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<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/three-things-jets-begin-homestand-with-4-1-loss>

***Three things - Jets begin homestand with 4-1 loss
Connor scores lone goal in 4-1 loss to Columbus***

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG - The Winnipeg Jets began a four game homestand with a 4-1 loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets at Canada Life Centre. Kyle Connor scored the lone goal for the Jets who saw their record drop to 20-9-0. Eric Comrie made 24 saves and has not received much in terms of goal support in his last four starts, the Jets have scored a total of six goals. Winnipeg went 1-for-4 on the power play, Columbus 1-for-2. The Jets will have Monday off and return to action on Tuesday when they welcome the Boston Bruins to town.

1. TIRED GROUP

The Jets were playing their third game in four nights on Sunday while the Blue Jackets arrived in the Manitoba capital on Saturday. Through the first 11 minutes of the opening period, Columbus had held the Jets to just two shots and won 75% of the face-offs (6-for-8). Winnipeg had two power plays in the first period and had just two shots, the best chance came off the stick of Cole Perfetti who was denied by Elvis Merzlikins. Columbus ended up outshooting Winnipeg 12-6.

2. CONNOR COMES THROUGH

The game remained scoreless until the 11:51 mark of the second period. With Justin Danforth in the box for a boarding call, the Jets scored on their fourth power play of the night. The Blue Jackets let Kyle Connor walk in and fire a wrist shot off the short side post and in for his 15th of the season. Josh Morrissey recorded his 134th primary assist and moved within one of tying Dustin Byfuglien (135) for the most by a Jets/Thrashers defenseman. It marked the second power play the Jets have scored in their last six games.

Columbus tied the game on a power play of their own, as Kirill Marchenko found Dmitri Voronkov at the far post and the Blue Jacket forward tapped it in to make it 1-1 at 13:53.

3. MISTAKES COSTLY IN THIRD

Seven minutes into the third, former Jet Sean Monahan had a chance to give Columbus their first lead of the night, but Eric Comrie reached out with the glove to make the save of the night. The Blue Jackets managed to take the lead at 7:15, Kent Johnson pounced on a Monahan rebound and made it 2-1. A Jet turnover led to Columbus taking a two-goal lead, James van Riemsdyk sent a perfect pass to Johnson who scored his second of the night at 9:42.

"We controlled some of the play there for a second and they did a really good job blocking shots. Not for a lack of effort from us, we could have stuck to our game for a little bit longer there," said Kyle Connor.

"Just stay with the forecheck simple through the neutral zone, we got away from that in the third period, kind of bit us."

NHL.com

<https://www.nhl.com/news/columbus-blue-jackets-winnipeg-jets-game-recap-december-8>

***Johnson scores twice in 3rd, lifts Blue Jackets past Jets
Merzlikins makes 24 saves for Columbus, which ends 3-game losing streak***

By Darrin Bauming

WINNIPEG -- Kent Johnson scored two goals in a 2:27 span in the third period to lift the Columbus Blue Jackets to a 4-1 win against the Winnipeg Jets at Canada Life Centre on Sunday.

Johnson first gave the Blue Jackets a 2-1 lead at 7:15, knocking in a rebound with his backhand after Sean Monahan redirected James van Riemsdyk's initial shot.

"They're both just really good players and do some different things than me," Johnson said of his linemates. "[Monahan's] a really good center, like two-way, offense, defense, can make every play. And then [van Riemsdyk] can make every play, too, and he's so good around the net, bigger body, likes to be there. I think they're a really good fit with me."

Johnson made it 3-1 at 9:42 with a one-timer off a pass from van Riemsdyk on a 2-on-1 rush.

"It was a perfect pass, so pretty easy to one-time," Johnson said. "Definitely whenever you're the one-time guy on a 2-on-1 you want it slid over to you, so it was nice."

Dmitri Voronkov and Sean Kuraly also scored for the Blue Jackets (12-12-3), who ended a three-game losing streak. Elvis Merzlikins made 24 saves.

"We were really, really happy with the start," Columbus coach Dean Evason said. "We went in and challenged the group that we have to start the same way. We started extremely well the other night in Vancouver (a 5-2 loss on Friday). ... We certainly played the same type of game. We started properly. They were ready to go. Credit to our leadership group."

Kyle Connor scored for the Jets (20-9-0), who won their previous two games, including 4-2 at the Chicago Blackhawks on Saturday. Eric Comrie made 24 saves.

"Third period, made two mistakes. Turnover in our end, turnover in the neutral zone, they turned around and put them right back in our net," Winnipeg coach Scott Arniel said. "We're tied going into the third kind of like we've been the last few games, when (we) found ways to win hockey games. This one we made mistakes and it ended up in the back of our net."

