

**Winnipegjets.com**

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/three-things-kyle-connor-puts-on-a-show>

***Three things - Kyle Connor puts on a show  
Connor records 6th career hat trick in a 6-1 victory***

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG – Kyle Connor scored the sixth hat trick of his career as the Winnipeg Jets beat the Vancouver Canucks 6-1 at Canada Life Centre. The Jets top line of Connor (3G, 1A), Mark Scheifele (1G, 1A) and Gabe Vilardi (3A) combined for nine points. Scheifele extended his personal point streak to six games and now has more goals (26) than he had the entire season in 2023-24. Nino Niederreiter (1G, 1A), Cole Perfetti (2A) and Neal Pionk also had multi point nights. Connor Hellebuyck made 23 saves for his league leading 27th win of the season, Winnipeg will host Seattle on Thursday night.

***ALL KC IN THE FIRST***

The Jets were looking to get off to another good start against one of the best road teams in the NHL and Kyle Connor made sure of that. Connor scored not once, not twice but three times in the opening frame in a 6:38 span that saw the Jets get out to a 3-0 lead.

Blake Wheeler's hat trick against the Penguins in October of 2017 was in 4:20, Connor did it in 6:38. Sean Monahan has the franchise record for fastest natural hat trick, he scored three goals in Calgary also in the first period in a 5:17 span. Gabe Vilardi recorded the primary assist on all three of Connor's goals.

***SHUTTING DOWN ANOTHER ELITE D-MAN***

Saturday night the Jets shut down the top scoring defenceman in the league, Cale Makar of the Avalanche and also didn't allow him to get a shot on goal. Tuesday night, Quinn Hughes who entered the night third in defence scoring (47 points) did not get on the scoresheet and ended the night -1 with a couple of shots on goal. Winnipeg's commitment to defence has really been on display the last three home games.

***KUPARI LINE***

The Lowry line got some much-deserved attention on Saturday after containing MacKinnon, Rantanen and Drouin in the 3-0 win over Colorado. Another newly formed line of Rasmus Kupari, Nino Niederreiter and Cole Perfetti had a productive night in their second game as a unit against the Canucks.

"Tonight was a really good step in the right direction. I think there's still a lot of things that we could have done a little bit better," said Cole Perfetti who recorded his 100th career point.

"But we were happy with how we kind of gelled tonight, we're reading off each other and making plays."

## **Canadian Press**

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/jets-kyle-connor-scores-first-period-natural-hat-trick-vs-canucks/>

### ***Connor wastes no time netting sixth career hat trick as Jets blitz Canucks***

By Canadian Press

WINNIPEG — Kyle Connor was glad he and the Winnipeg Jets got some puck luck on Tuesday.

Connor scored a natural hat trick in the first period to spark the Jets to a 6-1 victory over the Vancouver Canucks.

“We’ve had those nights, like the other night, where we’re hitting posts and they’re not going in,” Connor said. “So just one of those nights where I was able to bury a couple.”

The left-winger’s sixth career hat trick came in a span of 6:38, making it the third fastest in Jets-Thrashers’ history.

He couldn’t recall ever scoring three goals that quick.

“You’re the recipient of a nice pass on the first one from Gabe (Vilardi), and then the next, just kind of being in the right spot, where the bounces just seem to be going the right way, especially early,” Connor said.

He also had an assist, helping Winnipeg boost its point streak to four games (3-0-1) in front of 14,050 fans at Canada Life Centre.

Mark Scheifele, Neal Pionk and Nino Niederreitter each had a goal and assist for the Jets (30-12-3), who are the first team to hit 30 wins this season and moved into top spot in the NHL’s Western Conference.

Vilardi recorded three assists and Cole Perfetti added a pair to give him 100 NHL career points.

Connor’s hat trick went into the franchise record books behind two former Jets. Blake Wheeler scored three goals in a span of 4:20 in 2017, while Sean Monahan notched his in 5:17 last February.

