnson (St. Louis Blues, 2001-02) and Tiny Thompson (Boston Bruins, 1929-30). ... The Jets have won seven straight games against the Wild dating to April 11, 2023, their second-longest active streak against an opponent (8-0-0 against Anaheim Ducks). ... Winnipeg defenseman Ville Heinola had two shots on goal and one hit in 12:14 of ice time in his first NHL game since Jan. 19, 2023. In September, he had ankle surgery for the second time in less than a year. ... Wild forward Kirill Kaprizov had five shots and was minus-1 in 23:08 after missing one game with a lower-body injury. ... Minnesota forward Jakub Lauko (lower body) left the game in the third period. There was no update.

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/10888084/hellebuyck-iafallo-lead-winnipeg-jets-to-4-1-win-in-minnesota/>

Hellebuyck, Iafallo lead Winnipeg Jets to 4-1 win in Minnesota

By Christian Aumell & Russ Hobson Global News

Sometimes you need your goalie to bail you out of trouble. Good thing the Winnipeg Jets have the best goalie in the NHL.

Connor Hellebuyck stopped 43 of 44 shots as the Jets picked up a 4-1 win in Minnesota on Monday night to improve to 18-4 on the season.

The Jets weathered an early storm from the Wild as Hellebuyck was brilliant in making 38 saves over the first two periods in a showdown of the top two teams in the NHL's overall standings.

Alex Iafallo scored twice for Winnipeg. Nino Niederreiter added a second period tally and Adam Lowry sealed the deal with an empty netter, but it was the Vezina caliber goaltending that led to the two points for Winnipeg as they bounced back from Saturday's loss to Nashville.

"We were feeling out our game a little bit and making, maybe a few mistakes not getting the puck deep enough," said Hellebuyck. "We righted our wrong in that third period and we were just phenomenal in the third period. We got right back to our game."

It was just the fourth regulation loss for Minnesota all season.

They outshot the Jets 22-7 in the first period and the 39 shots surrendered by the Jets in the first two periods is the most in franchise history.

"Obviously we got to work on some things," said Iafallo. "But going forward it's a big win for us and especially on the road. Finishing off that third period is huge for us and building that momentum of hard plays and doing it right to the end."

Despite the wide margin in shots on goal, Jets head coach Scott Arniel didn't think it was as lopsided as the shots reflected.

"I think the shot guy fell asleep on the button," joked Arniel. "The first period, it felt more like a feeling out. They probably had the upper-hand. I thought in the second we started to get going where we weren't very good in Nashville in the second. I thought we did a better job of kinda being heavy. They were gonna get some looks, but I thought we did a good job of every time we got the puck below the goal line, our offence got going, and we got some zone time."

Ville Heinola appeared in his first NHL game in more than 22 months after Dylan Samberg suffered a broken foot blocking a shot in the Jets previous outing.

"There was a lot of things I liked," said Arniel. "He has patience and poise, we know that, especially on the breakouts, things like that. I think that there's a couple things where the speed, he kinda recognized that they're coming in a hurry. But at the end of the day, that's what we want. We want to get his feet wet."

Like he did when the two teams met in Winnipeg last month, Jake Middleton opened the scoring for the Wild, banging home a rebound at the 8:37 mark of the opening period.

The Jets answered back less than 90 seconds later thanks to their fourth line. Rasmus Kupari won a puck battle in the corner and fed Iafallo in front, who buried a hard backhand past Filip Gustavsson at the 10:03 mark.

Minnesota had the bulk of the good chances as the period wore along but Hellebuyck stood tall, turning aside 19 of 20 shots faced while the Jets mustered nine on goal in the first.

The Wild continued to pour shots on Hellebuyck in the second but it was Winnipeg who grabbed the lead 12:05 into the middle frame.

After Hellebuyck turned aside another top notch opportunity from Minnesota, the Jets broke up the ice 4-on-3 as two members of the Wild got tied up with Lafallo behind the Jets' net. Eventually, the puck wound up on the stick of Neal Pionk before he slid a perfect pass to Niederreiter, who roofed a backhand past Gustavsson to put the Jets ahead 2-1.

Winnipeg certainly had more life in the second period, especially after they scored but they were still outshot 17-13 for a two-period total of 39-20 in Minnesota's favour.

But in the third, the Jets put the clamps down on the Wild, allowing just two shots over the first 14 minutes before Winnipeg picked up an insurance marker on the power play.

With the second unit on the ice, Lafallo tipped a Pionk point shot that Gustavsson caught a piece of but not enough as it fell into the net to give Winnipeg a 3-1 lead. The goal was the 100th of Lafallo's career.

Minnesota pulled the goalie with just under three minutes left but couldn't muster much of a push before Lowry iced it with an empty net goal with just over a minute to play.

Winnipeg will now head further west to visit the Los Angeles Kings Wednesday night. Pregame coverage on 680 CJOB starts at 7 p.m. with the puck dropping just after 9 p.m.

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/jets-takeaways-connor-hellebuyck-making-case-for-hart-trophy/>

Jets Takeaways: Connor Hellebuyck making case for Hart Trophy

By Jacob Stoller

Connor Hellebuyck sure put himself through a lower-body workout.

