

Globe and Mail

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/sports/hockey/article-winnipeg-jets-nhl-best-record/>

The Winnipeg Jets are the NHL's hottest team – and somehow still flying under the radar

By Marty Klinkenberg

They are the best team in the NHL – on an extraordinary run – having won 13 of their first 14 games. But, outside of Winnipeg, there is not much in the way of conversation about the soaring Jets.

The same is true of their best player, Kyle Connor. He is an elite scorer but, because he plays in Manitoba rather than Manhattan, he may be the league's most underrated star.

He shrugs it off.

"I've been asked about that a lot throughout my career," Connor said on Thursday as he stood in front of his dressing stall at Canada Life Centre. He has a mouse beneath his right eye from a dust-up last weekend with Tampa Bay's Nikita Kucherov. "I think it is mostly a function of playing in a small market.

"I'm not focused on that at all. I am just focused on what I can control: the details and how I arrive at the rink. I am just trying to be the best teammate I can and do what I can do to help the team win."

With a victory over the Dallas Stars on Saturday, the Jets would improve to 14-1 and lay claim to the best start in NHL history. At this point, they have the league's best record, the most goals, the top power play and the best goalie in Connor Hellebuyck.

Last year's Vézina Trophy winner enters Saturday with a 10-1 mark, a .932 save percentage and a 1.91 goals-against average. He leads the NHL in each of those categories.

Who would have seen this coming? Certainly few outside the organization. Last season ended with a shattering 4-1 series loss to Colorado in the first round. The same fate was suffered the year before against Vegas.

"This all started in the summer," said Josh Morrissey, one of Winnipeg's alternate captains. He is second in league scoring among defencemen this season with 16 points.

"We kind of challenged everyone to come in and be in better shape than they ever had been before, and to work on things they felt they needed to.

"Did I think we'd be sitting here at 13-1? Who knows. There is a lot of hockey left but so far, so good."

On Thursday night the Jets avenged last postseason's defeat when they beat the Avalanche 1-0. They didn't seem to go into that game carrying much of a chip about last season's failure. They are Winnipeg personified. Nothing gaudy. They simply go about things quietly, almost to the point where people don't notice.

Winnipeg? It is famous for its ballet.

Connor was selected the NHL's second star for October, during which the 27-year-old recorded a point in all 10 of the Jets' games and set a league record by scoring a goal in seven consecutive outings to start the season.

He has cooled down a bit but has nine goals and 19 points through 14 games. His career highs are 47 goals and 93 points in 2021-22.

"I've been asked if this is the best I have ever played but I don't look at it that way," Connor said. "The things you really focus more on as a player are the chances you miss and the plays you don't make."

Connor is quiet and does everything he can to not draw attention to himself. But his teammates and coach notice the command he has on the ice.

"People don't see a lot of the simple plays he makes because he makes them at such a great pace," said Mark Scheifele, the veteran centre and alternate captain. "He has great tenacity. He's like a dog on a bone when he goes to get the puck."

Scott Arniel, Winnipeg's first-year coach, goes on and on when asked about Connor's skill. Arniel previously was a head coach in Columbus and an associate or assistant coach with the Jets, the New York Rangers and the Washington Capitals.

"He is a goal scorer," Arniel said. "He is not afraid to get inside and has great ability to find open space. I have coached some real good goal scorers over my years and he is in the top five in the way the puck comes off his stick. He is as fast as anybody.

"He has the demeanour where he wants to score a goal on every shift. He is in attack mode all of the time."

The Jets' start, of course, is unsustainable. But they have piled up 26 of a possible 28 points. Those will come in handy when they go on an inevitable skid. Two points count the same in November as they do in April.

"We are finding ways to get in games, to stay in games and get the outcome that we need," Arniel said. "You go into every game hoping and planning to win but it doesn't always work out. We are real happy and real excited about what's happened, but we still have 70-odd games or whatever to play."

The Jets are also battling history, not in a hopeless Maple Leafs kind of way, but there are skeptics. On a flight to Winnipeg this week, a fan was asked what she thought about the red-hot start.

Fewer than 13,000 spectators attended each of the Jets' home games this week in an arena that seats 15,004.

"We've seen all of this before," she mused. "Talk to me in April."

Connor understands.

“It’s not something that happens overnight,” he said. “It is something that we have worked on for years. That’s been the main focus: How can we get better as a group and improve. We know we have a championship team here.

“It’s not always a straight line to the top. You’ve got to learn, you’ve got to develop. You’re kind of seeing that.”

Jeff Baquiran has been a season-ticket holder in Winnipeg since 2011, when the Atlanta Thrashers relocated. With the exception of contests played without fans during the pandemic, he has attended 541 of 543 of Jets’ home games.