“He obviously has a very high ability to score goals and he’s got that knack for it,” Perfetti said of Connor. “When he gets those chances he doesn’t get excited or anything. He’s just calm and collected.”

“His shot is unbelievable. Like tonight, you see he has the shots, the breakaways, the nice hands, the rebounds, the nice catch on his forehand and backhand, stuff like that. He can just score in so many different ways. It’s a treat to watch.”

Connor’s second and third goals were scored 36 seconds apart.

“A 1-0 game, they’re still in it,” Perfetti said. “But when KC scores a second and third that fast, it is really deflating for them, and we just took over from there. It was a good boost for the group.”

Connor Hellebuyck made 23 saves to pick up his league-leading 27th win of the season for Winnipeg, which is 3-1-2 in its season-long, eight-game homestand.

Nils Hoglander scored a third-period goal for the Canucks (19-14-10), who finished a five-game road trip going 1-2-2. Kevin Lankinen stopped 27 shots for Vancouver.

“Obviously not ready to play,” said Canucks forward Conor Garland. “Disappointed not to get one on the power (play) there when they were up 2-0.

“... That third one goes (in) and that kind of hurts. They’re too good of a team to give them a lead like that, so it’s a tough lead to give them.”

Vancouver head coach Rick Tocchet said he didn’t mind his team’s start.

“We had some pucks, we’re getting pucks deflected, we’re getting people taking the puck to the interior, we’re just missing early,” he said.

“And then all of a sudden, bang-bang, miscommunication, we don’t reload properly. And then obviously the last half of the game, a little bit of fumbling around. But yeah, it’s a good hockey team, they skate well, very good. That’s a fast team.”

A mistake by Lankinen led to Connor’s first goal at 6:59.

The goalie went behind the net to get the puck, but sent it to Vilardi in the corner and he passed it to Connor out front before Lankinen could get back in position.

Connor scored his second goal with a backhand off a rebound at 13:01, then deked and put the puck past Lankinen 36 seconds later to make it 3-0 with his 26th goal of the season.

Pionk scored 39 seconds into the second frame with a blast from the point after a Vancouver turnover. Niederreitter made it 5-0 at 15:06 and Scheifele notched his 26th of the season on the power play 1:31 into the third period.

Hoglander ended the shutout bid when he got the puck off Jets’ defenceman Logan Stanley and beat Hellebuyck at 9:16.

## **NHL.com**

<https://www.nhl.com/news/vancouver-canucks-winnipeg-jets-game-recap-january-14>

***Connor gets natural hat trick in 6:38 span, Jets cruise past Canucks  
Hellebuyck makes 23 saves for Winnipeg, which becomes 1st team in NHL to 30 wins***

By Darrin Bauming

WINNIPEG -- Kyle Connor scored a natural hat trick in a 6:38 span in the first period, and the Winnipeg Jets cruised to a 6-1 win against the Vancouver Canucks at Canada Life Centre on Tuesday.

“The recipient of a nice pass on the first one from Gabe [Vilardi], and then the next just kind of being in the right spot where the bounces just seem to be going the right way,” Connor said. “Especially early. We’ve had those nights, like the other night, where we’re hitting posts and they’re not going in. So (tonight was) just one of those nights where I was able to bury a couple.”

Connor also had an assist, and Mark Scheifele, Nino Niederreiter and Neal Pionk each had a goal and an assist for the Jets (30-12-3), who have points in four straight (3-0-1) and are the first team in the NHL to reach 30 wins. Connor Hellebuyck made 23 saves, and Vilardi had three assists.

“You’re just seeing a guy (in Connor) that’s super confident in his game, his shot, his stickhandling tonight on that breakaway,” Winnipeg forward Cole Perfetti said. “You just see a guy that’s in complete control. He’s not second guessing himself. He obviously has a very high ability to score goals and he’s got that knack for it. When he gets those chances, he doesn’t get excited or anything. He’s just calm and collected.”

