

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/anderson-samberg-back-in-the-saddle-as-jets-ride-him-for-big-minutes>

ANDERSON: Samberg back in the saddle as Jets ride him for big minutes

By Gordon Anderson, Guest Opinion

In his scheduled bull session with the media on Thursday morning, Jets head coach Scott Arniel gave a “we’ll see” response when asked about his plan to ease Dylan Samberg back into the lineup.

But theory is vastly different than reality as Samberg logged 22:35 of ice time against the Kings on Friday night. Only Neal Pionk logged more minutes in the 2-1 overtime loss. The #4 in Jets silks was on the ice for 23:13.

Samberg was out for nearly seven weeks with a broken foot. Friday was his first game since Nov. 23.

In Saturday’s 3-0 win over the Avalanche, Samberg proved once again how critical he is to the overall success of the Jets. Arniel had one of his cornerstone pieces on the ice for 24:47, more than any other player on the team. The left-shot defender logged 22:22 of his minutes at even strength.

“We didn’t really want him to play that much. But again, I wasn’t sure how after last night being 22 minutes, how it was going to go,” Arniel said, also sprinkling the love around to his mainstays on d-core. “But man, he just built on last night’s game. They saw an awful lot of MacKinnon. All four of those D did a great job I thought against that big line. We had to switch off different guys at times. To have Sammy back, that’s a big plus for us.”

Samberg also set up the game winner when Nikolaj Ehlers beat Mackenzie Blackwood to the glove side with a rising shot from the right face-off circle at 1:08 of the first period. Ehlers also scored into the empty net at 19:03 for his second two-goal game of the season. The Aalborg, Denmark resident has 14 goals this season.

“I didn’t do a whole lot, to be honest,” Samberg said about the Ehlers lid-lifter. “Just get the puck to the right players, let them do their magic. That’s pretty much what it was.”

Samberg has three goals and four assists this season. The Saginaw, Minn., resident is plus-14 in 23 games played.

Mark Scheifele also scored a second period marker at 15:53. Kyle Connor and Josh Morrissey grabbed the helpers as the Jets centreman reached the quarter century mark in goals scored this season.

Sending a message?

Not only did the Jets increase their central division record to 12-4-0, but they pushed their advantage over the Avalanche to eight points with one game left to play in the four-game series. The locals won 1-0 at home on Nov. 7 and then lost 5-2 in Colorado on Dec. 31.

Ehlers was asked if the victory was laying down a marker should the team's meet down the road in the playoffs.

"I don't know. I mean, you look at last year, we sent a message with two games to go or what it was and ended up being out after five games," Ehlers said. "So, I don't think that really matters. The games that you end up playing in the playoffs are the ones that really matter not the ones three months before."

Ho hum for Hellebuyck

Hellebuyck turned aside 22 pucks to earn his league-leading 26th win. He was rarely troubled throughout. The Avalanche shoved in the third but registered seven shots. Three of them came on a powerplay as Connor picked up a high-sticking minor at 4:42.

The Jets improved to 21-0-1 when leading after 40 minutes.

"All the years I've played with him he's been unbelievable," Ehlers said of Hellebuyck. "We've had some really good goalies, been really lucky with the goalies we have. Combs played great on Friday. Bucky is the best, there's no way around it."

The lanky American netminder earned his sixth shutout of the season, leading the NHL in that category too.

"Yeah, we only gave up five five-on-five chances, so easy night," Arniel said, his voice dripping with sarcasm. "No. Never, ever discredit a guy that gets a shutout. I mean he had to make stops. He knew that they were trying to get their (shot) volume."

Hellebuyck has two shutouts against Colorado. The Avs have scored 147 goals this season, tied for third best heading into league action on Sunday.

"Yeah, he's been fantastic all year," Avalanche head coach Jared Bednar said. "And not just this year, for me he's been one of the top guys in the league for a while. I think that that is earned. It's consistency over time, giving your team a chance to win, which is kind of what we're seeing out of our guy now. He gives the chance every night if guys are playing and committed in front of him. When there's a breakdown, he's there to save it so you've got to try to make it as difficult as you can on him. We're putting some pucks there and some traffic there tonight. We couldn't come up with anything dangerous, for me. But I think it's overall team defense and then his play, giving them a chance every night."

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/10955479/analysis-winnipeg-jets-nhl-season/>

ANALYSIS: Are Jets set for memorable final months of NHL season?

By Cameron Poitras CJOB

... and, we wait.