Kick saves. Sliding saves. Glove saves.

"Definitely toe saves," Hellebuyck told reporters after stopping 43 of 44 shots in the Winnipeg Jets' 4-1 win over the Minnesota Wild. "My toe was hot."

Monday night was another instance of Hellebuyck doing what he does best: take over games.

He relishes an opportunity to square off against a fellow top-five team. And dealing with all those shots? No big deal. He boasts a 31-12-17 record when he faces 40-plus shots.

Having played 60-plus games in each of the last three seasons, the 31-year-old workhorse is the last of a dying breed at a position that's shifting away from the 'starter' and 'backup' distinctions and inching closer towards '1A' and '1B' tandems.

Right now, he's the best goaltender on the planet. A second straight Vezina? Book it. What about a first career Hart Trophy nomination? Don't scoff at it.

While we've only seen two goalies crowned league MVP in the last quarter-century, you can't overlook Hellebuyck's 2024-25 campaign so far.

Hellebuyck ranks first in save percentage (.929), goals-against average (2.06), goals saved above average (13.54) and goals saved above expected (13.54) among netminders that have played at least eight games, according to NaturalStatTrick.com. He already has three shutouts (another league-high) and if you don't already know how absurd that is — keep in mind no goalie recorded more than six in either of the last two seasons. And he's doing that all the while shouldering a heavy workload, starting in nearly 80 per cent of Winnipeg's games.

Sounds like a textbook MVP to me.

That said, it depends how one defines the award. Some people will, whether they like to admit it or not, vote for the best player — which is why Connor McDavid always has a healthy dose of first-place votes — while others will take a more literal approach. The latter group bases the decision off which players' contributions have been the biggest driver for a team.

Considering the Jets' team success has also been driven by a high-flying offence, Hellebuyck's case might be a tough sell to some. But make no mistake, the Jets are as good as they are because of Hellebuyck. Not the other way around.

"He is our backbone," Nino Niederreiter said after Hellebuyck pitched a shutout against Utah earlier this month.

And if he keeps playing this way, how could he not finish in the top three of Hart voting?

Jets' Swiss-Army Knife strikes

Depending on your expectations when he arrived two summers ago, Alex Lafallo may not be your cup of tea.

Armchair GM's often discard him and his \$4-million cap hit when building the optimal Jets roster, thinking those dollars would be better served elsewhere.

But Lafallo embodies a phrase that talent evaluators use as the ultimate measuring stick: he's a player you win with.

"He's such an all-purpose player," coach Scott Arniel told reporters after Monday's game. "We use him on the penalty kill, he's out there on the power play. Then when you need him to shut down the opposition he does a great job. And he's a real good pro. We know what we're getting every night from him."

Lafallo scored two goals — a beautiful backhand finish from the slot after a hard forecheck, plus a net-front power play deflection — and deserved a third assist on the second goal of the game. As the Jets transitioned the puck out of the defensive zone following a chance against, Lafallo, unintentionally, created an odd-man rush. After taking exception to a little jab given to Hellebuyck after a shot attempt, Joel Eriksson-Ek and Yakov Trenin became fixated with Lafallo in the defensive zone — spending several seconds completely concentrating on him and disregarding the play at the other end. It essentially created a mini 5-on-3 and Niederreiter capitalized on it. Whatever Lafallo did to annoy those two that much, worked.

Now, aside from that one-in-a-million play, Lafallo's true value doesn't show up on the box score. He's an exceptional forechecker, arguably one of the most aggressive in the entire league. A lot of it has to do with his stick work — he's got a knack for knocking down passes and fishing out

pucks along the wall — but he also has a high-end hockey IQ, which is why Arniel deploys him in so many different spots.

If there's ever a top-nine — or even top-six — injury, Iafallo likely would be first in line for a minutes increase.

Free(d) Ville

Ville Heinola played in his first NHL game in nearly 700 days. All things considered, he looked pretty solid. While there were times where he looked like a fish out of water when it came to the speed of the game (which was to be expected), his positioning and reads were sound. He did a good job tying up Marcus Johansson in front of the net in the first period and also drew a holding call in the third period.

“There was a lot of things I liked,” Arniel told reporters. “He has patience and poise, we know that, especially on the breakouts ... I think that there's a couple things where the speed, he kind of recognized that they're coming in a hurry. But at the end of the day, that's what we want. We want to get his feet wet.”

And placing Heinola with Colin Miller — as opposed to just thrusting him into a top-four role right away — was the right call. Those two were on a pairing together in training camp and in sheltered minutes, I think there's something there. They both move the puck extremely well, can make quick exit passes and neither player is afraid to jump into the rush offensively. I was pleasantly surprised with how noticeable those two were in what was a tight-checking affair against Minnesota.

Associated Press

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/jets-beat-wild-as-hellebuyck-stops-season-high-43-shots/>

Jets beat Wild as Hellebuyck stops season-high 43 shots

By Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Connor Hellebuyck made a season-high 43 saves, Alex Iafallo scored two goals, and the Winnipeg Jets beat the Minnesota Wild 4-1 on Monday night in a game between two of the Western Conference's best.

