

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/12/27/jets-face-critical-stretch>

Jets face critical stretch Imperative to pile up the points as games get tighter in second half of season

By: Mike McIntyre

The Winnipeg Jets had a Merry Christmas, with the first-place club enjoying a three-day hockey hiatus that allowed for some quality time with family and friends away from the rink.

Now the focus turns to what needs to be done to ensure 2025 becomes a Happy New Year.

"I think there's some more urgency," Jets captain Adam Lowry said Friday of what he's expecting to see when it comes to the post-holiday schedule that begins Saturday night with a visit from the Ottawa Senators.

"Obviously the playoff picture starts to shake out. Sometimes in October, April seems real far away and you might feel like you have time to make up some of those points. I think the hockey gets better, generally, as teams get to their structure. They've kind of ironed out the kinks or some of their weaknesses earlier in the year, so ice is harder to come by, it's harder to generate some chances."

The 25-10-1 Jets will play 10 of their next 11 games at the downtown rink, and 14 of 20 before they get an even longer break for the 4 Nations Face-Off starting Feb. 8.

"All the grinding we had to go through on the road, our road trips, some of the long ones, all the stuff we were talking about two months ago, now we get to sort of reap a little bit of the benefits," said head coach Scott Arniel following an hour-long practice.

"But we have to take advantage of these games at home here. There is another push that happens, from now to the break. Now it's jockeying for position. Because March and April they'll be coming quick, and they'll be coming heavy. So 20 games here, again sort of refocus, get ourselves taking advantage of this home ice and continue to build on what we've been doing."

Winnipeg will be looking to pick up where it left off following back-to-back wins last Saturday (5-0 over Minnesota) and Monday (5-2 in Toronto) before players scattered for a short but sweet break.

"Guys got to take off from Toronto to kind of cover both the U.S. and Canada and get to see family and now we're back. We had a good workday (Friday), which hopefully leads into (Saturday) and gets all of the Turkey and rust out of us and ready to go," said Arniel.

Half the league (16 of 32 teams) returned to action Friday night in a chaotic day that involved the eight visitors having to fly early in the morning (the collective bargaining agreement doesn't allow for activities to resume until Dec. 27), rather than the day before a game which is the standard.

Winnipeg had to do that last year and ultimately laid a bit of an egg, losing 2-1 in overtime to the Chicago Blackhawks. In that sense, the schedule maker did them a bit of a favour this year.

“This is one of the first ones where we can have a practice and then have a morning skate. I’d expect it to be a little sharper than last year’s game in Chicago,” said Lowry.

“You travel and go to the morning skate, and those days usually feel a little jammed, feeling your way through the first period. You know, both teams are playing well. I’d expect it to be a pretty well played game. I think having a practice day helps that.”

Indeed, the Senators also went into Christmas feeling rather jolly, having won six of their previous seven to climb into an Eastern Conference playoff spot.

“Watching them over the last couple weeks, they’re a great team. They’ve got a lot of depth,” said Lowry.

“We’re going to have to be ready. They skate well, they’ve got some real high-end skill and they’ve got some big bodies that like to go to the net. There might not be the rivalry that we have with some other teams, but it’s still going to be a hard-fought game.”

Goaltender Connor Hellebuyck is expected to make his 29th start of the season, while Arniel has some decisions to make on what his blue-line looks like. Haydn Fleury suffered a lower-body injury against the Maple Leafs last Monday and is now considered week-to-week. Logan Stanley missed the last two games with an ailment but was a regular participant in practice Friday, so he could be an option to return.

The Jets also called up Dylan Coghlan from the Manitoba Moose as added insurance. It appears Colin Miller will move up to take Fleury’s spot beside Neal Pionk, meaning two of Stanley, Coghlan and Ville Heinola would form the third pair with the other being a healthy scratch.

Ottawa is expected to be without No. 1 goaltender Linus Ullmark (12-7-2, 2.38 GAA, .915 save percentage), who is dealing with a back injury. Backup Anton Forsberg (4-6-0, 2.95 GAA, .889 save percentage) will likely get the call.

“I think the structure and what we did well in both those games (before Christmas) is going to be important moving forward,” said Lowry.

