

## Winnipegjets.com

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/three-things-hellebuyck-wins-showdown-with-laine>

### ***Three things - Hellebuyck wins showdown with Laine Jets finish four-game homestand with 4-2 win over Montreal***

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG - The Winnipeg Jets ended their four-game homestand with a 4-2 win over the Montreal Canadiens at Canada Life Centre. The Jets finished 2-1-1 on the homestand and are now 22-9-1 on the season. Kyle Connor and Gabe Vilardi had multi-point nights with a goal and an assist each and Josh Morrissey chipped in with a couple of helpers. Connor Hellebuyck recorded his league leading 19th win while making 26 saves and was named the game's first star. The Jets will head to California on Sunday for a two-game road trip starting Tuesday in San Jose.

#### HELLE DOING HELLE THINGS

Before the game, former Jet Patrik Laine joked that Connor Hellebuyck avoided facing him his previous two visits to Winnipeg because Hellebuyck had the Paddy flu. In the second period with the Jets enjoying a two-goal lead and the Canadiens on a power play, Lane Hutson found Laine open for the one-timer, but Hellebuyck made a stellar blocker save on Laine to keep it 3-1. Laine finished the night with seven shots on goal and the Vezina Trophy winner stopped them all.

"No flu tonight, no flu tonight," said Hellebuyck.

"He had a lot of shots tonight and he's a good shooter."

Hellebuyck has 294 wins to give him the third-most wins by a goalie in their first 10 seasons. He trails only Henrik Lundqvist (339) and Martin Brodeur (324) for wins in their first 10 seasons.

#### KC PASSES LITTS

The Canadiens had a 1-0 lead in the first period before the Jets went to the power play for the first time. Kyle Connor spotted Gabe Vilardi at the far post and sent a seeing eye pass for the easy tap in for Vilardi at 14:34. With the assist, Connor passed Bryan Little for fourth on the Jets/Thrashers all-time scoring list. He trails only Blake Wheeler (812), Mark Scheifele (751) and Ilya Kovalchuk (615) in the franchise list for points.

The number one power play in the league went to work again in the second period with Winnipeg up 2-1. The Canadiens took two minors 25 seconds apart to give the Jets a 5-on-3, with two seconds remaining in the first minor to Cole Caufield, Connor one-timed a Josh Morrissey pass past Sam Montembeault for a 3-1 Winnipeg lead. Connor has nine points (4G, 5A) in his past six games and is up to 523 career points.

#### JMO DISHES OUT THE ASSISTS

Josh Morrissey came into the night third amongst defencemen in assists with 25, and the Jets number one defenceman delivered again on Saturday night with his recorded his 51st career multi-assist game and passed Vyacheslav Kozlov (50) for the fifth most in franchise history. Morrissey is now up to 27 assists on the season.

## **Canadian Press**

<https://www.chrisd.ca/2024/12/14/winnipeg-jets-montreal-canadiens-game-recap/>

### ***Hellebuyck Frustrates Canadiens as Jets Win 4-2***

By Jim Bender, The Canadian Press

You could say that Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck is healthy.

Before the game, former Jets forward Patrik Laine joked that Hellebuyck must have had the “Patty Flu” because he has never played against him.

Well, Hellebuyck made 26 saves as Winnipeg defeated Laine’s Montreal Canadiens 4-2 before a sellout crowd of 15,225 fans at Canada Life Centre on Saturday.

“No flu tonight,” Hellebuyck said. “He had a lot of shots tonight. He’s a good shooter. But nothing for him.”

Laine had seven of Montreal’s 28 shots, but failed to score. So, was Hellebuyck motivated by his former teammate’s dig at him?

“I didn’t hear the comments, to be honest,” he said. “Until now.”

Laine declined a request for an interview after the game.

Hellebuyck stopped several of Laine’s one-timers from the slot.

“He has a great shot, obviously,” said Josh Morrissey, who assisted on two of the four Winnipeg goals. “Patty’s scored a lot of goals from that area of the ice, like some of the other great shooters in the league, and we saw it here for a long time. So definitely, the pre-scout since his return, their power plays produced some goals from over there. And they’ve got all the right-handed players.

“So, we obviously tried to make it an emphasis of trying to not give them those one-timers. But, when he did, Bucky was there and made some big saves. He’s unbelievable, the best goalie in the league, in my view.

“I get to see it every night and probably take it for granted when you watch it over and over and over again. ... He makes it look easy, but I guarantee it’s not. Just a special, special talent, and really a generational goalie in my view.”

Both Kyle Connor and Gabriel Vilardi scored a power-play goal and added an assist. Adam Lowry and Vlad Namestnikov, into an empty net, scored the others.

Josh Anderson and Lane Hutson, with his first NHL goal, replied for the Canadiens, who were frustrated by Hellebuyck.

“He’s a great goalie,” Hutson said. “He’s so big, so smart and sees the ice very well. He’s a hard goalie to beat, not just for us, but for anyone.”

It was Hellebuyck's 19th win of the season, which leads the NHL.

"There's some exciting stuff happening out there with him," said Jets coach Scott Arniel. "He's always on pucks. He has the ability to recognize what's coming with the next situation.

"He always seems to know where it is and I'm looking all over trying to find it half the time and he knows where it is — right in his glove."

Arniel also appreciated the way Hellebuyck shut down Laine.

"I think he knows the opponent pretty well," he said. "Probably saw him in practice. For us, no matter if it's Laine, it's Ovi (Alex Ovechkin) — there's certain players that you know are going to get their looks. We're kind of setting it up so (Hellebuyck) is waiting for it.

"We don't want multiple options happening, whether it's in the slot or maybe, it's the other flanker getting the shot. If Helly knows where the shots are going to be, he's set. He doesn't have to come from the other side and slide across to make a save."