The Jets needed each of Hellebuyck's stops in his league-leading 15th win. Only defenceman Jacob Middleton beat the reigning Vezina Trophy winner, on a rebound in the first period.

Iafallo tied the game less than 90 seconds later. His second goal came on a tip-in on the power play with 6:40 left in the game. It was the 100th goal of his career.

Nino Niederreiter's backhand from in front of Filip Gustavsson made it 2-1 with 8:55 remaining in the second period. Niederreiter spent 2013-18 in Minnesota and now has seven goals and four assists against his former team.

Minnesota has lost seven straight to the Jets, including a 2-1 overtime defeat earlier this year in Winnipeg.

Takeaways

Jets: Hellebuyck is now in a three-way tie for second in the NHL in goals-against average (2.13). That group includes Gustavsson, who stopped 28 of 31 shots on Monday.

Wild: Kirill Kaprizov returned to the lineup after a one-game absence with a lower-body injury suffered Thursday in Edmonton. The NHL's No. 2 scorer had his franchise-record 11-game point streak snapped.

Key moment

Niederreiter's goal came off the rush after Middleton fanned on a breakaway at the other end. Teammates Yakov Trenin and Joel Eriksson Ek then became tangled up with Lafallo, and Winnipeg went racing the other direction.

Key stat

The Wild were outshooting the Jets 36-16 when Niederreiter found the back of the net. Minnesota went nearly 11 minutes without a shot on goal in the third period but still finished with a 44-32 advantage.

Up next

The Jets continue a season-long six-game road trip Wednesday at Los Angeles; Minnesota visits Buffalo on Wednesday.

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/11/25/hellebuyck-steals-the-show>

Hellebuyck steals the show

All-world goalie makes 43 saves as Jets grind out victory over feisty Wild

By: Mike McIntyre

ST. PAUL, Minn. — How good was Connor Hellebuyck on Monday night? The architect of the team he'd just stonewalled for 60 minutes made his way over to personally congratulate him outside the Winnipeg Jets locker room.

Yeah, it was that kind of game for Hellebuyck — the reigning Vezina Trophy winner who stopped 43 of 44 shots he faced to lead his club to a 4-1 victory over the Minnesota Wild inside Xcel Energy Center.

To be clear, Wild general manager Bill Guerin was wearing his Team USA hat, rather than that of Winnipeg's closest divisional rival. No doubt he can't wait to have him as a friend, rather than a foe, for the upcoming 4 Nations Face-Off in which Hellebuyck is certain to be the starter.

"Definitely toe saves. My toe was hot. My glove was hot. I felt good," Hellebuyck told the Free Press of what went right. "I was seeing (the puck). The guys were allowing me to see lanes and picking up sticks and picking up rebounds. Great team effort tonight."

As for the Jets, they will make no apologies for employing the best goalie on the planet. Nor should they. They will acknowledge that in a game where they were far from their best — especially during a first period in which they surrendered 22 shots — another out-of-this-world performance from Hellebuyck was the difference.

"It's a big, big step, but obviously we got to work on some things," said Jets forward Alex Iafallo, who scored the 99th and 100th goals of his NHL career to lead the way offensively.

Winnipeg improves to an NHL-best 18-4-0, including 2-1-0 on this season-long six-game road trip. Minnesota, which began the night second overall in league standings, falls to 13-4-4.

Was it that lopsided?

The shot clock read 22-7 through 20 minutes, which suggests the Jets were hanging by a thread and fortunate to escape in a 1-1 tie.

Head coach Scott Arniel believes looks can be deceiving.

"I think the shot guy fell asleep on the button," he joked.

"Minnesota, they throw a lot of pucks to the net front. I mean, we went and looked at our scoring chances and it certainly didn't reflect what all of the shots that were coming. But they are a team that likes to throw pucks there, with bodies around there. I thought we did do a really good job there of finding a lot of the rebounds and kind of clearing them out."

That said, there's no denying Hellebuyck had to be sharp early and often, and he had already faced 39 shots through 40 minutes. However, with a 2-1 lead heading into the final frame, the Jets held the Wild to five shots in the third period.

"I like that third period a lot," said Hellebuyck. "We got back to our game and we really shut them down and kept them out of it. We kept them from getting any good looks and kept the momentum on our side. That's the sign of a good team."

Milestone game for AI

Iafallo is no stranger to skating in the State of Hockey. The New York native played four seasons with the University of Minnesota-Duluth before signing a free agent deal with the Los Angeles Kings to begin his pro career.

Now 30, Iafallo's fingerprints were all over this one.

He got his team on the board midway through the first period, taking a beautiful pass from Rasmus Kupari and beating Filip Gustavsson with a backhand from in tight. Give credit to Kupari for the aggressive forecheck, which set up the equalizer after Jake Middleton had opened the scoring for the home team.

Then, in the second period, Iafallo drew the ire of Minnesota's Joel Eriksson Ek and Yakov Trenin just in front of the Winnipeg net. While the trio exchanged plenty of shoves and gloved swats, play continued up the ice with the Jets having a numbers advantage.