Even he has been taken aback by their performance this season.

“If you told me the Jets would go 13-1 over the first 14 games, I would have said, ‘I’d like to have whatever it is you are smoking,’” Baquiran said. “It’s a shock, but it’s a good shock.”

A senior laboratory technologist, he has a large collection of game-worn jerseys, bobbleheads and a room full of Jets’ knickknacks.

“I started off with one jersey that I bought on an impulse, one turned into 10, and 10 turned into 20. Now, if I were to count I must have 35 to 40 in my closet.”

His seat is in the last row of the arena, up by the organist. But he never sits. He stands for entire games.

“The cushion is still in mint condition,” he said.

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/11/08/stellar-record-but-jets-still-a-work-in-progress>

Stellar record, but Jets still a work-in-progress Coach Arniel unafraid to shake things up when club get sloppy

By: Mike McIntyre

It wasn’t something you would typically see from a coach in that particular situation. But Scott Arniel didn’t hesitate to break out the line blender Thursday night despite the fact the NHL’s No. 1 team was leading the Colorado Avalanche as the third period got underway.

Nikolaj Ehlers was moved to the top line. Leading scorer Kyle Connor went down to the second line. Mason Appleton was shuffled off the shutdown third line, swapping places with fourth-liner Alex Lafallo.

A bold move? Sure. Risky, even. But one that speaks volumes about the culture and the mindset around the now 13-1-0 Jets, who ultimately hung on for a 1-0 victory. The results are great, no doubt. But the process is pivotal, too.

“The biggest thing you gotta remember with 82 games is you’re going to win games, some you don’t deserve,” Arniel explained on Friday following a short practice at Canada Life Centre.

“The players, they know. I tell them that it’s coming. Sometimes it’s just to get a reset, sometimes it’s just to get a quick spark.”

Arniel, who couldn’t have scripted a better start to his second stint behind an NHL bench, said he’s learned from some great coaches over his career that you should never be afraid to try something that might improve your team. The safe play, the status quo if you will, isn’t always the smartest move.

Especially when he’s seeing uncharacteristic things from his club, which seemed to be hanging on for dear life for the final 40 minutes against Colorado.

“At the end of the day, it’s just kind of a feel of where we’re at,” Arniel said.

“I think there’s been games where maybe the same thing has happened and I let them play themselves through it. Sometimes it’s just getting a feel for: Is it gonna come back? Are they going to get that tonight? I may not have it tonight. Maybe just try something new.”

Winnipeg’s lines were back to their regularly scheduled programming during Friday’s skate as the team prepares to close out its homestand against the Dallas Stars Saturday afternoon. It would seem to be a sign of maturity and growth that his group wasn’t exactly doing a victory lap after its latest triumph, knowing they may have gotten a bit lucky.

“It’s still early in the season and you can’t be content, ever. You can never just rest on what you’ve done. You always have to push for more,” said centre Mark Scheifele.

“This group is a resilient group that wants more, that wants to push for more. That expects more out of ourselves. That’s what makes up good teams, is never being satisfied and continuing to work on things. Sixty minutes is a tough time to play a perfect game so there’s always things to work on and that’s what makes hockey so fun.”

Although the execution may have been sloppy at times, there’s no questioning the effort against Colorado. Arniel pointed to several little plays during the game that add up — Nino Niederreiter negating an icing with a burst of speed and Neal Pionk diving to poke away a loose puck near the Jets crease among them.

“To see all those things... The best part is those guys see it amongst each other. You hear it on the bench. You hear it in the room when guys do those things and that’s part of that growth that we’re getting,” he said.

It’s part of the “10 per cent more” mantra that has become a theme for the Jets this year, with the group vowing to dig deep and give a bit more after a disappointing end to last season.

“There was some desperation,” admitted Scheifele.

“We knew we weren’t playing our best. But when they would make a pass or they would give a pass to the slot or get opportunities, we had good sticks. Broke up some passes, broke up some chances that could have been tap-ins.”

Dallas (8-4-0) should present as one of the toughest tests to date. Goals could be at a premium, with the Stars surrendering just 28 in 12 games and the Jets beaten just 30 times over 14 contests. That includes back-to-back shutouts this week over Utah and Colorado.

The Jets focused on fine-tuning some aspects of their game they didn't like during Friday's skate, including cleaner breakouts from their own zone. Unlike injury-depleted Colorado, Dallas is at full strength and likely would make Winnipeg pay a steeper price for its hockey sins.

"They don't have a lot of highs and lows. They're an even-keeled team. Just about how they play, they defend, they have structure, when it comes to their breakouts, they're good at it," Arniel said of the Stars, who made it to the Western Conference Final last year and were a consensus preseason pick to win the Central Division this year.

