

## **Winnipeg Free Press**

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/2024/12/22/jets-look-to-leave-losses-to-leafs-behind>

### ***Jets look to leave losses to Leafs behind 'Have to be at our best' to end three years of struggles against Toronto***

By: Ken Wiebe

Mark Scheifele doesn't believe in curses.

So when it was brought to his attention on Sunday afternoon that the Winnipeg Jets haven't beaten the Toronto Maple Leafs since Dec. 5 of 2021, the Winnipeg Jets centre was quick to shrug off the suggestion from social media that his words from that day could somehow had an impact on the six losses in six games that have followed.

"No. I don't even know what I said," said Scheifele, whose Jets face the Maple Leafs on Monday afternoon at Scotiabank Arena in the final game before the holiday break.

As Scheifele was involved in the post-game celebration back on that day in 2021, the Kitchener product was reminded that he asked his teammates: "is there anything better than beating the Leafs?"

Anyone who has been around Scheifele for any length of time knows that he was simply caught up in the moment and having fun with the fellas, even if a segment of the Maple Leafs fan base isn't letting him forget about the words that were uttered.

"That was like six years ago," said Scheifele. "Three years ago, OK. Being a kid from close to Toronto, obviously you want to beat the team that you grew up that close to.

"It's always fun to go to Toronto. I have so many friends and family that, first of all, are Leafs fans, and also they get to come to the game, it's that close. Obviously I'm always excited to play those games."

Although Scheifele was a Detroit Red Wings fan growing up, playing in Toronto is near and dear to his heart — especially since his first NHL goal was scored there on Oct. 19, 2011, on James Reimer.

Asked to recall the moment, Scheifele provided the intricate details that led to the memorable marker.

Those memories include Brett MacLean trying to make a seam pass that ended up on the stick of Jets defenceman Dustin Byfuglien, whose heavy shot off the pad landed directly on the tape of Scheifele.

"I do remember it very vividly," said Scheifele. "I was just sitting backdoor. It was a pretty easy one."

Scheifele has scored 314 more goals since his first in the NHL and he's delivered 16 of those goals and recorded 37 points in 29 career games against the Maple Leafs.

There's some additional motivation for the Jets as they get set for the second and final meeting of the regular season with the Maple Leafs, who were the team that stopped their season-opening winning streak at eight games back on Oct. 28.

"It wasn't our best outing and that's what probably sticks out the most," said Scheifele. "When they were here earlier this year, we obviously didn't play our game. They played well. They've been playing really good hockey. They have a great squad over there and they've been playing really good as of late.

"We just have to be at our best. We weren't happy with the one that we played earlier this season, when they beat us in our building. We just have to stick to our structure, stick to our game plan, and worry about ourselves."

Although the Jets made things interesting with a strong third period, the Maple Leafs had built a 4-0 lead before the second period was four minutes old.

"From the time I've been here last year, if I remember correctly they were both tight games," said Jets forward Gabe Vilardi. "This year, they kind of came in and stomped us in the first period and then we rebounded in the second and third, but it was a little too late."

The Jets are coming off a tidy 5-0 victory over the Minnesota Wild that featured an impressive start and one of the most complete games of the entire season.

The Maple Leafs continue to battle for top spot in the Atlantic Division, but they were a bit sloppy in a 6-3 loss to the New York Islanders on Saturday and are expected to be without top centre Auston Matthews and starting goalie Anthony Stolarz for Monday's matchup.

When it comes to recent success or struggles against a particular team — whether it's the eight consecutive wins over the Wild or the six straight losses to the Maple Leafs — the Jets aren't putting a whole lot of stock into it.

"I think we got another win streak after we lost to them anyways, right? So hopefully we can get another one of those going," said Vilardi, referring to the seven-game winning streak that followed the loss to the Maple Leafs. "You can say some teams play better against other teams. I don't know if it's systems that counter the other team or whatever, but yeah."

