

Winnipegjets.com

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/three-things-jets-best-team-in-nhl-at-the-break>

***Three things - Jets best team in NHL at the break
Scheifele (3G, 1A), Connor (2G, 2A) and Vilardi (3A) combine for 11 points***

By Jamie Thomas

The Winnipeg Jets got a hat trick from Mark Scheifele and two goals from Kyle Connor as they beat the Toronto Maple Leafs 5-2 at Scotiabank Arena. The Jets are the first team in the NHL to reach the 50-point mark and matched the franchise record for fewest games to 50 points in a season (36 GP in 2023-24 & 2018-19). Connor Hellebuyck won his league leading 22nd game of the season for Winnipeg who will face Ottawa on December 28th after the Christmas break.

20 (AND 21) FOR CONNOR

One of the most consistent goal scorers since he began his career in the NHL has been Kyle Connor. The Jets forward came into today's game tied with Blake Wheeler for third on the franchise's all-time goal scoring list with 262. The 27-year-old would move into third on his own in the first period, the Jets were on the power play when Josh Morrissey fired a shot from the point that was tipped by Gabe Vilardi, Joseph Woll made the initial stop but could not get over in time to stop Connor. Connor reached the 20-goal mark for the eighth consecutive season and is on pace for career best in goals.

Connor got his 21st of the season to make it 2-0 in the second period thanks to a couple great plays by his linemate Mark Scheifele. First, the Jets centreman would block a shot which turned into a two-on-one, Scheifele patiently waited for Connor to get into the right spot before he delivered a perfect pass.

SCHEIFELE'S HAT TRICK

In the third period, the Jets top line took over. At 3:27, a tremendous move by Gabe Vilardi turning Jake McCabe inside out before sending a seeing eye pass to Scheifele for the 3-1 goal.

After killing off a Dylan DeMelo penalty, Winnipeg made it 4-1 at 11:57. Josh Morrissey knocked the puck away from McCabe at the Jets blueline and raced down the left side of the ice and found Scheifele alone in front of the Leaf net. Scheifele was stopped the first time but stayed with the puck and slapped it off of the pad of Woll for the 4-1 lead. Scheifele hit 20 goals and now the Jets are the first team to have two 20-goal scorers this season. The 30-year-old completed the hat trick with an empty net goal at 19:39.

BEST TEAM IN THE NHL

They don't hand out the Stanley Cup in December, but the Jets will head into the Christmas break as the top team in the NHL with 51 points.

"We have a great team. We have a lot of great guys in this room that work very hard. And obviously, Helly's, he's been unbelievable this this year, goaltending has just been an unbelievable in general," said Mark Scheifele.

"So, they don't hand out awards at Christmas. But obviously, we're happy, it's good to get a couple days off and get recharged and get going for the next half the season."

NHL.com

<https://www.nhl.com/news/winnipeg-jets-toronto-maple-leafs-game-recap-december-23>

***Scheifele hat trick propels Jets past Maple Leafs
Combines with linemate Connor for 5 goals, 8 points; Tavares scores 200th goal with Toronto***

By Dave McCarthy

TORONTO -- Mark Scheifele had a hat trick and four points for the Winnipeg Jets in a 5-2 win against the Toronto Maple Leafs at Scotiabank Arena on Monday.

"We didn't try to chase the game," Scheifele said. "When they got sustained pressure, we got in front of our net. [Connor Hellebuyck] made some big saves and we just stuck with it."

Kyle Connor scored twice and had two assists, and Hellebuyck made 23 saves for the Jets (25-10-1), who are 5-1-1 in their past seven games.

"I thought it took us a bit to find our game in the first period," Connor said. "We did do a good job of putting pucks to the net and being simple coming through the neutral zone. That's something that we talked about. Obviously the way [the Maple Leafs] sit back in the 1-2-2, you can't be making cross-ice passes, they're going to get picked off. We just made it simple and just kind of built on that momentum."

John Tavares scored twice, and Joseph Woll made 20 saves for the Maple Leafs (21-12-2), who have lost two in a row, each without captain Auston Matthews, who is out with an upper-body injury.

"I think our team overall has played some real good hockey and done a lot of good things," Toronto coach Craig Berube said. "We've made a lot of strides in the right direction, and we will again but these last two games (also 6-3 loss to the New York Islanders on Saturday), we've slept."

Connor gave the Jets a 1-0 lead at 16:04 of the first period on the power play. After Gabriel Vilardi deflected a point shot from Josh Morrissey at the top of the crease, Connor put in the rebound from the bottom of the right faceoff circle for his 20th goal of the season, the eighth-straight season he has scored at least that many.

Connor made it 2-0 at 1:16 of the second period when he tapped in a pass from Scheifele on a 2-on-1.

"It was great," Connor said of Scheifele's pass. "Not too often that you're driving it back post with your backhand there. It's something where I had a step on him, the D-man, and just kind of kept going and he kind of double-clutched it at first and then kind of saw that I had him beat and threw it in there. It was a great pass. Obviously, [Scheifele] had to beat the man that was on him and feather it in there."

Tavares cut it to 2-1 at 5:25 on the power play when he put in a cross-slot pass from Mitch Marner at the side of the net. It was his 200th goal with the Maple Leafs.