Connor gave the Jets a 1-0 lead with a power-play goal at 11:51 of the second period, scoring with a wrist shot from the right face-off dot under the glove of Merzlikins.

"I think we had some offensive zone shifts where you're almost looking for the perfect play," Connor said. "By that time, they're able to collapse and take away the middle of the ice. I think being quicker to get pucks to the net and creating that chaos and those seam plays, everything else will come from that."

Voronkov tied it 1-1 with his own power-play goal at 13:53. Kirill Marchenko flubbed a one-timer in the left circle, but the puck went right to Voronkov, who jammed it in at the right post.

"We made [the Jets] continually go back and get some pucks," Evason said. "We didn't turn it over, we didn't feed into their transition game where they could get going and get their offense going. We got pucks out, we didn't let them have sustained pressure. Our guys were committed to doing the right things defensively, and obviously it translated into some offense here tonight as well."

After Johnson put Columbus in front, Kuraly shot into an empty net at 18:38 of the third for the 4-1 final.

"That's definitely a good measuring stick game. You know what kind of season those guys are having over there," van Riemsdyk said. "It was one of those games I felt like we stuck with it the whole 60. I thought we played fairly consistent, no lapses in our game, and did the little things and took care of the details to win a game."

Sunday was the conclusion of a stretch of five road games (2-3-0) in eight days for the Blue Jackets.

"I'm happy that we managed to handle it well, end on the right note to finish this road trip. It's great," Merzlikins said. "This win was really important. We're tired from this long road trip, and [the Jets] had a back-to-back, so it was even. It was a good win. I'm really happy."

NOTES: Van Riemsdyk had two assists after being held without a point in his previous six games. ... Columbus forward Cole Sillinger sustained a lower-body injury in third period. There was no update postgame. ... Blue Jackets forward Kevin Labanc played his 500th NHL game. ... Winnipeg had won each of the previous three games against Columbus by a combined score of 17-3.

Canadian Press

<https://www.chrisd.ca/2024/12/08/winnipeg-jets-columbus-blue-jackets-game-story-loss/>

Jets Blame Loss to Blue Jackets on Turnovers, Trying to Be Too Pretty

By Judy Owen, The Canadian Press

Mistakes and seeking the perfect play proved costly for the Winnipeg Jets on Sunday.

Kent Johnson scored a pair of third-period goals to help the Columbus Blue Jackets snap a three-game losing skid with a 4-1 victory over the Jets.

"I think we had some offensive-zone shifts where you're almost looking for the perfect play and by that time, they're able to collapse and take away the middle of the ice," said winger Kyle Connor, who scored Winnipeg's lone goal.

"I think being quicker to get pucks to the net and creating that chaos, and those seam plays and everything else will come from that."

The Jets (20-9-0) had a two-game win streak halted, which had followed a four-game losing streak.

After a 4-1 loss to the St. Louis Blues last week — Winnipeg's fourth in a row — head coach Scott Arniel talked about the team having opportunities to attack the net, but instead players were looking for "one more play."

The Columbus game was a bit of déjà vu.

"Earlier on, we had a real mindset that we were in attack mode all of the time and now we're at times looking for that one extra pass," Arniel said. "This is the time when you need the (shot) volume sometimes."

He also pointed to a pair of costly third-period mistakes.

"Turnover in our end, turnover in the neutral zone. They turned around and put them right back in our net," Arniel said.

Dmitri Voronkov and Sean Kuraly, into an empty net, also scored for Columbus (12-12-3). James van Riemsdyk had a pair of assists.

Elvis Merzlikins made 24 saves for the Blue Jackets, who ended a five-game road trip with a 2-3-0 record.

"We're tired from this long road trip and (the Jets) had back-to-backs so it was even," Merzlikins said. "It was a good win. I'm really happy."

Winnipeg beat the Chicago Blackhawks 4-2 Saturday afternoon to end a season-high six-game road trip.

"Everybody in there felt great, there's no excuses," Connor said. "We had that game tied at home going to the third, you want that one."

Eric Comrie stopped 24 shots for Winnipeg, which played in Chicago Saturday afternoon.

"(Comrie) played great," Jets defenceman Dylan DeMelo said. "He wasn't the reason we lost. We weren't good on any of the goals we gave up."

The Jets didn't get their first shot on goal until a power play five minutes into the game, and were outshot 12-6 by the visitors.

Connor scored his team-leading 15th goal of the season on Winnipeg's fourth power play of the game when his shot from the right circle went over Merzlikins' left pad at 11:51 of second period.

Columbus had its second power play shortly after Connor's goal and didn't waste it.

Voronkov made it 1-1 when he banged in the puck that had bounced off the post at 13:53.

Johnson gave the Blue Jackets the lead off a rebound at 7:15 of the third and added his eighth goal of the season at 9:42 on a two-on-one with van Riemsdyk.