With the referees allowing the skirmish to continue, Nino Niederreiter took a pass from Neal Pionk and beat Gustavsson with a backhand for his ninth goal of the year.

"I just saw somebody hit Bucky, so I just kind of went in there and trying to clean it up around there. And I just looked down the ice, and the boys were scoring," said Iafallo.

Iafallo didn't draw an official assist, but he certainly was a key part of the scoring play.

Then, lafallo tipped Pionk's shot in the third period for his 100th goal, which gave the Jets some valuable insurance.

"I barely touched it," lafallo admitted. "That's a great shot from up top, because we're just talking about getting pucks to net on power play right there, especially at the end. We need a goal to keep the momentum going."

The only goal lafallo didn't contribute to was Adam Lowry's empty-netter.

The longest wait

Did Mark Scheifele end up with the longest two-minute penalty in NHL history? It likely felt the case for the Jets top centre, who was sent to the sin bin with exactly one minute left in the first period after getting into a skirmish with Wild defenceman Middleton. Scheifele got a minor for roughing, while Middleton was the aggressor and got the extra punishment.

Winnipeg ultimately didn't score on the play, and there wasn't a single whistle until 12:55 was left in the middle frame. At that point, Scheifele — who couldn't come out until play was halted due to the offsetting nature of his penalty — had served a sentence that lasted 8:05.

Throw in the 18-minute intermission and it seemed like an eternity between shifts for Scheifele.

Ville's debut

Plenty of eyes were on Jets defenceman Ville Heinola, who was playing his first NHL game in more than 22 months after returning from not one, but two ankle surgeries. Skating on the third paring with Colin Miller, the 23-year-old had a mostly quiet night. And that's a good thing.

Heinola did show off his wheels in the third period when he tried to skate the puck out from behind his net only to be hauled down by Marcus Foligno. That led to the power play on which lafallo would capitalize.

Heinola played 12:14, with four shot attempts, two on goal and two giveaways on the night.

"I think he'd be the first to admit, that was fast for him. That was heavy and fast," said Arniel.

"But he got to get in and experience it. But there were a lot of things that I liked. He has patience and poise. We know that. Especially on the breakouts and things like that."

Key play

lafallo's second goal of the night on the power play gave Winnipeg some breathing room.

Three stars

1. Jets Connor Hellebuyck: 43 saves.
2. Jets RW Alex lafallo: 2 goals.
3. Winnipeg D Neal Pionk: 2 assists.

Extra, extra

Defenceman Dylan Coghlan (22 straight scratches) and forward David Gustafsson (21 of 22 games parked in the press box) were once again the extras for Winnipeg.

Minnesota's Kirill Kaprizov, who began the night second in NHL scoring with 34 points (13G, 21A) suited up despite suffering a lower-body injury last Thursday in Edmonton and missing Saturday's game in Calgary.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/11/25/heinola-super-excited-to-be-back>

***Heinola 'super excited to be back'
Jets hard-luck D-man finally back in the lineup***

By: Mike McIntyre

ST. PAUL, Minn. — The emotion was written all over Ville Heinola's face Monday as he prepared to play his first NHL game in more than 22 long — at times excruciatingly painful — months.

"Every time you watch the team play you just want to get out there and it kills you inside when you can't," Heinola told the Free Press following the Winnipeg Jets morning skate at Xcel Energy Center.

"I'm just happy it's over now and I don't have to worry about that."

The watching and waiting and worrying finally ended as Heinola was in the Jets lineup for the first time since Jan. 19, 2023, as they took on the Minnesota Wild.

"It's been a long journey for me, for sure," said the 23-year-old smooth-skating, puck-moving defenceman, who was selected 20th overall in the 2019 NHL draft.

"It's been a struggle to get back and feel good. But now it feels great and I'm super excited to be back."

Heinola's medical history is rather heartbreaking, given that he's seen two golden opportunities vanish due to circumstances beyond his control.

The first occurred during training camp in 2023, when an impressive preseason meant he had earned a spot not only on the 23-man roster, but in the opening-night lineup as well. However, a broken ankle suffered in the final preseason tune-up set the course for a series of unfortunate events that would severely test the young Finn physically and mentally.

By the time he'd made a full recovery a few months later, the Jets were flying high with no room for him on a crowded, healthy blue line so Heinola spent the second half of the season with the Manitoba Moose, waiting for an opportunity that would never come.

Fast forward to 2024 training camp and, once again, the door was wide open. The Jets hadn't re-signed free agents Brenden Dillon and Nate Schmidt, and Heinola was going to get a chance to play regular minutes. Before he could even get in an exhibition game, however, his surgically-repaired ankle developed an infection.

The only remedy was to go back under the knife, which would cost Heinola two more months of action.

"It's been a long ride for him," said Jets coach Scott Arniel.

“But it is what it is. That’s why we said to him that he’s waited long enough. We wanted to get him a couple of quick games down with the Moose. Now it’s a case of he’s here, so go and show us what you can do. He’s pretty excited and I know he’s been waiting for this moment for a long time.”