"We played a real good first period," Berube said. "We got a penalty, and they scored on the power play but I thought we were the better team. Even in the second I liked our game, but we've got to clean up the mistakes, the details. The game is right there, we created enough. But we didn't score enough goals obviously tonight, but we did a lot of good things tonight. I thought we checked well tonight but we've got to clean up some stuff."

Scheifele pushed it to 3-1 at 3:27 of the third period when he beat Bobby McMann for positioning to the top of the crease and redirected a pass from Vilardi.

Scheifele jammed in a loose puck from behind the net for a 4-1 lead at 11:57 for his 20th goal of the season, the 10th straight season he has scored at least that many.

Winnipeg became the first team in the NHL this season with two 20-goal scorers.

"When your top guys can do that, it gets the opposition on their heels a little bit," Jets coach Scott Arniel said. "They have to be aware of when they're on the ice at all times. And when you can go out on the road and your top line can do that, it certainly leads to lots of success."

Scheifele, Connor and Vilardi combined for 11 points (five goals, six assists).

"Their top line is as elite as any in making plays and taking advantage when they get time and space and you're chasing them," Tavares said.

Tavares cut it to 4-2 at 13:42 when he took a pass from Jake McCabe and shot blocker side from the high slot.

Scheifele completed the hat trick with an empty-net goal at 19:39 for the 5-2 final.

Winnipeg had lost the past six games against Toronto (0-5-1), including 6-4 at home on October 28, their first loss after starting the season 8-0-0.

"I think the biggest thing is we didn't play our best when we played them last," Scheifele said. "We were excited to get another crack at them and show them the game that we can play. All in all, it's a big win for us and that's pretty much it."

NOTES: Tavares, who scored 272 goals with the New York Islanders, became the fifth player in NHL history to score 200 goals for two teams, joining Wayne Gretzky (Edmonton Oilers, Los Angeles Kings), Lanny McDonald (Maple Leafs, Calgary Flames), Mark Messier (Oilers, New York Rangers) and Keith Tkachuk (Winnipeg Jets/Phoenix Coyotes, St. Louis Blues). ... Jets defenseman Haydn Fleury appeared to injure his right leg in a battle for a loose puck with Maple Leafs defenseman Connor Dewar and left the game at 19:06 of the second period. Arniel said he "tweaked the lower body" and is day to day... The Maple Leafs were also without defenseman Chris Tanev, who was scratched after taking the warmup because of a lower-body injury.\

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.chrisd.ca/2024/12/22/winnipeg-jets-minnesota-wild-game-recap/>

Jets' Scheifele playing with a vengeance after 4 Nations snub

By Jacob Stoller

It's no secret Mark Scheifele gets an extra jolt when he faces off against the Leafs.

Rewind three years ago to that infamous clip of Scheifele handing out the player of the game helmet after the Winnipeg Jets beat the Toronto Maple Leafs at home.

"Hey boys," Scheifele said as he stood near the centre of the Jets' dressing room with the helmet up high. "Is there anything better than beating the Leafs? Hey? Anything better?"

It's a line that resonates with Winnipeggers, many of whom feel looked down upon by those in the centre of the Hockey universe. Scheifele may hail from Kitchener, Ont., however, after 12 years as a Jet, he, too, seems to have developed that same bitter taste in his mouth. And he always shows up in those games, having recorded 37 points in 29 career games against Toronto.

You know what makes beating the Leafs even sweeter? Doing it in front of your friends and family. And on Monday, Scheifele's four-point outing — which included a hat trick — propelled the Jets to a 5-2 win at Scotiabank Arena.

"I get a bit extra excited to play here," Scheifele told reporters moments after giving a wide grin when asked about the significance of the game.

But Leafs aside, Scheifele's been playing with a vengeance lately.

In the nearly three-week span since being snubbed for the 4 Nations Face-Off, the 31-year-old — who is on pace for a career-high 96 points — has kicked things up a notch. Since Dec. 4, Scheifele is tied for the second most goals (eight), ranks seventh in points (15) and only Auston Matthews and William Nylander have recorded more five-on-five high-danger shot attempts than him (17).

"He'll be on that Olympic team, I got no doubts," Kyle Connor told reporters. "He'll take this motivation and he's the type of player that can ramp it up like that."

Monday was a perfect example of that.

There were moments, like his assist early in the second period — where he pounced on a broken play, carried the puck into the offensive zone and opened his hips before dishing the puck to Kyle Connor, who made it 2-0 — that were trademark Scheifele. And then there were sequences that aren't a staple of his game, although they've become more prevalent lately.

His first goal, with 16:34 left in the third period, came from crashing the net and tapping in a beautiful pass from Gabriel Vilardi to make it 3-1. Later in the period, with 8:08 remaining, Vilardi found Scheifele again. This time, he was in all alone — right above the blue paint — on Joseph Woll. After his initial backhand deke was denied, Scheifele saw that the puck wasn't covered.

"It was just under his skate blade," Scheifele said. "That's kind of why I kept fighting and I really don't know how it ended up in the net but... you don't ask."

And it doesn't matter. The point is that he went to the dirty areas of the ice. It wasn't a one-off moment either — as indicated by his recent volume of high-danger shot attempts — and it's an encouraging development for a player who often prefers to veer off to the perimeter and facilitate from the flank. It's a testament to Scheifele's evolution.

When he came into the league, Scheifele was lauded as the game's next great talent. In recent years, the love for him leaguewide has soured, with many coining him as a one-dimensional centre and he's become an afterthought when people rank the best centres in the game. And it wasn't too long ago that a large sector of Jets fans had seen enough of him.