After facing Ottawa, the Jets will host the Nashville Predators on Monday night, then travel to Denver immediately after to face the Colorado Avalanche on New Year’s Eve. An eight-game homestand will then follow starting next Thursday.

The Jets are a sizzling 12-3-1 at home this season and could really start to pull away from some divisional rivals if they can keep that up over this next stretch of schedule.

“Home ice is critical. You want to take advantage of these games where you can control the matchups. You want to perform well in front of the fans,” said Lowry.

“I think for the most part we’ve played pretty well. There’s been a couple games we haven’t loved at home but for the most part, we’ve been able to get to our game plan, get to our forecheck and our power play has been red hot at home. Having this stretch where you don’t have to travel as much, you get some more practice time, it’s going to be invaluable for us.”

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/2024/12/27/coghlan-rides-pro-hockey-roller-coaster-back-to-the-jets>

Coghlan rides pro hockey roller-coaster back to the Jets

By: Mike McIntyre

Dylan Coghlan is hoping patience truly is a virtue.

The veteran defenceman is back for a second stint with the Winnipeg Jets after an eventful week that included being placed on waivers while on the Mom's trip in California, having no other team make a claim, scoring a goal in his debut with the Manitoba Moose, then getting a Boxing Day call from the big club.

"It's frustrating. Everyone wants to play and make a difference and help out in any way they can," Coghlan said Friday.

"Just waiting for a chance and hopefully get it here pretty soon. I feel good. Mentally and physically, I feel ready. And if they find a spot to use me, I know I'll exceed those expectations."

The undrafted 26-year-old from British Columbia was acquired in a trade from the Carolina Hurricanes last summer, then signed a one-year, two-way contract with the Jets. He was a healthy scratch in 32 of the first 33 games before being put on waivers on Dec. 19, just a few hours before his team was to face the Anaheim Ducks.

"It's not a feeling that anybody wants to go through. Am I going to move in the next couple days and move my family, or am I going to be staying here?" said Coghlan, who added it was both strange but also comforting to have his mom on the road with him at the time.

"Obviously I was a little bit down and a little sad, so it was nice to have her there and just hang out with her for that day and a little bit the next morning," he said.

One of the positives is the Moose and Jets play under the same roof, so a demotion to the minors didn't mean an upheaval.

"I wasn't sure what was going to happen and I (Jets coach Scott Arniel) before they put me on waivers, I wanted to be here. And wanted to help this team. And that's all I've wanted, is to play on this team," he said.

He'll get another chance as early as Saturday when the Jets host the Ottawa Senators. Haydn Fleury suffered a lower-body injury last Monday in Toronto which now has him listed as week-to-week. With Dylan Samberg still sidelined with a broken foot, opportunity appears to be knocking.

Coghlan spent Friday's practice doing line rushes with Ville Heinola and Logan Stanley on the third-pair.

"I'm not saying it's (Saturday), I haven't decided. But he's going to get in," said Arniel.

"I think for him he's had a great attitude this year. He works hard in practice even when he hasn't been playing. So he'll get some looks here in the next few games. And he went down (to the Moose) and played well and did what we asked, and now here's his chance."

Indeed, Coghlan opened the scoring last Friday night for the Moose, then played again Sunday for the AHL club.

"It's just nice to get out there and have fun again. Skating without games can be pretty tiring, and it can get to you mentally," he said.

Coghlan didn't look out of place at all when he made his Jets debut on Nov. 29 in Vegas, and he's now champing at the bit to show there's more where that came from.

"I've always felt like my game was kind of made for this system. This team, and the way they play, and the way they that Arnie wants us to play, I feel like just suits my game," he said.

Speaking of Samberg, he hit the ice for the first time Friday since suffering his injury blocking a Steven Stamkos slapshot Nov. 23 in Nashville. The shutdown defender skated by himself, which is the next step in his progression.

"It will be a while just doing that. I can't tell you if it's five days or 10 days," said Arniel.

"The one big thing is putting that boot on. The comfort of having his boot on. Hopefully there's no swelling or anything like that that comes from it. Just every day will be kind of re-evaluating and talking to him, seeing where he's at moving forward."

Captain Canada

The Jets were obviously thrilled to see forward prospect Brayden Yager named captain of the Canadian World Junior team, especially after a dynamic training camp where the 19-year-old opened plenty of eyes.