Connor’s 26 goals are tied with Scheifele for third-most in the NHL.

“[Connor’s] shot is unbelievable,” Perfetti said. “Like tonight; you see he has the shots, the breakaways, the nice hands, the rebounds, the nice catch on his forehand and backhand, stuff like that. He can just score in so many different ways. It’s a treat to watch.”

Nils Hoglander scored for the Canucks (19-14-10), who have lost five of six (1-3-2). Kevin Lankinen made 27 saves.

“I didn’t mind the start,” Vancouver coach Rick Tocchet said. “We’re just missing early. And then all of a sudden, bang-bang, miscommunication. We don’t reload properly. And then obviously the last half of the game, a little bit of fumbling around. But yeah, (Winnipeg is) a good hockey team, they skate well, very good. That’s a fast team.”

Connor gave the Jets a 1-0 lead at 6:59 when Lankinen, while playing the puck behind his net, turned it over to Vilardi in the right corner who then found Connor in front for a tap in.

“They turned the puck over and it was a bang-bang play, right in the back of the net,” Winnipeg coach Scott Arniel said. “I liked a lot of what we did in that first period. We got off to playing our game right away and it certainly was the difference.”

Connor’s second and third goals came 36 seconds apart. He made it 2-0 at 13:01, finding Pionk’s rebound in the slot and scoring on the backhand, then pushed it to 3-0 at 13:37 when he deked around Lankinen on a breakaway before putting the puck in at the left post.

“It’s tough when you go down 3-0 after one and then, obviously, five after two,” Canucks captain Quinn Hughes said. “You can’t just look at the start... I would say the whole 60 (minutes).”

Pionk’s one-timer from the right point through traffic pushed it to 4-0 just 39 seconds into the second period, and Niederreiter made it 5-0 at 15:06 when he banked the puck off the back of Lankinen’s leg and in from a tight angle below the right circle.

“We’ve definitely matured in that aspect, where you’ve got to be able to play the game in front of you but knowing that every single night you can play that shutdown,” Connor said. “Not giving

other teams much, kind of keep them to the outside, and the shots they are getting are hopefully not as many Grade-A's as we get, and that's kind of your foundation. And then you can respond and the offence will come."

Nikolaj Ehlers found Scheifele for a one-timer from the slot to make it 6-0 at 1:31 of the third on the power play.

"Obviously we didn't play well, but we didn't have guys quitting," Vancouver forward Conor Garland said. "You're down to a good team, we fought back. They're not going to give you much. They have some great defensemen and some really good defensive forwards that are going to be above you all night. You've got to fight to score against that team. That's why they're one of the top of the standings. You just can't give it to them like that; three (goals) right off the bat."

Hoglander cut it to 6-1 at 9:16, taking the puck from Jets defenseman Logan Stanley and beating Hellebuyck with a snap shot from the right face-off dot.

"It's hard to be consistent, right?" Tocchet said. "It's hard to do the right things all the time. It's hard. It's hard to go through people, it's hard to serve properly, it's hard to reload properly. It's hard to get the pucks out when you need to do it, it's hard to take pucks to the net. And you can't do it once in a while if you want to be a good team. That's what it is... I mean, it's my job. I've got to get the guys committed. It's on me."

**NOTES:** Connor's sixth NHL hat trick surpassed Ehlers for the fourth-most in Jets/Thrashers history. ... Connor's first NHL natural hat trick came 13:37 into the game. The only faster instance to begin a game in Jets/Thrashers history is Sean Monahan on Feb. 19, 2024 (11:24), which also marked the last natural hat trick by any Jets player. ... Connor's ninth NHL four-point game ties Vyacheslav Kozlov for the fourth-most in Jets/Thrashers history. He trails Ilya Kovalchuk (20), Blake Wheeler (13) and Scheifele (12). ... Hellebuyck's 302nd career win passes Mike Richter for the sixth-most by a U.S.-born goaltender in NHL history. He trails Jonathan Quick (399), Ryan Miller (391), John Vanbiesbrouck (374), Tom Barrasso (369) and Craig Anderson (319). ... Canucks defenseman Filip Hronek had three hits and two blocked shots in 20:50 of ice time in his first game since Nov. 27.