Winnipeg was two-for-six on the power play and killed off four penalties, including a 30-second two-man advantage.

#### NOTES

The Jets went into the game with 21 wins, the most in franchise history through the first 31 games. They also had a plus-34 goal differential, the most in franchise history through the first 31 games. That was also the second-most in the NHL heading into Saturday's action.

#### **NHL.com**

<https://www.nhl.com/news/montreal-canadiens-winnipeg-jets-game-recap-december-14>

#### ***Connor, Vilardi each has 2 points, Jets hold off Canadiens Hellebuyck makes 26 saves; Hutson scores 1st NHL goal for Montreal***

By Darrin Bauming

WINNIPEG -- Kyle Connor and Gabriel Vilardi each had a goal and an assist for the Winnipeg Jets, who held on for a 4-2 win against the Montreal Canadiens at Canada Life Centre on Saturday.

"It was a pretty entertaining game," Winnipeg coach Scott Arniel said. "A lot of special teams ... real proud of both our units there. Our power play and penalty kill really stepped up tonight. I really liked our effort. It was a really good bounce back from what we had done the other night against Vegas (a 3-2 overtime loss on Thursday). It was a real solid win."

Adam Lowry and Vladislav Namestnikov also scored, and Connor Hellebuyck made 26 saves for the Jets (22-9-1), who have earned a point in five of their past six (4-1-1). Josh Morrissey had two assists.

"He's unbelievable," Morrissey said of Hellebuyck. "The best goalie in the League, in my view. I get to see it every night and probably take it for granted, when you watch it over and over and over again. I was reminiscing about that the other day. I think when I played my 600th game, I

was thinking about how I probably played about 500 at least with him in the net. That's pretty lucky as a player. He makes it look easy, but I guarantee it's not. Just a special, special talent, and really a generational goalie in my view."

Lane Hutson scored his first NHL goal for the Canadiens (11-16-3), who have lost three of four (1-3-0). Sam Montembeault made 23 saves.

"I thought it was a great game on both sides," Montreal coach Martin St. Louis said. "Both goalies made big saves. I'm proud of our group. We played hard coming off a tough third period at home (on Thursday, when they allowed six goals in a 9-2 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins). It's very encouraging."

Hutson gave the Canadiens a 1-0 lead at 7:48 of the first period with a wrist shot from the left face-off dot that beat Hellebuyck glove side.

"It's pretty special," said Hutson, who was playing in his 32nd NHL game. "You never know when it's going to be your last goal or your first goal. So, it's cool, for sure, but I would have loved to have scored and won the game. Hopefully we can do that soon."

Vilardi tied it 1-1 on the power play at 14:34. He finished a backdoor pass from Connor, who was in the right corner, at the left post.

Lowry then put the Jets in front 2-1 at 16:40. As Nino Niederreiter was skating behind the net, he sent a backhand pass out to Lowry, who jammed the puck in with Montembeault looking the other way.

"That was a nice play, and where [Lowry] scored from, those are the hard areas," Arniel said. "I thought in the first [Namestnikov's] line had a couple of great looks. They were hacking and whacking in around there. Even [Mark Scheifele] and those guys, [Connor], they threw some in there and we went into those areas. That's what you have to do as the games get harder and teams get tougher."

Connor made it 3-1 at 6:26 of the second period with a one-timer during a 5-on-3 power play.

The Jets went 2-for-6 with the man-advantage and were 4-for-4 on the penalty kill.

"It's huge. That's how you win in this league," Hellebuyck said. "Especially at this time when things are getting tighter and teams are figuring out their game and bouncing back from bad games or whatnot. Your big guys have got to bring their A-game on a consistent basis, and I thought they did tonight."

Josh Anderson cut it to 3-2 at 8:00 of the third period, skating into the rebound of Christian Dvorak's backhand attempt and scoring five-hole from the slot.

"Sometimes you play good enough to win and sometimes you get on the wrong end of it," Hutson said. "At the end of the day, we liked what we did in the third and we want to keep building on that."

Namestnikov shot into an empty net at 19:54 for the 4-2 final.

“We stuck with it,” Morrissey said. “Special teams were great. The power play was awesome, our penalty kill was outstanding. I thought we did a better job of not giving them as much free offense as we have in the last few games. They are a highly skilled group over there. ... They get paid to play the game, too, so I thought we did a good job overall. It was a huge win.”

NOTES: Morrissey has five points (one goal, four assists) during a four-game point streak. ... Hutson has 20 points (one goal, 19 assists) in 30 games this season. He is the second Canadiens rookie in the past 30 years to reach 20 points in 30 or fewer games, joining Brendan Gallagher (30 games in 2012-13). ... Connor has nine points (four goals, five assists) in his past six games. ... Anderson’s goal was his first in 12 games.

## **Sportsnet.ca**

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/generational-goalie-jets-hellebuyck-delivers-another-reminder-of-impact/>

### ***'Generational goalie': Jets' Hellebuyck delivers another reminder of impact***

by Jacob Stoller

WINNIPEG — Patrik Laine got his wish.

Sort of.

During a Saturday morning media availability at the Montreal Canadiens’ hotel, Laine told reporters he was hoping Connor Hellebuyck would be in net when he faced his former team.

Laine had never played against Hellebuyck.

“The last two times I’ve been here, I don’t think he’s played. He’s had the Paddy flu — I mean, it’s understandable,” Laine quipped.

But by the time the buzzer sounded on the Winnipeg Jets’ 4-2 win over the Habs, it was the two-time Vezina Trophy winner who got the last laugh.

Hellebuyck held Laine off the scoresheet, saving all seven shots the latter recorded. Four of those came on the power play.

“No flu tonight,” Hellebuyck said post-game. “He had a lot of shots tonight. He’s a good shooter. But nothing for him.”