"They're pretty predictable, but they're really good at it. They've been doing it as a group for a while. How they take away ice in the neutral zone. They have good speed on their counters through the neutral zone offensively. They haven't changed. For the last three years I've been here, they continue to do the right things all of the time."

Connor Hellebuyck, who has stopped all 56 combined shots he's faced in recording consecutive clean sheets for the first time in his NHL career, is expecting to be in net.

Winnipeg is just the second team in NHL history to start a year with 13 wins in 14 games, joining the 2007-08 Ottawa Senators. That club lost Game 15, meaning a victory over Dallas would make the Jets the first-ever 14-1-0 squad.

Their only blemish so far this year is a 6-4 loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs on Oct. 28 in a game where the first 40 minutes were rather ugly. The Jets responded in their next game by pummeling the Detroit Red Wings 6-2.

You get the sense they are viewing their lacklustre performance against Colorado in a similar vein.

"I think it's kind of the same feel," said Appleton. "There were things we want to fix and adjust and clean up (Friday) in practice and we want to just play a clean, fast game (Saturday), which we're going to do."

After facing the Stars, the Jets will play nine of their next 10 games on the road, with plenty of elite competition on the way, including the reigning Presidents Trophy winners (New York Rangers) and a home-and-home set with the Stanley Cup champion Florida Panthers.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/2024/11/08/lowry-a-team-canada-dark-horse>

**Lowry a Team Canada dark horse
Jets shutdown centre would make valuable contribution at 4 Nations Face-Off**

By: Ken Wiebe and Mike McIntyre

“I don’t know about that.”

Adam Lowry had just been informed that NHL insider Elliotte Friedman mentioned him as a dark-horse candidate to suit up for Team Canada at the 4 Nations Face-Off in February and the Winnipeg Jets captain wasn’t quite sure what to make of the suggestion.

For the sake of context, the conversation with Lowry took place prior to his red-hot start to the season, one that has seen the veteran centre collect 11 points (2G, 9A) in 14 games for the Jets, who lead the league with an outstanding 13-1-0 record heading into Saturday’s game with the Dallas Stars.

Lowry’s line with Mason Appleton and Nino Niederreiter has outscored opponents 10-1 at five-on-five this season, while Lowry has been shining on the penalty kill, is a force in the faceoff circle and plays a physical style that brings teammates into the battle.

If you’re looking to protect a lead, Lowry is someone a coach can feel comfortable tapping on the shoulder.

“I’ll be honest, it’s not something I’ve given much thought to,” said Lowry. “Canada has so many world-class players. Obviously, it would be an incredible honour to just be included in the thought of potential selection.

“Do I think that’s probable? Probably not. It’s awesome to have best-on-best hockey. We haven’t seen the opportunity to have (Nathan) MacKinnon and (Sidney) Crosby play together in a meaningful lead up to the Olympics. To see the best players on display with their skill, it’s going to be huge for the game and it will be great to watch.”

Although the tournament is three months away, the 23-man rosters are due on Dec. 1, which means players are being scouted heavily and short lists are being made by the management teams for Canada, the United States, Sweden and Finland.

The Jets figure to be well represented, with Josh Morrissey a lock to suit up for Canada — only Cale Makar has more points among defencemen this year — and goalie Connor Hellebuyck and left-winger Kyle Connor virtual shoo-ins to represent the United States.

Given the start Mark Scheifele is having with 18 points (7G, 11A) in 14 games, he’s a good bet to join Morrissey on Team Canada. Scheifele suited up for Team North America at the 2016 World Cup of Hockey with guys such as MacKinnon and Connor McDavid, who figure to play a pivotal role for Canada as best-on-best competition returns.

“I think subconsciously, yeah it is (on your mind),” said Scheifele. “Everyone wants to see best on best. (The World Cup) was one of the most fun (times) I ever had playing hockey. Obviously I played with some pretty fun players and we succeeded. It was a great group to be a part of. I still think back to that tournament and how much fun we had.

“Obviously, it’s a goal of mine to make Canada, but like I said before it’s focusing on the Winnipeg Jets and doing what I can for this group.”

Jets head coach Scott Arniel believes Scheifele’s commitment to playing the right way without the puck should only bolster his chances to wear the Maple Leaf.

“One hundred percent. I really do. I know that with Canada, there’s a lot of centremen that they’re talking about,” said Arniel. “Obviously, when you get on those teams, minutes change. Everybody wants a chance to go, so they’ll play anywhere. They’ll play with anybody. Whatever the role is handed to them.”

Scheifele’s hockey sense, speed and ability to play a puck possession game also work in his favour. He’s got the speed and smarts to skate on a line with MacKinnon and/or McDavid and can shift over to play the wing if necessary.