## **Sportsnet.ca**

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/how-an-historical-season-could-earn-connor-hellebuyck-the-vezina-and-hart/>

### ***How historical season could earn Connor Hellebuyck the Vezina, Hart***

By Adam Vingan

To save some time, the NHL can probably go ahead and engrave Connor Hellebuyck's name on the Vezina Trophy.

Barring injury or an unforeseen collapse, Hellebuyck will win the award given to the league's top goaltender for the second year in a row and third time in the past six years. New Jersey's Martin Brodeur was the last repeat Vezina Trophy winner in 2007 and 2008. Hockey Hall of Famers Brodeur (four), Patrick Roy (three) and Dominik Hasek (six) are the only goaltenders who have won the award at least three times since general managers began voting on it in 1981-82.

Winnipeg's franchise cornerstone could also receive serious consideration for the Hart Trophy, which has not been presented to a goaltender since 2014-15 (Montreal's Carey Price).

"For the longest time I was just playing," Hellebuyck told reporters last week after becoming the third-fastest goaltender in league history to reach 300 wins. "Taking it day-by-day, having fun, working hard and trying to get better. As you get a little older in this league and things start to happen and you start to achieve some things, that kind of sets in and you start to realize that you're doing some great things."

Hellebuyck leads all qualified goaltenders (minimum 10 games played) in wins (26), shutouts (six), goals-against average (2.02) and save percentage (.928). The last goaltender who finished a season atop the league in all four categories was Philadelphia's Bob Froese in 1985-86. Three others have also pulled off that feat — Philadelphia's Bernie Parent in 1973-74, as well as Montreal's Ken Dryden in 1972-73 and Jacques Plante in 1958-59.

Hellebuyck has saved 25.2 goals above expected this season — five more than the next-closest goaltender, Washington's Logan Thompson (20.2). His most outstanding performance came on Nov. 25, when he prevented 4.61 goals above expected in the Jets' 4-1 win against the Minnesota Wild. (Only Columbus' Elvis Merzlikins, who recorded 5.04 GSAE in a win last month against the Devils, has had a better single-game performance this season.)

There are no clear weaknesses in Hellebuyck's game. He rarely allows soft goals; opponents have scored seven goals on 305 point shots against him (.977 save percentage). Only two of the seven were not screened. (Fourteen of the 69 total goals allowed by Hellebuyck have come from outside the slot.)

Teams have had some success when forcing Hellebuyck to move from his right to his left. Nine of the 15 seam goals Hellebuyck has allowed this season have come on west-to-east passes (from the shooter's perspective). His .763 save percentage on those shots is not far above the league average of .755 and ranks 33rd out of 62 qualified goaltenders. But it requires that level of nitpicking to find flaws.

To the credit of Hellebuyck's teammates, they have supported him with solid play at both ends. Winnipeg ranks ninth in expected goals against per game at 5-on-5 and 13th in all situations. The Jets' top-ranked power play (32.3 per cent) makes up for their middle-of-the pack penalty kill (79 per cent). Hellebuyck has recorded 3.76 GSAE while shorthanded.

To fully cement his place among the greats, Hellebuyck will have to take the Jets on another long playoff run. He has lost eight of 10 starts over the past two post-seasons, allowing 24 goals in five games against the Colorado Avalanche last spring. (Hellebuyck has responded by shutting out the Avalanche twice this season.)

Last week, Jets fans at Canada Life Centre serenaded Hellebuyck with "MVP" chants. Could he end the decade-long drought for goaltenders?