“It was a perfect pass, so pretty easy to one-time,” said Johnson, who was playing his second game on a line with van Riemsdyk and Sean Monahan.

Winnipeg went 1-for-4 on the power play. Columbus was 1-for 2.

The Jets had gone into the game with only one power-play goal in 14 chances in their previous five games.

“Earlier in the year, a lot of those pucks were getting through,” Arniel said. “Now the opposition is trying to get in and make sure we’re not getting those shot opportunities.”

It’s something they’ll work on.

“Kind of like the five-on-five,” Arniel said. “We know what our mindset needs to be when we have the puck. We’ll continue hammering that home.”

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/12/08/turnovers-costly-for-jets-in-lacklustre-loss-to-blue-jackets>

Turnovers costly for Jets in lacklustre loss to Blue Jackets

By: Mike McIntyre

The Winnipeg Jets have finished off the most gruelling part of their schedule not with a bang, but with a whimper.

A lacklustre 4-1 loss to the rebuilding Columbus Blue Jackets on Sunday at Canada Life Centre was low on energy and execution from the home side, not to mention excitement for the 13,887 fans who braved some ugly winter weather to make it to the downtown rink.

“Made two mistakes. Turnover in our end, turnover in the neutral zone. They turned around and put them right back in our net,” is how coach Scott Arniel summed up the latest one to get away.

Indeed, this followed a near identical script to recent defeats in Las Vegas (Nov. 30) and Dallas (Dec. 1) in which the Jets were deadlocked with their opponent in the third period, only to come away empty-handed.

So what’s behind these costly errors? Mental and/or physical fatigue?

Although the Jets haven’t had much time lately to stop and catch their breath — they were playing for the second time in as many days, the third time in four days, the fifth time in eight days and the 10th time in 17 days with extensive travel mixed in — nobody was taking the bait and pinning blame in that direction.

“No. We’re never going to use that one,” said Arniel.

“You know what, it’s three in four nights, that’s all the more reason to simplify what you’re doing, making sure that, you hope that you do the right things, that it doesn’t turn into offence for the opposition.”

Winnipeg had won two straight games which had also been tied entering the final frame, both on the road, including a 4-2 triumph on Saturday afternoon in Chicago. Columbus, meanwhile, had been in Winnipeg since early Saturday morning after playing Friday night in Vancouver and looked like the group with a lot more jump.

"We've talked about it as a group. We're not looking for excuses based on the schedule. This is hockey," said Arniel.

"There's things that happen out there that you're in charge of and you can handle, whether that's not having your legs one night or maybe you're not feeling, maybe there's some injuries, whatever it might be. You have to grind your way through it. Everybody else does."

On this night anyways, the Jets didn't do a very good job in that regard as they fall to 20-9-0 on the season. Columbus improves to 12-12-3.

Let's break this one down further:

Comrie deserved better. It would appear Eric Comrie's luck has turned. The backup goaltender won his first three starts of the year, and it says here his play has been remarkably consistent in the four which have followed. However, Comrie has now dropped all of those despite doing his best to give his team a chance.

That was certainly the case on Sunday, where he flashed leather to make a spectacular save off former Jets centre Sean Monahan with just over 13 minutes left in regulation and the score tied 1-1.

You'd think that might have given the Jets some momentum, with the crowd buzzing about what they'd just seen. But only 23 seconds later, Columbus forward Kent Johnson was left all alone in front of Comrie to backhand a rebound created off another Comrie save off Monahan.

Johnson struck again just 2:27 later as the Jets got caught up the ice and gifted the Blue Jackets a two-on-one rush, with James van Riemsdyk feeding his linemate for a one-timer that Comrie had no chance on.

"It felt like we gave them those two," said defenceman Dylan DeMelo.

"Sure, they went and got it, but we, equally, gave it to them. We weren't in our structure and we didn't do what we needed to do in certain roles. That is really what it came down to."

Sean Kuraly iced the game with an empty-netter with 1:22 left to play.

Comrie is now 3-4-0 with a 3.05 goals-against-average and .901 save-percentage.

"We're not getting the run support for him. He's been really good for us," said Arniel. "He certainly isn't any of the problem that's for sure."

Special teams saw-off: Winnipeg's power play came in ice cold, having gone 1-for-14 over the past five games. It looked like that drought would continue as they whiffed on their first three chances against Columbus, spending far too much time trying to get set up and looking for the perfect shot.

However, the fourth time on this night was the charm, as Kyle Connor ripped home his team-leading 15th of the season at 11:51 of the second period to put the Jets up 1-0.

“Earlier in the year, a lot of those pucks were getting through. Now the opposition is trying to get in and make sure we’re not getting those shot opportunities,” Arniel said of what’s changed for his team.