Connor has been one of the most dangerous snipers in the NHL since becoming a regular and he figures to play a prominent role with the U.S. team, someone who could easily ride shotgun with Auston Matthews of the Toronto Maple Leafs or Jack Eichel of the Golden Knights.

Hellebuyck looks poised to be in the conversation to win a third Vezina Trophy and is the front-runner to be the starter for Team USA, who could also have Jake Oettinger of the Dallas Stars, Jeremy Swayman of the Boston Bruins and Thatcher Demko of the Vancouver Canucks in the mix, provided his health continues to improve.

A sleeper for the U.S. team could be Jets blue-liner Dylan Samberg, who has flourished in a second pairing role with Neal Pionk this season.

Samberg has played for his country in two world junior hockey championships and also at the 2023 world men’s hockey championship. A two-time NCAA Frozen Four champion, Samberg could be asked to play a shutdown role or serve as the seventh D-man, since he’s likely to be under consideration for the Olympic team down the road.

“Obviously that would be pretty cool. But so far, I’m just focusing on this season,” said Samberg. “You never know what they’re going to want or need at the time or what’s going to happen. I’m just going to keep worrying about my game and if it happens, it happens. That’s great and if not, it’s okay.”

By producing 13 points (3G, 10A) in 14 games and improving his defensive zone play, Pionk has probably worked his way onto the radar as well — though it’s too early to tell whether he or Samberg will be in the mix when the rosters are unveiled.

What Arniel knows for sure is that whoever has an opportunity to showcase their talents in the tournament in February should be coming home with some important experience to share with their teammates during the stretch run and into the Stanley Cup playoffs.

“That’s playoff hockey in February, that’s playing at an elite level against elite skill,” said Arniel. “When you have top players like that and have that desire to win, that’s what you want within your group and the more that have it, the better it is.”

With that in mind, here are our roster projections for Team Canada with just under three weeks left to go in the evaluation process:

Ken Wiebe's Team Canada:

FORWARDS:

Sidney Crosby-Nathan MacKinnon-Sam Reinhart
Zach Hyman-Mark Scheifele-Connor McDavid
Brad Marchand-Brayden Point-Mark Stone
Brandon Hagel-Connor Bedard-Mitch Marner
Alexis Lafreniere

DEFENCE:

Devon Toews-Cale Makar
Josh Morrissey-Alex Pietrangelo
Shea Theodore-Brandon Montour
Evan Bouchard

GOALIES:

Adin Hill
Jordan Binnington
Stuart Skinner

THE SKINNY: There are tough decisions coming at each of the position groups, leading with between the pipes, since there is no clear-cut starter.

Hill and Binnington have Stanley Cups on their resumes, while Skinner dealt with some adversity last spring but regrouped to take his team to Game 7 before losing to the Florida Panthers.

On the back end, Drew Doughty could force himself into the mix if he's healthy enough to play. Up front, some quality veterans could be left off the roster, with an eye on the Olympics and getting younger/faster.

Lowry is someone who merits consideration, but I've gone with Alexis Lafreniere for the 13th forward spot. Put Carolina Hurricanes forward and Winnipegger Seth Jarvis in the sleeper category, as he plays a responsible two-way game and is averaging nearly a point per game. Same goes for Tampa Lightning centre Anthony Cirelli, who is a favourite of head coach Jon Cooper.

Mike McIntyre's Team Canada:

FORWARDS:

Zach Hyman-Connor McDavid-Sam Reinhart
Sidney Crosby-Nathan MacKinnon-Mark Stone
Brad Marchand-Bryaden Point-Mitch Marner
Alexis Lafreniere-Nick Suzuki-Mark Scheifele
Connor Bedard

DEFENCE:

Josh Morrissey-Cale Makar
Shea Theodore-Alex Pietrangelo
Devon Toews-Aaron Ekblad

Morgan Rielly

GOALIES:

Jordan Binnington

Adin Hill

Sam Montembault

THE SKINNY: I don't envy the decision makers, especially when it comes to the forwards and defencemen here. Just looking at who I haven't included it dawned on me that those skaters would make a heck of a "B Team." Heck, maybe even a "C Team."

The likes of Brandon Hagel, Steven Stamkos, Mathew Barzal, John Tavares, Wyatt Johnston, Robert Thomas, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Bo Horvat, Jonathan Marchessault, Ryan O'Reilly, Carter Verhaeghe, Quinton Byfield, Jordan Kyrou, Jarvis, Cirelli and Lowry up front. The likes of Evan Bouchard, MacKenzie Weegar, Brandon Montour, Owen Power, Noah Dobson, Vince Dunn, Thomas Chabot, Dougie Hamilton, Travis Sanheim and Doughty on the back-end.