"I think there's been other years that he should've gotten it and hasn't," Jets captain Adam Lowry told reporters Monday. "I think sometimes (voters) overlook the goaltending position, I guess because they have the Vezina. ... He's incredible. Every stat, everything I look at, he's (at the) top of the league. He gives us a chance to win every night. We're where we're at in the standings largely because of how well he's played."

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/jets-kyle-connor-offers-more-than-just-scoring-in-dominant-win-over-canucks/>

## ***Jets' Kyle Connor offers more than just scoring in dominant win over Canucks***

By Jacob Stoller

WINNIPEG — Kyle Connor wasn't about to pat himself on the back.

He hardly ever does. Even after scoring a first-period natural hat trick — the second-fastest one in Jets 2.0 history (6:38) — Connor downplayed the beauty of his first 20 minutes.

Connor has never been one to bask in his glory. And that's why, despite an incredible offensive outing, he didn't waver from his low-key and unassuming demeanor when asked to reflect on his dominant performance during the Winnipeg Jets 6-1 win over the Vancouver Canucks on Tuesday.

"You're the recipient of a nice pass on the first one from (Gabriel Vilardi). And then the next, just kind of being in the right spot, where the bounces just seem to be going the right way," Connor said post-game, completely omitting his highlight-reel worthy final tally of the night.

Connor — who has recorded 26 goals and 59 points in 45 games this season — attributed it to being "just another one of those nights" that brought about fortunate puck luck. But his three-goal, four-point outing was far from a coincidence. It was yet another example of how Connor's cerebral nature allows him to weaponize his world-class talent.

As much as it's easy to marvel at Connor's shot, his hands and elusiveness — his brain is the driver behind him being one of the NHL's most lethal offensive threats.

It's why his first goal wasn't solely a byproduct of Vilardi's well-placed pass or Kevin Lankinen misplaying the puck before that. Once Vilardi gained possession, Connor shifted gears instantly and cut into the middle of the ice, positioning himself in the perfect position to receive that pass.

"He is always in the right spot," Jets teammate Cole Perfetti said. "He just has that instinct, that ability to find the soft area, find a weak spot in the coverage."

It's why the second goal wasn't your typical garbage goal. While most players would've just fired the puck on net after scooping a rebound, Connor waited an extra half second to toe-drag and curl the puck onto his backhand — catching Lankinen out of position.

"It's just that ability to recognize what the next play is going to be and it's kind of almost like he's one step ahead of it," Jets coach Scott Arniel explained.

And his thought process is what led to his third goal — which came 36 seconds after his second — being so jaw-dropping. In all alone against Lankinen, Connor stickhandled rapidly before motioning to his backhand — fooling Vancouver's netminder — before pulling it back to his forehand and shooting into open real estate.

"I've seen that move a few times. Seen it a few times in a game as well. It's either that or, well, I'm not going to say ..." Perfetti said before nearly revealing Connor's playbook. "He's got a couple moves, but that one you see a lot. He can make goalies look silly, for sure."

The naked eye may chalk up that goal as another example of Connor's silky mitts, but it's more than that.

"You just see a guy that's in complete control," Perfetti said. "He's not second-guessing himself."

His split second decisions are well-calculated.

"Analyzing everything, reading the goalie," Connor said, when dissecting his thought-process on the breakaway. "I've got a couple moves in my head that maybe I'm thinking, and just seeing where he reacts off of what I do, and just kind of take the space that's there, make him make a move."

There's an art to it.

"I was always jealous because you hear about those skill guys, those great players, they say it's like they slow down and go in slow motion. I was the opposite," said Arniel, a veteran of 730 NHL games. "I was the opposite. My brain was going 100 miles an hour. But it's exactly what they say. He's thinking about probably three different moves that he might try. The normal person is probably just trying to do something as fast as possible."

Connor isn't just a run-of-the-mill player, though.

"When he has the puck, he's got ice in his veins," Arniel said.