“We know what our mindset needs to be when we have the puck. We’ll continue hammering that home.”

The lead would be short-lived, as Brad Lambert took a high-sticking penalty just 71 seconds later and Blue Jackets forward Dmitri Voronkov poked home a loose puck at the side of the Winnipeg net for the power play equalizer.

The Jets penalty kill has also regressed after a hot start to the year, and this was another example of that.

Two for fighting? There was a strange sequence in the first period when van Riemsdyk caught Connor with a dangerous leg-on-leg trip that sent the Jets forward tumbling to the ice.

Teammate Neal Pionk immediately responded by confronting the veteran Columbus forward, with both players dropping their gloves and exchanging punches.

Incredibly, referees didn’t deem that spirited exchange worthy of a fight, giving them just two minutes each for roughing (plus the initial tripping penalty on van Riemsdyk).

“We were giving it to (Pionk) for sure. It looked like a fight to me,” said Connor, who luckily escaped any injury on the play.

Putting it in perspective: Sunday was the annual Military Appreciation Night game for the Jets, with hundreds of active members joining the players on the ice for a post-game photo.

“I just spoke with someone who was just in Iraq for six months. We’ve got a pretty good gig with what we’re doing here,” said DeMelo.

“Even in a tough night where we maybe didn’t have our best, there’s no bad days in this league. You’ve got to cherish every moment. The men and women that fight for our country and let us play a game for a living... we’re not able to without their sacrifice and the people that sacrificed before and the people who will sacrifice in the future for us.”

Key play: Johnson’s second goal of the third period essentially put this one to the bed, with the Jets getting burned for their needless aggression on the play.

Three stars: 1. Columbus C Kent Johnson: 2 goals. 2. Columbus G Elvis Merzlikins: 24 saves. 3. Columbus LW James van Riemsdyk: 2 assists.

Extra, extra: The Jets made one other lineup change besides Comrie going in for Connor Hellebuyck, as defenceman Ville Heinola was scratched in favour of Colin Miller. Arniel said this is a case of some load management for Heinola, who had played the previous three games (over a five-day span) and is coming off ankle surgery in the preseason.

Forward David Gustafsson and defencemen Dylan Coghlan were the other healthy scratches.

Sunday marked the first time in 15 games the Jets don't have to hop on a plane to fly to another city to prepare for the next one. They'll take Monday off away from the rink, then host the Boston Bruins on Tuesday night in the second game of a four-game homestand.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/2024/12/08/jets-prospects-lucius-excited-to-be-back-playing-scoring>

Jets prospects: Lucius excited to be back playing, scoring

By: Mike McIntyre

The Winnipeg Jets continue to fly high near the top of the NHL standings thanks to a deep and talented lineup.

The organization also has 23 drafted and developing prospects playing in various leagues and levels who could one day work their way up to the big club. Ten of them are currently with the Manitoba Moose, one is in the ECHL while the other 12 are scattered around the Canadian Hockey League, college and European clubs.

To help you keep tabs, we'll check in on the kids each month over the course of the season.

Chaz Lucius has largely been out of sight when it comes to forecasting the future, owing to the fact he just can't seem to stay healthy.

The 21-year-old, who was drafted 18th-overall in 2021, was stuck at 29 professional games as of late last week, spread over parts of three injury-plagued seasons with the Moose. Sure, there had been some decent production (4G, 16A), but constantly being sidelined is not a recipe for long-term success.

All of which is why this past weekend was so important for the young forward. Lucius dressed in back-to-back games on Friday and Saturday and potted a pair of goals along with an assist, showing off a skillset befitting of a first-rounder and demonstrating why it would be silly to give up on him just yet.

"The ankle feels great, finally," Lucius told reporters earlier this week.

The Kansas product been on a bit of load management with the Moose so far this year, including some setbacks as he rehabilitated from last year's season-ending surgery which caused him to miss 14 of the first 17 games.

Lucius is now up to five points (2G, 3A) in five AHL contests this year and is hoping to go on a lengthy and productive run.

In speaking with reporters following Friday's game (1G, 1A), Lucius said lighting the lamp for the first time in more than a calendar year (Nov. 26, 2023) felt "like a weight was lifted off my chest."

“It gives me a lot of confidence for sure knowing that I can still put the puck in the back of the net,” said Lucius, who had no issues doing that during his decorated junior/college career. “

He followed that up Saturday with another snipe.

“Really excited to be back with the guys and just play games,” he said. “I think now I’m at a point where I can play games consistently and do all that stuff.”

That’s music to the ears of the organization, which has all kinds of patience for Lucius and still believes he has a bright future.

MANITOBA MOOSE:

It’s been a rough go for the AHL team, which is just 6-12-1 so far. We’ve removed Brad Lambert off this list, since he’s now up with the Jets.