What can't be disputed is that the Jets gained some valuable breathing room in the Central Division standings by defeating a Wild team that could have pulled within a point with an outright win, but now sit five points behind them.

"As a team, (if) you win 5-0 against a team that's right behind you, it's always a good thing," said Vilardi.

And if the Jets find a way to beat the Maple Leafs on Monday, Scheifele probably won't have to answer many more questions about a harmless comment made in the moment more than three years ago.

*JETS NOTES:* Jets captain Adam Lowry and forward Nikolaj Ehlers skipped Sunday's on-ice workout for maintenance. Lowry left Saturday's game in the third period with an undisclosed injury, while Ehlers has been back for two games since sitting out the previous nine with a lower-body issue. The Jets are currently carrying one extra healthy forward, so if either injury

was deemed to be something that could keep either player out of the lineup, another player would have likely been recalled from the Manitoba Moose of the American Hockey League.

## **Winnipeg Sun**

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-face-their-own-scrooge-in-pre-christmas-tilt-with-leafs>

### ***Jets face their own Scrooge in pre-Christmas tilt with Leafs***

By Paul Friesen

The last time the Winnipeg Jets beat Toronto, Mark Scheifele's enthusiasm was captured by a camera in the Jets dressing room.

"Is there anything better than beating the Leafs?" the Kitchener, Ont., product said that day.

Some of Scheifele's teammates wouldn't know. They've never done it.

Since that day, three years ago this month, the Leafs have been Winnipeg's Scrooge, winning six straight: One that season, two in each of the next two years and one more earlier this season.

The Jets will try to end the skid — the curse? — in Toronto on Monday afternoon.

Does No. 55 even believe in curses?

"No," Scheifele said as the Jets prepared to hit the road on Sunday. "Being a kid from close to Toronto, obviously you want to beat the team that you grew up that close to. If they're still talking about it, it's probably a bigger deal than it is."

Most things in Toronto are made out to be bigger deals than they really are.

As far as Gabe Vilardi is concerned, the losing streak against the Leafs is only half as big.

"Since I've been here we're 0-3," Vilardi said. "Last year if I remember correctly they were both tight games. This year they came in and stomped us in the first period and then we rebounded in the second and third, but it was a little too late."

Vilardi's memory is as keen as his play around the crease.

Last year the teams played back-to-back games in late January, the Jets losing 1-0 in overtime in Toronto, 4-2 at home three nights later.

Their meeting early this season saw the Leafs jump all over the Jets, scoring the first four goals and cruising to a 6-4 win, ending Winnipeg's 8-0 run to start the year.

"I think we got another win streak after we lost to them anyways, right?" Vilardi said.

Right again. The Jets immediately went on a seven-game heater to cap a record-setting, 15-1 start.

“So hopefully we can get another one of those going.”

Coming off a 5-0 romp over Minnesota can't hurt.

The Jets did most everything right in manhandling the Wild on home ice, Saturday.

The power play was firing, the penalty kill stifling, their team defence suffocating.

A perfect game, though? Not really.

The top line of Scheifele, Vilardi and Kyle Connor was blanked, held to a combined two shots, both from Scheifele, a stark contrast to how hot they'd been.

So if you want to talk about momentum going into Toronto, you might want to leave Vilardi, at least, out of the conversation.

“There's good energy in the rink, if that's what you mean by momentum,” he said after Sunday's practice. “Everyone seems to be happy. It wasn't one of my better games, personally.”

A bunch of penalties ruined the flow, is how Vilardi saw it.

“Kind of a wash for our line. We didn't really create that much. I don't think we gave up that much, either.”

They didn't.

While the NHL's No. 1 team was getting back on track with an airtight win over Minnesota, Toronto was leaking half a dozen goals in a 6-3 loss to the New York Islanders.

They still held a share of the Atlantic Division lead with Florida, though, going into the Panthers' Sunday night game against Tampa Bay.

But no matter what these teams have done lately, it's gone Toronto's way for a while now.