One of those saves was highlight-reel worthy, with Hellebuyck robbing Laine of a power-play goal with a cross-crease blocker save — where he lost his stick in the process — before subsequently swatting the puck out of mid-air with his hands.

Hellebuyck hadn’t heard Laine’s pre-game remarks until he was asked about it post-game. But it’s not like he needed any extra motivation to dial in. Having faced off against him in practice so many times — let alone the fact his trademark one-timer is no secret — Hellebuyck’s positioning was that of someone who knew what to do every time Laine was in his trademark shooting spot.

“He always has the ability to recognize what’s coming with the next situation,” Arniel said.

While Jets fans are undeniably happy seeing Laine happy, healthy and back playing, a lingering “what could have been” feeling will always ruminate in this market. Seeing a player your team drafted second overall — and rose to become one of the most prolific scorers in the game as a teenager — in another team’s colours stings. Nearly four years since he was traded to the Columbus Blue Jackets for Pierre-Luc Dubois, there’s still a litany of Laine jerseys on any given night at Canada Life Centre.

But Saturday’s game was a not-so-subtle reminder of the franchise-altering talent they do have. That is, the best goaltender on the planet.

“I get to see it every night and probably take it for granted when you watch it over and over and over again. I was reminiscing about that the other day,” Josh Morrissey said post-game. “I think when I played my 600th game, I was thinking about how I probably played about 500 at least with him in the net. That’s pretty lucky as a player. He makes it look easy, but I guarantee it’s not. Just a special, special talent, and really a generational goalie in my view.”

Sure, Hellebuyck’s on-ice — or off-ice — brilliance isn’t as marketable as Laine’s once was. But you’d be hard-pressed to argue against Hellebuyck being the franchise’s most impactful player since they relocated from Atlanta to Winnipeg.

Since the 2016-17 season, his first as a starter, no goalie has recorded more shutouts than Hellebuyck (38), who also ranks second in wins (281). According to data retrieved by NaturalStatTrick.com, Hellebuyck ranks fourth in Goals Saved Above Expected per 60 minutes (0.21) among the 61 goalies that have played at least 150 games in that span. He’s done that all the while facing the 19th most high-danger shots against per game (7.99).

He’s a near-lock to win his third Vezina, boasting a .926 save percentage, a 2.11 goals-against average and three shutouts through 25 games. At this rate, it’s hard to foresee him being left off the Hart Trophy ballot.

Frankly, it’s not inconceivable to think Hellebuyck will be inducted into the Hall of Fame once it’s all said and done. And he doesn’t need a Stanley Cup to get there. A championship win at the Four Nations Face-Off and perhaps even an Olympic Gold Medal could give him enough accolades to fit the bill.

And if he remains in Winnipeg throughout his current contract, that’ll mark nearly two decades in a Jets uniform. By then, you’ll see a lot more “Hellebuyck” namebars — as opposed to “Laine” — on the backs of fans at Canada Life Centre.

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/self-destructive-mistakes-hurt-canadiens-again/>

### ***Self-destructive mistakes hurt Canadiens again***

By Eric Engels

It was nothing to be embarrassed about, which you might consider a step forward for a Montreal Canadiens team that virtually stumbled backwards into an oncoming bus on Thursday.

Still, despite a strong bid on Saturday to restore some of the dignity sacrificed two days prior in the 9-2 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins, the Canadiens once again beat themselves.

This time, it was a 4-2 loss to the NHL-leading Winnipeg Jets, who got as far ahead with six seconds remaining, when Vladislav Namestnikov fired the puck into an empty net. But the Canadiens essentially put the dagger in front of their own heart before it was plunged straight through by the Jets.

You can't help but wonder how destructive this pattern might be in the long run for a team approaching the halfway mark of a rebuild. To keep losing the same way — with so many actions to help the opposition and so few to help themselves — must be traumatic to a degree. Especially when efforts and intentions are in the right place.

They were there again at Canada Life Centre on Saturday. Right from the start, with the Canadiens notching 18 of the first 26 shot attempts and grabbing the lead 7:48 into the first period on Lane Hutson's first NHL goal.

This should've been a galvanizing one. Just looking at the reactions from the bench — even from head coach Martin St. Louis — made you feel like it would be.

But then Kirby Dach put the league's best power play at home to work with a needless high-sticking penalty 150 feet from his own net a little less than six minutes later, and he was barely warming his seat in the box when the Canadiens' kill broke down to Gabe Vilardi's benefit.

Two minutes and seven seconds later, the Canadiens' first line got caught on an extended shift and ended up watching as six-foot-five Jets captain Adam Lowry took advantage of the mismatch with Hutson in front of the net to make it 2-1.

If Dach's undiscipline was costly, Cole Caufield's and Christian Dvorak's to give the Jets a five-on-three advantage in the fifth minute of the second period proved deadly.

Kyle Connor made sure of it.

At least the Canadiens didn't quit right then and there, like they did when Thursday's game turned on the goal that made it 4-2 Penguins.

It's just that they'd have given themselves a much better chance to come back and beat the Jets had they not taken three more penalties over the final 25 minutes of play.

The Canadiens knew that was the difference.

"We knew they had a really good power play," Mike Matheson said to reporters on site after the game. "We gave them too many chances."

Josh Anderson, who offered up one late in the second, scored a big goal to narrow the gap with 12 minutes to play in the third.

The Canadiens took momentum from it and generated two of nine scoring chances they had in the frame.

They looked dangerous at six-on-five near the end, but they only had 1:35 to play with that advantage after Brendan Gallagher took a slashing penalty.

At least the Canadiens kept pushing, leaving St. Louis saying he was encouraged by their response.

Maybe the players were, too, but the frustration of letting another game slip away can't be easy to deal with.

