

## **Winnipeg Free Press**

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/12/11/jets-top-line-finding-chemistry>

### ***Jets top line finding chemistry Vilardi, Scheifele and Connor meeting expectations with dominant play***

By: Ken Wiebe

Outings like this one are part of the reason Rick Bowness put this trio together in the first place.

As the Winnipeg Jets delivered one of the most impressive bounce back performances of the entire season in Tuesday's 8-1 blowout win over the Boston Bruins, the top line of Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Gabe Vilardi took centre stage.

By the time the final buzzer had sounded, the line had scored three times at five-on-five and were involved in one of the three power-play markers that beat beleaguered Bruins netminder Jeremy Swayman.

Seven different Jets lit the lamp in this one, with Scheifele being the only player to score twice — moving him into a tie with Connor for the team lead in goals.

"Usually when they play like that, it leads to a win," said Jets captain Adam Lowry. "They came up huge for us throughout the game, dominant shifts, some huge goals at critical times to get us the lead and things like that.

"So, their line, they've had a great year so far, and it kind of starts with Mark driving it down the middle. So in order for us to be successful, he started that, that's the line that we look to and that was a big performance."

Was it ever.

It came on the heels of a tough third period for that line in Sunday's 4-1 loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets — when turnovers in the defensive zone by Connor and another just inside the offensive blue line by Scheifele — led directly to goals that snapped a 1-1 tie.

Almost since Scheifele and Connor were put together on a full-time basis, the debate about keeping them together has centred around whether or not that can produce more than they give up defensively.

Scheifele and Connor have stepped up their defensive efforts over the past several seasons and that's evident in the results this season.

With three goals at five-on-five on Tuesday and none against, the ledger now reads 21 goals for and 17 goals against — not an overpowering stat line, but a more impressive one when you consider it once read two goals for and nine goals against (minus-7) in those circumstances.

Scheifele and Connor have a long history of playing together and their offensive chemistry is undeniable.

There's almost a sixth sense of knowing where the other person is going to be out there and because they play a direct game, the scoring chances they create are often of the high-danger variety — even if the volume isn't always excessive.

Some looked at last season's results and were quick to dismiss Vilardi as the type of player who helps turn the line into a net-positive.

The forward, who came over in the blockbuster deal with the Los Angeles Kings, only played 17 games with both Scheifele and Connor last season, mostly due to injuries that had Vilardi and Connor on the shelf for extended periods of time.

"What you're seeing now is what we hoped they would get to. The injuries killed it last year," Bowness said during a recent conversation. "You had the vision that this line should be a good line. I know some analytics last year didn't work in their favour, but you had to believe that the combination of those three guys should work and it's working this year and I love that.

"If they stay healthy, all three of them should have great years."

The traditional counting stats back that up, with Connor and Scheifele tied for the team lead in goals (16) and sitting one-two in points — with 36 and 34 respectively.

Vilardi is third in goals (12) and sixth in points (22) while appearing in all 30 games so far.

There are still times when the line can give up too many scoring chances on extended shifts in the defensive zone, but progress is being made on that front as well.

"You can see him as a person, getting comfortable with his teammates and being himself and that translates to his game and just being comfortable with what he is and what he brings to the table," said Connor. "He's a hound on that puck. We haven't spent a ton of time together as a line and it's been really nice to see what everybody looks like when we're on. When we're off, we're trying to help each other out and pull each other together to bring the most out of each other."

Vilardi admits there was a bit of a feeling-out process that was hindered by the fact he hurt his knee three games into his Jets' tenure.

"Those two have played together. For me, it was kind of new and I wasn't used to playing top-six minutes as much in LA," said Vilardi. "It was a big change. Then we all had our injuries. It takes time to build chemistry, things just don't happen automatically."

So, why has Vilardi fit so well this season?

"He gets to the net. He gets himself into the corners, he wins battles. Somebody has to stay close to him when he's around the front of the net," said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. "He does a good job of helping out on faceoffs, getting into the corners, (and with) puck possession. Using his size and his hands."

Going into the season, Vilardi made a point of saying that one of his goals for this season was to score a bit more from distance and his marker on Tuesday was a prime example of that.

Taking a pass from Connor at the offensive blue line, Vilardi showed great patience as Connor and Scheifele drove the net on the odd-man rush and he eventually ripped the puck home to make it 5-1.

Vilardi's career high for goals is 23 (in 63 games with the Kings in 2022-23) and he's well on his way to chasing 30.

"If you play with those guys, it's a great opportunity to get more space because they bring guys into them and they're so smart at reading the game," said Vilardi. "They'll wait that extra second, so that way you get the extra second when you receive the puck."

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/2024/12/11/stanley-questions-frederics-choice-of-dance-partners>

***Stanley questions Frederic's choice of dance partners  
'I was standing right there,' towering D-man says after Bruins tough guy drops Gustafsson***

By: Ken Wiebe

Logan Stanley would have gladly accepted an earlier invitation, had one been offered.

On a day Winnipeg Jets head coach Scott Arniel confirmed David Gustafsson was in concussion protocol after taking a couple of big right hands from Boston Bruins forward Trent Frederic, Stanley still wasn't happy about what transpired in the third period of Tuesday's 8-1 victory.

Eight seconds after Alex Lafallo had given the Jets a 6-1 lead, Frederic cross-checked Gustafsson on multiple occasions after the faceoff at centre ice and eventually dropped the gloves with him.