As of today, Jan. 13, the NHL regular season for the Winnipeg Jets is still 93 days away from coming to a close.

That's over three months away.

Now, we really can't look that far ahead. I mean, there are still 38 games and the 4 Nations Face-Off between then and now — right?

Sure, the Jets are first place at this moment in the Central Division — tied with Vegas and Washington with 61 points for first place in the entire National Hockey League.

But so much can change... and here comes the only test that matters.

While the club can't (and won't) look that far ahead, at the end of the day, no one — barring a complete (and unlikely) collapse, I might add — will remember, really, how the Jets perform over these final 38 games.

If things stay as they have been, people will go to games, they'll see the Jets win a majority of them, and listen on the radio and be happy — but everything has an asterisk.

While the Jets certainly tuned up a Colorado Avalanche team coming into Winnipeg on a three-games-in-four-nights road-trip, it was a game that Winnipeg should have, and had to, win.

But the night before against Los Angeles, the latest edition of "playoff-style hockey," the Jets, while putting together a great effort defensively with Eric Comrie in net, couldn't get past the Kings.

Losing in 3-on-3 overtime doesn't come close to registering as what could even potentially happen in an actual playoff situation, but the Jets, a league-top offence, couldn't break through.

I'd say don't read too much into it, but everything remains to be seen over the next three months.

Three months to playoff hockey. Can the Jets break through then?

... and, we wait.

NHL.com

<https://www.nhl.com/news/vezina-trophy-tracker-jets-connor-hellebuyck-favorite>

***Trophy Tracker: Hellebuyck of Jets choice to win Vezina as best goalie
Gustavsson, Markstrom also among favorites at halfway point of season by NHL.com
panel***

By Adam Kimelman

To mark the halfway point of the 2024-25 regular season, NHL.com is running its third installment of the Trophy Tracker series this week. Today, we look at the race for the Vezina Trophy, given annually to the top goalie in the NHL as selected by NHL general managers.

Connor Hellebuyck made history Jan. 7, when he got his 300th NHL win.

Coming into his 538th game, the Winnipeg Jets goalie became the quickest to 300 victories among United States-born goalies, and third fastest in NHL history after Andrei Vasilevskiy (490 games) and Jacques Plante (521).

He was named First Star of the game, a 5-2 win against the Nashville Predators, and in honor of the standing ovation he received from the fans at Canada Life Centre, he pointed to the Jets logo on his jersey as a way to repay the fans for the energy they provide him.

"Trying to share the moment with the fans," Hellebuyck said. "At the heart of our game we're entertainers, and they've been with us through the start of it. Everyone that was in the crowd tonight, I was trying to give them a piece of that emotion I was feeling."

Hellebuyck has given Jets fans a lot to cheer about, leading the NHL in wins (26), shutouts (six), goals-against average (2.02, minimum 20 games) and save percentage (.928, minimum 20 games) to help Winnipeg (29-12-3) spend most of the season atop the Central Division and Western Conference standings.

It's also why Hellebuyck was a unanimous selection to win the Vezina Trophy for the second consecutive season and third time, receiving all 16 first-place votes (80 points) from the NHL.com voting panel. He also was the unanimous pick for the first quarter of the season.

Filip Gustavsson of the Minnesota Wild was second with 51 voting points, followed by Jacob Markstrom of the New Jersey Devils with 50 points.

"He just very much embraces Winnipeg and Winnipeg embraces him," Jets forward Morgan Barron said. "That's really cool to see, the connection such a great player has with such a great city. You can tell he loves being here, he's passionate about being here, passionate about being a Winnipeg Jet."

Staying in Winnipeg was important for Hellebuyck, who is in the first season of a seven-year, \$59.5 million contract (\$8.5 million average annual value) he signed Oct. 9, 2023.

"For the longest time I was just playing, taking it day by day, having fun, working hard and trying to get better," he said. "As you get a little older in this league and things start to happen and you start to achieve some things, that sets in and you start to realize you're doing some great things. I've been grateful to be part of a great organization and have a lot of these guys around me the entire time and to be on a good team the entire time I've been here. I'm very grateful for everything that's been going on around me and I know it's not just me, it's the whole team and the whole organization that's helped."

It's reciprocal as Hellebuyck's strong play is a big reason for the Jets' success.

USA Hockey assistant executive director of hockey operations John Vanbiesbrouck saw it while he was helping select players for the United States team for the 4 Nations Face-Off. Hellebuyck will be one of the three goalies playing for the U.S. when the tournament is held Feb. 12-20 in Boston and Montreal.