By now, we've all come to know that about a player that's on pace for a career-high 108 points and ranks fourth in even-strength goals since 2019-20 (with 148). But what's become more apparent this year is just how elite his hockey sense really is.

Take what he's done on the penalty kill, as an example.

He's shown a knack for not only breaking up plays but also pouncing on loose pucks and creating chances for the Jets, even when they're down a man. Connor ranks seventh in penalty-kill scoring chances per 60 minutes (6.81) among forwards who have played at least 30 minutes.

"He recognizes where that next play's going, probably because he plays on the power play, but he's really good at anticipating plays," Arniel said.

Even during five-on-five play, Connor's defensive game has taken a sizeable step forward. Over the previous three seasons, Connor was on the ice for 13.4 five-on-five high-danger attempts per 60 minutes — ranking him in the 15th percentile among forwards who played at least 600 minutes. This year? That figure's down to 9.52, placing him in the 72nd percentile among forwards who have played at least 200 minutes.

"He's a guy that, when he doesn't have (the puck), he goes and gets it," Arniel said in October.

It's hard not to get lost in the beauty that is Connor's stickhandling, shooting, passing and skating. But it's his hockey IQ that stitches it all together to make him the gamebreaker that he is.

And that's why Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff will surely be offering Connor a blank cheque once he's eligible for an extension on July 1.

### **Winnipeg Free Press**

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/01/14/connors-crush-canucks>

#### ***Connors crush Canucks***

#### ***High-scoring forward notches natural hat-trick, Hellebuyck turns aside 23 of 24 shots in Jets victory***

By: Mike McIntyre

Game, set, mismatch.

The Winnipeg Jets looked like a team on a mission. The Vancouver Canucks looked like one that had gone missing. The end result was a 6-1 laughter for the home side on Tuesday night at Canada Life Centre that wasn't nearly as close as the final score indicated.

Star forward Kyle Connor played a big part in that. His 24th, 25th and 26th goals of the year were already in the bank with more than 46 minutes left in the game and must have had Victor Shabatoski of Yorkton, Sask., — the \$1 million Save-On-Food Score and Win contestant if any Jets player can score five in a game — seeing dollar signs.

“Just one of those nights,” is how the modest Connor described it.

Alas, while the Jets weren't nearly done lighting the lamp, the final three tallies came off the sticks of Connor's teammates Neal Pionk, Nino Niederreiter and Mark Scheifele.

Sorry, Victor.

Winnipeg improves to 30-12-3, including 3-1-2 on this season-long eight-game homestand, and now stand alone on top of the Western Conference in both points and winning percentage. They are also tied for first-overall with Washington at 63 points, although the Capitals have played one less game. Vancouver falls to 19-14-10.

“Pretty impressive,” Jets head coach Scott Arniel said of Connor's sixth career hat trick.

“Obviously, we had talked a couple of weeks ago about our starts and we've been getting a lot better at it — and getting out of the gate. I thought we did that as a group. We got off to playing our game right away and it certainly was the difference.”

#### ***TRICK WAS A TREAT***

Connor is one of the elite goal scorers in the NHL who can burn you in many ways. Many of those were on display in this one.

Goal No. 1 at 6:59 was an absolute gift. Vancouver goalie Kevin Lankinen went for a skate and tried to play a dump-in but fired the puck right to a waiting Gabe Vilardi, who quickly fed his wide-open linemate for what was essentially an empty-netter.

Goal No. 2 at 13:01 was about going to the net. Vilardi made a nice drop pass to Pionk, whose initial shot was stopped by Lankinen. A hard-charging Connor scooped up the rebound and buried it.

Goal No. 3 at 13:37 was just pure skill on display. Vilardi made a perfect pass to a streaking Connor, who burst through the neutral zone on a breakaway and beat Lankinen with a nifty deke.

Add it all up and it took all of 6:38 for Connor to give the Jets a healthy 3-0 lead and for plenty of the 14,050 fans in attendance to donate their hats to a good cause.