“They have a great squad over there and they've been playing really good as of late,” Scheifele said. “We just have to be at our best. We obviously weren't happy with the one that we played earlier this season when they beat us in our building.”

What the Jets have been happy with pretty much all season is their power play.

That might be the biggest difference between the teams.

While the Leafs are a decent 20 percent with the extra man, the Jets are a league-leading 31.8 percent, including two more goals on Saturday and a third right after a power play expired.

Scheifele says the last time he was on a power play this hot was probably with the Barrie Colts in the Ontario junior league.

Then again, he recalled some pretty good runs with Blake Wheeler running it and Dustin Byfuglien on the blue line.

“That was a pretty lethal power play as well,” Scheifele said. “It’s been humming along really well right now. We went through a lull a couple of weeks ago and we’ve gotten back on track.”

Something else Scheifele remembers fondly: his first of 315 NHL goals, scored in Toronto on Oct. 19, 2011.

He remembers it like it was yesterday: Brett McLean’s pass hitting a stick and going to Byfuglien, the defenceman’s shot being stopped, leaving an easy rebound for the 18-year-old, future No. 1 centre.

Players may get old, but some of their favourite moments never do.

“I do remember it very vividly,” Scheifele said. “There’s a lot of connections to Toronto, scoring my first goal against them, too. Very, very excited to go play against the Leafs in Toronto, close to home. Before Christmas makes it even better.”

Needless to say, finally unwrapping a win against them would be a pretty good gift to kick things off.

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/matthews-out-for-leafs-lowery-ehlers-miss-practice-with-jets>

### ***Matthews out for Leafs, Lowry, Ehlers miss practice with Jets***

BY Paul Friesen

One threat the Winnipeg Jets won’t have to deal with in Toronto on Monday is Auston Matthews, as the Leafs’ star centre will miss a second straight game.

The Jets could have a hole down the middle of their lineup, too, if Adam Lowry can’t suit up.

Lowry left Saturday’s win over Minnesota midway through the third period.

He missed Sunday’s practice, too, along with winger Nik Ehlers.

Head coach Scott Arniel wasn’t available to update the status of either, although a team spokesperson said both were taking “maintenance” days.

Both face a short turnaround, as Monday’s game is at 1 p.m. Winnipeg time.

Saturday was Ehlers’ second game back from an injury that forced him to miss nine.

He scored a power-play goal as the Jets beat the Wild, 5-0.

“Having Fly on the goal line and me on the other goal line creates a different dynamic,” fellow power-play winger Gabe Vilardi said of Ehlers, Sunday. “I don’t know if it’s necessarily what you want all the time. But with him on the goal line and me on the other side it gives penalty killers something else to worry about.”

“It’s a good look and we’ve got to keep adding different looks like that that keeps teams guessing.”

Monday’s game is the Jets’ last before a three-day Christmas break. They’ll fly back to Winnipeg for a Friday practice, then host Ottawa on Saturday.

With how hectic their schedule has been, players will revel in the days off no matter what happens in Toronto.

“Whether you win or lose you’re going to go into the break,” is how Gabe Vilardi put it. “So it’s going to be a good break. I’m excited for the break.”

## **Toronto Sun**

<https://torontosun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/toronto-maple-leafs/jets-looking-for-payback-against-maple-leafs-in-mondays-trip-to-toronto>

### ***Jets looking for payback against Maple Leafs in Monday's trip to Toronto***

By Lance Hornby

This is one memory test the Winnipeg Jets won’t fail.

As in which team ended their eight-game win streak to start the season as they approached the NHL record for best start — 6-4 at home no less — their only defeat in the schedule’s first 16 games?

The answer is plain as blue and white. On Monday afternoon, payback is possible when Winnipeg faces the Leafs again, this time at Scotiabank Arena.

The Leafs have five fewer points than Winnipeg and were knocked from first place in the Atlantic on Sunday when Florida beat Tampa Bay. Toronto is also coming off a bad 6-3 home loss to the Islanders, looking very much like a team drained in the second half of a back-to-back.