This was Montreal's 19th loss of the season, and it came on the heels of a good stretch of hockey that was undone in dramatic fashion in the 18th loss. You'd like to think that because the response to that was reasonably good, another step in the right direction can be taken.

But until the pattern of self-destruction is broken, there's no betting on it.

Hutson's first goal a product of his determination

You might see it as skill — and it is when a player reads the faceoff play the way Hutson did, quickly corralling a pass and handling the puck once before firing it post-and-in on the NHL's top candidate for the Vezina Trophy — but there's another reason this goal was scored as it was.

Practice makes perfect.

For weeks, Hutson has stepped on the ice ahead of practice with Canadiens director of development Adam Nicholas to work on shots from that exact location (among others). Saturday's goal was the fruit of that labour. He put in the extra time and got rewarded for it on Saturday.

The goal came in Hutson's 32nd NHL game, and it'll be the first of many he scores in this league — even if he said afterwards, "You never know when it's going to be your last goal or your first goal."

Considering that, the 20-year-old's celebration was relatively subdued, as he twirled his stick down into the imaginary holster like Tiger Woods twirls his driver after slapping the ball 300 yards down the fairway.

But everyone around Hutson was overjoyed.

Matheson and Caufield raced to get the puck out of Connor Hellebuyck's net. St. Louis was leading the fist-pumping brigade on the Canadiens' bench.

How did that make Hutson feel?

"These guys have accepted me right from the start," he said, "been nothing but great to me."

It's not just because of Hutson's game-breaking talent; it's mostly because he aims to make a difference on every single shift and puts everything he has into his preparation so that he can actually make the difference on any single one of them.

"He plays a big role, and he brings a lot," said St. Louis, who's played Hutson nearly 23 minutes per game in his rookie season.



“I think it’s been a while that everyone’s been talking about (him not scoring),” St. Louis added, “but I had no doubt Lane Hutson was going to score goals in this league. It was fun to see him get one tonight.”

It was no accident.

That determination Hutson had to make it happen sooner than later is the type you want all young players to have.

The Canadiens can only hope it rubs off on everyone around him.

### **Winnipeg Free Press**

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/12/14/hellebuyck-tames-laine-as-jets-roll-past-habs>

### ***Hellebuyck tames Laine as Jets roll past Habs***

By: Ken Wiebe

Connor Hellebuyck isn’t the type of guy who requires any additional motivation.

Nor is he the type of player who’s scouring social media for any particular bulletin-board material in the hours leading up to puck drop.

So it came as little surprise that the Winnipeg Jets all-world goalie didn’t hear former teammate Patrik Laine joking about Hellebuyck having the “Paddy flu” in the three previous meetings when he spoke to reporters on Saturday morning.

“No flu tonight,” said Hellebuyck, who finished with 26 saves in the 4-2 win for the Jets over the Montreal Canadiens on Saturday before a sold-out crowd of 15,224 at Canada Life Centre. “He had a lot of shots. He’s a good shooter. But nothing for him.”

Nothing indeed, but it wasn’t for a lack of trying as Laine had seven shots on goal and nine shot attempts in the contest as he had just over 16 minutes of ice time against the organization that chose him second overall in the 2016 NHL Draft.

Hellebuyck is up to a league-leading 19 wins in 25 starts this season to go with a 2.11 goals-against average and .926 save percentage.

“He’s unbelievable, the best goalie in the league, in my view,” said Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey. “I get to see it every night and probably take it for granted when you watch it over and over and over again.

“He makes it look easy, but I guarantee it’s not. Just a special, special talent, and really a generational goalie in my view.”

The Jets, who improved to 22-9-1 on the season, are heading out on the road for a pair of games in California against the San Jose Sharks on Tuesday and the Anaheim Ducks on Wednesday.

Let's take a closer look at this one:

*SPECIAL STUFF:* The Jets power play finished two-for-six, cashing in once at five-on-four on a fantastic backdoor pass from Kyle Connor to Gabe Vilardi that tied the game 1-1, then added another from Connor on a one-timer with just two seconds remaining in a two-man advantage.

"It's huge. That's how you win in this league," said Hellebuyck. "Especially at this time when things are getting tighter and teams are figuring out their game, and bouncing back from bad games or what not. Your big guys have got to bring their A-game on a consistent basis and I thought they did."

The Jets recently leaky penalty kill, which had allowed a goal in five consecutive games, locked things down in this one — finishing four-for-four while short-handed.

*ASSESSING THE HOMESTAND:* With the win, the Jets took home five of a possible eight points during this homestand and they've now secured nine of the 12 points available in the past six games.

"You have to do that. You have to take advantage when you're home here," said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. "We just like the way we came out and got our points."

The hot stretch has allowed the Jets to move back into top spot in the Central Division standings, one point ahead of the Minnesota Wild, who hold two games in hand and face the Vegas Golden Knights on Sunday.

"It was a good homestand and now a couple days off here and we'd like to finish strong before Christmas," said Morrissey.

*THE RETURN:* Although he's suited up in Winnipeg as a member of the visiting team previously, this was a special appearance for Laine.

The second-overall pick in the 2016 NHL Draft was suiting up in his first game here since coming out of the NHL/NHLPA player assistance program.

Laine suited up in his sixth game of the season on Saturday and generated several dangerous scoring chances, including a blistering one-timer late in the second period during a Canadiens power play.

"It's one of those things where say if I screw up, I can make a good save," said Hellebuyck, who had lost his stick for a second before pushing across to make a blocker save. "By the time I picked it up, it was on its way to the net. So the only thing I could do was just flail and try and make something cool, and thank God I did."

Did Hellebuyck think the puck was going to cross the goal line if he didn't snag it out of the air?

"It was coming down right on my head, and there's two guys crashing the net. So you can play any type of what-if game you want," said Hellebuyck. "But I got my glove on it, stopped it and sent it out."