Among those who reached out to him over the past week were the entire Jets leadership group of Adam Lowry, Josh Morrissey and Mark Scheifele along with Arniel.

"Obviously being named captain is a tremendous honour, especially playing in Canada this year. He's a good kid, and new to the organization, really excited to be a Winnipeg Jet," said Arniel.

"We think he's a real good young prospect that is going through a lot of good experiences. And playing in the World Juniors like this against some of that talent and playing with some of those teammates, that's a great growing curve for him, and obviously we're hoping it just continues to make him a better player."

Yager had 30 points (11G, 19A) in 21 games with the Moose Jaw Warriors this season before he was shipped to the Lethbridge Hurricanes, where he had a goal and three assists in his first two games.

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/winnipeg-jets-have-chance-to-add-gravy-to-high-calorie-first-half>

Winnipeg Jets have chance to add gravy to high-calorie first half

By Paul Friesen

Nobody can argue with the pre-Christmas results.

But now that the turkey's digested, we'll get a better handle on Scott Arniel's Winnipeg Jets.

Based on this team's schedule, the next 20 games provide a chance for the Jets to pour some real gravy on what they've cooked up through their first 36.

"We've got 20 games until February 8, 14 of them at home," Arniel was saying on Friday. "So all the grinding we had to go through on the road... now we get to reap a little bit of the benefits. But we have to take advantage of these games at home."

They'll launch into it against Ottawa on Saturday, the start of a six-week run loaded with home cooking.

At 25-10-1, the Jets have played higher calorie hockey than everyone except Vegas, their .708 points percentage at the Christmas break behind only the Golden Knights' .721.

The "race to Christmas," as Arniel called it, allowed some of the NHL cream to rise to the top.

Now it's about setting the table for the playoffs.

"There is another push that happens, from now to the break," the coach said, referring to the 4 Nations Tournament in February. "Now it's jockeying for position. Because March and April they'll be coming quick, and they'll be coming heavy."

While many teams had to play Friday night, the Jets returned for a practice to be followed by a normal game-day routine on Saturday.

So it shouldn't feel as hurried or look as out of sync against the 18-14-2 Senators as it sometimes does after the holidays.

"I'd expect it to be a little sharper than last year's game in Chicago," captain Adam Lowry said. "You travel and go to the morning skate, and those days usually feel a little jammed, feeling your way through the first period. I'd expect it to be a pretty well-played game. Having a practice day helps that."

The Jets we last saw were beating the Leafs and Minnesota by a combined 10-2 count, fueled by their league-leading power play.

Already 12-3-1 at home — also one of the NHL's best marks — they play 10 of their next 11 at Portage and Hargrave.

“Home ice is critical,” Lowry said. “There’s been a couple games we haven’t loved at home, but for the most part we’ve been able to get to our game plan, get to our forecheck. And our power play has been red-hot at home ... it feels like they’ve been clicking every time they step on the ice.”

It’s more like every third time, but that’s still sizzling.

“You’re never really out of games,” Lowry said. “And you can start games on the right foot... where we haven’t had a lot going for us and our power play has been able to get some momentum.

“It’s a tough league to score five-on-five, so any time you can get impactful contributions from your special teams, it’s huge.”

The Jets captain agrees the intensity picks up after Christmas, and not just because teams have their systems and lineups down pat.

“There’s some more urgency,” Lowry said. “The playoff picture starts to shake out. Sometimes in October, April seems real far away and you might feel like you have time to make up some of those points.”

His team doesn’t need to make up anything, but it can solidify what it really wants: top spot in its division.

The Minnesota Wild were five points back with a game in hand going into a Friday night game in Dallas.

While a Winnipeg-Ottawa matchup doesn’t scream rivalry the way a Jets-Minnesota or even a Jets-Toronto matchup might, the Sens are 8-2 in their last 10, even better than the Jets’ 7-2-1 pace.

No. 1 goalie Linus Ullmark is out, though.

“Watching them over the last couple weeks, they’re a great team,” Lowry said. “They’ve got a lot of depth. They skate well, they’ve got some real high-end skill and they’ve got some big bodies that like to go to the net. There might not be the rivalry that we have with some other teams, but it’s still going to be a hard-fought game.”