– G Thomas Milic (5th round, 2023): Milic was arguably the MVP of the Moose last year as a rookie, but is fighting it a bit so far this year with a 2-6-1 record, a 3.34 GAA and .873 SV%.

– D Elias Salomonsson (2nd round, 2022): Winnipeg’s top blue-line prospect has been a real bright spot in his first year in North America, with 12 points (3G, 9A) through 17 games which has him second in team scoring. However, he suffered an upper-body injury on Friday night and did not play Saturday, so here’s hoping it’s not too serious.

– F Danny Zhilkin (3rd round, 2022): He’s currently sidelined with an injury and has just one assist through seven games.

– F Fabian Wagner (6th round, 2022): After going 16 games without a point for Linkopings HC in the top Swedish men’s league, the 20-year-old defensive forward recently joined the Moose and is still looking for his first point after three AHL games.

– F Nikita Chibrikov (2nd round, 2021): Will he be the next to get the call from the Jets? The young Russian leads the Moose in scoring with 13 points (5G, 8A) in 19 games.

– D Dmitry Kuzmin (3rd round, 2021): He spent some time in the ECHL last year after struggling at the AHL level but has shown some growth, with three points (1G, 2A) in 12 Moose games so far.

– F Daniel Torgersson (2nd round, 2020): Is the writing on the wall for the 22-year-old from Sweden? He had a disappointing 2023-24 season with the Moose (1G, 8A in 52 games) and has no points to show for nine games this year, along with plenty of healthy scratches.

– D Tyrel Bauer (6th round, 2020): The hard-nosed defenceman has no points through 14 games this year.

– D Simon Lundmark (2nd round, 2019): After an eye-opening Jets camp in which he was one of the final cuts, the 24-year-old has five points (2G, 3A) in 16 games so far.

– F Henri Nikannen (4th round, 2019): Similar to Torgersson, Nikkanen is once again struggling to produce much at the pro level with just four points (1G, 3A) in 13 games along with some press box stints.

ECHL:

– G Dom DiVincentiis (7th round, 2022): He was the best goaltender on the Moose, with a 2-3-0 record, a 2.24 GAA and a .930 SV%. But he's now been bumped to the ECHL affiliate (Norfolk Admirals) with the Jets reclaiming veteran Kaapo Kahkonen on waivers. The first-year pro is now tearing up that league with a 5-0-0 record, a 2.14 GAA and a .919 SV%. With Kahkonen and Milic struggling with the Moose, it seems like just a matter of time before he is called back up.

OHL:

– F Kevin He (4th round, 2024): His production has slowed a bit over the past month, but the energetic Beijing product is still having a great season with 33 points (20G, 13A) in 25 games with the Niagara IceDogs.

– F Kieron Walton (6th round, 2024): Just an incredible start for the 18-year-old, who has already matched his career high in points (43, set in 65 games last year) in just 27 contests this year (16G, 27A) with the Sudbury Wolves. The 6-6, 216 pound centre is among the top OHL scorers and looks like a potential steal for the Jets.

– F Colby Barlow (1st round, 2023): Snubbed by the World Junior selection committee, Barlow is finally starting to pick it up after a sluggish first few weeks with the Oshawa Generals following a sub-par training camp with the Jets. He's now scored in four straight games with the Oshawa Generals and is up to 22 points (14G, 8A) in 27 games.

– F Jacob Julien (5th round, 2023): After jumping from 16 points to 78 with the London Knights last year, Julien has come back down to Earth with just 15 points (5G, 10A) in 28 games this year. Although his team is tops in the OHL standings, Julien isn't playing a significant role right now.

WHL:

– F Markus Loponen (5th round, 2024): The 18-year-old Finnish forward continues to adjust well to North American hockey. Loponen has 20 points (8G, 12A) through 27 games with the Victoria Royals.

– F Brayden Yager (1st round, 2023): He's the only one in this piece that wasn't drafted by the Jets, but we're including him because he was swapped for Rutger McGroarty. It's been quite a stretch for Yager, who is expected to be the N0. 1 centre for Canada at the World Juniors and just got traded from the struggling Moose Jaw Warriors (11G, 19A in 21 games) to the Lethbridge Hurricanes, where he's put up four points (1G, 3A) in his first two games. McGroarty, by the way, has seven points (2G, 5A) in 16 AHL games with Wilkes-Barre.

–F Connor Levis (7th round, 2023): The 20-year-old right-winger has 21 points (8G, 13A) in 25 games this year with the Vancouver Giants after putting up 55 points in 65 games last year.

COLLEGE:

– F Zach Nehring (3rd round, 2023): He's jumped from the USHL (14 points in 44 games last year) to college and has slowed after a hot start (3G, 2A in his first five games, just 2A in his last nine games) at Western Michigan University.