Frederic, with 38 NHL tilts on his resume before Tuesday's, dropped Gustafsson (who was out of his weight class in his first NHL fight) with one punch and landed another as the Jets forward was falling to the ice.

"It's a tough one. Obviously, (Gustafsson) gets his gloves off. I just think (Trent) Frederic has been in a lot more fights than David Gustafsson has," said Stanley, who suited up in his seventh consecutive game since returning from a mid-body injury. "I was standing right there, so if there was anyone he wanted to go, it didn't have to be Gus."

With one more meeting between the two non-conference opponents set for Jan. 30 at TD Garden in Boston, it wouldn't come as a surprise if Stanley and Frederic square off.

Gustafsson needed to be helped to the bench by a pair of teammates and before play resumed, Stanley got involved in a secondary altercation with Bruins forward Mark Kastelic, with both players earning fighting majors and automatic game misconducts.

"It's unfortunate to see a teammate get hurt like that. I'm not a huge fan, but stuff happens in the game," said Stanley. "You see a teammate and one of your best friends down on the ice, you want to stick up for him anyway that you can. You talk about having good people in your room and that's what (Gustafsson) is. One of the best people that I know."

The third fight in a two-second span of play involved Jets captain Adam Lowry and Bruins D-man Nikita Zadorov.

“I’ve got a lot of respect for Z over there, he doesn’t have to answer the bell, (the) game is kind of over,” said Lowry. “Both times I fought him, they’ve been in kind of blow out games. So, he shows up, and I appreciated that.”

As the Jets continue a four-game homestand against the Vegas Golden Knights, Rasmus Kupari figures to draw back into the Jets’ lineup for Gustafsson.

Arniel was happy with the way his team responded, but reiterated he wanted the focus to be on how well his team played, not how they showed up when the extra curriculums arrived.

“There’s no secret, we frustrated Boston last night because we played our game,” said Arniel. “And to me that’s why I don’t want to get caught up in what happened, whatever that was.”

The Jets got goals from seven different players, generated 35 shots on goal, which was up dramatically from recent games when the team occasionally had issues with both quality and volume.

This was what Arniel and company were talking about when mentioning the need to get back into attack mode.

“We had (59) shot attempts last night, which for us is probably 20 higher than what we’ve been averaging,” said Arniel. “What it does is it forces the opposition now to have to defend. Now maybe they’re running (into) the corners or they’ve got to figure out what their assignments are, whatever.”

“We get people on the run and when we do that, that’s more like us and that’s what we saw earlier in the year and I’m glad we got back to that. That has to be sort of in our DNA every game.”

The Jets are 8-8-2 against the Golden Knights since the franchise entered the NHL for the 2017-18 season, but Vegas has eliminated Winnipeg from the Stanley Cup playoffs on two occasions (2018 and 2023) and held a decisive advantage in recent meetings — winning 11 of the past 12, including the post-season.

The Golden Knights have won three consecutive games and haven’t played since a 3-2 win over the Dallas Stars last Friday.

They currently lead the Pacific Division with 39 points in 28 games and welcomed back Winnipegger and captain Mark Stone from injury on Dec. 6.

Despite missing 14 games this season, Stone is still tied for third in team scoring with six goals and 22 points.

Defenceman Zach Whitecloud has been sidelined with an upper-body issue since Nov. 23 and is inching closer to a return, while the Golden Knights Manitoba content also features forwards Keegan Kolesar and Brett Howden, the Oakbank product who scored twice and provided the game-winner in the Nov. 29 meeting at T-Mobile Arena.

**POWER-PLAY UNITS PUSHING ONE ANOTHER:** By scoring three times in five chances — including once on an abbreviated power play after a four-on-four situation that lasted 71 seconds, the Jets improved to 30.4 per cent efficiency for the season and moved into second place in the NHL behind the New Jersey Devils (31.3 percent).

Mark Scheifele ripped home a one-timer, but the second unit also got goals on a redirection from the slot by Lafallo and another from Vladislav Namestnikov that was a byproduct of he and Nino Niederreiter crashing the net.

That leaves the top unit with 17 goals with the man-advantage and 11 others recorded by the second unit.

“When you have both units firing on all cylinders, it helps everybody,” said Lafallo, who has scored four of his five goals on the power play this season. “When everybody is buzzing like that, it gives us momentum.”

Namestnikov’s marker snapped a nine-game goal-scoring drought and moved him to seven goals for the season.

### **Winnipeg Sun**

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-rally-around-concussed-gustafsson>

#### ***'You come at one, you come at all of us': Jets rally around concussed teammate***

By Paul Friesen

Winnipeg Jets forward David Gustafsson suffered a concussion when he took a punch to the jaw from Boston’s Trent Frederic on Tuesday.

His reputation with teammates, though, only grew.

“Super unfortunate,” Mason Appleton said on Wednesday. “Gus is obviously a guy who’s trying to do everything he can to stay in the lineup. You hate to see the result of it. You feel for the guy and you understand where he’s coming from. You definitely gain respect for a guy who’s willing to go toe-to-toe with a good fighter in this league.

“I just hope he feels better soon.”

A healthy scratch for all but three games this season, Gustafsson found Frederic in his face after the Jets were rubbing it in Boston’s, up 6-1 in the third on their way to an 8-1 romp.

The play began with Frederic cross-checking Gustafsson to the ice right after the faceoff.