It's not nearly as deep in goal, where I think Binnington is the best of a fairly average bunch, Hill goes because of his Stanley Cup pedigree and Montembault is the young player who is brought along for experience and seasoning. Stuart Skinner, Logan Thompson, Connor Ingram, Cam Talbot, Darcy Kuemper and even Marc-Andre Fleury could all get consideration, too.

Fun fact: Jets backup goaltender Eric Comrie currently has the best save percentage this year of all Canadian netminders. However it shakes out, I'm excited to see what the final product looks like on the ice.

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-mark-scheifele-keeping-the-faith-on-nhl-4-nations-face-off-roster-spot>

Jets' Mark Scheifele keeping the faith on NHL 4 Nations Face-Off roster spot

By Scott Billeck

Mark Scheifele is putting his Team Canada hopes for the NHL 4 Nations Face-Off next year in God's hands.

The Winnipeg Jets centre, whose only experience playing in a best-on-best tournament came back at the 2016 World Cup of Hockey, is in the running for one of those coveted roster spots.

"Obviously, it's a goal of mine to make Canada," Scheifele said. "But like I said before, it's focusing on the Winnipeg Jets and doing what I can for this group.

"And whatever happens, put that in God's hands."

Don Sweeney's, too.

The Boston Bruins general manager also serves in the same role with Team Canada and has plenty of roster decisions to make ahead of the early December deadline.

"I think subconsciously it is," Scheifele said, asked if it's on his mind. "First and foremost, you want to play good for your team. That's all you can do is control what you can control. Focus on your team, playing the best for your team, and whatever happens, happens."

Scheifele has held up his end of the bargain, helping the Jets to a 13-1-0 start, the second-best in NHL history.

He is second on the Jets in scoring, with 18 points (seven goals, 11 assists), just one behind team leader Kyle Connor, and on pace to hit the 100-point mark for the first time in his career.

The 31-year-old is averaging just over 20 minutes of ice time and is winning 51% of his faceoffs through 14 games.

"Last time we did this was the World Cup back when we had Team North America," Scheifele said. "Obviously, that was a blast. I think everyone wants to see best-on-best. It's a great event. It's great to get that back into the mix."

Jets head coach Scott Arniel thinks Scheifele has the skill set to help Canada reign supreme.

"One hundred percent," Arniel said. "I really do. I know that with Canada, there's a lot of centremen that they're talking about. I look back at a few years ago when he went to the world championship, he went over there as a third or fourth centreman and he ended up playing and working his way up to the top. He has experience.

"With his skillset, I know that he's being watched and being watched hard. With Scheif, he's taking pride, not just in these first 14 games (this season) with the buy-in to how we play without the puck and what he does when he doesn't have it, that's also part of what whoever is watching him, they're watching him on a nightly basis. Faceoffs or whatever that role becomes, penalty killing, power play, second power play. When you get on those teams, minutes change. So it's an opportunity for him to continue to showcase his skillset."

Given Canada's immense depth down the middle, Scheifele may have to move out to the wing to crack the roster.

Not a problem, Arniel figures.

"One thing that when you go into these situations, everybody wants a chance to go, so they'll play anywhere," he said. "They'll play with anybody. Whatever the role is handed to them, just the chance to play, for him to represent Canada or (for others), the U.S. To have that honour, guys will do anything and that just comes with the professionals that they are."

Arniel's Jets, too, stand to benefit from the February tournament.

Sure, it's created a bit of a scheduling crunch, and he needs to manage his No. 1 netminder, Connor Hellebuyck, but there are tangible benefits to featuring on that stage mid-season.

"That's playoff hockey in February, that's playing at an elite level against elite skill," Arniel said. "Those are experiences that we're hoping they come back with and pass on to their linemates, teammates and D partners when they're in those situations for the rest of the year from February and on.

“They’ve been in it before at that level, and they can continue to be good at it, continue to show others how they do it and when you have top players like that and having that desire to win, that’s what you want within your group and the more that have it, the better it is.”

Meanwhile, Scheifele joked Friday that it would be nice if Hellebuyck and Kyle Connor, two locks to make the American team, had different passports.

“That’s for sure. That is definitely for sure,” he said. “It is what it is. They’re fantastic players. I obviously wish they had different passports, but that’s just the way she goes.”

Canada has already named six players to its lineup for the inaugural tournament. That list includes Sidney Crosby, Nathan MacKinnon, Cale Makar, Brad Marchand, Brayden Point and captain Connor McDavid.

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5904097/2024/11/08/connor-hellebuyck-revenge-winnipeg-historic-start-takeaways/>

Connor Hellebuyck steals ‘revenge game,’ Winnipeg continues historic start: 3 takeaways

By Murat Ates

WINNIPEG — The Winnipeg Jets went to great lengths to downplay the notion of Thursday’s rematch with Colorado as a matter of playoff revenge.