Laine has three goals and four points since returning from a knee injury he suffered in his second pre-season game back in September.

*THE KEY PLAY:* With two seconds left in a two-man advantage, Connor blasted home a one-timer that ended up being the game-winning goal.

*THE THREE STARS:* 1. Connor Hellebuyck, Jets, 26 saves, including several of the highlight-reel variety; 2. Josh Morrissey, Jets, two more assists in 23:37 of work; 3. Kyle Connor, Jets, scored the game-winner and set up another with the man advantage.

*EXTRA, EXTRA:* Adam Lowry scored his eighth goal of the season at 16:40 of the first period to put the Jets up 2-1, converting a beautiful pass from Nino Niederreiter. Lowry is up to eight goals in 32 games as he continues to chase his career-best of 15 that he produced during the 2016-17 campaign...

Vladislav Namestnikov rounded out the scoring for the Jets, scoring into the empty net with 5.4 seconds to go in regulation, moving him to eight goals on the season...

The Jets made one lineup change, inserting Colin Miller on the third pairing for Ville Heinola. Miller had three shots on goal and 13:41 of ice time in his 26th game of the season...

Canadiens defenceman Lane Hutson scored his first NHL goal in the first period, beating Hellebuyck with a quick shot. Hutson also has 19 assists this season and his offensive skill is impressive to watch...

Canadiens D-man David Savard returned to the lineup on Saturday and made his presence felt, finishing with three hits and three blocked shots.

Savard, 34, is someone that has been on the Jets' radar previously and he's on an expiring contract. He's got size, is no stranger to shot-blocking and killing penalties and has 57 games of Stanley Cup playoff experience on his resume — winning the Stanley Cup with the Tampa Bay Lightning in 2021 after he was acquired in a deadline deal with the Columbus Blue Jackets.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/12/15/laine-having-fun-on-and-off-the-ice-again>

### ***Laine having fun on and off the ice again***

By: Ken Wiebe

This was performance art at its finest, which is an area Patrik Laine has ample expertise in.

As the former Winnipeg Jets sniper rolled into town as a member of the Montreal Canadiens on the weekend, it was as though he had taken a plunge into the hot tub time machine.

With a gathering of media members from both Montreal and Winnipeg huddled around him in a circle on the second floor of the Canadiens' downtown hotel, Laine looked and sounded like the player who took this city and province by storm as a teenager and into his early 20s.

During a question-and-answer period that lasted nearly 10 minutes, Laine tackled a variety of topics the way he had so many times before.

The ability to weave smoothly between exuding extreme confidence, while mixing in self deprecation and showing self awareness is often a tough road to navigate.

But Laine did so with aplomb.

The one-liners were flowing and that's often part of the back-and-forth when it comes to conversations with Laine.

Whether on or off the ice, Laine was always comfortable under the spotlight and seemed to relish the responsibility when it came to the role of entertainer.

While some Jets fans might have had their back up with Laine making a tongue-in-cheek comment about goalie Connor Hellebuyck having the "Paddy flu" the past three times Laine has been an opponent, the quip was obviously said in jest.

There wasn't an ounce of malice in the statement, nor was he actually calling out a former teammate for being scared to go up against him.

This was pure, good-natured fun, with one of the best shooters in the game setting the stage to go up against the reigning Vezina Trophy winner.

That's something the NHL could use a little bit more of, especially during the dog days of the marathon season.

Much like he did when he was a member of the Jets, Laine also took a fun-loving swipe at his close friend and former linemate Nikolaj Ehlers.

Not only did Laine joke that he brought a signed jersey with him to Winnipeg to help cheer Ehlers up as he works his way back from a lower-body injury, he said he hoped the Danish forward wouldn't be scared when he got back on the ice for the rematch in Montreal next month.

Again, anyone involved in the conversation knew full well that Laine was basically in character, providing a quote that brought a little bit of colour to the proceedings for Game 32 and beyond.

The maturity in how Laine is carrying himself these days is even more impressive when you consider the tough patch he endured while spending a significant amount of time getting the help he needed in the NHL/NHLPA player assistance program.

Although Laine has kept the details of his personal battle to himself, it's moments like Saturday that show the Finnish winger finds himself in a much better place these days.

To hear him discuss what it's like to have fun being on the ice and putting on the uniform is encouraging to hear.

Because in those early years of his career, Laine's love for the sport — and for finding the back of the net — was on display for the world to witness.

You could see it when he fired home a one-timer on the power play, when the youthful exuberance of his celebrations could light up an entire arena.

And you could see it when he offered a juicy quote with a wry smile or came through with one of his classic quotes when he was in the midst of a rare slump, declaring for all to hear that “hockey is hard.”

That someone with such a remarkable ability to score goals so openly wore his heart on his sleeve and showed his emotions in both good times and bad was part of his allure.

The second overall pick of the 2016 NHL Draft was a fan favourite around these parts for good reason during his four-plus seasons in the organization.

Quite simply, he captivated audiences with his otherworldly shot — and still does.

“It’s elite,” Canadiens head coach Marty St. Louis said on Saturday. “It comes off his stick pretty fast, hard and accurate. He’s given goalies trouble since he’s been in the league. So, it’s fun to watch.”

That things eventually went sideways and Laine was moved to the Columbus Blue Jackets in January 2021 is a sore spot for a segment of the Jets fan base, but the appreciation for what he did while he was here and what he’s been through was on display on Saturday night.

When Laine was shown on the scoreboard during the anthem, a loud roar was heard inside Canada Life Centre.

There were other examples of ooh-ing and ahh-ing when each of his scoring chances were thwarted by Hellebuyck

Earlier in the day, Laine talked about feeling the support from Jets’ fans and being back in a place where he created a lot of great memories.