Meanwhile, Winnipeg fended off the Central Division’s second seed, the Minnesota Wild, with a 5-0 win, taking full advantage of the Wild on its back-to-back.

Monday’s game, moved up to early afternoon as part of the Leafs promoting a ‘Next Generation’ crowd of younger fans, is the last for both clubs before the Christmas break.

“I have noticed we’ve had a tough time against Toronto the last few years,” said Jets forward Morgan Barron. “A lot of skill over there. Hopefully, we can get one more on the road and head into Christmas feeling good.”

It could be a matchup of strong American-born goalies, Jets’ Connor Hellebuyck, the current active league save-percentage leader (.927), versus Toronto’s Joseph Woll.

<https://torontosun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/toronto-maple-leafs/game-day-major-test-awaits-leafs-with-central-leading-jets-in-town>

### ***GAME DAY: Major test awaits Leafs with Central-leading Winnipeg Jets in town***

Up Next - Maple Leafs' third line erupts to spur big win over Sabres

WHEN: Monday, 2 p.m.

TV: TSN4

RADIO: FAN 590

ODDS: Winnipeg +110, Toronto – 149

#### ***THE BUZZ***

The Jets will have Oct. 28 in the back of their minds, when Toronto knocked them off 6-4 on home ice and ended an eight-game win streak to start the season. “We obviously didn’t play our game,” forward Mark Scheifele told Winnipeg media Sunday. “They played well. They’ve been playing really good hockey. We just have to be at our best, stick to our game. We obviously weren’t happy when they beat us in our building. We just have to stick to our structure, stick to our game plan, and worry about ourselves” ... This is also Toronto’s first encounter since then with a Canadian team other than the Habs or Senators. as interest renews as to which Great White North franchise might end the Stanley Cup curse ... The Leafs didn’t get off to a good start Saturday without the injured Auston Matthews. The first few minutes Monday, in an unfamiliar earlier start time, will be crucial to re-establish some home-ice mojo.

#### ***THE NEWS***

The Maple Leafs didn’t practice Sunday, but the Jets did and then travelled ... The Leafs could swap out backup goaltenders again, Matt Murray for Dennis Hildeby, although if Joseph Woll starts, they can keep Hildeby and make a longer term move with Murray after the NHL’s holiday roster freeze is lifted later in the week ... Maple Leafs head coach Craig Berube will decide whether to reinstate Pontus Holmberg as a bottom-six forward or keep Winnipeg native Ryan Reaves for this game ... John Tavares will be looking for his 200th goal as a Leaf to become the fifth in NHL history to get at least that many with two different franchises (Toronto and the Islanders).

#### ***THE QUOTE***

“They came in and stomped us in the first period, then we rebounded in the second and third, but it was a little too late. Other than that, we haven’t played that bad against them.” – Jets forward Gabriel Vilardi, on the last meeting.

#### ***THE PROJECTED LEAFS LINEUP***

Forwards

Matthew Knies/David Kampf/Mitch Marner

Max Pacioretty/John Tavares/William Nylander

Bobby McMann/Max Domi/Nick Robertson

Pontus Holmberg or Ryan Reaves/Connor Dewar/Steven Lorentz

Defence

Morgan Rielly/Conor Timmins

Oliver Ekman-Larsson/Chris Tanev  
Simon Benoit/Jake McCabe

Goal  
Joseph Woll  
Dennis Hildeby or Matt Murray

Injuries  
Toronto: G Anthony Stolarz (knee), D Jani Hakanpaa (knee), C Auston Matthews (upper body),  
F Calle Jarnkrok (groin).  
Winnipeg: D Dylan Samberg (foot), Logan Stanley (lower body).

*The Prediction*  
Jets even up the season's series in a tight game, 3-2 Winnipeg.