But this post-snob version of Scheifele, coupled with what he's shown since the start of the year, isn't a flash in the pan. It's a response. A hockey junkie like Scheifele knows what's been written about him.

And he knows what Winnipeggers want to hear. Which is why when he accepted this year's player of the game badge-of-honour — a pilot's jacket — he subtly replicated his infamous shot at the Leafs.

"Hey, is there anything better than winning...right before Christmas," he said before grinning from ear-to-ear.

Back-to-back statement wins

It may seem silly to deem the last two games as 'must-wins,' but in a way they were.

The Jets had gone 8-9-1 since their 15-1-0 start to the season and there was a litany of alarming trends emerging.

Arniel wasn't ready to sound off any alarm bells on Friday morning.

"I don't know if you guys have seen the standings," he told reporters "We are number one in the league. I don't know if you notice that."

And hey, kudos to the Jets. They reaffirmed that with their last two wins. Against both Minnesota and Toronto, they got contributions from all four lines and they controlled the pace of play at five-on-five. Through those six periods, the Jets generated 23 five-on-five high danger shot attempts, while only allowing 12 against.

Their special teams were pristine. The power play was exceptional as usual — converting on three of their seven attempts — while the penalty kill killed off five of their seven opportunities.

It was exactly the type of showing you'd want heading into the Christmas break. And for the time being, it surely alleviates a lot of the doubts surrounding this team.

Other Thoughts

- Haydn Fleury left the game late in the second period after getting tangled up with Connor Dewar. He was holding his knee down on the ice and had to be helped off the ice. Arniel said he's "day-to-day" for now. Fleury has been filling in for Dylan Samberg.

- Ville Heinola picked a good night to have a good game. If Fleury's out, he's the next man up to join the top-four. And even if Fleury is fine once the Jets get back from the break, it would be a mistake to take Heinola out of the lineup — given that he's finally starting to find his stride. Not only was Heinola moving the puck effectively but he made a couple swift defensive reads. One of these came in the first period, when Heinola killed a play down low and then passed the puck up the ice, which generated a transition chance.

- David Gustafsson has re-ignited the Jets fourth line. While Rasmus Kupari had a pretty firm handle on the fourth-line centre role for a while, it's hard to foresee Arniel parking the 'Gus Bus' in the garage anytime soon. While Gustafsson doesn't have Kupari's wheels, he's a sound defensive player who can also help sustain offensive zone pressure off the cycle. With Gustafsson over Kupari, that line's less of a transition threat, but frankly, with a fourth line, that shouldn't be a priority anyway. And Gustafsson, when he's on his game, is much more efficient at playing a chip-and-chase game. If that line ever caught against a dangerous top-six centre, I'd rather have Gustafsson be tasked with shutting down the player.

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/mark-scheifele-breaks-toronto-curse-in-star-turn-over-banged-up-maple-leafs/>

Mark Scheifele breaks Toronto curse in star turn over banged-up Maple Leafs

by Luke Fox

TORONTO – Is there anything better than beating the Leafs?

Well, how about beating the Leafs after they've had your number for six straight since your post-victory crowing in the Winnipeg Jets dressing room went viral?

Or beating the Leafs after they rolled into your own barn less than two months ago and squashed your epic season-opening, eight-game win streak in decisive fashion?

Or beating the Leafs while ensuring your team first-place status at Christmas and ripping a game-winning hat trick in your home province, with a healthy, happy contingent of friends, family members, and "True North!" anthem interrupters in the enemy's barn?

Well, at least one of them chucked a Jets toque onto the ice when Mark Scheifele potted his third goal, an empty-netter, in a 5-2 win for the visitors.

"I was hoping I was gonna see a couple (hats) right away. But maybe the Jets fans couldn't get the seats closer to the ice," smiled Scheifele, the target of boos at Scotiabank Arena.

Scheifele says he doesn't believe in curses.

Yet the Kitchener, Ont., native had waited more than three years to rejoice in a victory over Toronto since he delivered this speech:

And the Jets had spoken openly with each other before the puck dropped on Monday's matinee about avenging their 6-4 home loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs on Oct. 28.

“The biggest thing is, we didn’t play our best when we played them last. So, we were excited to get another crack at them and show them the game that we can play. So, all in all, it’s a big win for us,” Scheifele said.

“Being a kid from close to Toronto, you want to beat the team that you grew up that close to. If they’re still talking about (my 2021 comment), it’s probably a bigger deal than it is.”

Scorching his way into the holidays like Clark Griswold on a sled greased with cooking oil, Scheifele’s four-point afternoon gives him nine goals and 16 points in 11 games since being left off Team Canada’s 4 Nations roster.

“There’s always a little bit of motivation that you can draw from in every game,” Scheifele said of the snub. “But it’s just a matter of playing good for the Winnipeg Jets.”

American linemate Kyle Connor has “no doubts” his motivated centreman will change minds and make Canada’s Olympic squad.

“He’s taking a shot-first mentality when it’s there. And we all know he’s an elite passer; he can find the seam when it is there,” Connor said.

“But at the same time, he’s really enjoying being able to play against other teams’ best. Especially on the road, when we’re not able to get our match our (Adam) Lowry line against the other teams, he relishes in those opportunities.”