He also talked about what it’s been like to be back playing in a hockey-mad market, where the passion is flowing at full speed, even in the midst of a rebuild.

“We’re a really young team and even I’m feeling old these days,” said Laine, who only turns 27 in April. “Obviously playing in Montreal is something special. It kind of fires you up overall, playing in Canada. I did miss that when I was playing in the States.”

Laine has created an online initiative with his fiancée, Jordan Leigh, called From Us To You with the goal of helping make people feel more comfortable talking about overcoming adversity and speaking out about mental health.

And while it’s great to see Laine once again bringing people out of their seats when the puck is on his stick, perhaps his most important contribution might be what he’s doing off the ice.

“I love helping people. It’s important,” said Laine. “If you can help people, why not? All of that has been great, too.”

What was clear about Saturday was that Laine is still shaking off the rust that comes along with not touching a hockey stick or being on the ice for seven or eight months and then having to battle back from the knee injury he sustained in the second pre-season game.

“My game is not quite there yet, but after almost a year-long break, I’m not expecting it to be,” said Laine, who has three goals and four points in six games. “But we’re working on it and we’re trending in the right direction.”

Speaking of trending in the right direction, the NHL finds itself in a better place when Laine is on the ice providing highlight-reel moments and sharing his personality off of it.

While hockey may still be hard at times, it can also be part of the healing process.

## **Winnipeg Sun**

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/no-flu-tonight-jets-connor-hellebuyck-slams-door-on-patrik-laine-in-win-over-habs>

### ***'No flu tonight': Jets' Connor Hellebuyck slams door on Patrik Laine in win over Habs***

By Paul Friesen

Whenever Patrik Laine faced the Winnipeg Jets, he always got the backup goalie from his former team, causing him to joke that Connor Hellebuyck must have had “the Patty flu” for those games.

Going into Saturday’s tilt in downtown Winnipeg, Laine told reporters he hoped to face the Jets No. 1 netminder this time.

He did, and the winner of this long-awaited showdown wasn’t wearing No. 92 for the Montreal Canadiens.

“No flu tonight,” Hellebuyck said, after the Jets won, 4-2. “He had a lot of shots, and he’s a good shooter. But nothing for him.”

Laine’s first game against the Jets with his new team produced seven shots on goal and a few chances, but Hellebuyck turned them aside, including a couple of the winger’s famous one-timers that gave the all-star goalie all he could handle.

One late Laine shot off Hellebuyck’s stick bounced high in the air, but as he was on his butt he swatted it out of harm’s way.

“It was coming down right on my head, and there’s two guys crashing the net,” Hellebuyck said. “So you can play any type of what-if game you want, but I got my glove on it, stopped it and sent it out.”

“He’s unbelievable,” Josh Morrissey said of his goalie. “The best goalie in the league, in my view. I get to see it every night and probably take it for granted when you watch it over and over and over again.”

The last-place team in the NHL East gave the Winnipeg Jets all they could handle.

Two power-play goals staked the Jets to a 3-1 lead through two periods and the Jets withstood a late Montreal rally, ending a four-game home stand on a happy note.

Gabe Vilardi, Adam Lowry and Kyle Connor staked the Jets to their two-goal lead, while Vlad Namestnikov added an empty-netter.

In addition to going 2-for-6 on the power play, the Jets killed off all four of Montreal's.

"We stuck with it," Morrissey said after collecting a pair of assists. "Special teams were great. The power play was awesome. Our penalty kill was outstanding. We did a better job of not giving them as much free offence as we have in the last few games. They are a highly-skilled group over there ... they get paid to play the game too, so I thought we did a good job overall. It was a huge win."

Nursing a 3-1 lead in the third period, the Jets got loose in their own end, allowing Josh Anderson free rein to bury a rebound behind Hellebuyck.

With still more than half a period to go, the Habs had new life. But they couldn't complete the comeback, Namestnikov slamming the final nail in with five seconds left.

Winnipeg's fourth sellout crowd of the season, bolstered by a throng in Montreal red, saw the Jets improve to 22-9-1.

Shots were 28-27, Montreal, as Hellebuyck improved to 19-5-1, holding the most wins in the NHL.

"He always has the ability to recognize what's coming with the next situation," Jets coach Scott Arniel said of his goalie. "He always seems to know where it is and I'm looking all over trying to find it half the time and he knows where it is, right in his glove."

The home side was a little slow out of the gate, allowing 20-year-old Lane Hutson to score his first career goal for Montreal some eight minutes in.

The Jets got that one back on a sneaky power-play goal by Vilardi, Connor finding him lurking at the edge of the crease with a perfect, no-look pass.

Less than two minutes later, Nino Niederreiter's sneaky pass to the front of the net while he skated behind it allowed Lowry to bang it home for a 2-1 Jets lead after one.

Some undisciplined play by the Habs handed Winnipeg a two-man advantage early in the second period, and Connor sniped his 17th of the year for a 3-1 lead.

A highly-debatable high-sticking penalty on Mason Appleton handed Montreal its own brief five-on-three later in the second, but the Jets killed it off and took their two-goal lead into the third.

"It's been a tough stretch of games," Morrissey said. "You look back at the last three-and-a-half weeks, we haven't had two days off in a long time. Obviously, that's the NHL and every team goes through those stretches. It was a good home stand and now a couple days off here and we'd like to finish strong before Christmas."

With a 2-1-1 mark over their last four at home, the Jets pack up and fly to California on Sunday with a bunch of their mothers on board.

They'll play games in San Jose on Tuesday, Anaheim the next night, before returning home for a Saturday tilt against rival Minnesota.

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hes-had-the-patty-flu-laine-takes-poke-at-jets-hellebuyck>

### ***'He's had the Patty flu': Patrik Laine takes poke at Jets' Connor Hellebuyck***

By Paul Friesen

His trademark wit was not only intact on Saturday, it was on fire.