Heinola resumed skating a few weeks ago and agreed to a brief conditioning stint in the AHL, which culminated Saturday with him setting up the game-winning goal in the third period.

“I think it helps a lot. Obviously, it’s been a while since I played with those guys. So just getting my legs and everything back the way it was,” said Heinola.

“I feel like I had more power in my legs on Saturday. I think it takes a little bit to get back into game shape. But I’ve been working hard in the gym every single day, so I’m not really worried about my conditioning.”

For a change, Heinola’s timing couldn’t be better. His return comes after Dylan Samberg suffered a broken foot in Nashville on Saturday night, sidelining him indefinitely.

“Every time you see a guy go down it’s not a great feeling. For me, especially, I know how it is to not play and be out for a while,” said Heinola. “But I just hope he has a quick recovery and will be back soon.”

Although Samberg and Heinola are very different players, the Jets were glad to have an injection of talent and youthful energy in their lineup.

“The perseverance is incredible,” said defenceman Neal Pionk.

“You see what he went through last year, you feel awful for him. There’s not a whole lot you can do. This year, you get all excited for him and you kind of look at things through his eyes and then he gets the bad news again in training camp and you just feel for him. I’m excited for him. You look at it as a bit of a morale boost.”

Heinola took Samberg’s spot on the roster, but not immediately in the defence pairings. Haydn Fleury moved up to skate beside Pionk, while Heinola started Monday’s game with Colin Miller.

“We’ve been talking a lot. Obviously, we haven’t played together yet. But he’s a great guy,” said Heinola.

“He talks a lot, so it should make my job pretty easy to play with him. He’s obviously a great player. So I think we’re going to play pretty well together.

Heinola could certainly find himself moving up the lineup, especially if he can show the form that has made him one of the best young defenceman in the AHL.

“I just want to move him in slowly here, get him in the mix, get him feeling comfortable,” said Arniel.

“Obviously, the pace is going to be even higher than it was on the weekend for him. He’s a mobile, real-good pass-first defenceman and we just want to get him comfortable, to get out there and feeling good and then we’ll see where it goes from there.”

There's no timeline for Samberg's return. His toughness was on display as he blocked the Steven Stamkos slap shot, then managed to pick himself up, continue the shift and even try to get in the way of another blast before limping back to the bench.

"That's how tough he is," Pionk said of his blue-line partner.

"Not only that, but he skated off the ice on his own power. With a broken bone in his foot. That's no joke. It says a lot about him. He's willing to do the little things for the team. He always has. That's one of his specialties, shot-blocking, he's a warrior."

Dylan Coghlan is the only other healthy defenceman on the roster right now. The right-shot journeyman was a healthy scratch for a 22nd consecutive game on Monday.

Logan Stanley has been sidelined since Nov. 9 with a mid-body injury, but took another step in his recovery as he joined the Jets for morning skate, albeit in a yellow non-contact jersey. He's not expected to be ready for at least another week.

"We're going to have to step up by committee," said Pionk.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/they-can-win-games-so-many-different-ways-corrado-on-if-the-jets-are-cup-contenders%7E3033793>

'They can win games in so many different ways': Corrado on if the Jets are cup contenders (VIDEO)

The Winnipeg Jets have the most points in the NHL and they picked up their 18th win of the season Monday night, but they only have the 11th best odds on FanDuel to win the Stanley Cup this year. TSN's Hockey analyst Frank Corrado joins SportsCentre to share if he thinks the Jets are true cup contenders come spring-time.

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5948291/2024/11/25/wild-jets-connor-hellebuyck-takeaways/>

How Connor Hellebuyck stole latest Jets victory over Wild: 3 takeaways

By Michael Russo

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Connor Hellebuyck put on a show at Xcel Energy Center on Monday night to lift the Winnipeg Jets to a seventh consecutive victory over their rival Minnesota Wild.

Hellebuyck made 38 of his 43 saves in the first two periods as the Jets secured a 4-1 victory at Xcel Energy Center.

The Wild threw so much rubber to little avail in the first 36 minutes that the Wild seemed to sap themselves of energy. They went 12 minutes without a shot and had only five in the final 24 minutes.

Alex Iafallo, the University of Minnesota Duluth product, scored two goals, former Wild player Nino Niederreiter scored the winner, and Adam Lowry had an empty-netter for the Jets. For the second meeting in a row against Winnipeg, defenseman Jake Middleton opened the scoring, and the Wild didn't score again.

Hellebuyck, who is coming off his second Vezina Trophy last season and could be the front-runner to win his second in a row this season, improved to 15-2 for the NHL-leading Jets.

In a battle between the top teams in the West, Kirill Kaprizov was able to return after missing Saturday's game against the Calgary Flames. But he finished with four shots and no points.

Filip Gustavsson, who along with Hellebuyck entered the game with a 2.13 goals-against average and .924 save percentage, made 28 saves.

Wild winger Jakub Lauko didn't play in the third period because of an injury. Three of the Wild's four regulation losses in 21 games have come at home, where they are a pedestrian 4-3-1.

The Wild are 0-12-2 in the past two seasons against the Central Division foe Jets, Colorado Avalanche and Dallas Stars.