Scheifele and Connor combined to score all five Jets goals in this one, in part because Toronto’s top line was without Auston Matthews and Toronto’s top shutdown pair was without Chris Tanev. (Not to mention the weeks-long injury to Toronto’s top goalie.)

And, studying the Leafs’ 1-2-2 defensive system, the Jets smartly avoided cross-ice passes in the neutral zone, simplifying their attack and taking pouncing on a few undetailed mistakes in Toronto’s end.

“Having friends and everybody around, it’s just different than any other game of the year, y’know?” Connor said. “I know he’s got a lot of buddies and family that he looks forward to seeing. And whether that gives you extra energy or whatever it is, I don’t know. It’s just out of the ordinary. So, it seemed like he had another jump tonight.”

Coming up on the losing end of this battle between two of the country’s three best teams, Leafs coach Craig Berube heads into the three-day holiday break vowing to “clean up the mistakes and details” that have resulted in a two-game skid and hoping for a healthier return.

Down the hall, Winnipeg’s Scott Arniel was singing the joys of “your best players being your best players,” and Scheifele was relishing a gift come early.

“Close to home, before Christmas — makes it even better,” the game’s first star beamed. “I love coming to Toronto.

“I get a little extra excited to play here, so getting the win before the break is huge.”

Is there anything better than beating the Leafs?

Maybe tying a bow on the curse.

“For Scheif,” Arniel said, “that will make for a nice Christmas present.”

Fox's Fast Five

- Uncertainty over Matthews' health keeps nagging at the process, like cheap tinsel caught in the Roomba.

“He's going to rest here over the break and hopefully comes back in a lot better shape,” Berube said. “He gets relief at times, but it's not good enough.”

Matthews has now missed 11 of Toronto's 35 games with an upper-body injury that has hampered him since training camp.

Not only is Matthews questionable to suit up Friday in Detroit, but fans are already debating the worth of his participation in February's 4 Nations Face-Off.

- More injury news: A surprise game-time scratch, Tanev missed his first game as a Leaf due to a lower-body ailment suffered Saturday versus the Islanders.

- Attempting to flip momentum and jolt the crowd, Max Domi picked a scrap with mild-mannered Alex Iafallo.

Iafallo had gone his whole pro career (558 games, including playoffs) without fighting.

Iafallo's most recent bout, according to HockeyFights.com, was 12 years ago, when, as a star for the USHL's Fargo Force, he dropped the gloves with Seth Adams of the Des Moines Buccaneers.

- Connor has now kicked off his full-time NHL with eight consecutive 20-goal seasons.

With two goals on the afternoon, the shooter is on pace for 49 goals in 2024-25, which would match his career high.

“I'm so lucky to play with him. He's unbelievable. He does so many amazing things out there,” Scheifele says. “His speed, his shot are the first things that come to mind, but he makes some fantastic passes. He goes to the right areas. He grinds in the corners. He's a real pleasure to play with.”

- Caught defending after playing the entirety of a double power-play, William Nylander clocked in a ridiculous shift that lasted four minutes and 55 seconds.

“He's got the iron lungs,” Mitch Marner said.

That's the longest shift logged by a Leaf this season.

“Willy knows he can stay out for the full power play, two minutes,” Berube said. “At that point, I have to look at the tape and think about why he didn't come off.”

In fairness, Nylander did ask Santa for more ice time for Christmas.

Canadian Press

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/scheifele-notches-hat-trick-as-jets-top-maple-leafs-ahead-of-holiday-break/>

Scheifele notches hat trick as Jets top Maple Leafs ahead of holiday break

By Canadian Press

The Winnipeg Jets had payback on their minds and top spot in the National Hockey League in their final game before the holiday break.

The Jets made good on both accounts with a 5-2 win against the Toronto Maple Leafs before 18,923 at Scotiabank Arena on Monday.

The win avenged a 6-4 home loss to Toronto on Oct. 28, that halted the Jets' eight-game win streak to begin the season. It also pushed the Jets into first overall.

"They don't hand out awards at Christmas, but obviously, we're happy," said Jets centre Mark Scheifele, who enjoyed a three-goal, four-point outing.

"It's good to get a couple of days off, get recharged and get going for the next half of the season."

Surprisingly, the Jets (25-10-1) are only one point ahead of the 36-game pace of 23-9-4 set a year ago.

"We've been good from top to bottom and we need everybody in this group," said Kyle Connor, who scored the Jets first two goals and helped set up Scheifele for his first of three third-period goals.

"I just think our ability to roll over lines and be hungry, and not to be satisfied with anything. We also have taken a day-to-day approach, learning what we can improve on from wins and losses and implementing the adjustments."

Besides defeating the Maple Leafs after what transpired in late October, Scheifele had extra motivation after being left off Canada's roster for the 4 Nations Face-Off in February.

In the 10 games since Canada's roster was announced, Scheifele has eight goals and 15 points.

"You're disappointed, but at the end of the day, you just want to play well for your group of guys," Scheifele said.

"There's always a bit of motivation you can draw from in every game. But it's just a matter of playing good for the Winnipeg Jets and controlling what I can control."

He also enjoys playing in Toronto, an hour from his hometown of Kitchener.

"I love coming to Toronto to have the opportunity to play in front of a lot of friends and family," Scheifele said. "Being so close to home, I get a little extra excited to play here."