The pair exchanged a few more cross-checks before dropping the gloves, Frederic landing his first punch to Gustafsson’s jaw and throwing two more after he’d hit the ice.

It was the 24-year-old Swede's first NHL fight – he needed help getting off the ice – and it caused tempers to boil over from down on the ice to the owner's box, where Mark Chipman was cursing what he'd just seen.

A day later, reaction was more tempered.

"Gus is a grown man," Appleton said. "He's going to make that decision for himself. You can look back at it and say maybe he shouldn't have done that. But in the moment, you're making a split (second) decision and you've got to live with it."

Defenceman Dylan DeMelo agreed.

"I've been down 5-1, 6-1, where you're annoyed, ticked off and whoever's in your way you're trying to get maybe an extra piece," DeMelo said. "Emotions run high. Did Gus have to fight him? Maybe not. But when the guy's standing over you and cross-checking you a few times, you want to stand up for yourself. Gus did what he felt was right in the moment. We don't really expect him to do that."

"We're proud of him for being willing to stand up for himself against a guy who's had that many fights. Maybe Gus didn't know that, I don't know."

After the game, Jets captain Adam Lowry questioned Frederic's choice of opponents.

Gustafsson was already a highly regarded teammate who plays a clean, gentlemanly game. He had taken just three minor penalties in 115 NHL games before Tuesday.

"You talk about having good people in your room and that's what Gus is," defenceman Logan Stanley said. "One of the best people that I know personally. To see him go down ... it doesn't sit well with anyone in our room. We stick up for each other in here."

Stanley did just that, immediately taking on Boston's Mark Kastelic, who already had 50 penalty minutes this season.

One faceoff later, Lowry, who's 6-foot-5, 210 pounds, squared off with the Bruins' most penalized player, 6-foot-6, 248-pound defenceman Nikita Zadorov.

Some teammates tried to talk Lowry out of it as he went out for that faceoff.

"Sometimes I say that to Adam," Appleton said. "But Adam's the captain of our team and when he feels like he needs to go and impose his will, he does so. I'm never going to fault Adam for going and fighting a tough dude. Adam's a warrior in that aspect."

DeMelo says he's not about to dissuade his captain from doing what he feels needs to be done.

"He's been that type of player for us ever since he's been in this organization," the defenceman said. "More than willing. That's why he wears the C. Wasn't surprised. He picked a guy who's an absolute behemoth, too, in Zadorov. He's not fighting nobodies."

"And he stands in there and he gives them hell."

There's no word on how long Gustafsson will be out. With concussions, it's impossible to predict.

His teammates say the effects of the incident in the Jets room will be immediate and long-lasting.

"We found a way to really stick together," Appleton said. "And whoever it was stepping up, that's what we do. You come at one, you come at all of us."

"We've got guys who are willing to answer the bell if needed," DeMelo added. "We certainly didn't initiate it, but we took care of it on our end. That just speaks to the togetherness of our group, guys willing to go to bat for each other. If it's one guy in a pile, we're all in there as well."

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-full-of-piss-and-vinegar-for-rival-golden-knights>

### ***Jets full of 'piss and vinegar' for rival Golden Knights***

By Paul Friesen

So if that's what happens against a non-rival like the Boston Bruins, what's in store when the Winnipeg Jets take on Vegas, Thursday?

Head coach Scott Arniel doesn't expect a continuation of Tuesday's fight-filled third period.

"That doesn't happen a whole heck of a lot in hockey anymore," Arniel told reporters on Wednesday. "It's a different game now. That's why you guys are still talking about it. We're not. It was just one of those crazy evenings that happen."

"If you're in your division, you're in the West, you play teams a little more often, there is a little bit of a rivalry, there's people you dislike a lot more."

Arniel and Co. have every reason to dislike the Golden Knights: Since he's joined the Jets, they've never won a regular-season matchup.

His first season as assistant to Rick Bowness, the Jets went 0-3.

Facing Vegas in the playoffs that year, Winnipeg won the opener, then lost four straight.

The next season: 0-3.

This season: 0-for-1.

If you're doing the math at home, that's seven straight regular-season losses, one win in the last 12, overall.

"That's yesterday's news," Arniel said. "They're a different team, we're a different team. They're Stanley Cup champions a couple of years ago. They've got some guys that know how to win. These teams that have won, there's a maturity, there's a confidence that they play with. And you have to be at your best when you play them."

The Jets weren't far off in a 4-3 loss in Vegas at the end of November.

Arniel lamented one late mistake that cost his team the game.

"We shot ourselves in the foot more than anything," is how forward Mason Appleton put it. "That game it didn't feel like they beat us, it felt like we beat us. I guess we've got to go for us right now. And coming off an 8-1 win, you feel good in that aspect. In our home barn, hopefully tells a different tale.

"The tide's got to turn at some point."

The teams have virtually identical points percentages, the 21-9 Jets at .700, 18-7-3 Vegas at .696.

If the Jets can repeat the aggressive, attack-mode effort that throttled Boston 8-1 on Tuesday, they like their chances.

"There's no secret, we frustrated Boston because we played our game," Arniel said. "And if we're going to have success against Vegas we have got to do that ... the whole roster playing the right way."

They shouldn't have to worry about a letdown, not in a rivalry Appleton says is right up there with their most heated.

"In terms of wanting to win against them, they're up there with anyone," he said. "There's definitely a little more piss and vinegar, whatever you want to call it. They're a team that we're going to come after."