Hellebuyck continues his roll

For the first time this season, the Wild got "goalied."

They had a season-high 22 shots in the first period, which was tied for the second-highest single-period shot total in the NHL this season. It was also the second-highest first-period shot total since the 2017-18 season (23 shots versus Winnipeg on Jan. 13, 2018).

Through two periods, they had 39 shots, and they had by far the better of the chances all night.

But Hellebuyck was seeing everything, finding pucks through all sorts of traffic and often on grade-A chances. On one first-period sequence, Ryan Hartman turned Dylan DeMelo into a pretzel at the blue line, skated in on a two-on-one and made a tremendous pass to Marcus Johansson that Hellebuyck somehow reacted to and stopped while sliding right.

In the past four years, Hellebuyck has the second-most games, minutes, shots faced and saves in the NHL and is first in victories.

He showed why. The Wild had 4.41 expected goals after two periods.

Niederreiter strikes again

One of the worst trades in Wild history was Paul Fenton dealing Niederreiter to the Carolina Hurricanes for Victor Rask.

Niederreiter has haunted the Wild ever since with consistently good games. He snapped a 1-1 tie late in the second period with a cut to the net that ended with him roofing a backhand by Gustavsson for his ninth goal of the season.

Niederreiter has seven goals and 11 points in 15 meetings against the Wild.

This goal was avoidable. After Middleton fanned on a shot in the Jets' end, Iafallo went back at Joel Eriksson Ek and got into a skirmish. For some reason, Yakov Trenin not once (behind the

goal line) but twice (at the Winnipeg blue line) decided not to backcheck so he could help Eriksson Ek and let the Jets essentially run a four-on-three in the Wild zone while he and Eriksson Ek were well outside the play.

The Jets capitalized on that error in judgment.

Khusnutdinov misses second game in a row

Marat Khusnutdinov, who sustained a lower-body injury Thursday night at the Edmonton Oilers when blocking Evan Bouchard's blast on a third-period Oilers power play, didn't play for the second game in a row.

The Wild center took part in Monday's morning skate, but he was limping around the dressing room when it was over. The fact the Wild then turned Travis Boyd's emergency recall for Kaprizov into a regular recall might mean Khusnutdinov needs more time and Boyd will be the extra forward taken to Buffalo on Tuesday for a Wednesday night game against the Sabres. With Lauko banged up, that could be needed.

Boyd, a native of Hopkins, made his Wild debut in Calgary but didn't play Monday. He took part in warmups, but Ben Jones and Devin Shore joined Lauko on the fourth line.

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5948732/2024/11/26/wild-keep-losing-to-jets/>

Wild get 'goalied' and deserved better but suffer another loss to Jets

By Michael Russo

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Bill Guerin, the Minnesota Wild president and general manager, came down the press elevator, walked down a short hallway and made a right toward the Wild dressing room.

It wouldn't have been surprising if he had made a left and gone directly to the Winnipeg Jets' room instead.

Guerin is double dipping as the United States GM for the 2025 4-Nations Face-Off and 2026 Winter Olympics. Though we know Connor Hellebuyck will be on both teams, the USA Hockey hierarchy will have a tough decision about which goalie will get the nod as the No. 1 among Hellebuyck, Jake Oettinger and, probably, Jeremy Swayman.

But if Guerin had to make the decision Monday night based on what he witnessed, you can bet he would have told Hellebuyck — the two-time Vezina Trophy winner and likely front-runner to win a third at the end of this season — that he won the starting job outright with his performance during the Jets' 4-1 win.

Hellebuyck made 38 of his 43 saves in the first 36 minutes and made 3.63 saves above expected, according to MoneyPuck, to lift the Jets to a seventh consecutive win over a Wild team that seems incapable of beating the top teams in the Central Division.

Sure, the Wild have been competitive in their three losses (0-2-1) against the Jets and Dallas Stars this season. But the only thing that matters is results, and the Wild are 0-12-2 against the Jets, Stars and Colorado Avalanche — three of the best teams in the Central — in the past 13 months.

And in a league in which the Wild will likely have to meet these teams in the first two rounds of the playoffs, well, beating them just once in a while would be fairly good for their psyche.

That could explain why the Wild looked and sounded so shell-shocked after Monday's loss.

They played with impressive pace in the first 20 minutes. They fired 22 shots at Hellebuyck. Yet, other than Jake Middleton's game-opening goal for the second consecutive meeting with the Jets, the Wild couldn't buy another goal.

Yes, you read that right.

In 121 minutes of hockey against Hellebuyck and the Jets this season, the only Wild player to score is Middleton, a veteran defenseman with 17 goals in 259 career games.

Not good enough.

"Obviously, you get up for this game," said Matt Boldy, who had four shots. "It's a division game. It's a team that's ahead of us that's had our number. We want to win every game. It doesn't matter who is first. That's a good team over there, and we gotta find a way to get going and find ways to win these games."

Hellebuyck was sensational, but when the Wild gave up the go-ahead goal to former Wild forward Nino Niederreiter, it just seemed to sap their energy and left them dejected.

They had 39 shots through the first 36:08 and five in the last 23:52.

