

## **Winnipeg Free Press**

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/12/13/laine-still-has-it>

### ***Laine still has it***

### ***Former Jets teammates glad to see Finnish sniper happy and healthy with Habs***

By: Mike McIntyre

Patrik Laine is happy, healthy and showing he still has a howitzer of a shot. His return from a lengthy hockey absence has come just in the nick of time, with the dynamic Finnish sniper set to face the Winnipeg Jets on Saturday night.

“It’s good to see Patty back to himself,” former teammate Mason Appleton said Friday.

“The last couple years for him have been a little tougher. In this league, you’re kind of all rooting for each other to have success when you’re not playing one another. Patty’s a guy most of us know in this room, so to see him happy and back to his normal ways is a good sign.”

Laine, 26, was limited to just 18 games last year with the Columbus Blue Jackets as he first dealt with an injury, then entered the NHL/NHLPA player assistance program for a lengthy spell to deal with his mental health. He was traded last summer to the Montreal Canadiens, but his debut was delayed after he suffered a knee sprain in the preseason.

Laine returned to action last week and has three goals and an assist in his first five games with the Habs. This will mark his third game as a visitor at Canada Life Centre, but the first in more than two years.

“As human beings, we want to see guys be the best they can be. He had a great time here and I cherish all of those memories,” said Jets winger Kyle Connor.

“You never want to see anybody go through the stuff he’s gone through. I don’t want to speak for him, but it’s just great to see him look like he’s loving the game again and enjoying his teammates in Montreal and playing well as well. He’s a great guy, he was a great teammate. I always love the guy. Good to see him back on the ice and having some success. I think we’re all cheering for him.”

Laine — the second-overall pick of Winnipeg in 2016 who was traded along with Jack Roslovic in exchange for Pierre-Luc Dubois in January 2021 — was held off the scoresheet the first time he returned to face the Jets in March 2022. But he had two goals in a 4-1 Blue Jackets victory during his most recent visit on Dec. 12, 2022.

“A dynamic player, he’s right up there with Ovie sitting on that side with that shot,” said Jets coach Scott Arniel.

“We’re always trying to sell this league. You hate to see any time when your star players aren’t able to play. Glad to see him back. Hopefully, he’s not feeling so good (Saturday).”

Laine and his current teammates are likely feeling a bit sour after they were trounced 9-2 on home ice Thursday night by the Pittsburgh Penguins. The Jets aren't feeling so hot either after blowing a late lead and falling 3-2 in overtime to the Vegas Golden Knights in a game they admittedly were far from their best.

"Obviously had a little slice of humble pie," is how Appleton described it.

Connor was even more blunt: "That was unacceptable and probably one of the worst games we've had in a very long time. It was very disappointing."

Not surprisingly, the Jets spent much of Friday's practice getting back to some of the basics which they believe have slipped during a busy stretch of hockey that has seen them follow up a record-setting 15-1-0 start with a 6-8-1 stretch over the last 15 games.

"You get into some bad habits and play so many games in a short period of time, the bad habits show up," is how Arniel explained it.

"And also the other side of that, the fatigue, you make some mental mistakes that maybe you didn't earlier in the year."

The Jets don't have to look very far to find a game they really liked, as they were clicking on all cylinders in Tuesday's 8-1 victory over the Boston Bruins, only to follow that up 48 hours later with a bit of a clunker.

"You never want to take any team lightly in this league. I know (Montreal) just got beat pretty good coming off their last game. So did we, so we're going to be a pretty motivated group," said Connor.

"I think just focusing on us and what we can control. We have stuff we're trying to work on, and like you said, hopefully this benefits us for the long-term and it's something we can maybe build on and show some growth in our game."

Expect the Jets to make one lineup change, with defenceman Colin Miller replacing Ville Heinola. Forwards Nikolaj Ehlers and David Gustafsson and blue-liner Dylan Samberg remain out with injuries, although Ehlers took a big step Friday as he joined the main group for practice in a non-contact sweater.

Ehlers suffered a lower-body injury on Nov. 29 in Vegas and resumed skating by himself earlier this week.

"Any time Fly is coming back off an injury you definitely are going to get a huge spark to your lineup really quick here," said Appleton.

"He's been great for us to start, he's such a dynamic player and he really drives whatever line he's on. Obviously, whenever he's back we'll be thrilled for that."