Ask defenceman Dylan DeMelo when he last beat Vegas, and he nails it: That first playoff game in the spring of 2023.

"They've had our number," DeMelo acknowledged. "We'll win sooner or later. They're a team that we've always had good games with, games that are right down to the wire. Two quality teams going at it, with a little playoff experience that adds to it. They definitely have our respect.

"We're due. We're overdue."

## **The Athletic**

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5988314/2024/12/12/bruins-jets-trent-frederic-david-gustafsson-fight/>

### ***Bruins' Trent Frederic, Jets' David Gustafsson and the one-punch aftermath***

By Fluto Shinzawa

SEATTLE — The game was over. The Winnipeg Jets had a 6-1 lead over the Boston Bruins with 12:33 left in regulation. The last thing Trent Frederic wanted to do was mess up his hands in a fight.



But Frederic, on the ice for the faceoff following Winnipeg's sixth goal, got annoyed with David Gustafsson. The score did nothing to soothe Frederic's temper.

"We just went to take a faceoff. I didn't like how he was lining up," Frederic said on Wednesday at Climate Pledge Arena, one day after the Bruins' 8-1 beatdown against the Jets. "Obviously frustrated with the game. I said something. He did the same thing. I won the faceoff back. Gave him a cross-check because I was mad about before the faceoff. Then we both kind of grabbed each other. I don't know if he dropped first. But we essentially agreed to fight. And that's that."

According to HockeyFights, Gustafsson entered the throwdown at a 23-0 career NHL fight disadvantage against Frederic. It showed.

Frederic threw the first punch. That's all he needed. Frederic caught Gustafsson on the chin. Gustafsson crumpled. Frederic landed two more before linesmen Trent Knorr and Travis Gawryletz jumped in.

The Jets didn't like it. Coach Scott Arniel told Jets reporters on Wednesday that Gustafsson is in concussion protocol.

"I would have to argue that he was the one that asked me," Frederic said. "I wasn't expecting it."

#### *Unaware of his opponent*

Frederic understands the politics of fighting. Before each game, the 6-foot-3, 221-pounder studies the opposing roster and identifies his likely combatants. Frederic knew 6-foot-7, 231-pound defenseman Logan Stanley (14 fights) was a possible opponent.

In fact, Frederic asked Stanley to go in the first period. Frederic didn't care for Stanley's hit on David Pastrnak. The defenseman said no. The Jets had just taken a 1-0 lead. Frederic understood.

Frederic has been on the other side. In the AHL, Frederic recalled being asked to fight by unfamiliar ECHL call-ups. Sometimes he said yes. It wasn't until afterward that he'd learn of their resumes. Jay Leach, Frederic's coach in Providence at the time, would correct him for accepting unnecessary invitations.

"I would end up fighting them. They would thank me in the penalty box for fighting them," Frederic said. "Then I would find out they have 15 fights in the ECHL. You just don't know. Sometimes they come in all shapes and forms. You don't really necessarily know. A lot of times I would get in trouble. Leachy, I remember, was mad at me one time when I was in Prov for fighting someone like that. But no one told me. I didn't know. You're just kind of battling and you're in the game. It happens."

Frederic, in other words, did not process the fact that Gustafsson (6-foot-2, 196 pounds) had never fought when their gloves flew off. Frederic was in a fight. He was going to do what he needed to do to win it.

"There's nothing I would change or regret," Frederic said. "I would do it again every time. If someone wants to fight, I don't care if they're ... whatever, I don't really care. If you want to fight in a hockey game, especially when you're frustrated and you're losing 6-1, I'm obviously going to do that."

Moments later, Mark Kastelic and Stanley threw down. It was a fair fight.

Adam Lowry didn't think anything about Frederic vs. Gustafsson was fair. Nikita Zadorov understood the situation.

*'He asked me nicely'*

As Winnipeg's captain, Lowry made it clear that Frederic one-punching the 24-year-old Swede was unacceptable. So the 6-foot-5, 210-pound Lowry asked Zadorov to fight.

"If I don't fight him, then he's probably going to start running around and possibly trying to hurt our players," Zadorov explained. "Because one of their players got hurt right before that. We still have unwritten rules. He asked me nicely. I fought him twice before. I have so much respect for him as a player. I love his game. It was important for him to answer for his team as captain. I agree. So I gave it to him."

Like Frederic, Zadorov (24 fights) knows what he's doing with his gloves off. He's been on the asking end. He isn't happy when his requests are denied.

"There's times when our team is not going and you're trying to get the boys going," said Zadorov. "You ask the other player to fight you. He'd be like, 'Do I have to?' Then you'd be like, 'Just give it to me, please. I want to spark my boys. Next time you're in the same situation and you ask me, I'm going to give it to you.' There's definitely mutual agreements kind of like this in the league."

So given the situation, the 6-foot-6, 248-pound defenseman said yes to Lowry. They fought briefly. Lowry was satisfied. No other fights took place.

*Fighting matters*

The Bruins are 7-3-0 under interim coach Joe Sacco. None of the seven wins have been against a team currently in playoff position.

Meanwhile, it was the latest shelling the Bruins took from a high-end team. There have been shady outcomes: 6-4 against the Florida Panthers, 8-2 against the Carolina Hurricanes, 7-2 against the Dallas Stars.