EUROPE:

– D Alfons Freij (2nd round, 2024): The smooth-skating Swede is really starting to produce in the top men's league over there with seven points (2G, 5A) in 22 games. The 18-year-old had spent the last three years in the Swedish junior league.

– D Garrett Brown (4th round, 2022): Brown is finally healthy after suffering a torn ACL last year after just eight games with the University of Denver. The defensive defenceman has been held without a point through 14 games this year.

– F Dmitry Rashevsky (5th round, 2021): It remains to be seen whether this intriguing player will ever be lured away from the KHL, but the Jets certainly hope that could be the case. He has 16 points (10G, 6A) in 32 games with Moscow Dynamo so far this year after putting up 43 points (24G, 19A) in 67 contests last season.

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/jets-modest-win-streak-plowed-under-by-visiting-blue-jackets>

'Gave it away': Jets' modest win streak plowed under by visiting Blue Jackets

By Paul Friesen

A 15-1 mark to start the year, a 5-8 record since. Will the real Winnipeg Jets please stand up?

Perhaps that was them trying to catch a nap in the third period against Columbus on Sunday.

All even at a goal apiece, two of the Jets' high-end players committed turnovers that tilted the ice the Blue Jackets way, a 4-1 defeat the result.

"Third period, made two mistakes," is how head coach Scott Arniel summed up how it got away from his team. "Turnover in our end, turnover in the neutral zone. They turned around and put them right back in our net."

Kyle Connor was the culprit on the first one, Mark Scheifele on the second, as any prospect of a Jets win streak was nipped in the bud, at two.

Let's nip one potential Jets excuse in the bud, too: fatigue.

Yeah, they were playing a fifth game in eight days.

Well, guess what? So, too, was Columbus. All of them on the road.

To their credit, Connor and Co. weren't leaning on that crutch, either, not even after playing on back-to-back days (they won in Chicago on Saturday).

"There's no excuses," Connor said, saying he felt just fine. "I mean, this (was) obviously a long road trip that everybody goes through at some point. Everybody in there felt great. We had that game tied at home going to the third. We want that one."

Instead, they gave it away.

Columbus had lost three straight coming in, but got those two third-period goals from Kent Johnson, the first coming 7:15 into the third period, the second minutes later on a two-on-one, Johnson one-timing a pass from former Jet Sean Monahan.

Sean Kuraly's empty-netter sent most of the 13,886 fans scurrying back out into the snow, some of them no doubt wondering where that front-running team of the first month and a half has gone.

The Jets are still among the NHL's front-runners, their hot start seeing to that.

A record of 20-9 is nothing to sneeze at, something anyone would have taken going into the season,

But in the what-have-you-done-lately department, they're fading fast.

Tired legs would just be a tired excuse.

"We're never going to use that one," Arniel said. "I can show you everybody else's schedule. They're doing the same thing. It's three in four nights, that's all the more reason to simplify what you're doing, making sure that... it doesn't turn into offence for the opposition."

Over-passing on three of their four power plays – there's another running theme, as the Jets had been one-for-their-last-17 with the extra man — Arniel's squad cashed in on its fourth, Connor pulling the trigger in the second period, breaking a scoreless tie.

They gave that one back two minutes later, young Brad Lambert getting careless with his stick and Dmitri Voronkov making him pay on the Blue Jackets power play.

The teams took the 1-1 tie into the third.

You know the rest.

"It felt like we gave them those two," defenceman Dylan DeMelo said. "Sure, they went and got it, but we equally gave it to them. We weren't in our structure and we didn't do what we needed to do in certain roles. That is really what it came down to."

As for why it's been happening so much lately: "Not sure," DeMelo said. "We have time to figure it out. There is still lots of games left, lots of season left. We are still in a pretty darn good spot. That's the encouraging part, we still have lots to learn. We will continue to build our brand here."

They'll at least be able to build it at home for a while, with games every other day this week, beginning with Boston on Tuesday.

The breakdowns ruined another fine night by backup goalie Eric Comrie, who stopped 24 of 27 shots and gave his team a chance.

"Again," Arniel said. "In every game he's played. And that's the hard part. We're not getting the run support for him. He's been really good for us. He certainly isn't any of the problem, that's for sure."

Special-teams breakdown

On paper, special teams heavily favoured the Jets.

On the ice, it didn't quite work out that way.

Despite two Winnipeg power plays in the first period to one for Columbus, the shot count favoured the Blue Jackets, 12-6.

Comrie had to be sharp in goal or the Jets would have had to come from behind.

It took two more Columbus penalties in the second for the NHL's No. 3 power play – up against the No. 29 penalty kill – to break out, Connor rifling it home from the faceoff dot, short side, on Elvis Merzlikins.

The league's 26th ranked power play answered right back, Voronkov with an open-net redirect.