Patrik Laine's Saturday session with media types before his Montreal Canadiens took on the Jets at times resembled an appearance by a stand-up comic.

On whether or not two-time Vezina Trophy winner Connor Hellebuyck was going to be in goal for the Jets:

"I don't know if Helle's playing," Laine said. "I really hope so. Oh, he is? I love that. The last two times I've been here, I don't think he's played. He's had the Patty flu. I mean, it's understandable."

Laine was right: this would be his first game against Hellebuyck. In the three times he'd played the Jets going into Saturday, he'd always faced the backup goalie.

He scored three times in two games against then-backup David Rittich during the 2022-23 season, but failed to beat Eric Comrie in his first visit to Winnipeg late in the previous season.

Saturday's conversation eventually turned to his good friend, Jets winger Nik Ehlers, who's out with a foot injury.

"I brought him a signed jersey to cheer him up a little bit," Laine said. "No, he asked for it. I didn't just bring it."

Luckily, Laine added, he'll have another chance to play against Ehlers in Montreal later this season.

"Hopefully he'll be out there and not too scared."

As for the warm reception he expected from Jets fans, Laine said it's always felt special coming back to the place he started his NHL career.

"Hopefully they don't hate me this time," he said. "They might feel different after the game, I hope."

It was just Laine's third game against his old team. In the most recent one, he scored twice for Columbus.

"It's always fun to play against old teams and old teammates," he said. "Try to show off a little bit."



<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/scoring-goals-impacting-lives-former-jets-star-patrik-laine-is-back>

## ***Scoring goals, impacting lives: former Jets star Patrik Laine is back***

By Paul Friesen

For the better part of seven years, his shot brought people out of their seats from Winnipeg to Columbus and most places in between.

But Patrik Laine's greatest impact may come from the seven or eight months in which he didn't touch a hockey stick.

Struggling with his mental and physical health over the last year and coming out of it okay has been life-changing for the former Jets star.

"In a lot of ways," Laine, back in Winnipeg with the Montreal Canadiens, said on Saturday. "Obviously, hockey-wise it hasn't been great. But when you look at the bigger picture – you don't really look at it that way when you're going through something. But then after you look back a little bit... you always learn something. Those times test you.

"But just got to work through it and you'll come back better on the other side. That's kind of what happened."

What's happened with Laine since the Jets traded him four years ago is an emotional and physical roller-coaster ride that's included the death of his father, a multitude of injuries, scoring streaks and slumps, his first game as a healthy scratch and a six-month stretch in the players' union assistance program.

Typically, players don't talk about why they've needed help from the program, but Laine's been different, opening up about his struggle with mental health.

"I generally believe that everything happens for a reason, and it was some type of reason for those tough times," he said. "Don't know what that is, yet. But I'm sure we'll find out later."

There's already been a positive from it.

If a player in the macho world of pro hockey can acknowledge he needs some help, it makes it okay for some people to talk about their own struggles.

Laine's former teammates in Winnipeg are thrilled not only to see him bouncing back, scoring goals and having fun again, but making a difference by wading into an area not everybody is willing to go.

"This guy's doing that and is going through what he's gone through and is willing to talk about it in front of the world – I'm sure it's inspired a lot of people," Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey said. "And he deserves a lot of credit for that."

"It's great to see him in a great place," Adam Lowry added. "It's great to see him using his platform to raise awareness, to let people that look up to him know that it's okay to speak out, it's okay to look for help.

“Everyone in this room is really happy to see him doing well and see him getting another fresh start in Montreal.”

That fresh start, which began with a summer trade from Columbus, hit a speed-bump in training camp, when a knee sprain in a preseason game cost Laine the first 24 games of the season.

“It wasn’t ideal,” he said. “Since I worked so hard to get back... with the new team and all that. But then second game you get hurt again. It was tough mentally. But just figured that crying about it is not going to help.”

So he just got to work, coming back quicker than the Habs initially thought he would.

Goals in his first two games, three in his first five, signalled the return of that famous shot.

“I took a pretty long break from touching my stick,” he said. “So I wasn’t working on it too much. But I guess it’s still there. There’s a lot of other things I need to work on right now. But at least one of the things I’m known for is still working.”

And yes, the 26-year-old says, he’s having fun again, even if he feels a little old around some of his young Habs teammates.

There’s something about being back in Canada, too, that’s special. In Montreal, it’s magnified even more.

“It fires you up,” Laine said. “Overall, playing in Canada, I did miss that when I was playing in the States.”

Fans will hang on his every shot, just like they did in Winnipeg.

But he’s impacting more than games now.

He’s impacting lives.

Back in the summer, Laine said one of the best pieces of advice he’s ever got was to be brave enough to ask for help.

“I’ve struggled with that a lot,” he said at the time. “With a lot of people there is a lot of shame, a lot of being too proud to reach out and ask for help.”

He worked up the courage to ask for it.

Now he’s giving it.

“I love helping people,” he said. “If you can help people, why not?”

## **Global Montreal**

<https://globalnews.ca/news/10916465/call-of-the-wilde-montreal-canadiens-winnipeg-jets-dec-14-2024/>

### ***Call of the Wilde: Montreal Canadiens fall on road to Winnipeg Jets***

By Brian Wilde Global News

The Winnipeg Jets recently beat the Boston Bruins 8-1. The Montreal Canadiens just lost to the Pittsburgh Penguins 9-2. On paper, this one looked frightening. However, the Canadiens, even though they lost, competed well falling 4-2.