"I think the biggest thing is we didn't play our best when we played them last. We were excited to get another crack at them and show them the game we can play. All in all, it's a big win for us."

MATTHEWS STILL OUT WITH INJURY

While the Jets enter the Christmas break with back-to-back wins, the Maple Leafs dropped their second in a row at home without wounded captain Auston Matthews, out with an upper-body injury.

"We just have to clean up some things off the rush, the transition part especially against a team that's obviously very good with their top line that takes advantage of time and space," said Maple Leafs centre John Tavares, who scored both Toronto goals.

The Maple Leafs have gone 7-4-0 with Matthews on the sidelines this season and 42-23-2 in his career.

Toronto was also missing defenceman Chris Tanev, out day-to-day with a lower-body ailment.

Tanev missed his first game after skating in the pre-game warm-up.

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/10931621/scheifeles-hat-trick-propels-winnipeg-jets-to-5-2-win-in-toronto/>

Scheifele's hat trick propels Winnipeg Jets to 5-2 win in Toronto

By Christian Aumell Global News

Thanks to their star players, the Winnipeg Jets gave their fans an early Christmas present Monday afternoon, downing the Maple Leafs 5-2 in Toronto.

Toronto was the better team for the bulk of the opening period before the Jets earned the game's first power play with just under five minutes to go in the first and their top-ranked unit cashed in.

Off a faceoff win, a Josh Morrissey point shot was tipped in front by Gabriel Vilardi, creating a big rebound that ricocheted to Kyle Connor, who buried it past Joseph Woll for his 20th goal of the season.

After a slow start, Winnipeg wound up outshooting Toronto 11-8 in the opening 20 minutes and carried their 1-0 lead into the second, where it didn't take long for them to expand their lead.

Just over a minute into the period, Mark Scheifele blocked a shot near the Winnipeg blue line and the puck caromed into the neutral zone. Scheifele tracked it down and skated it into the Leafs' end where he waited patiently for a hard-charging Connor to drive the net. Scheifele then slid a perfect pass that Connor steered into the goal for his second of the afternoon, giving Winnipeg a 2-0 lead.

Not long after, Max Domi instigated a fight with Alex Iafallo (the first fighting major of Iafallo's career), giving the Jets their second power play look of the day.

The Leafs had the best scoring chance on the Winnipeg power play when Mitch Marner blocked a shot and tried to skate away from Neal Pionk for a breakaway but as Marner tried to begin a deke on Connor Hellebuyck, Pionk executed a textbook stick lift to knock the puck away.

A double-minor high stick penalty to Mason Appleton at the 4:16 mark of the period gave Toronto an excellent chance to get back into the game, and they took advantage thanks to their star players as an off-speed pass from Marner fooled the Jets before landing on the stick of John Tavares for a back-door tap-in.

The goal came during the first leg of the double-minor, giving Toronto two more minutes to try and draw level on the power play but the Jets killed it off to maintain the 2-1 lead.

With the Leafs still pushing to tie the game late in the second, Haydn Fleury went down awkwardly and clutched at his knee. He very slowly got to the bench with some help and had to leave the game, forcing the Jets to finish the game with five blueliners.

At the 3:27 mark of the third, Winnipeg's top line got back to work. Gabriel Vilardi made a great play to knock down the puck in the Toronto end and corral it before sending a perfect back-door pass that Scheifele redirected past Woll to make it 3-1 with his 19th of the year.

With a touch under 11 minutes left, a delay of game penalty sent Toronto back to the power play. Early in the man advantage look, the Jets got a shorthanded 2-on-1 but Iafallo was turned aside by Woll. Toronto wasn't able to parlay that into anything though as the score stayed 3-1, but not for long as Winnipeg's stars came through again.

With just over eight minutes left in the third, Scheifele found himself alone in front of the Toronto net and his initial try was stopped by Woll but he kept digging away and the puck eventually trickled over the goal line to make it 4-1.

Tavares got the Leafs back within two with 6:18 to go, burying a shot from the slot in transition for his second of the game.

With just over 2:30 to go, Woll went to the bench for an extra attacker but Toronto couldn't generate much of a push through the Jets defence before Scheifele found the empty net with 21 seconds left to seal the win with a third period hat trick, the tenth of his career and second of the season.

Hellebuyck turned aside 23 shots to earn the win as the Jets enter the Christmas break in first place in the NHL with 51 points.

They will return to action Saturday when they host the Ottawa Senators.

[TSN.ca](#)

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/make-it-eight-jets-get-standing-o-after-hammering-rival-wild>

Scheifele on Jets win over Leafs: 'We stayed patient and didn't chase the game' (VIDEO)

Jets forward Mark Scheifele spoke with TSN's Dan Robertson following his hat trick performance against the Maple Leafs to discuss what beating Toronto for the first time since 2021, the chemistry with his linemates Gabriel Vilardi and Kyle Connor, and what makes Connor Hellebuyck special.

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/scheifele-and-connor-cruise-as-jets-rout-leafs%7E3052187>

Scheifele and Connor cruise as Jets rout Leafs (VIDEO)

Mark Scheifele scored a hat trick and Kyle Connor lit the lamp twice as the Jets snapped a six-game losing streak to Toronto. The TSN Hockey panel have more on their impressive play, and what the Maple Leafs should do about injured captain Auston Matthews.