Through 40 minutes, shots were 19-14 for the visitors, their power play hitting on one of two chances, the Jets' on one of four.

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<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/troubling-pattern-starting-to-emerge-for-jets/>

Troubling pattern starting to emerge for Jets

By Jacob Stoller

WINNIPEG — The sky isn't falling, but the concern-o-meter is activated.

Sunday's 4-1 loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets marked the third time in the last 10 days that the Winnipeg Jets lost after entering the third period tied 1-1.

It was a game they should've won, with most of the first 40 minutes being spent in Columbus' zone. But two defensive-zone breakdowns midway through the final frame led to Kent Johnson scoring twice (on consecutive shifts) before the game was ultimately put out of reach by Sean Kuraly's empty-net goal.

A defensive-zone giveaway by Kyle Connor led to Columbus gaining possession seconds before Johnson scored his first goal. And a neutral-zone turnover from Mark Scheifele is what ignited the two-on-one chance that led to Johnson's second goal.

"It felt like we gave them those two (goals) tonight," Dylan DeMelo said. "Sure, they went and got it but, we equally, gave it to them. We weren't in our structure and we didn't do what we needed to do in certain roles."

Structure. It's a broad term in the hockey landscape, often used as a buzzword to depict "gameplan" or "identity." We know the Jets pride themselves on being a hard-nosed, straight-lined forechecking team that defends well during five-on-five play. So, what's led to them struggling to execute that, consistently, throughout their 3-6-0 stretch over the last 15 days?

"Not sure," DeMelo said before pursing his lips.

Jets personnel have (publicly) resisted any link between fatigue from their gruelling schedule and their output. As they should. Every team goes through exhausting stretches in the schedule.

“You have to grind your way through it,” Scott Arniel said.

But the gaffes we saw leading to Johnson’s two goals are a byproduct of a troubling pattern. Players are blowing assignments, mistakes are compounding and they’re looking out of sync as a five-man unit without the puck.

It’s not any better with the puck, either.

The power play has veered away from the newfound ‘attack mindset’ that made them so dominant at the start of the year (more on that, in a bit). Plays are dying off in the neutral zone at even strength. And even when they’re able to get into the offensive zone — they aren’t generating quality chances. They’re straying to the perimeter far too often.

“They’re collapsing, they’re taking away the good ice, we’re just around the outside,” Connor said. “That’s what we want to do in our D zone, keep it to the outside. It’s just a mind-set shift for us that we need to get back to.”

Just 27.4 per cent of Winnipeg’s 51 five-on-five shot attempts against Columbus hit the net (14). For reference, the league wide average is 47.2 per cent. Columbus blocked 21 of those attempts, too.

“As forwards, maybe (we’re) holding onto the puck too long,” Connor said. “I think we had some offensive-zone shifts where you’re almost looking for the perfect play.”

You can’t blame that on fatigue.

“It’s three (games) in four nights, that’s all the more reason to simplify what you’re doing,” Arniel said.

And with the Jets playing at such an elite level for most of the season, they deserve the benefit of the doubt that this is just a bump in the road, not the start of a steep decline.

That said, their next three games — against the Boston Bruins, Vegas Golden Knights and Montreal Canadiens at home — will be telling.

Ehlers update

Arniel said there’s a good chance Nikolaj Ehlers will return to practice this week.

The Jets power play hasn’t looked the same since Ehlers suffered a lower-body injury on Nov. 29 against the Golden Knights. Over the last five games, Winnipeg’s converted on just two of its 15 power plays and its shot generation has declined. With Ehlers in the lineup, the Jets averaged 51.77 shots per 60 minutes on the power play — which ranked 16th in the league. Without Ehlers, the Jets are generating 36.81 power play shots per 60 minutes (28th).

More alarmingly, they’ve looked more passive — reverting to their old ways of just passing it around the perimeter — with little movement off the puck. Cole Perfetti has filled in for Ehlers in the bumper (or as assistant coach Davis Payne calls it, the “pop shot”), and while he had a few

good looks inside Sunday, not having Ehlers' explosiveness in the slot gives opposing penalty kills one less thing to worry about.

Other thoughts

Poor Eric Comrie. The Jets have scored just one goal in three of his last four starts. He's given them a chance to win every night and it was no different Sunday, where yet again his efforts — including his 'superman' cross-crease glove save in the third period — were put to waste.

- Somehow, James Van Riemsdyk and Neal Pionk were given roughing minors in the first period for what was, clearly, a fight.

"We were giving it to (Pionk) for sure. It looked like a fight to me," Connor said.

- It was Canadian Armed Forces night at Canada Life Centre. Jets players met with several people who have served — past and present — at ice level after the game. DeMelo took some time out of his post-game media availability to provide some gratitude and perspective.