"I think they play confident," said Vanbiesbrouck, an NHL goalie for 20 seasons and winner of the Vezina Trophy in 1986. "In games that you get down, you know that you can take a chance, because he's going to hold the fort. ... I think he really gives his team a lot of confidence."

Hellebuyck's 300th win followed him getting his 40th shutout on Nov. 7. He's one of four active goalies to reach that milestone, along with Marc-Andre Fleury of the Wild, Sergei Bobrovsky of the Florida Panthers and Jonathan Quick of the New York Rangers. At 31 he's more than five years younger than any of them, meaning there's likely more milestones to come.

"I think there's been sort of era goalies," Jets coach Scott Arniel said. "Don't want to go too far back ... but you go through [Martin] Brodeur, you go through Patrick Roy. ... I had a chance to be around [Henrik Lundqvist] in New York. There's just elite players.

"To be around that, to watch that, to be on the bench watching it every night, that's special for me. These guys, they come along every so often and he's one of those guys and we've got him for a few more years, which is great."

Voting totals (points awarded on a 5-4-3-2-1 basis): Connor Hellebuyck, Jets, 80 points (16 first-place votes); Filip Gustavsson, Wild, 51; Jacob Markstrom, Devils, 50; Jake Oettinger, Dallas Stars, 17; Andrei Vasilevskiy, Tampa Bay Lightning, 11; Linus Ullmark, Ottawa Senators, 8; Logan Thompson, Washington Capitals, 5; Anthony Stolarz, Toronto Maple Leafs, 4; Adin Hill, Vegas Golden Knights, 4; Sergei Bobrovsky, Panthers, 4; Lukas Dostal, Anaheim Ducks, 2; Karel Vejmelka, Utah Hockey Club, 1; Kevin Lankinen, Vancouver Canucks, 1; Juuse Saros, Nashville Predators, 1; Igor Shesterkin, Rangers, 1

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Three Takeaways From Avalanche's 3-0 Loss To Winnipeg Jets

By Adam Proteau

The Colorado Avalanche lost 3-0 to the Winnipeg Jets Saturday. The defeat was Colorado's second in its past three games, and the Avs have now fallen from third place in the competitive Central Division to the first Western Conference wild card spot.

Here are three takeaways from the Avalanche's loss to the Jets:

1. No shots, no goals.

Ideally this season, NHL teams can generate upwards of 30-32 shots per game, and the Avs are currently 10th in the league in shots-taken, at 29.5 shots per game. But against Winnipeg Saturday, Colorado managed to put only 12 shots on net in the second and third periods combined.

The Avalanche finished with just 22 shots. The Jets finished with 29. It's not a coincidence the game ended the way it did. Colorado needs to improve at puck possession and creating legitimate scoring chances, as those were in short supply for them Saturday.

2. Blackwood was good. Hellebuyck was better.

The Avalanche continued getting solid goaltending from Mackenzie Blackwood, as he allowed just two goals in Sunday's loss. (Winnipeg's other goal was an empty-netter at the end of the game.) Blackwood faced 28 shots in total, so two goals-allowed should've been enough defense to keep the Avs' offense to win the game. That didn't happen, and that's not the fault of Blackwood.

That said, if you looked at this matchup in the micro sense and just focused on the two goaltenders, you'd have to give the win to Winnipeg's Connor Hellebuyck, who turned aside each of Colorado's 22 shots for his sixth shutout of the season. Hellebuyck outplayed Blackwood, and the Vezina Trophy front-runner is continuing to lead the way for the Jets. Blackwood has to pull some 'W's for his team in a game like this, and if that doesn't happen, the Avalanche are going to be in trouble when the games matter most.

3. MacKinnon, Rantanen lead way in shots, but can't convert any of them into goals.

Avs superstars Nathan MacKinnon and Mikko Rantanen led the way for Colorado in the shots department Saturday, with three shots apiece. Defenseman Josh Manson also had three shots - - and after that, Devon Toews, Ross Colton, Logan O'Connor, Jonathan Drouin, and Keaton Middleton each had two shots for the Avalanche. And none of them could beat Hellebuyck.

The Avalanche's offense is too potent for there to be many nights like this one. But in the race to win the Central, they need to be better than their opponent consistently, and Saturday's loss should underscore the challenges they face in that regard. Blackwood can only control so much. For the Avs to continue thriving, the offense has to do its job as well.