Neal Pionk, Adam Lowry, and Scott Arniel were all given tons of opportunities to say, “Yes, we circled this one on the calendar. We’re still mad about the playoffs and want to prove we’re better than them.” All three Jets deflected reporters’ questions.

“It’s not a revenge game,” Lowry said. “We’ve had to move past that.”

“Last season’s over,” Pionk said. “We approach today as today.”

“We’ve talked enough about what happened last spring,” Arniel said. “This is all about what happens tonight.”

And then Winnipeg won its league-leading 13th game of the season against the team that dominated it in the playoffs. Gabriel Vilardi scored the only goal 66 seconds into the game and Winnipeg looked good early; by the third period, the Jets were in survival mode. Colorado outshot Winnipeg 17-4 in the third period, chaining dangerous shifts together that showed its all-too-familiar ability to shoot, recover the puck, and then open up a seam for a Grade-A scoring chance.

Connor Hellebuyck found answers for everything, stopping all 35 shots he faced. It was Hellebuyck’s second straight shutout and the 40th of his career.

“Bucky won that game for us. It’s that simple,” Vilardi said after the Jets’ 1-0 win.

What did we learn about the Jets during Winnipeg's win? What will Arniel want to improve heading into Saturday's game against Dallas — the team who beat Colorado after Colorado steamrolled Winnipeg?

The Jets may not say that Thursday's game was an effort of retribution, but one thing they haven't been shy about naming is their ambition.

"We know we have a championship team in this group," Kyle Connor said Tuesday. "It's not always a straight line to the top. You've got to learn, you've got to develop. You're seeing that here."

Anyone familiar with Jets history knows the cautionary tales. Winnipeg's hot starts were derailed in 2018-19, 2022-23 and again in 2023-24. In all three seasons, Winnipeg led the Western Conference before the new year, while last season's Jets led the league in January. In all three seasons, Winnipeg was outplayed and eliminated in the first round of the playoffs.

Are the 13-1-0 Jets for real? Can we believe in them? These questions might sound absurd to ask about a 13-1-0 team, but Jets fans have had their expectations crushed before.

Here are the answers we found in Winnipeg's 1-0 win over Colorado on Thursday.

Connor Hellebuyck remains great, exorcises playoff demons

If you go back and watch the tape of Colorado's five-game rout of Winnipeg last April, you might find it tough to pin all 24 goals on the Jets goaltender. My guess is that an emotionless second viewing would exonerate Hellebuyck from the avalanche of criticism that came his way at the time.

Wherever you stand on his playoff performance, the loss still stung Hellebuyck — and his 35-save shutout shone brighter because of it.

If you're looking at the Jets' season with the mind to find flaws, you can find them. They've mostly played middling teams, putting together a 3-1 record against clubs who made the 2023-24 playoffs. They've scored a bunch of goals in six-on-five situations and won all three of their overtime games. Toronto dominated them in their first true test, while Colorado did the same for stretches of Thursday's Jets win.

But here's the thing. Goaltenders are allowed to steal games. And, if you're looking at the Jets roster with the mind to guess how good their goaltending is going to be, the answer is still "phenomenal."

"I thought the guys played really hard in front of me," Hellebuyck said. "They let me see pucks, cleared rebounds, scored. We really committed to our game in our defensive zone. It might not have been pretty, but that's why every game is a team effort."

It wasn't pretty. Getting outshot 17-4 in a period and relying on Hellebuyck's highlight reel isn't sustainable.

But that's not the story of the season so far. Winnipeg has the sixth-highest percentage of shots taken at five-on-five while the score is tied, indicating the Jets are not riding goaltending by itself. Winnipeg has led a lot, so it's been made to absorb some desperate pushes by other teams, and Winnipeg's goalies have been there every step of the way.

Scott Arniel isn't afraid to run Ehlers-Scheifele-Vilardi

Mark Scheifele set up the game's only goal with a perfect pass to Vilardi. He also made a series of hard plays, including a first-period forecheck that bodied Cale Makar into giving up the puck. Connor took three shots and made a number of dangerous plays in the offensive zone. But Colorado dominated the third period. And, on the shift where Colorado registered its seventh and eighth shots, Connor and Scheifele kept giving the Avalanche the puck.

First, it was Connor who stole it from defenceman Sam Malinski, only to give it right back. Scheifele stole it again just two seconds later but promptly gave it away, leading to a shot by Logan O'Connor.

"There was a lot of that," Arniel said. "We had the puck and didn't make the right decision with it. And it was a lot of areas on the ice."