"I spoke with someone who was just in Iraq for six months," DeMelo said. "We've got a pretty good gig with what we're doing here. Even in a tough night where we maybe didn't have our best, there's no bad days in this league. You've got to cherish every moment.

"The men and women that fight for our country and let us play a game for a living ... we're not able to without their sacrifice and the people that sacrificed before and the people who will sacrifice in the future for us. When you put that thing into perspective, tonight doesn't mean that much in regards to what those people have to go through. It was great to put some smiles on some faces out there. Even for us, maybe for a couple minutes or so forget about the loss and thank them for everything they have done for us."

Columbus Dispatch

<https://www.dispatch.com/story/sports/nhl/columbus-blue-jackets/2024/12/08/columbus-blue-jackets-ground-winnipeg-jets-to-finish-trip-with-4-1-win/76854280007/>

Columbus Blue Jackets surge past Winnipeg Jets to cap tough road trip with a boost

By Brian Hedger

Facing the potential of returning from a five-game road trip on a four-game winless skid, the Blue Jackets avoided that outcome Sunday against the Winnipeg Jets.

Despite falling behind 1-0 while allowing a power-play goal for the 13th straight game, the Jackets (12-12-3) fought back with three straight goals of their own — including one by Dmitri Voronkov on a power play — to finish a long, frustrating trip with a 4-1 victory at Canada Life Centre.

"I think it shows a lot of character," defenseman Ivan Provorov said in a postgame interview shown on FanDuel Sports Network. "I think (Friday in Vancouver), we deserved better, and for us to not feel sorry for ourselves, stay focused and play the right way on the last game on a road trip, it shows a lot about this team. I think we've grown a lot since last year and I think we're trending in the right direction."

Provorov played through a painful thumb injury that knocked him out of Friday's loss to the Vancouver Canucks in the second period. He left the ice with a left thumb bent at a shockingly unnatural angle, but played 23:07 two days later and assisted on the second of Kent Johnson's two goals that provided the difference.

Johnson's linemate, left wing James van Riemsdyk, assisted on both of his goals and center Sean Monahan contributed to the first. The Jackets' other goals were scored by Voronkov on a power play in the second and Sean Kuraly, who sent the puck into an empty net with 1:22 left to seal the victory. Elvis Merzlikins earned the goaltending win with 24 saves during an impressive rebound from a tough loss in Vancouver that partially swung on his aggressive decision to play a puck far out of his net with a 2-1 lead.

Johnson's goals were the difference.

He scored both in the third period, giving the Blue Jackets a 3-1 lead after Merzlikins made a series of stops to keep it tied 1-1 starting the frame. Johnson's first tally made it 2-1 after he poked the puck into the Winnipeg net off a Monahan deflection of Van Riemsdyk's shot. His second of the game, eighth of the season, capped a 2-on-1 rush with Van Riemsdyk that started with a perfect cross-ice feed and finished with a quick one-timer past Jets goalie Eric Comrie with 10:18 left to play.

Kyle Connor scored the lone goal for the Jets (20-9-0), who'd won three straight games against the Blue Jackets dating to last season. That string included the Jets' 6-2 blowout win Nov. 1 at Nationwide Arena, which pushed their combined margin of victory to a whopping 17-3 during the streak.

This game, finally, was a lot tighter for the Blue Jackets.

"It's just nice to back up what we did the other night (in Vancouver)," Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said during a postgame interview shown on the television broadcast. "We were really, really happy with the start. We went in and challenged the group that we (had) to start the same way. We certainly played the same type of game."

Neither team made it easy through the middle of the ice, which is why it was knotted at just 1-1 starting the third on power-play goals by Connor and Voronkov. Connor's tally extended the Blue Jackets' dubious streak of allowing man-advantage goals to 13 games, but they'd already killed three against the NHL's third-ranked team on power plays before Merzlikins was finally beaten.

Connor's goal put the Jets up 1-0 with 8:09 left in the second, but the Blue Jackets tied it two minutes later with a power-play goal of their own.

Following a scrum behind the Winnipeg net, Sean Monahan sent a pass out to Zach Werenski high in the zone for a cross-ice setup to Kirill Marchenko on the left wing. Marchenko sent a slap pass toward the far post for Voronkov, who tucked the equalizer into the net for his seventh goal of the season.

That set the stage for a hotly contested third, which started with Merzlikins making a few big stops to keep the Jets from re-taking the lead on the first two shifts. Comrie returned serve at 6:50 of the third, denying Monahan with a dazzling glove save off a slapper to keep it 1-1, but the tie didn't last much longer thanks to the Blue Jackets' top forward line.

"It's definitely a good win," Merzlikins told reporters after the game. "We all remember how our trip was in California, right, and it was going on the same (winless) road here. I'm happy that we managed to handle it well, and, on the right note, finish this road trip."