#### *Wilde Horses*

Lane Hutson finally has his first NHL goal in his 32nd game. Considering he is the best blueliner on the team, it's about time. Mike Matheson found Hutson free on the left side. He picked the far side on Connor Hellebuyck with a perfect shot. Hutson won't have to embellish to his grandkids when he tells stories of his first NHL goal. It was already beautiful.

In fact, in a season full of step-backs from a lot of the roster, Hutson's development is one of the few beautiful stories on the team. He's 20. He plays almost half of every game. He's third on the team in scoring. The Canadiens have scored 82 goals and he has been in on 21 of them.

Add to that, he's entertaining. When the club is losing by three or four at home, Hutson is still putting on a show for the Bell Centre faithful. A rebuild is about adding talented players, so while there have been lows, the high of Hutson means progress overall for management.

Another player who is progressing quite well is Arber Xhekaj. Last season, Xhekaj was trying to do everything, and the learning curve was just too steep. He wanted to be a fighter, and a scorer, and a defender, and his brain was too full.

This season, Xhekaj is simply going about the business of defending, reading plays, choosing safe options. Xhekaj can still show that scary side, and that reputation does still make an opponent take a step back. However, that doesn't define him anymore. What defines him is good defending.

There is no question that Xhekaj has leapt past Justin Barron and Jayden Struble on the depth chart. There is a spot for many years to come on the third pair for Xhekaj. He's been that good this season.

Other general managers around the league saw the potential. That's why the offers were so good for Xhekaj. Good thing that Kent Hughes didn't bite. A third pair defender who can play every shift and who keeps the opponent scared is extremely valuable.

Two new reliable adds to the blue line this year. With that perspective, there is progress in the rebuild.

Story continues below advertisement

#### *Wilde Goats*

He's 20. That's how a fair scouting report has to start on Juraj Slafkovsky. He's young. He's only three seasons into what should be a long career. With that said, Slafkovsky is showing very little hockey sense too often in what should be his breakout season.

After 20 goals last year, we are approaching the halfway point of the season and Slafkovsky has only two goals. However, it isn't the goal total that is concerning. It's the decision making.

In the first period, on one shift, Slafkovsky had the puck on the left-side trying to lead a breakout. The Jets began to come at him. He threw it right to the Jets player who was 15 feet from him. The Jets player was right in his eye-line. He tried the pass anyway. He did this twice. In the same shift.

The game is still too fast for him. The dumb passes are made this season because he doesn't feel like he has time. His mind is rushed, so he tries what is not there.

Contrast this with Hutson. He's got only 30 games of NHL career and anyone can see that he is slowing down the game to exactly the pace that he feels like playing at. Slafkovsky can't do that at all. He gets the puck, and he has no time. He hasn't assessed his options. He hasn't read the ice yet. He doesn't know what the correct play is.

Again, he's 20. They can't take his size away from him. They can't take from him many of the elements that caused him to be the first pick overall, but anyone can see that he needs to add elements. What the organization is looking for is smarter reads that come out of repetition. What becomes familiar eventually becomes easier.

There's a skill-set that a quality football quarterback has that Slafkovsky needs to borrow. A quarterback runs through his progressions. Each play starts with a primary choice, and then moves through secondary and third and fourth choice depending on what's open. The quarterback has a plan before the play even starts. Slafkovsky needs to understand each touch has a progression of choices. Hockey happens fast, but the good players feel like it's going slowly.

Call it what you will. Progressions. Decisions. Patterns. Hockey sense. Whatever you want to call it, Slafkovsky needs to get better at it. Plenty of seasons to figure it out still for a young man, but improvement in this area soon would be optimal.

#### *Wilde Cards*

There is a mighty wind blowing that the Canadiens need another right side defender. The argument is that David Reinbacher and Logan Mailloux will both not be ready next season.

It's true. Mailloux is dominant at the AHL level but stumbles when in the NHL, while Reinbacher will have to test his reconstructed knee next season at a lower level before being ready with the Canadiens.

However, if the point is that these two players aren't ready for another season, then, look around, the Canadiens need other positions filled even more next season.

At centre, Kirby Dach has two goals and is minus-21. Christian Dvorak and Jake Evans are unrestricted free agents. Owen Beck is just as unready for the NHL as Mailloux. Beck hasn't proven he can translate his AHL success to the NHL. The Canadiens have one qualified NHL centre under contract next season.

The organization is relying on Michael Hage to be a saviour at centre. He may be, but he is a lot farther along the curve than Mailloux and Reinbacher on defence, or Ivan Demidov on the wing.

Wing is the healthiest position. Cole Caufield is having an outstanding season. Slafkovsky has two goals. Alex Newhook has six. Patrik Laine looks good. Ivan Demidov is coming next season. They have two proven and two more should live up to their high draft pick status.

In net, the back-up goalie is absolutely demoralized at the moment. Cayden Primeau has an .836 save percentage. The future number one is at Boston College, but Jacob Fowler is three seasons out from replacing Primeau. The AHL goalies aren't NHL calibre, though everyone likes to dream. Imagine if Samuel Montembeault were injured. They'd have no one to stop the puck. Every game is a 7-2 loss with an .836 goalie.

The desperately short at defence chatter is way overblown. When David Savard exits, there will be two close to arriving to fill that void.

Defence next season with Mike Matheson, Lane Hutson, Jayden Struble, Arber Xhekaj, Kaiden Guhle, Justin Barron already putting in NHL minutes, Mailloux in his third pro season, and Reinbacher, the top defender taken in the draft, is a healthy stable of talent.

As GM, here are the priorities in order for next season: Get a centre because only Nick Suzuki is proven as able to handle the assignment. Get a goalie because 25 games simply can't go in the auto-loss column.

Get a defender? Sure, but only when the nine strong ones on the roster and in the pipeline prove they can't reach their NHL dreams.

Bottom line: Montreal's surplus numbers are good on the blue line, but they're horrible at centre and in net.