It might be tempting to look past this one at the back-to-back division games coming up next: at home against Nashville on Monday and especially in Colorado the next night.

Aniel says based on what he saw in Friday’s practice, his first-place team is ready to hit the ground running and gobble up some more points.

“We had a good workday, which hopefully leads into (Saturday) and gets all of the turkey and rust out of us and ready to go.”

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/jets-notes-i-dont-really-remember-it-says-gustafsson-after-being-knocked-out-in-first-fight>

JETS NOTES: 'I don't really remember it' says Gustafsson after being knocked out in first fight

By Paul Friesen

David Gustafsson stayed in Winnipeg for the NHL's Christmas break, getting together with some fellow Swedes who play for the Manitoba Moose.

On the dinner menu?

"We get all the Swedish culture together," the Winnipeg Jets winger said on Friday. "Swedish meatballs, obviously. Swedish Christmas ham."

One thing probably not on the menu for discussion: Gustafsson's first NHL fight.

"Probably not the first one you want," he said, managing a chuckle. "But it just happened. I mean, I can only go up from here. It's just something you try to forget, really."

The 24-year-old took on Boston's Trent Frederic just over two weeks ago, suffering a concussion that forced him to miss four games.

He returned for the last two before Christmas.

On Friday, Gustafsson revealed he wasn't just stunned from Frederic's punch to his jaw.

"I got knocked out," he said. "I don't really remember it."

The Jets were laying a licking on the Bruins when Frederic and Gustafsson began exchanging crosschecks right after a faceoff.

While Winnipeg's second-round draft pick from six years ago had never dropped his gloves before, Frederic was a veteran of 38 NHL scraps, making this a mismatch before it even started.

"I wasn't really sure," Gustafsson said of his opponent's history. "I guess that's something you learn the more you play over here. Looking back, yeah, maybe I shouldn't. But it's happened now. At least you learn something from it."

In 117 games before that one, Gustafsson had taken just six minutes in penalties. He had to be helped off the ice while teammates did a not-so-slow burn.

More fights broke out, and after the game Jets captain Adam Lowry lauded Gustafsson for standing up for himself, while also saying he shouldn't have been put in that position.

Gustafsson says in the heat of the moment it just felt like something he had to do.

The resulting brain injury and loss of consciousness is something he'd never experienced before.

Luckily he recovered quickly, getting through the concussion protocol and missing just a week. He got through games against Minnesota and Toronto without a setback.

Despite his injury, Gustafsson says he wouldn't rule out dropping his gloves again if put in a similar situation.

"I've got to prepare myself a little bit," he said. "Just ask around... try to know how to protect myself a little better."

BLUE-LINE SHUFFLE

Head coach Scott Arniel says defenceman Haydn Fleury is out "week-to-week" with what looked like a knee injury suffered in the win over Toronto on Dec. 23.

"He tried to skate on it (Friday) morning and it didn't go very good," Arniel said, adding he wasn't ready to commit to his lineup just yet. "We're going to throw stuff on the wall here and see what sticks."

Logan Stanley practised on Friday and appears ready to return from a two-game absence.

Another option is Dylan Coghlan, called back up from the Moose on Friday.

"I'm not saying it's (Saturday), I haven't decided. But he's going to get in," Arniel said. "He'll get some looks here in the next few games. He went down and played well and did what we asked, and now here's his chance."

Coghlan has been a healthy scratch for all but one NHL game this season.

While he went down to the Moose and scored in his first of two games, the Jets were just relieved he wasn't claimed off waivers.

They lost Declan Chisholm (to Minnesota) that way a year ago, and Johnny Kovacevic (Montreal) the year before that.

"We were worried," Arniel said. "And then we also had the injury at the same time as we put him on. Stanley got hurt, I think it was almost the exact same day. So it was like, 'Wow, here we go again.' But he was hoping that he stayed."

Traded to Winnipeg by Carolina last summer, Coghlan says this season has definitely tested his patience.

"It's frustrating," the 26-year-old said. "Everyone wants to play and make a difference and help out in any way they can. Felt like my game has been pretty good in the last three years or so. Just waiting for a chance and hopefully get it here pretty soon."

"And if they find a spot to use me, I know I'll exceed those expectations."

Hitting the waiver wire wasn't easy, either.