### **Yahoo Sports**

<https://ca.sports.yahoo.com/news/nikolaj-ehlers-speed-unlocks-true-203234070.html>

### ***Nikolaj Ehlers' Speed Unlocks True Strengths Of Jets' Offence***

By Julian Gaudio

Nikolaj Ehlers' return to the Winnipeg Jets' lineup has come at an important time, and his speed unlocks the true strengths of the team's offence.

View the original article to see embedded media.

Ehlers opened the scoring against the Minnesota Wild on Saturday night and extended his point streak to four games, dating back to before he sustained his injury.

His goal didn't show off his speed, but throughout the game, Ehlers used his speed to gain the offensive blue line and put the Wild defenders on their heels. What the goal did show was Ehlers' willingness to attack the net and go to the dirty areas to score.

The Jets picked up two vital points against the Wild, which helped them separate themselves in the race for the Central Division. On top of the two points, HC Scott Arniel was happy with the complete game the Jets played.

"I would say it's probably one of our better efforts in the last few games here," said Arniel. "We knew they were coming in after playing last night, went after them in the first period, and kind of continued that through the three periods. Liked a lot of our compete, sort of our little details. A lot of good things that happened tonight."

Part of the complete game Arniel was talking about was playing with pace, and that was highlighted by the 28-year-old Danish winger.

"Yeah, when you see his speed like that, when he puts it on display, it's nerve-wracking for the opposition and especially the defenders who have to play that side of the ice," said Arniel on Ehlers hitting another gear. "It just creates offensive zone time for that group. I thought those



three, they did a really good job and spent a lot of time down in that end of the rink, and they got rewarded for it."

When Ehlers was out of the lineup, Kyle Connor, Mark Scheifele and Gabriel Vilardi carried a heavy load of the Jets' offence, but with Ehlers back at his best, the Jets have become increasingly dangerous on multiple lines.

With a big fixture on deck against the Toronto Maple Leafs on Monday, the Jets will need Ehlers to continue to play at a high speed.

## **Globe and Mail**

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/sports/hockey/article-jets-trying-to-overcome-nemesis-maple-leafs/>

### ***Jets trying to overcome nemesis Maple Leafs***

By Reuters

The Winnipeg Jets will be looking for some revenge when they visit the Toronto Maple Leafs on Monday afternoon.

The Maple Leafs defeated the Jets at Winnipeg 6-4 on Oct. 28. It was the first loss of the season for the Jets after they had opened the season with eight straight wins. They won seven in a row after that loss to go 15-1-0.

The Jets will try to repeat the way they played Saturday in a 5-0 home win over the Minnesota Wild with Connor Hellebuyck earning his fourth shutout of the season.

"Another game like that, exactly," said Cole Perfetti, who had a goal and two assists. "I have noticed we've had a tough time against Toronto the last few years. A lot of skill over there, and hopefully we can get one more on the road and hopefully head into Christmas feeling good."

Toronto was 2-0-0 against Winnipeg last season.

The Maple Leafs had their three-game win streak end with a 6-3 home loss to the New York Islanders on Saturday despite two goals from William Nylander.

Auston Matthews (upper-body injury) was out Saturday after scoring a goal on Friday in the 6-3 road win over the Buffalo Sabres. The Maple Leafs' captain was crosschecked on Friday, aggravating an injury that already had cost him nine games.

"He's just doing everything he can to help this team," said John Tavares, who had one assist on Saturday. "I know it's very tough on him to miss games, and he does everything he can on a daily basis to prepare himself, not only to play at the highest level but to be healthy. He'll continue with everything he needs to do to get back as soon as possible."

The Jets have evened out since their 15-1-0 start, going 9-9-1 since.

The Jets were coming off a 3-2 road loss to the Anaheim Ducks on Wednesday. They took advantage of the Wild, who had played on Friday.

“I would say it’s probably one of our better efforts in the last few games here,” Jets coach Scott Arniel said. “We went after them in the first period and kind of continued that through the three periods. Liked a lot of our compete, our little details. A lot of good things that happened.”

After going 2-for-5 against Minnesota, Winnipeg’s power play is 11-for-28 over the past seven games.