So on Wednesday, the Bruins regrouped ahead of Thursday's game against the Seattle Kraken. They had work to do. In particular, Sacco didn't care for the third-period looseness which let a 3-1 game get out of hand. But Sacco endorsed how the Bruins' competitiveness showed in the three fights.

"The guys played hard right to the end," Sacco said. "That's all we're asking. We just want to make sure there's no quit in our game, especially in the third period."

There is little to gain from an 8-1 flogging. But fights have a way of bringing players together when nothing else is going right.

"We were getting smoked," said Zadorov. "You've got to show some pride. The guys stepped in. They fought. They showed their character. They showed we don't care. There's no quit in this room. Everybody cares."

“I know it wasn’t a good game for us. Just didn’t go our way at all. But you’ve got to show some emotion at the end. Show some pride for playing for the Boston Bruins.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5981816/2024/12/12/winnipeg-jets-30-games-stats/>

## ***The Jets’ biggest strengths and weaknesses after 30 games and the stats behind them***

By Murat Ates

“I’m not going to use any names but, there’s been lots of players over my career where analytically, you’re going ‘What’s he doing on our team?’” Scott Arniel told The Athletic this September. “And then you go: ‘I need this guy on my team.’”

“It might be as simple as the dressing room. Maybe that’s a guy we need to have in our dressing room. Maybe there’s a certain element that he has that you just need on your hockey team.”

I couldn’t help but think of that quote when Logan Stanley fought Mark Kastelic in the aftermath of David Gustafsson’s injury against Boston on Tuesday night. Trent Frederic challenged Gustafsson to a fight after Winnipeg’s 6-1 goal; Gustafsson accepted and was immediately hurt, cut open by Frederic’s first punch. The Jets were incensed. Frederic is a good hockey player and the Bruins put him on the ice following multiple Jets goals during Winnipeg’s 8-1 win. But Winnipeg’s players have a good sense of which Bruins do and don’t fight.

Gustafsson had zero fights in his career before the one that injured him. Frederic had 38. Gustafsson missed practice on Wednesday and is now in concussion protocol. It was a mismatch that Gustafsson was in an awkward position to accept and cost the Jets. Stanley stepped up, fighting Kastelic, and then, when the game was over, Mark Scheifele awarded Stanley a jacket to celebrate his efforts.

Stanley isn’t an analytical darling. His size and willingness to use it may be keeping him in the Jets lineup more than his abilities at five-on-five. Multiple Jets coaching staffs have decided they want Stanley on their roster or in their lineup, sometimes at the expense of other young defencemen like Declan Chisholm or Johnathan Kovacevic.

Strengths in one area can be weaknesses in another. The Jets would be better served if the player performing Stanley’s job in that situation had the on-ice impact of Dustin Byfuglien or Chris Pronger — or more realistically, Jamie Oleksiak or Chris Tanev.

But Stanley can’t control the Jets’ roster or the minutes he gets. He’s taken too many penalties and shown mobility issues at even strength. And he’s stepped up, earning the praise of his team’s biggest stars.

Using Stanley’s performance as inspiration, today is a day to reflect on Winnipeg’s biggest strengths and weaknesses. Thirty games into the season, the Jets have given us a lot of highs and a few lows to investigate.

### ***1.040: Winnipeg’s league-leading shooting and save percentages***

There is a simple stat called “PDO” that people in the analytics community often use as a measure of luck. The letters “PDO” don’t stand for anything. They’re a reference to a blogger named Brian King. His idea was that, if you add a team’s shooting percentage to its save

percentage and get a number much bigger than 1.000, then that team might be enjoying an unsustainable run of luck.

The Jets have the third-best shooting percentage in the NHL (12.69 percent) and the second-best save percentage (.913). Add them together and Winnipeg's "PDO" is 1.040 — tied with Washington for the league's highest number.

So what, Murat. You can't just invent numbers and then say they're important without saying why.

Honestly: good point. My opinion is that we need to pay attention to the Jets' shooting and save percentages because those numbers are among the most volatile and impactful stats in hockey. The sport is chaos as a general rule. Goals win games and depend partly on talent and partly on traffic, deflections, and two inch posts: In the wrong circumstances, even the best goaltender on the planet can put up an .870 save percentage in a sample size as small as five games.

It's hard to sustain extreme highs or lows in the long run, though. A goalie's save percentage tends to regress toward their career average. The same applies to shooters. If Kyle Connor goes 15 shots in a row without a goal, it doesn't mean he's forgotten how to shoot.

Still, some people are going to throw Winnipeg's 1.040 PDO around and claim that the Jets' run to the top of the standings is all about luck. I think that's too simple — and that digging into it reveals a source of Jets strength. Winnipeg's save percentage from 2021-22 through 2023-24 — the three seasons before this one — was .912. With Hellebuyck in net, a .913 isn't unsustainable. It's the norm to which hot or cold streaks regress — and it's better than most teams because Hellebuyck is better than most goalies.

Winnipeg's shooting percentage would be a concern, though. Are the Jets leading the league in goals because of some unsustainable run of shooting luck?

Yes, but only on the power play, which is running neck-and-neck with Hellebuyck for the title of Winnipeg's biggest strength through 30 games. Winnipeg is taking an average number of shots and scoring an average number of goals at even strength, riding Hellebuyck's excellence to a 61-48 lead in goals. Winnipeg's top line, centred by Scheifele, is winning its minutes 21-17 despite getting outshot.