"It's not a feeling that anybody wants to go through," Coghlan said. "Am I going to move in the next couple days and move my family, or am I going to be staying here? That's all I've wanted,

is to play on this team. And obviously we're pretty deep, and first place after Christmas, which is where everyone wants to be."

Undrafted out of the Western Hockey League, the B.C. product has played 107 NHL games with Winnipeg, Vegas and Carolina, recording six goals – his first three in one game with the Golden Knights – and 16 assists.

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/10934953/analysis-winnipeg-jets-flying-start-nhl-season/>

ANALYSIS: Winnipeg Jets off to a flying start this NHL season

By John Shannon Global News

It's hard to imagine the first 36 games of the Jets' season going any better.

First in the Central.

First in the West.

First in the entire National Hockey League.

Oh sure, there was that two-week brain cramp with too many road games, but when you start the season with 15 wins in your first 16 games, and then go 7-2-1 in your last 10 games, you are obviously doing something right.

Life is pretty, pretty good.

So, with three days to enjoy their place in the hockey world, the Jets must know that the real challenge starts now, even as early as Saturday night against Ottawa. Scott Arniel has alluded to this a few times in the past few weeks. Being first means there are 31 teams behind you — and without a doubt, there is a target on your back.

As individuals and as a team, the Jets have put the rest of the league on notice. Monday's game in Toronto certainly affirmed that. While Josh Morrissey and Connor Hellebuyck have garnered much of the attention, Mark Scheifele outplayed John Tavares and Kyle Connor outplayed Mitch Marner.

Those successes did not go unnoticed. And if this Winnipeg team is to maintain its place in the NHL, the stars are going to have to continue to dominate, night in and night out.

If that is truly the case, it is going to be a fun ride indeed.

The age-old saying, "With great power comes great responsibility," is one that might apply to this hockey club. With great success now comes great expectations.

City TV Winnipeg

<https://winnipeg.citynews.ca/2024/12/27/jets-challenge-cup/>

Winnipeg Jets' Challenge Cup brings thousands of young hockey players to Winnipeg

By Joanne Roberts

Each holiday season, the Winnipeg Jets hosts its Challenge Cup — a grassroots minor tournament held at the Hockey For All Centre.

180 teams from all over Canada, with some coming from as far away as Ranken Inlet, Nunavut, have come to face off on the ice and see how far their team can go.

“It’s exciting,” said Maxwell Paseska, who captains Winnipeg’s St. James Canucks U11 team. “I want to go score a goal. I want to go get a goal with the team.”

Teamwork is what the young players have been focusing on all season, so when they were able to meet Jets players Mark Scheifele, Dylan Demelo and Morgan Barron before their game, it was the push they needed to get onto the ice and do their best to play together to win.

“They’re always being a team player, they’re not like, hogging the puck. They’re not trying to do it themselves. They’re always passing, they’re always talking,” said Paseska.

The team also delighted in getting autographs from the Jets.

“I got them to sign my water bottle and then my old Canucks jersey,” said Brody Ferenc, who plays left and right wing for the team, as he showed off his items to CityNews.

Jason Paseska, who coaches the young players, said it was exciting but also important for them to meet Winnipeg’s NHL players.

“They’re looking ahead in life and saying like, maybe I want to do that later in life. So it’s really good for them to see them in here and see what kind of they do to get ready for a game and practice and stuff,” he said.

Dean Court, the director of amateur development and programming at the centre, said the tournament serves as inspiration for youth to see how far they can go in the sport.

“It gives kids an opportunity to see that, if I work hard maybe there might be an opportunity for me to be like them someday,” said Court.

There’s a real chance these dreams can become a reality, as the Challenge Cup has seen its players eventually move into the NHL, like St. Adolphe’s Owen Pickering and Winnipeg’s Denton Mateychuk.

“Everyone who normally wouldn’t get a chance to play in a tournament have a tournament right here locally,” said Court.

The tournament runs through to January 2.

TheAHL.com

<https://theahl.com/news/moose-looking-good-for-25-seasons>

Moose looking good for 25 seasons

by Daniel Fink | AHL On The Beat

The Manitoba Moose are in the midst of their 25th season in Winnipeg. With festivities ongoing, the Moose want to bring some of that legacy to fans throughout the campaign.

