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Looking for a “W” in Big D Road-weary Jets hope to wrap up trip with win over Stars

By: Mike McIntyre

DALLAS — The Winnipeg Jets have finally hit the end of the long road here in Dallas. Now the question is whether the hockey club has any fuel left in the tank?

Stops in Pittsburgh, Nashville, St. Paul, Los Angeles and Las Vegas have produced a 2-3-0 record so far. If the Jets are to finish this 10-day trek at .500, they'll need to find a way to beat a tough Stars team on Sunday afternoon.

“This has been a grind. It really has,” said head coach Scott Arniel. “We’ve got one more to go here. We’d all love to go home 3-3.”

One potentially good bit of news emerged during Saturday’s optional practice at American Airlines Center — forward Nikolaj Ehlers, who left Friday’s 4-3 loss to the Golden Knights with a lower-body injury, has not entirely been ruled out.

“We’ll see how he is tomorrow, see if he’s any better. Get some treatment, get some rest today. And then look at it tomorrow and see where we’re at,” said Arniel.

“He’s the type of guy that wants to play. It doesn’t help that it’s a 3:30 game (with no morning skate).”

Ehlers was one of a handful of players who didn’t hit the ice, along with Mark Scheifele (who is also battling an undisclosed ailment), Vlad Namestnikov (he also missed Thursday’s skate in Vegas for maintenance) and defenceman Dylan DeMelo.

Winnipeg still has the best record in the NHL at 18-6-0, although they are just 3-5-0 in the last eight games overall as tough travel, tough opponents and some tough breaks on the injury front all take a toll.

Shutdown defenceman Dylan Samberg suffered a broken foot a week ago against the Predators and is sidelined indefinitely, and the Jets certainly missed Ehlers’ presence for the second half of their game against the Golden Knights, especially late as they pushed for the equalizer with a 6-on-4 advantage in the final minute.

“He has a skill-set that opposition coaches kind of circle. His skill and his speed and his ability to create,” Arniel said of Ehlers, who is third on the team in scoring with 25 points (9G, 16A) in 24 games.

“It’s a hole when he’s not there.”

Alex Iafallo jumped up from the fourth line to take Ehlers’ spot beside Namestnikov and Cole Perfetti, who snapped an 11-game scoring slump with two goals. That trio would likely remain

intact if Ehlers can't go, and David Gustafsson — a healthy scratch for 23 of 24 games — would come into the lineup to fill Lafallo's role.

"I was real proud of Cole last night. He's been struggling," said Arniel.

"The biggest thing is where he went and scored that first goal. It was to the net-front against a team that's real hard. Vegas doesn't let you get inside, and he went right in there and got that first one. I liked the way he competed on pucks. That line has to do that. If Al's in there tomorrow, we'll see how it goes without Fly (Ehlers)."

Lafallo had a great net-front drive on Perfetti's second goal and will look to do more of the same if required.

"It's tough when a guy goes down like Fly in the second, obviously we had to just pick up from there and try to get as many chances as we could," he said.

"It was great for him to get those two goals. Now he's just got to remember to not grip his stick too hard. Just play the right way and it will eventually go in, and that's what he did yesterday. He had a great game."

Hellebuyck will start in goal for the Jets after getting a rest against the Golden Knights.

Arniel wasn't about to tip his hand as to other potential lineup decisions. He opted to scratch third-pairing defencemen Ville Heinola and Colin Miller against Vegas in favour of Dylan Coghlan (making his Jets debut after 23 straight scratches) and Logan Stanley (coming off the injured list).

"I felt good. First couple shifts I got into it early with a little turnover and then getting my stick on a puck that probably was going to go into the net," said Coghlan, who still has several friends on the Golden Knights after playing his first two NHL seasons (2020-21, 2021-22) there.

The undrafted 26-year-old says he prides himself on being a good teammate and understood why it was tough to crack an otherwise healthy Jets lineup that was flying so high.

"I feel like I've done a pretty good job trying to stay mentally prepared and ready. Through video and stuff, just making sure those little things I'm not losing sight of," said Coghlan.

"It is hard, but I've done it in the past so it's not something I'm new to. Obviously everybody wants to play, but happy for all the guys and I don't think anybody expected us to start 15-1. I'm not one to complain when guys are playing well and the team's doing so well. That's kind of my mindset."

Although they suffered a second straight loss, Arniel was much more pleased with the effort against Vegas than the one on Wednesday night in Los Angeles, where the Jets mustered just 14 shots in a lacklustre 4-1 setback.

"I liked a lot of what we did. There were a lot of good things. We stayed in it," said Arniel. "Now Dallas, a different team, a different look."

This is the second meeting of the year between the Jets and Stars, with Winnipeg taking the first by a 4-1 score back on Nov. 9 at Canada Life Centre.

“To me this is the second-best team in the Western Conference,” Arniel said of Dallas, which is coming off a 5-3 victory over Colorado on Friday. “These guys are real good and they’re probably going to be real angry after our game that we had in Winnipeg. We’re going to have make sure we have all our energy, all our right mindset.”

lafallo doesn’t believe that will be a problem, even if fatigue is a real factor during a schedule such as this.

“We definitely have to have a good game and try to get a win out of this,” he said. “Our expectations are high, so we’ve got to keep pushing to get to that next level. Obviously we had a good start to the season but this long road trip, we’ve got to come together and finish it with a good end. The boys are going to be ready to do whatever it takes.”

Sports Illustrated

<https://www.nhl.com/news/winnipeg-jets-vegas-golden-knights-game-recap-november-29>

After Hot Start, Jets Coming Down To Earth The Winnipeg Jets are returning to earth after having the best start in the NHL.

By Jacob Punturi

The Winnipeg Jets stormed out of the gate to begin the 2024-2025 NHL season, posting a 15-1 record through their first 16 games. They became the first team in NHL history to win 15 of their first 16 games and they’ve been on top of the NHL standings through the first two months of the season.

With the quarter mark come and gone, the Jets are 18-6. They are still at the top of the league standings, but while they appeared invincible to begin the year, they have suddenly and steeply fallen back down to earth.

Over their last 10 games, the Jets are an even 5-5. In a vacuum, there isn’t anything wrong with this stretch. But for the Jets, it could be showcasing a more accurate version of who this team really is. Are they a playoff team and contender in the Western Conference? Of course they are. But are they the biggest threat in the West, like their record indicates? Absolutely not.

Instead, the Jets are a strong team that still has everything to prove. This fall back down to normalcy isn’t a death sentence for their season, but it is a wake-up call. A wake-up call that relying so heavily on their star goaltender and inflated shooting percentages doesn’t guarantee you a season of winning.

And when their Vezina Trophy winner Connor Hellebuyck couldn’t down the fort or back-up Eric Comrie is between the pipes, the Jets are realizing how exposed they are. In their last five losses, they’ve surrendered at least four goals including a 5-0 stinker against the Florida Panthers.

Thankfully, the Jets still have the roster and coaching to establish a consistent and reliable structure to win games. Their forward group is loaded with talent, led by Mark Scheifele, Nikolaj Ehlers, and Kyle Connor all averaging a point-per-game or higher. Their defense is anchored by

one of the most dependable blue liners in Josh Morrissey, and Hellebuyck is a perennial Vezina candidate.

The challenge now is for the team to find consistency as they come back down to earth. The talent is still there throughout the roster and they have a quality head coach, but will they be able to stay relevant as they continue to cool off?