Getting outshot is not a new idea for Scheifele. Neither is the idea of Winnipeg scoring on a higher-than-average number of shots when he's on the ice. He tends to finish among league leaders in "passes to the slot" and has finished with a higher share of goals than shots in every season in his career but one.

"I'm a guy that, my whole career, I've played a possession game, especially in the O-zone," Scheifele once told me. "I like to hold on to the puck, especially below the goal line. That's kind of where I create my offence. And then go to the slot when I play with some pretty magical players that can find me in the slot. That's always been my game."

There have been times when Connor, Scheifele, and Gabriel Vilardi have given up so many shots — or so many quality transition scoring chances — that it's let the air out of their offensive success. They're winning their minutes on the whole, though, and they haven't needed unsustainable shooting percentages to do it.

One area of concern? The Jets' power play is scoring on a higher percentage of its shots than the best power play in NHL history. Scheifele, Connor, Vilaridi, Cole Perfetti, Nikolaj Ehlers, Nino Niederreiter, Neal Pionk, and Alex Iafallo are all scoring on at least 20 percent of their shots. That's not sustainable, no matter how much variety the Jets have added to their power play this season, and it leaves room for concern. The Jets scored just one power-play goal during their recent four-game losing streak. A mini-slump of that nature is entirely normal and, while the Jets were struggling in other areas of the game during that slide, it illustrated how quickly things can go south for a team that dominates by its power play and goaltending. That's true even when those are real strengths.

Wait, did you lead with "the Jets are lucky" just to end with "they're only lucky in specific ways?"

Yes. If you want other signs of luck, you can find them in the Jets' seven goals with their goalie pulled — second-most in the league despite the league's second-best record — or their perfect 4-0 record in overtime. I think Winnipeg is an average five-on-five team with good finishing, great goaltending, and an elite power play that might sometimes run cold because that's what power plays do.

#### *77.6 percent: Winnipeg's PK success rate and its most costly weakness*

The Jets' power play exploded for three goals against Boston, improving that special teams area to 30.4 percent — the second-best rate in the NHL. It was a much-needed outburst from a unit that's struggled to maintain its pace without Ehlers. It was also a reminder that the Jets' power play is helping the team more than their penalty kill is hurting it — even as we watched David Pastrnak strike back on the power play for the Bruins' only goal. Winnipeg's special teams are +13 on the season.

The penalty kill is still a problem. Winnipeg's 77.6 percent efficiency rate is 22nd-best in the NHL. Three shorthanded goals help the team to a shorthanded goal differential of "only" -14, despite 17 goals against — tied for ninth-best in the NHL.

What's going poorly?

Winnipeg's PK gives up a ton of shots from most parts of the defensive zone. It gives up a disproportionate number of those shots from the most dangerous areas of the ice — the low slot and all around the crease. If this sounds familiar, it's because it was a problem last season as well as poor faceoff percentages, failed clears, and struggles to clear the net front kept Winnipeg in its own zone for 62.3 percent of its PK minutes — well below league average.

The Jets continue to struggle in the faceoff circle; they're the third-worst shorthanded faceoff team, despite average results on the power play and at five-on-five. Adam Lowry has taken the lion's share of PK faceoffs, typically drawing the opponents' top unit, and struggled to a 34 percent win rate. Rasmus Kupari has managed to win half of his 40 shorthanded faceoffs so far this season — Winnipeg's best number — but is typically the Jets' second option.

The problems go well beyond the dot, though. I see it as a combination of two things — a lack of overall pace and an inability to win battles in the crease. The latter is easier to quantify: the Jets have given up the third most rebound shots on the PK, despite being one of the league's most disciplined teams.

A rebound needs an initial shot. Winnipeg gives up the fourth most unblocked shots per minute on the PK. It needs a goaltender to leave a rebound; Hellebuyck has obliged. And it needs the attacking team to beat the Jets' PK to the loose puck.

Here's a map from Hockey Viz. If an area is red, Winnipeg gives up more shots than average from that spot — and that's the trend, on the whole.

Dylan DeMelo is doing what's asked of him here, but he's not fast enough to get into Pastrnak's shooting lane (although his stick accidentally contributes to the goal.) Pastrnak ends up with time and space — and he's one player whose time and space is most troubling, from a Jets perspective.

Based on my understanding of the Jets penalty kill, DeMelo is correct to take Pavel Zacha in front, correct to release him to Vladislav Namestnikov, and correct to stay net front until the pass gets to Charlie McAvoy at the top of the zone. The moment McAvoy gets the puck, Pastrnak is a threat and you can see DeMelo racing out into his shooting lane. That's the ask of Jets defencemen in that situation: get in the lane. It doesn't work out, DeMelo looks slow, and it's easy to wonder why he didn't leave the net front earlier to cheat into Pastrnak's lane.

The problem with that is Elias Lindholm has a lane to Zacha in the middle of the ice and Zacha has positioned himself below Namestnikov in the slot. If DeMelo abandons the slot, then Zacha is alone with a lane to the net. If DeMelo pops up to take Zacha and Namestnikov cheats up on McAvoy, then Lindholm and Brad Marchand have seam passes available to Pastrnak.

My read, then, is that Connor and Stanley give up a lot of space in their attempts to be aggressive on Marchand and Lindholm. It's also that DeMelo is slow to get into the lane when the pass ultimately reaches its intended target. I'd also like to leave a little bit of room for Pastrnak being an elite shooter who gets a good bounce off of DeMelo's stick.