You know Ehlers would love to face the Habs, considering he's best friends with Laine, but that is unlikely. Arniel is hopeful a return is just around the corner. After closing out this four-game homestand against Montreal, the Jets will hit the road for back-to-back games next Tuesday and Wednesday against the San Jose Sharks and Anaheim Ducks.

They'll also have some special company as this will be mom's trip.

"We went 0-3 last mom's trip so there's a little bit of pressure," Connor said of the 2020 trek through Carolina, Columbus and Chicago.

"I think the moms are well aware. It's going to be fun. It kind of breaks up the whole routine of everything and obviously, it's a shared experience of what we do every day with some of the people that we love."

### **The Athletic**

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5993010/2024/12/14/winnipeg-jets-ville-heinola-logan-stanley/>

### ***Ville Heinola or Logan Stanley? Who's the solution to Winnipeg Jets' third-pair problems?***

By Murat Ates

Winnipeg's third defence pair of Ville Heinola and Logan Stanley is a short-term problem that is supposed to provide a long-term solution. At the moment, it's not looking good.

The Jets hope one or both first-round picks can cement themselves as everyday third-pairing defencemen. They are willing to endure growing pains to find out whether Stanley, 26, or Heinola, 23, can help higher up the lineup someday, too.

But both players struggled as Winnipeg coughed up two third-period leads Thursday. Heinola was benched; Stanley was on the ice for both Vegas Golden Knights goals and contributed directly to one of them. Thus, even as the Jets try to remain patient about each defenceman in a macro sense, Jets fans are losing patience — some with Heinola, some with Stanley, some with the coach — right here, right now.

It's been eight years since Winnipeg traded up to take Stanley in the 2016 draft and five years since Heinola was taken with the first-round pick Winnipeg got back, in part, for Jacob Trouba. I don't think the Jets feel like they know what they have — even if it can be argued they should know by now, particularly with the 26-year-old Stanley — but they're trying to stay patient with both players. Scott Arniel has played the smaller, offensively inclined Heinola on his offhand side alongside the bigger, occasionally physical Stanley on Winnipeg's third pairing.

Neither defenceman was particularly good Thursday night. It can be argued they haven't been good as a pairing; whereas the Jets earned 53 percent of the shots with the veteran third-pair option of Haydn Fleury and Colin Miller earlier in the season, they've earned only 46 percent of shots with Heinola and Stanley together now. The Jets have a longer track record of Stanley's

struggles — both in previous seasons and before Heinola's return to health this season — but no analysis of Thursday's game should include a declaration of Heinola's excellence versus Stanley's struggles. But each player struggled. One was benched.

"Ville got stuck in our end a few times and we were kind of looking at five (defencemen)," Arniel said Friday. "We had a one-goal lead and we were just trying to stay over top of that."

You have to squint a bit to make the logic hold, but it is possible to do so, and I'll get to that.

First, some context within Thursday's game. In the second period, Heinola and Stanley were caught on the ice for a two-minute shift, stuck in Winnipeg's zone for extended periods on both sides of an icing call. Stanley started the third period with veteran Dylan DeMelo, but the duo were beaten on a one-minute, 45-second shift for the score-tying goal. Stanley's breakout pass to Kyle Connor landed on the tape but put Connor in a tough spot with Golden Knights defenceman Shea Theodore over his shoulder. Connor might have done more to battle for that puck once it came to him; Stanley might have seen Theodore there and chosen a different play.

Five minutes later, Heinola got stuck for a similarly problematic shift with Neal Pionk but escaped after 1:39 without giving up a goal. Josh Morrissey then scored, putting the Jets up 2-1, and Heinola didn't play another shift in the game. Stanley was part of the PK unit that gave up the five-on-three goal that sent the game into overtime; Winnipeg went on to lose 3-2. Friday's practice lines implied the Jets will sit Heinola on Saturday against the Montreal Canadiens, playing Stanley with Miller.

Make it make sense, Murat.

In the immediate context of Thursday's game, I can't do that — at least, not to a satisfying conclusion. Heinola was caught in his own zone for long shifts, as Arniel said — with and without Stanley — and it was not a good game from him. Stanley was caught in his own zone for long shifts, with and without Heinola, and I didn't think he had a particularly strong night, either. Hindsight makes this even easier: If Winnipeg wanted to protect its one-goal lead, perhaps sitting both members of its third pair was the play.