"It's always tight games against these guys, I feel like," said Marcus Johansson, who had a point for the fifth time in the past six games. "We wanted to get the upper hand tonight and show that we can play with everyone. But I mean, even though we did show that, we didn't get the 2 points. We didn't get the win, and that's frustrating."

In games against these top teams that routinely beat them, the Wild can't afford to do foolish things.

The Wild did just that on Niederreiter's winner.

Middleton came in on a breakaway and couldn't get off a good shot. The Jets countered quickly. Alex Iafallo got into a confrontation with Joel Eriksson Ek behind the Jets goal line, and for some reason, Yakov Trenin decided to join the fray.

As the play went the other way — Trenin had to see his teammates were being outmanned four against three in the Wild end — Eriksson Ek and Iafallo again got into it at the Jets blue line. Trenin again stopped and turned toward the Eriksson Ek and Iafallo jostling rather than getting on his horse and backchecking like a bandit.

The shift ended with Niederreiter scoring the winner.

"Watching it live and kind of in between periods, I think there's some discussion points we can have on that situation," coach John Hynes said diplomatically of Trenin, who has one assist in

21 games. He had his seventh consecutive shotless game on a night when 16 teammates had at least one shot.

In hindsight, Minnesota would have liked a whistle there and coincidental minors to Eriksson Ek and Lafallo, but play was allowed to continue, and it cost the Wild.

"I didn't see what was happening down in the offensive zone, but yeah, that sucked," Middleton said. "I wouldn't even call it a breakdown. There was just other s— going on, and it ended in an odd-man situation, and they scored a go-ahead goal and kind of bored us in the third for the rest of the game."

Marcus Foligno took a holding penalty in the offensive zone with 7:31 left in the third, and Lafallo and Neal Pionk, both products of the University of Minnesota-Duluth, combined for a power-play backbreaker and 3-1 Jets lead.

Pionk, who assisted on Niederreiter's winner, also assisted on Lafallo's second goal.

"Disappointing," Middleton said. "But we threw a lot (at Hellebuyck). That was probably the best first period we played all year, as far as not giving up shot opportunities and funneling pucks to the net. Tip your cap to Connor. He played really well, but we didn't play the same game in the third."

The Wild deserved a lot better than a 1-1 game going into the second and a 2-1 deficit going into the third.

"We had a lot of grade-As, shot attempts, zone time, all those things," Hynes said.

Added Boldy about Hellebuyck: "He's a good goalie. He's the best goalie in the league right now, in almost every category. So, you gotta keep doing it, keep going and try to find chances. And we weren't able to tonight."

The Wild have a busy week with three games in four days starting Wednesday night at the Buffalo Sabres. So Hynes wanted to take the good out of Monday's game and quickly move forward. The Wild will take Tuesday off before their flight to Buffalo. Fourth-line winger Jakub Lauko didn't play in the third period because of a lower-body injury, so Travis Boyd will likely play his second game in the past three.

As disappointing as the latest defeat was to the Jets, the reality is if the Wild play like they did Monday, they'll win more than they lose and bury more pucks than they don't.

But Hellebuyck, who became the fourth goalie in NHL history to win 15 games in his first 17, was that good. He saw everything, was clean on everything and made all sorts of tremendous stops.

"My toe was hot. My glove was hot. I felt good," Hellebuyck said. "I was seeing (the puck). The guys were allowing me to see lanes and picking up sticks and picking up rebounds. Great team effort tonight."

Asked whether Guerin came to congratulate him, Hellebuyck said, "No comment."

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-ride-hellebuyck-to-4-1-win-over-rival-wild>

Jets ride Hellebuyck to 4-1 win over rival Wild

By Paul Friesen

The Winnipeg Jets rode goaltender Connor Hellebuyck and some A.I. to another win over the rival Minnesota Wild.

Connor Hellebuyck stoned the Wild through two periods and fourth-line forward Alex Iafallo scored twice as the Jets beat the Wild, 4-1, in the Twin Cities on Monday.

“My toe was hot, my glove was hot,” Hellebuyck told reporters, post-game. “I felt good.”

It was the Jets’ seventh straight win over Minnesota, in a game that featured the NHL’s two hottest teams through the first quarter of the season.

“As much as we’re having success, we’re been kind of following Minny, we know what they’ve been up to,” head coach Scott Arniel said. “They’ve been playing some great hockey as well and they’re not going away. I’m sure we’ll run into each other again.

“A hard, hard building to play in. But I really liked the way, as the game kept going on, we kept getting stronger and stronger, building ourselves into a real solid win at the end.”

For the second time in two meetings this season, the Wild could beat Hellebuyck only once, as the Jets avoided a second straight loss and reached the mid-point of their six-game road trip with a 2-1 mark.

Out-skated, out-worked and out-shot through 40 minutes, the Jets weren’t just in the game, but leading it, thanks to Hellebuyck.

The Jets nursed a 2-1 lead through most of the third period, when Iafallo’s second of the night and 100th of his career on a power play gave them some breathing room.

“I barely touched it,” Iafallo said of his deflection, crediting defenceman Neal Pionk with a well-aimed point shot.