The whole sequence seems a bit too easy, from the Bruins' puck recovery off their initial missed shot through Pastrnak getting the puck with DeMelo a half step slow to step into the lane. Winnipeg's defencemen are slower than the NHL average as a rule, based on NHL Edge data, so I wonder if that half step is unavoidable. I also tend to credit PK forwards for reducing shot quantity by virtue of their speed and outside pressure, while crediting defencemen for impacting quality by tying up sticks and fighting for rebounds in front of the net.

That's an oversimplification but it's worth noting that the two Jets forwards who have been on the ice for the fewest shots per PK minute are Connor and Kupari — two of the Jets' fastest skaters. The two Jets defencemen who have been on the ice for the fewest low slot chances per minute are Dylan Samberg, who is an excellent all-around defender, and Stanley, who is the Jets' biggest defenceman.

It's possible that Winnipeg's PK system is fine but doomed to failure until its forwards get faster or its defencemen get better at clearing the net. Samberg's importance is well felt, too. I'm tempted to look at the multiple years of struggle and conclude that it's about personnel, not the Xs and Os, while thinking the Jets might get better results from using Connor, Kupari, and other speedsters even more than they do.

And I think a veteran defenceman who can impact the PK and play top competition at five-on-five, too, would be a brilliant trade deadline acquisition.

## **CTV Winnipeg**

<https://winnipeg.ctvnews.ca/winnipeg-jets-visit-kids-to-spread-holiday-cheer-1.7142311>

### ***Winnipeg Jets visit kids to spread holiday cheer***

By Devon McKendrick

The Winnipeg Jets helped bring some holiday cheer to a bunch of kids during their annual visit Wednesday.

Several Jets players spent time with kids and their families at the Rehabilitation Centre for Children.

The centre helps enhance the lives of kids that live with physical and cognitive disabilities. It supports kids from birth all the way up to 21 years old.

Jane Kidd-Hantscher, the executive director of the Children's Rehabilitation Foundation, said there is always so much excitement when the Winnipeg Jets can visit.

"One of the things that we're really proud of as a foundation is being able to help families have highlight reel moments, and today is one of those moments," she said.

The Jets players gave gift bags to the kids, signed autographs, and spent time talking with them about their lives.

Following multiple highlight reel moments for the Jets Tuesday against the Boston Bruins, Kidd-Hantscher said the memories the kids get from this are something they will never forget.

"There's nothing more special than being part of that and watching it," she said.

"The excitement that they bring to the community...it's part of what makes Winnipeg and Manitoba so special. We are a cold place; we are a hockey community; a day like today is spectacular."

Kidd-Hantscher said the community helps make these days possible through funding and other support, noting it all culminates in an emotional experience for everyone who is involved.

## **CITY TV Winnipeg**

<https://winnipeg.citynews.ca/2024/12/11/winnipeg-jets-bring-holiday-cheer-at-sscy-centre/>

### ***Winnipeg Jets bring holiday cheer to young hockey fans at SSCY Centre***

By Neve Van Pelt and Morgan Modjeski

It was an exciting day for kids at the Specialized Services for Children and Youth (SSCY) Centre on Wednesday, as members of the Winnipeg Jets stopped by to spread some holiday cheer.

"I was so excited I've never seen a Jets hockey player in my whole entire life and it's just so amazing to see one in my real life to get my first ever autograph," said one of the kids in attendance.

Winnipeg Jets greeting young hockey fans at SSCY Centre on December 11, 2024. (Neve VanPelt, CityNews)

"They're probably my favourite hockey team," said another.

About 30 children receiving services from the Children's Rehabilitation Foundation had the chance to meet some of their hometown heroes, as nine players from the NHL club were at the SSCY Centre for a seasonal visit, and there was no shortage of stoked kids.

"I'm so excited to see Mark Scheifele," said one of the excited hockey fans.

Winnipeg Jets greeting young hockey fans at SSCY Centre on December 11, 2024. (Neve VanPelt, CityNews)

The kids weren't the only ones who were excited, as the professional athletes say they were happy to make a difference in the lives of these children.

"What they have to go through and what they have to deal with really puts things in perspective for us," said the Winnipeg Jets captain Adam Lowry. "But their joy for life, even with the hardships they've been dealt, it's awesome to bring them some smiles and interact with them."

The Children's Rehabilitation Foundation supports children and youth with a range of physical and cognitive disabilities and executive director Jane Kidd-Hantscher says the NHL club's annual visit is one the children appreciate greatly.

"This is just one of those days we look forward to because for a lot of these kids obviously they would never get this opportunity. We also sometimes gift them going to Jets games, so it's high on the list too, and it's just so special," she said.

And when it comes to taking some time off the ice to meet their young fans, some of the biggest names in the game in Winnipeg say it's time they enjoy.

"It's obviously a pretty special moment," said Jets Centre, Mark Scheifele. "It's a moment that we all look forward to each year, to do the hospital visits, to see kids smiling and make their day, sometimes I think it means more to us than it does to them."

The Winnipeg Jets are currently No. 2 in the NHL.

## **The Hockey News**

<https://thehockeynews.com/nhl/winnipeg-jets/game-day/nikita-chibrikov-really-happy-and-excited-for-season-debut-with-jets>

### ***Nikita Chibrikov "Really Happy and Excited" for Season Debut with Jets***

THN Winnipeg StaffT

"I had a call from (Moose head coach) Mark Morrison. He said I am the call-up. I was really happy and excited to be here."