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/12/23/scheifele-shines-against-leafs>

Scheifele shines against Leafs Top centre continues to roll, notching hat trick and adding assist in victory

By: Ken Wiebe

TORONTO — Never mind the words he spoke more than three years ago, it was the actions of Mark Scheifele on the ice on this December afternoon that people will be talking about for the foreseeable future.

The Winnipeg Jets top centre had a game for the ages, notching his 10th career hat trick and adding an assist as his team cruised to a 5-2 victory over the Toronto Maple Leafs on Monday before plenty of friends and family members at Scotiabank Arena.

Just one day earlier, Scheifele was reminded the Jets hadn't won in six meetings with the Maple Leafs since he asked during a post-game celebration in the dressing room that aired on the team's social media account: "Is there anything better than beating the Leafs?"

Scheifele wasn't accidentally handing out bulletin-board material after this game, but he gave folks in attendance or watching elsewhere plenty to talk about with this virtuoso performance.

Scheifele had five shots on goal, nine shot attempts and his pass to Kyle Connor on a two-on-one rush for his second goal of the contest was a thing of beauty.

"Oh, yeah. Obviously, I know how much it means for him to come in here. He's just a local kid that wants to do well," said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. "That whole line, I thought they did lots of good things and yeah, for Scheif, that will make for a nice Christmas present."

The Jets were eager to return the favour to the Maple Leafs after they snapped their season-opening eight-game winning streak in late October.

"We were excited to get another crack at them and show them the game that we can play," said Scheifele. "All in all, it's a big win for us and that's pretty much it."

Several hats were tossed onto the ice when Scheifele sealed the game with his empty-netter with 20.9 seconds to go.

“I was hoping I was going to see a couple right away,” said Scheifele. “Maybe the Jets fans couldn’t get the seats closer to the ice.”

Since it was his first time in Toronto since Canada named its 4 Nations Face-Off roster, Scheifele was asked about being left off the team and he gave a diplomatic answer — saying he was disappointed but just wants to play well for the Jets and control what he can control.

Connor, his longtime linemate, was also asked whether or not Scheifele has been playing with additional motivation since the announcement.

“Whether it is or not, his play has been great all year. He’ll be on that Olympic team, I’ve got no doubts,” said Connor, who had a four-point effort of his own with two goals and two assists. “He’ll take this motivation and he’s the type of player that can ramp it up like that. It’s too bad he didn’t make the team, but it is what it is. Obviously you’ve seen what he’s done since.”

The Jets enter the holiday break with a record of 25-10-1 and 51 points, which is tops in the NHL.

“Well, it’s a good start. It’s a race,” said Arniel. “Obviously you’ve got to get out of the gate good and we did. Now you’re hitting close to that halfway mark, Christmas break, obviously we’re really happy with our accomplishment but there’s a lot of games to go.

“We’ll have a couple of days to recognize what we’ve done and then we’ll turn the page and move on.”

The Jets are back in action on Saturday when they host the Ottawa Senators.

Let’s take a closer look at this one.

DISHING CLINIC – Along with the one Scheifele made to Connor for the backhand redirection, there were several other beautiful passes made by the Jets that led to goals, including a backhand saucer from Gabe Vilardi to Scheifele that made it a 3-1 game early in the second period.

Josh Morrissey also found Scheifele alone with a backhand pass in the third period and while Joseph Woll made the initial save, Scheifele stuck with it and somehow poked the puck across the goal line.

“Yeah, I saw it from where I was that it was just under his skate blade,” said Scheifele. “That’s kind of why I kept fighting and I really don’t know how it ended up in the net but... you don’t ask.”

With Scheifele and Connor each scoring their 21st goals on Monday, the Jets became the first team with a pair of 20-goal scorers — an impressive number through 36 games — and the third member of the line (Vilardi) already has 14.

“It’s one area where we’ve kind of had it spread out a little bit there. We’ve got contributions from everybody. But when your top guys can do that, it gets the opposition on their heels a little

bit,” said Arniel. “They have to be aware of when they’re on the ice at all times. And when you can go out on the road and your top line can do that, it certainly leads to lots of success.”

THE INJURY – The Jets lost D-man Haydn Fleury in the final minute of the second period after he appeared to suffer a knee injury.

Fleury, who has stepped into a role on the second pairing with Dylan Samberg sidelined with a broken foot, was engaged with a Maple Leafs player in the corner of the defensive zone when his right knee buckled after it appeared his skate might have been caught in a rut.

With Fleury out, the Jets were left to play the third period with five blue-liners — which meant the minutes went up for everyone and the pairings were a bit jumbled.

“At the end of the day, they just dug in and we put a lot of emphasis on our forwards to do the work to help our D-men, don’t put them in situations where they get stuck in their end,” said Arniel. “At the end of the day, we did a pretty good job managing that puck in the third.”

Following the game, Arniel said that Fleury is officially day-to-day. He will be re-evaluated after the holiday break.

“We’ll see how he is when we get home,” said Arniel. “Just kind of tweaked the lower body there.”

THE KEY PLAY – Vilardi’s beautiful backhand pass to Scheifele at 3:27 of the third period restored a two-goal cushion and proved to be the game-winner.

THE THREE STARS

Mark Scheifele, Jets – Three goals, one assist.

Kyle Connor, Jets – Two goals, two assists.

Josh Morrissey, Jets – Two assists, 25:13 of ice time.

EXTRA, EXTRA – Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck made 23 saves as he recorded his league-leading 22nd victory in his 28th start of the campaign.