In the medium term, I can make things make sense. Stanley is one game removed from receiving a player of the game jacket, in part because of his willingness to fight Mark Kastelic in the immediate aftermath of David Gustafsson's injury. Stanley also fought the Buffalo Sabres' Dennis Gilbert last week; to whatever extent that Stanley draws criticism for not being more physical, Arniel has asked him to be more of a pest this season and he's tried to answer that bell. My own opinion of Stanley's Gilbert fight is quite cynical; Stanley and Heinola had been torched for a three-on-two goal nine seconds before the tilt.

Stanley was slow to react to the Sabres' rush and didn't take away Dylan Cozens' stick in front of Winnipeg's net. Whether it was done with this intention or not, Stanley's fight immediately drew attention to an attribute he has that most Jets defencemen don't. Stanley's more veteran status, his physicality and his role on the PK made him the coach's choice.

The long-term lens is probably the most important, given that I view Stanley and Heinola as a project at this point in their career. Stanley is 26; I'm more inclined to believe he is what he is — closer to Nathan Beaulieu in on-ice impact than Jamie Oleksiak. Heinola is 23, an age associated with more continued development, but has delivered similarly replacement-level results through his first seven games this season. (It should be noted their impact is difficult to separate, given how often they've played together, and Heinola is playing on his offhand side.)

If either player is going to break through their current bottom pair ceiling, it's Heinola, even as early returns don't look promising. The Jets' long-term history makes his Thursday night benching — and Stanley's continued minutes — worse than it is, though. Heinola's NHL debut on an awful 2019-20 team as an 18-year-old created unrealistic expectations. The Jets' awkward development of him during the 2020-21 season, at one point keeping him out of NHL or AHL action for over a month, has left a lasting memory.

Though Winnipeg had previously been able to keep Heinola in the AHL, Stanley lost his waivers exemption three years ago and has been in the NHL since that time. He's also been protected by the Jets in multiple ways — first, from Seattle expansion, and then from waivers — at the expense of Johnathan Kovacevic and Declan Chisholm. Given that the Jets traded up to draft Stanley in the first place, it seems as though some of his extra opportunity could be perceived as chasing a sunk cost. The reality is that neither defenceman achieved results that imply a long-term, top-four solution.

Can Heinola, still 23, get there? And, if so, how does his benching fit in?

It's easy to lose track of Heinola's recent history when thinking about his long-term lack of NHL minutes with the Jets. Heinola's ankle injury last year (and ensuing infection this year) has stopped the small, young defenceman from taking a big step forward. He missed all of training camp and the first six weeks of the regular season recovering from his ankle infection — this, after playing the entirety of his post-surgery 2023-24 season in the AHL. I don't think it's reasonable or realistic to expect instant excellence from any player in that position and the Jets have not received that excellence.

I'm sticking to my cautious long-term approach from before Heinola's AHL conditioning stint.

Despite benching Heinola on Thursday, Arniel has given him and Stanley more opportunity than either has received in recent seasons. He's gone to bat for both in the media, multiple times, whether calling himself Heinola's "biggest fan" or saying he needs Stanley in the lineup, playing Stanley in all eight available games since his return from a "mid-body" injury suffered Nov. 9.

It's clear to all observers Stanley is ahead of Heinola on the Jets' depth chart, just as it's clear to me Stanley is not on track to become a top-four defenceman on these Jets. My view is that Winnipeg's best six defencemen, when healthy, are Josh Morrissey, Dylan Samberg, Pionk, DeMelo, Miller and then some combination of Fleury, Heinola, Stanley and seldom-used Dylan Coghlan.

Heinola is Winnipeg's best bet to get a helpful, everyday defenceman from that latter group. He'd probably be in a better position to succeed playing alongside the more veteran Miller on

Winnipeg's third pair than skating on his offhand side with Stanley. The sit-down doesn't change Heinola's trajectory and might even be of service. He's a gamer, trying to establish position to box out bigger forwards well in advance of a shot, and he has NHL-quality offensive instincts. I just can't look at the AHL season he had last year or the time he's missed now and get worked up about his minutes at this stage of the season.