The team's goal is to involve as many people as possible in the celebrations.

"Finding ways to layer the 25th season throughout the year, so everyone gets to be a part of it, is important," said Colin Peterson, the team's manager of game presentation. "Every time we have a conversation about a specific event, or something on our schedule, we add in the extra question of, 'What does this mean for the 25th season? Is there some extra level we can add to this?'"

"It's about finding things that tie back to the main thread."

Part of that process is coming to an understanding of how to approach celebrating the 25th season of Moose hockey. It's an opportunity to tell new stories about the franchise, the people within it and the team's relationship with fans.

"When we were celebrating 20 seasons, we'd only been back for a few years," explained Raquel Payne, manager of marketing for the Moose. "Now we've re-established ourselves in our market. So, we're not quite looking back as strongly on the nostalgic '1.0 era.' We're more focusing on what 25 seasons looks like more specifically within the '2.0 era.' We're focusing more on recent accomplishments than accomplishments over a longer period."

The Moose came to Winnipeg as members of the International Hockey League in 1996, and began play in the AHL in 2001. They relocated to St. John's, N.L., in 2011 when the Winnipeg Jets took the ice, and returned in 2015 as the Jets' top development affiliate

The so-called '2.0 era' of the Moose now has nearly a decade of stories to tell. As one of just a handful of AHL affiliates located in the same city as its NHL team, many Moose alumni continue to have a connection to local fans as members of the Jets.

"We have direct lines to draw between current Winnipeg Jets and Moose who were here since the team returned," added Peterson. "The fact we can tell these stories completely now gives the anniversary a fresh look."

The centerpiece of that fresh look is the team's 25th season celebration jersey, which debuted on Nov. 23. The jersey merges the team's classic "happy moose" logo with the organization's current color palette to combine the franchise's two eras.

Work on the celebration jersey began back in the summer of 2022 as the True North Sports + Entertainment design team worked to find the balance between nostalgia and celebrating where the team is now. The original logo was identified as the preference for the main crest due in part to its significance for current Moose and TNSE staff.

“Everybody in our offices were just dying to see something with our ‘happy moose’ again,” said Marc Gomez, art director for the TNSE creative services team. “The ‘happy moose’ is something really important to the history of the brand. It’s something that is synonymous with many of the people who we work with and grew up with the Moose.”

The logo also has a more whimsical feel to it, which connects to the younger fans which make up a large part of the contingent at every Moose home game. It’s a connection to the history of the team that Payne hopes resonates with the team’s young fans.

“A lot of our fans tend to be of a younger demographic. So, we want to make sure it’s something that they’ll remember, and they’ll love just as much as our fans who did grow up with it.”

People are passionate about jerseys. You don’t have to look hard to see strong reactions to any jersey revealed by a team from youth sports all the way to the professional and international ranks. With any new reveal comes a little trepidation as the initial launch begins and the opinions start to come in. For Gomez, those nerves started to fade once the first jersey came out of the box.

“There was excitement, and obviously you need to keep it under wraps a little bit, but I did want to just throw it on and run through the office. It’s a great looking sweater, and I think everybody here is happy it’s out in the world right now.”

That excitement carried right to fans who quickly embraced the new sweater. Many heralded the new look as one of the best specialty jerseys produced by the team – high praise considering some of the looks the TNSE design team fashioned for the club in the past. Jerseys were all but sold out at retail by the time the team hit the holiday break.

“There’s a lot of satisfaction when we get that positive reaction,” added Payne. “To hear that kind of reaction when we rolled it out on social media. We were flooded with so much support and so much love. Hearing our supporters are just as excited as we are solidified this jersey was the right choice for us.”

The jersey enjoyed a winning debut as the Moose battled back from a third-period deficit to win 4-2 over their long-time rivals, the Chicago Wolves. The new look had players talking post-game.

“I thought they looked pretty sharp. I thought they looked great,” Moose defenseman Dylan Anhorn told reporters following the win. “Maybe we need to boost how many times we wear them this year based on the jump we had today.”

While jerseys may be in short supply, fans can purchase other 25th season merchandise at Jets Gear locations or online at TrueNorthShop.com. For more information on the 25th season of Moose hockey, including the promotional schedule, single game tickets and ticket memberships, visit MooseHockey.com.