Nino Niederreiter had the other Jets goal, while Adam Lowry added an empty-netter.

Hellebuyck stopped 43 of 44 shots.

The win improves the Jets to a league-leading 18-4.

Minnesota falls to 13-4-4.

The Jets play the fourth game of their road trip in Los Angeles on Wednesday.

The Wild were full marks for the first goal, defenceman Jake Middleton out-muscling Mark Scheifele to deposit a rebound past Hellebuyck not quite midway through the first period.

The Jets answered right back with a goal by their fourth line some 90 seconds later.

Rasmus Kupari's first assist in 47 games was well-earned: His aggressive forecheck allowed him to get the puck to Lafallo, whose backhand beat Filip Gustavsson.

But the ice remained tilted in Minnesota's favour for most of the opening 20 minutes, much of the play clustered around Hellebuyck, who had to be sharp.

Shots through the first were a whopping 22-7 in favour of the Wild.

"I think the shot guy fell asleep on the button," Arniel joked, suggesting the ice wasn't as tilted as the shot clock showed. "We went and looked at our scoring chances and it certainly didn't reflect what all of the shots that were coming. But they are a team that likes to throw pucks there, with bodies around. We did do a really good job of finding a lot of the rebounds and clearing them out."

Things didn't change much in the second, but Hellebuyck kept things even as the Minnesota shot count reached the mid-30s.

It was the Jets who broke the tie, though.

As Lafallo occupied two Wild players in his end, his teammates broke the other way, Niederreiter set up by Pionk for his ninth goal of the year.

It was Niederreiter's fourth goal in four games against Gustavsson.

"I'm not sure what he was up to," Arniel said of Lafallo. "But he got everybody stirred up and mad at him on Nino's goal. He had two guys sort of chasing him around the ice, and we took advantage of it. But that's one thing about AI, he's such an all-purpose player."

Lafallo says he was just defending his goalie, who'd been bumped on the play.

"So I just went in there trying to clean it up," he said. "And I just looked down the ice, and the boys were scoring. So it was nice to just relax a bit after that."

Shots were 39-20 after the second, but Winnipeg took their 2-1 lead into the third.

They rewarded their goalie with a much tighter final 20 minutes, out-shooting Minnesota, 12-5.

"We righted our wrong in that third period," is how Hellebuyck put it. "We were just phenomenal."

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/kills-you-inside-winnipeg-jets-ville-heinola-finally-makes-it-back>

'Kills you inside': Winnipeg Jets' Ville Heinola finally makes it back

By Paul Friesen

You could never accuse the Winnipeg Jets of rushing Ville Heinola into their lineup.

But five years after making the Finnish defenceman a first-round draft pick, that's exactly what the Jets will do Monday night in Minnesota.

Recovered from a second ankle surgery, Heinola finished a two-game conditioning stint with the AHL Manitoba Moose on Saturday, joined the Jets on the road a day later and will suit up against the Wild on Monday.

The reason for the delayed rush job: the broken foot suffered by Dylan Samberg in Saturday's loss in Nashville.

"It's been a long ride for him," head coach Scott Arniel said of Heinola. "With him pretty much making our team two years ago and having the injury and it's unfortunate what happened in training camp... that's why we said to him that he's waited long enough.

"We wanted to get him a couple of quick games down with the Moose. Now... he's here, so go and show us what you can do."

Still just 23, Heinola was all set to grab an NHL job last year, but a fractured ankle ended that notion in a snap.

When he came back months later, all that was left for him was another half season with the Moose.

At training camp this year, that same ankle got infected and Heinola went under the knife again, doctors removing a pin from the foot and one quarter of the NHL season from his unfortunate grasp.

"It's been a long journey for me, for sure," Heinola told reporters on scene in the Twin Cities after Monday's morning skate. "Ever since the injury happened last spring, it's been a struggle to get back and feel good. Every time you watch the team play you just want to get out there.

"And it kills you inside when you can't play. I'm just happy it's over now and I don't have to worry about that."

In a matchup of the NHL's top two teams, Arniel planned to ease Heinola into the lineup by using him on a third defence pair, next to Colin Miller.

Haydn Fleury gets bumped up a pairing to take Samberg's spot alongside Neal Pionk.

As hard as it is to see Samberg break his foot, Pionk says Heinola's return is a morale boost.

"The perseverance is incredible," Pionk said. "You see what he went through last year, you feel awful for him. There's not a whole lot you can do. This year, you get all excited for him and you look at things through his eyes and then he gets the bad news again in training camp and you just feel for him. I'm excited for him."

The Jets are coming off a 4-1 loss in Nashville — the tail end of their first back-to-back games of the season — and had Sunday off.

At 17-4, they remain atop the overall standings, while Minnesota, 13-3-4, has the fewest losses in regulation.

“Central Division doesn’t get any easier,” Arniel said. “Everybody is a tough out and these guys, obviously, have been having a great start, just like us.”

Heinola says it doesn’t matter which team he’s playing, he’s just happy to finally join the one he’s been trying to make for such a long time.

“They’ve been unreal the start of the year, and I’m just happy to jump on the train.”