Again, Winnipeg is trying to be patient with both players to learn more about them now than previous regimes did in past seasons. It should have close to all of the information it needs about its 6-foot-7, 26-year-old Stanley. Heinola isn't a known quantity yet — and it's not reasonable to expect him to be this soon after missing so much time to start the first full-time NHL season of his career.

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5990507/2024/12/14/nhl-trade-rumors-top-targets/>

### ***NHL mock trade proposals: One tantalizing target for each team. Could any deals happen?***

By The Athletic NHL Staff

The NHL trade market has been a busy place over the past few weeks, and the rumor mill is churning.

Once we get through the holiday roster freeze (Dec. 20-27), names of possible trade targets will begin swirling around teams with increased speed leading to the March 7 deadline — whether those names emerge from insight, speculation, common sense or simply because a fan base is curious if a given player would be a good fit on their team.

This week, The Athletic asked its NHL staff to identify one player or pick each team should target in a trade. Some reporters chose big swings capable of drastically altering a franchise's trajectory, while others took a more realistic approach.

Senior writer James Mirtle looked at all the proposed targets and came up with a reasonable acquisition cost. Each transaction was then assessed with the cost in mind. Does a deal make sense?

Here's what we came up with.

#### ***Winnipeg Jets***

Target: MacKenzie Weegar, RHD (CGY)\* — Murat Ates  
(\*Full no-trade clause)

Cost: Brad Lambert, C (WPG) (or equivalent) — Mirtle

Reality: I targeted Weegar because I see him as an ideal top-pairing complement for Josh Morrissey. Weegar is tough, he's a strong penalty-killer, he wins battles in front of his net and he's a right-handed defenseman who plays first-pairing competition and beats it. He's not a rental, either. Weegar's \$6.25 million contract runs through the end of 2030-31, implying a top

four of Morrissey, Weegar, Dylan Samberg and Elias Salomonsson. Brad Lambert is a reasonable ask from Mirtle, and I believe the Jets could afford it, even with the long-term aging risk, but I imagine Winnipeg would prefer to keep Lambert well into the future. — Ates

## **Global Winnipeg**

<https://globalnews.ca/news/10916360/winnipeg-jets-wins-losses-analysis/>

### ***ANALYSIS: Jets experience thrill of victory, agony of defeat***

By John Shannon CJOB

When I was a kid, a long, long time ago, every Saturday there was a sports anthology show, The Wide World of Sports, on television. I marveled every week when the great Jim McKay talked about “the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat”.

And in a 72-hour period, the Jets and their fans experienced just that... the best and worst of what the NHL offers.

Losing is never fun. It’s not supposed to be. Winning, on the other hand, can be thrilling. Every time.

The thrill of that 8-1 victory against Boston on Tuesday was exactly what the Jets needed to get some level confidence back. And Thursday night, after 58 minutes of fun, edge-of-your-seat stuff... the Jets found themselves a miserable way to lose to Vegas.

Silly mistakes, silly penalties erased a quality effort from the home team.

But as well as it appeared the Jets played Thursday night, never did you think the game was in control. Unlike Tuesday, when Winnipeg took control of the game versus Boston, and filled the net at will, the Jets were truly embroiled in a heavyweight battle against Vegas.

You could feel the intensity grow throughout the game — a style of hockey that fits the personality of the Golden Knights. A style of hockey that the Jets can learn from. In fact, I would suggest, that Scott Arniel’s team learned much, much more from the overtime loss than they did from the seven-goal victory.

What’s the old saying? “No pain, no gain”

There is little doubt that the Jets can play with the big boys — Vegas, Dallas, Edmonton — but playing at an elite level comes with pain. Agonizing pain. And it comes by being consistent and relentless and playing every minute of every game.

## **City TV Winnipeg**

<https://winnipeg.citynews.ca/video/2024/12/12/south-asian-heritage-celebrated-during-winnipeg-jets-game/>

### ***South Asian heritage celebrated during Winnipeg Jets game (VIDEO)***

Thursday evening was a special game for the Winnipeg Jets as it hosted its third annual South Asian Heritage Night. Joanne Roberts has the story.

## **Sportsnet.ca**

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/whats-at-the-top-of-each-canadian-teams-wish-list/>

### ***What's at the top of each Canadian team's wish list? (VIDEO)***

Sam Cosentino joins Danielle Michaud on Sportsnet Central to discuss what he believes should top the wish lists of Canadian teams as they approach the holiday season.