David Gustafsson was in the lineup as the fourth-line centre for a second consecutive game, bringing him up to five for the season. That left Rasmus Kupari as a healthy scratch.

Defenceman Simon Lundmark was recalled as insurance from the Manitoba Moose of the American Hockey League but was scratched, so he’ll continue to wait to make his NHL debut.

If Fleury (lower body) is unable to go in the next game, and if Logan Stanley isn’t ready to return from a foot injury that has kept him out of the past two games, then either Lundmark will stay up or Dylan Coghlan could be recalled from the Moose after suiting up in a pair of AHL games over the weekend.

The Maple Leafs were without defenceman Chris Tanev, as the former Moose blue-liner sat out with a lower-body injury after taking the warmup. Auston Matthews also missed a second game in a row with an undisclosed ailment.

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/two-man-scoring-show-as-jets-end-skid-against-leafs>

Jets end skid against Leafs, hit holidays on a high

By Paul Friesen

The Winnipeg Jets opened some early Christmas gifts on Monday..

Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor scored all five Winnipeg goals as the Jets manhandled the Maple Leafs and went into the holiday break on a high note.

Connor scored the first two, Scheifele the next three, including an empty-netter, as the Jets ended a six-game losing streak against the Leafs with a 5-2 win in Toronto.

The outburst left both players at 21 goals as the Jets became the first NHL team with two 20-goal scorers.

A bit of a fuss had been made of Scheifele's post-game comments the last time Winnipeg beat Toronto, when he wondered aloud if there was anything better than beating the Leafs. A six-game curse apparently ensued.

On social media, the Jets showed No. 55 having some fun with that after this win.

"Hey, is there anything better than winning right before Christmas?" Scheifele said in the dressing room, post-game.

After a quiet game against Minnesota, Winnipeg's No. 1 line was on fire. It was a four-point night for both Scheifele and Connor, while linemate Gabe Vilardi had three assists.

"They were outstanding," head coach Scott Arniel said. "Scored obviously all our goals and did some great things. And when your best players are your best players, that goes a long way.

"For Scheif, that will make for a nice Christmas present."

The win, Winnipeg's second straight but first against the Leafs since December of 2021, improves the Jets to 25-10-1. Their 51 points is one better than they had at this point last year.

"It's a team effort," Connor said of being on top of the NHL in points. "Top to bottom, we need everybody in this group. Our ability to roll over lines and be hungry, not be satisfied with anything. We've also been able to take a day-to-day approach, learning what we can improve on from wins and losses. And we've done a great job implementing the adjustments we need to."

After a 10-game run that saw them go just 3-7, the Jets are 7-2-1 in their last 10, regaining some of the mojo that saw them start the year with 15 wins in 16 games.

"Yeah, it's been fun," Scheifele said. "We have a great team. We have a lot of great guys in this room that work very hard. And obviously... goaltending has just been unbelievable in general.

They don't hand out awards at Christmas. But obviously we're happy. It's good to get a couple days off and get recharged and get going for the next half of the season.

"Just very happy with our team, and I'm very happy to be part of it."

Shots on Monday were 27-25 in favour of the Jets, goalie Connor Hellebuyck improving his league-leading record to 22-5-1.

They don't play again until next Saturday, when they host Ottawa.

"It's a good start," Arniel said. "It's a race. Obviously you've got to get out of the gate good and we did. Now you're hitting close to that halfway mark, Christmas break... we're really happy with our accomplishment. But there's a lot of games to go.

"We'll have a couple of days to recognize what we've done and then we'll turn the page and move on."

Winnipeg played the third period with five defencemen after losing Haydn Fleury to what looked like a knee injury late in the second.

Arniel said it was too soon to know the extent of the injury, but he was quick to laud the play of the remaining members of the blue line.

"They just dug in," the coach said. "And we put a lot of emphasis on our forwards to do the work to help our D-men, don't put them in situations where they get stuck in their end."

Both teams came out a little sleepy for the early afternoon faceoff.

Generating next to nothing for most of the first period, the Jets turned to – what else? – their top-ranked power play.

Connor slammed a rebound past Joseph Woll to become the first Jet to hit the 20-goal mark. Ho-hum: he's done it in each of his eight seasons.

He made it 2-1 early in the second, converting a perfect Scheifele pass on a two-on-one for 2-0 Jets lead.

"He's amazing," Scheifele said of his winger. "I'm so lucky to play with him. He's unbelievable. He does some amazing things out there. Obviously, his speed, his shot, the first things that come (to mind). But he makes some fantastic passes. He goes to the right areas. He grinds in the corners."

The Leafs, playing without No. 1 centre Auston Matthews, got on the board with Jets winger Mason Appleton serving a double-minor for high-sticking, John Tavares set up by Mitch Marner's seeing-eye pass through traffic.

Scheifele, set up by Vilardi, made it 3-1 with his 19th early in the third, then jammed some insurance under Woll's pads with some eight minutes to go.

Josh Morrissey set that one up with some serious hustle and the willingness to take a hit to make a pass, one of his two assists on the day.

It's Scheifele's 10th consecutive 20-goal season in his dozen years in the league.

"I love coming to Toronto just because I have the opportunity to play in front of lots of friends and family, being so close to home," he said. "Obviously I get a bit extra excited to play here, so getting the win before the break here is huge."