So Arniel stepped in. Nikolaj Ehlers was promoted to the top line, while Connor dropped down to play with Cole Perfetti and Vladislav Namestnikov. Suddenly, Winnipeg had life: Namestnikov stole a puck, creating a long two-on-one chance with Connor. Scheifele found Mason Appleton coming off the bench, who made a stunning deke before setting Ehlers up with a perfect cross-crease pass.

My point isn't to criticize a top line that's scored a lot of goals lately, including at five-on-five where it's sometimes struggled. It's to praise the head coach for recognizing Scheifele's trio had lost its way for a moment, doing something about it, and candidly acknowledging the challenge in his postgame comments.

I've been impressed by Arniel's commitment to being honest about the process — which has often been great — and I think it bodes well for the sustainability of Winnipeg's success. Connor in particular has made a lot of good defensive plays even on nights when the line has struggled. He and Scheifele will work magic again. In the meantime, Arniel has established early in his tenure that Winnipeg has other options and will use them when he decides the time is right.

These kinds of starts do not guarantee playoff success

Winnipeg is on the cusp of history. The Jets have already become one of two teams in NHL history to win 13 of their first 14 games. If they beat Dallas on Saturday, they'll be the only team to start a season with wins in 14 of its first 15 games.

So what happened to the 2007-08 Ottawa Senators, who won 13 of their first 14 games but then lost to Washington in Game 15?

Everything happened, that's what.

The first sign that something was wrong was the seven-game losing streak in November and December, but the Senators bounced back. They'd only just played in the 2007 Stanley Cup Final and were still led by Daniel Alfredsson, Dany Heatley and Jason Spezza. All three players were named to the 2008 All-Star game, along with head coach John Paddock, recognizing their continued success.

But Heatley got hurt, goaltender Ray Emery got fined for missing a practice in New York City, and Ottawa fell apart.

The Senators played poorly in January and February and fired Paddock a month after his All-Star appearance. Despite adding playoff experience in Cory Stillman and Mike Commodore at the trade deadline, Ottawa struggled so badly down the stretch that it needed 3 points from its final three games to qualify for the playoffs — and lost the first of those three games.

The Senators ultimately qualified for the playoffs but lost to Sidney Crosby's up-and-coming Penguins in four straight games.

What does it all mean?

Winnipeg is full value for its 13-1-0 start. The Jets have dominated games, eked them out by way of power-play success, won via overtime and beat Colorado with spectacular goaltending.

This is still the ultimate “don't count your chickens before they hatch” scenario for a team that's struggled in the second half of consecutive seasons. Arniel has been focused on Winnipeg's process as opposed to its results through 14 games and he's been right to do so. The Jets could play .500 hockey from here through the postseason and still clinch a playoff spot. They'll probably be much better than that — and it's not fair to criticize them for not having won games that have yet to be played.

But Dallas brings a new level of challenge, as will back-to-back games against Florida next week. We know that these Jets have been historically successful; we're still learning what kind of team the Jets can be against the NHL's elite.

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5904864/2024/11/09/maple-leafs-trade-kaprizov-contract-daly-bettman/>

Will Leafs trade for 3C? Kaprizov contract over/under? Does Daly succeed Bettman? Ask CJ

By Chris Johnston

The trade winds started blowing earlier than usual during this 2024-25 NHL season, and they should only pick up speed with general managers set to gather for meetings early next week in Toronto.

We recently put out the call for mailbag questions, and unsurprisingly many of you readers were wondering about players who could be on the move. There were also queries about collective bargaining talks, load management, Kirill Kaprizov's next contract and dueling milestone chases, among other topics.

As always, thank you for taking the time to read, engage and respond.

Let's go!

If you were a 13-1 small-market team with better but not yet perfect attendance, how would you handle in-season trades? Winnipeg is a good team but could use another top-six center and some size on the back end. Does it benefit TNSE to make a splash this winter? — Scott B.

Given all of the circumstances you've laid out here, I would expect the Jets to go all in on their group this season. There are a number of people around the league who view them as a true contender. And to be fair to Jets ownership and management, they've never previously shied

away from spending like bigger-market teams or parting with draft capital to bring in reinforcements at the trade deadline. While the attendance issues are an ongoing challenge and concern in Winnipeg, my impression is that ownership remains committed to building up its corporate support base and ultimately selling more season-ticket packages. Icing a championship-caliber team certainly won't hurt those efforts.

Daily Faceoff

<https://www.dailyfaceoff.com/news/where-did-the-winnipeg-jets-offense-come-from-this-season>

Where did the Winnipeg Jets' offense come from this season?

By Tyler Kuehl

The incredible start for the Winnipeg Jets continues.