Some may recall his NHL debut last season, where he earned a call-up alongside Brad Lambert for the final game of the year. He scored pretty goal in a lopsided win, and celebrated directly into the lens of the television camera.

"It helps a lot," Chibrikov said when asked about getting the nerves out of the way in his first NHL contest last season.

"When I made my debut, it was one of the first steps to becoming an NHL player and build a little bit more confidence. But it is a new season, it's the regular season going, so it's not their last game, so it's a more pressure here. I am read for this game and will try my best to help the team to win this game"

The 21-year-old Russian has played primarily with the Moose the past two seasons after being drafted in the second round by Winnipeg in 2021.

He leads the Moose in scoring with five goals and 13 points in 19 games but has a -10 plus/minus statistic.

Chibrikov will join Vladislav Namestnikov and Cole Perfetti on the team's second line.

"Yeah, great guys," he said of his linemates. "So Vladdy also knows Russian, so that's a little easier for me. Fetts is a real smart player, so I think it's really easy to find the chemistry with them. Just play the right way."

And what exactly is the 'right way?'

"It's more try to play my best game. Play my way, be ready a little bit quicker and fast decisions," he said.

"Try to go in the corners, be heavy with the guys. I am not afraid to go to the net. Make smart decisions and a little bit of play making. Play smart and make some good moves for my partners also."

With his recall comes the re-assignment of 20-year-old Brad Lambert to the Moose. He had two penalty minutes and a -1 rating in his four games with the big league club this season.

Last year with Manitoba, Chibrikov put up 17 goals and 47 points in 70 games, and was invited to serve as the team's representative at the NHLPA Rookie Showcase this summer.

### **Las Vegas Review Journal**

<https://www.reviewjournal.com/sports/goldenknights/knights-begin-road-trip-in-winnipeg-after-lengthy-break-3226819/>

### ***Knights begin road trip in Winnipeg after lengthy break***

By Danny Webster Las Vegas Review-Journal

Don't miss the latest VGK news. Like our Golden Edge page

The Golden Knights utilized their five-day break to the best of their abilities.

Some players went to the Chris Stapleton and George Strait concert Saturday at Allegiant Stadium. The team had its Christmas party Sunday.

Then came two days of lively practice where the vibes were good. It was a well-deserved rest after the Knights got through a hectic November, then started December with a three-game winning streak, with victories against two of their bigger rivals in Edmonton and Dallas.

Now comes the feeling of “here we go again.”

The Knights (18-7-3) begin a three-game road trip over the next four days Thursday against the Winnipeg Jets (21-9-0) at Canada Life Centre. The Knights wrapped up 10 games in 17 days from Nov. 20 to Dec. 6 that featured three back-to-back games.

The good news for the Knights is this is the final time they will have a stretch like this until mid-January. They will close out 2024 with six games over the final three weeks.

“We have had time to recover,” coach Bruce Cassidy said. “I thought it was right for us because of the intensity of our schedule early on, so we needed it. It came at a good time for us. Hopefully they have lots of energy in the third periods. That’s what rest does for you. It should give you some legs each night.”

The Knights have every right to feel good about where they’re at.

#### *Surviving without Stone*

They went 8-4-2 in a stacked November that included a season-long five-game road trip in which they earned seven of a possible 10 points. Twelve of those games came without captain Mark Stone because of a pulled muscle in his lower body.

The Knights went 14 games without one of their leading scorers (22 points in 14 games), but they went 8-4-2 in Stone’s absence, including wins in the first two games of December.

The Knights will be in Edmonton on Saturday, then end the trip Sunday against another top Central Division team, the Minnesota Wild.

Stone had an assist in 19:25 in his return Friday in the 3-2 win over the Stars.

“I felt good going into it,” Stone said. “It was nice to get back into a familiar spot and just play.”

The Knights also head into this trip with their whole lineup intact.

Defenseman Zach Whitecloud was a full-contact participant at practice Tuesday after missing the past seven games with an upper-body injury. Should Whitecloud return Thursday — a strong possibility that the Manitoba native will play at home — it will be the first time this season the Knights have their whole lineup available.

“He’s taking another step getting in a normal jersey,” Cassidy said. “He’s trending for this weekend.”

### *Expect Hellebuyck*

The Knights should expect to see a different Jets team than the one they saw two weeks ago.

The 4-3 win on Nov. 29 at T-Mobile Arena was, at the time, the Knights' best win of the season given Winnipeg's place in the standings. That was part of four straight losses for the Jets, who went 3-7-0 after starting the season 15-1-0.

Winnipeg has turned the corner with three wins in its past four games.

The Knights faced backup goalie Eric Comrie in that late November win. It's almost a given that reigning Vezina Trophy winner Connor Hellebuyck will start this time around.

But it hasn't mattered who's in net for the Jets. The Knights have dominated Winnipeg in the Cassidy era. They're 7-0 dating back to October 2022 and have won 11 of the past 12 meetings, including the five-game, first-round series win in 2023.

The Knights have averaged 4.41 goals in the past seven regular-season meetings with Winnipeg and have outscored the Jets 31-17.

"They're obviously a really good team, and they have a lot of skill," left wing Victor Olofsson said. "I think we played a disciplined game that night, and we've got to do it again. It's probably going to be even tougher."