"I know what it's like to play at home in Detroit," Connor added. "It's just different than any other game of the year... whether that gives you extra energy or whatever it is, it's just out of the ordinary. It seemed like he had another jump."

"He's been a great player for us all year, it was good to see him have a great night."

Scheifele's insurance goal came in handy when Tavares scored his second of the day with 6:18 to go.

The defensive play of the game came from Jets D-man Neal Pionk.

Chasing Marner on a shorthanded breakaway in the second period, Pionk put himself in the perfect position to lift Marner's stick just as he tried to shoot.

The Jets' power play went 1-for-2, while Toronto's scored once in three chances.

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hell-be-on-that-olympic-team-jets-connor-on-snubbed-scheifele>

'He'll be on that Olympic team': Jets' Connor on snubbed Scheifele

By Paul Friesen

His Winnipeg Jets teammate may have been snubbed for the 4 Nations Face-Off, but Kyle Connor expects to be squaring off against Mark Scheifele in the 2026 Winter Olympics.

Jets' Connor rips backhand tip for beautiful two-on-one goal

Connor, part of Team USA for the 4 Nations event early next year, made the comment after having a front-row seat for Scheifele's hat-trick in the Jets' 5-2 win in Toronto on Monday.

The Winnipeg winger suggested his centre may even have a chip on his shoulder after being overlooked by Team Canada for February's tournament.

"Whether it is or not, his play has been great all year," Connor said. "He'll be on that Olympic team, I've got no doubts. He'll take this motivation and he's the type of player that can ramp it up like that. It's too bad he didn't make the team, but it is what it is. Obviously you've seen what he's done since."

Scheifele has recorded eight goals and five assists in nine games since Team Canada released its 4 Nations roster.

He scored his 19th, 20th and 21st goals of the season in Toronto, the latter into an empty net, tying Connor, who had two, for the team lead.

Injuries could still open up spots on the Canadian roster.

On pace for career highs in goals and points, the Jets assistant captain has also been more noticeable in his own zone, and for good reasons.

“It’s just his 200-foot game,” Connor said. “Since I’ve played with him, he just does everything well. This year, especially, he’s ramped it up. He’s taking a shot-first mentality when it’s there and we all know he’s an elite passer, he can find the seam when it is there. But at the same time he’s really enjoying being able to play against the other team’s best, especially on the road it seems like.

“When we’re not able to get our matchup or (Adam) Lowry’s line against the other team’s, he relishes those opportunities and has been great.”

Asked if the Team Canada snub has provided some extra motivation, Scheifele remained coy.

“Obviously you’re disappointed,” he said. “At the end of the day, you just want to play well for your group of guys. There’s always a little motivation that you can draw from in every game. Just a matter of playing good for the Winnipeg Jets and controlling what I can control.”

Toronto Sun

<https://torontosun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/toronto-maple-leafs/leafs-head-into-christmas-break-on-a-downer-in-loss-to-jets>

Leafs head into Christmas break on a downer in loss to Jets

By Lance Hornby

The Maple Leafs had Grinched the Winnipeg Jets just about long enough.

It was time to steal one back after Toronto’s six straight wins, in the final pre-Christmas game for both teams on Monday afternoon at Scotiabank Arena.

Now it will be a bit of a bah-humbug break for Toronto, which fell 5-2, recording consecutive losses for the second time this month. While the Leafs are still a strong second in the Atlantic Division (21-12-2), coach Craig Berube was grouching before the game that details in the team’s system are slipping, including the three preceding wins.

Winnipeg, leading the Central Division and tied with New Jersey atop the NHL’s overall standings, hadn’t beaten the Leafs in a few years, which included Toronto ending its eight-game win streak to start this season. Mark Scheifele’s empty-netter completed a hat trick.

The Leafs had a couple of first-period chances against league save-percentage leader Connor Hellebuyck, including a breakaway by Manitoba native Connor Dewar. But it was another Connor, first name Kyle, who opened the scoring for the visitors.

With Mitch Marner off on a rare penalty, a hook that spun Nino Niederreiter hard into Joseph Woll’s post. Connor pounced on a rebound before Woll could get across to his left.

Connor added his 15th goal in 23 career games against Toronto early in the second period, getting a step on defenceman Oliver Ekman-Larsson to tip in Scheifele's pass, before the Leafs got to work with a double minor when Morgan Rielly was high-sticked.

Anxious to atone, Marner delivered his own fine feed diagonally through the slot to John Tavares for his 200th as a Leaf. Tavares became the fifth NHLer with 200 for two teams, joining Wayne Gretzky, Keith Tkachuk, Lanny McDonald and Mark Messier.

Scheifele, with a Connor assist, made it 3-1 in the third, then jammed the puck through a mouse hole Woll had left trying to hug the post on a stretch pad save.

Tavares added another late in the game, Nylander reaching 40 points with his second assist.

Coach Craig Berube made two changes, resting workhorse defenceman Chris Tanev with what was listed as a lower body injury and winger Ryan Reaves. Philippe Myers, valued for his size and hard shot, came in, partnered with Rielly, and Pontus Holmberg replaced Reaves. Myers had a grand opportunity late in the second period alone on Hellebuyck, but was halted.

The Leafs will be free to make more roster moves if they choose after they play in Detroit on Friday and the NHL holiday roster freeze is lifted. That will likely see Matt Murray recalled to play in the back-to-back against Washington.