Following a 1-0 win over the Colorado Avalanche, the team that knocked them out of last year's Stanley Cup Playoffs, the Jets became just the second team in NHL history to started 13-1. There is no question it has been an impressive start. Vezina Trophy winner Connor Hellebuyck is playing well and, surprisingly enough, Winnipeg's offense is one of the best in the league.

Through 14 games, the Jets have scored 63 goals as a team, far beyond the rest of the NHL. Kyle Connor is off to a terrific start with 19 points, while Mark Scheifele and Nikolaj Ehlers are also putting up big number with 18 and 17 points respectively.

On Friday's edition of Daily Faceoff LIVE, Frank Seravalli and Tyler Yaremchuk explain what has been so impressive about the Jets through the first month of the season.

Frank Seravalli: Where the heck did this offense come from? This is mostly the same collection of players that was there last year. I'm looking at this [forward group], was there even one player that wasn't there last year? They didn't have this kind of success last year, offensively, their power play really struggled. This is a massive change. So, either this is a team that's on an incredible heater that will regress, they've got 20 more goals than the average NHL team so far this year...We've only played 13-14 games, that's bananas.

They don't have one of the league leaders in goals, they don't have one of the league leaders in points. They've got 10 guys that have already hit double digits in points. It's insane to see what this team offensively has done. Look, will there be some kind of regression? Yes, absolutely. We know there will be, but right now I have the Jets in my Inner Circle.

Tyler Yaremchuk: They could have as much as \$8.5 million in cap space at the trade deadline...With that cap space you can go and have the luxury of adding guys without having to add a third-party broker...they can still do some damage.

Frank: I think they're really well-prepared, no matter which way they want to play it. I don't know how much tinkering you want to do right now...I think sometimes teams get twisted in terms of having to absolutely feel like they have to go out and do something, I don't know how much it really increases your chances to win.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/video/domino-s-that-s-hockey-post-2-post-who-starts-for-usa%7E3025523>

Domino's That's Hockey: Post 2 Post - Who starts for USA? (VIDEO)

Connor Hellebuyck and Jake Oettinger will square off on Saturday when the Jets host the Stars. With both goalies being frontrunners to man the net for the Americans in the coming years, Jamie McLennan takes a closer look at who might be the number one for the USA in Post 2 Post.

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/sc-timeline-how-the-jets-stars-paved-the-way-for-their-incredible-start~3025500>

SC Timeline: How the Jets' stars paved the way for their incredible start (VIDEO)

The Winnipeg Jets have gotten off to an insane 13-1-0 start and they are on the cusp of NHL history Saturday with their game against the Dallas Stars. TSN takes a look back at the stars on the Jets and how they paved the way for their incredible start.

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/the-talking-point-what-s-it-like-coaching-a-team-on-a-heater~3025525>

The Talking Point: What's it like coaching a team on a heater? (VIDEO)

TSN Hockey analyst Bruce Boudreau coached through some hot streaks during his NHL career behind the bench but what is it actually like guiding a team that seemingly can't lose? Boudreau explains what might be going on inside the Jets' room in The Talking Point.

Sports Illustrated

<https://www.si.com/onsi/breakaway/news-feed-page/winnipeg-jets-continue-make-nhl-history-13-wins>

Jets Have Put NHL on Notice

By Jacob Punturi

The Winnipeg Jets are playing the best hockey in the NHL to start the season. With an 11-1 record through their first 12 games, the team sits atop the league standings and has come in an number one in the first two Breakaway onSI power rankings.

Following a disappointing first-round loss in the postseason, the Jets entered the 2024-2025 campaign as an afterthought. They weren't very active in the offseason either, leading many to believe the team might take a step back. With this amazing start through the first month, however, it has the NHL on notice.

League insider and The Athletic writer Pierre LeBrun recently stopped by TSN's SC with Jay Onrait to discuss all of the latest in the NHL. When the Jets came up, LeBrun quoted an anonymous rival general manager to illustrate a point: Winnipeg is a legitimate Stanley Cup contender this season.

"You know, they are as legit as they get." the anonymous rival GM said. "Their lineup is layered in a way that they can sustain injuries to key players more than most teams in the cap system.

To LeBrun, it makes complete sense and coincides with the growing belief in the Jets around the league. One of the reasons he points out is that their salary cap management has been elite, thanks to the work of general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff. Despite Winnipeg being one of the least desired locations in the NHL, they've retained many top-tier players at impressive rates.

"Some of the contracts Cheveldayoff has signed on this team," LeBrun said. "Kyle Connor at \$7.1 million, are you kidding me?"

It's all led to the NHL taking notice and recognizing that the Jets are a threat. Now, it's on Winnipeg to maintain this strong start and prove it once the postseason comes around. They have the roster already to be a championship team in 2025, and the rest of the NHL finally agrees.