“You’re just seeing a guy that’s super confident in his game. You just see a guy that’s in complete control. He’s not second guessing himself,” said Jets forward Cole Perfetti.

“He obviously has a very high ability to score goals and he’s got that knack for it. When he gets those chances he doesn’t get excited or anything. He’s just calm and collected. His shot is unbelievable. It’s a treat to watch.”

Only Jets forwards Blake Wheeler (a 4:20 span against Pittsburgh in 2017) and Sean Monahan (a 5:17 span against Calgary 2024) have scored three goals in more rapid fashion in franchise history, with Monahan’s being the only natural hatty (three in a row without any other scoring).

Connor had plenty of other good looks on the night to notch at least a couple more. However, the only other time he hit the scoresheet was an assist on a Tick-tack-toe power-play goal at 1:31 of the third period to finish off Winnipeg’s scoring.

Connor and Scheifele are now tied for the team lead in goals and tied for third-overall in the NHL behind Edmonton Oilers forward Leon Draisaitl (31) and Florida Panthers forward Sam Reinhart (27).

Connor is now up to 59 points this year through 45 games, which has him tied for sixth in the league.

#### *CENTURY CLUB FOR COLE*

Perfetti had been stuck on 98 career points for nine games as he experienced yet another prolonged offensive drought. Now skating on a new-look third line with Niederreiter and Rasmus Kupari, the 23-year-old had the type of performance that might help build momentum.

Perfetti set up Pionk for the 4-0 goal 39 seconds into the second period, then had the secondary helper on Niederreiter’s tally with just under five minutes left in the middle frame that made it 5-0.

“When KC scores his second and third that fast, it’s really deflating for them. We really just took over from there,” Perfetti said of keeping the foot on the gas. “It was a really good boost for the group.”

That's now 100 points (36G, 64A) in 185 career NHL games for Perfetti, the 10th-overall pick in the 2020 draft. No doubt he hopes the next 100 come a little bit quicker.

"Last year he went through a stretch where he was having a tough time, whether it was scoring or getting points and it felt like he was getting farther and farther away from the net," Arniel said of what he's seen different in the young forward. "Now, he's staying in the fight and he's winning a lot of his one-on-one confrontations or battles and again, he's making plays, getting in there and when he does that, that's when he's at his best."

#### *CAREER HIGH FOR VILARDI*

While Connor and Scheifele tend to get most of the headlines, don't discount the role Vilardi has played in making Winnipeg's top line among the best in the business.

With three assists on Tuesday, Vilardi matched a career high of 41 points. Thing is, he's done it this year in 45 games, compared to the 63 it took in 2022-23 with the Los Angeles Kings.

The sky would appear to be the limit for the key return of the Pierre-Luc Dubois trade, which also included Kupari, Alex Iafallo and a second-round draft pick that turned into Swedish defenceman Alfons Freij.

#### *KEY PLAY*

Connor's third goal of the game made it feel like the roof might come off the downtown rink and paved the way for a rout.

#### *THREE STARS*

1. Jets Kyle Connor: 3G, 1A
2. Jets Gabe Vilardi: 3A
3. Jets Nino Niederreiter: 1G, 1A

#### *EXTRA, EXTRA*

Connor Hellebuyck's bid for a second consecutive shutout and seventh of the season was lost with just over 10 minutes left in the third period as Nils Hoglander took the puck away from Jets defenceman Logan Stanley and wired a wicked wrist shot past the reigning Vezina Trophy winner.

There was a smattering of boos from the home crowd directed towards Stanley on the following shift.

Hellebuyck finished with 23 saves on 24 shots. Lankinen, who was coming off a 3-0 shutout victory last Saturday in Toronto, stopped 27 of 33 pucks he faced.

The Jets had another good night on special teams, going one-for-three on the power play and killing off both minors they took.

Defenceman Dylan Coghlan was the lone healthy scratch for Winnipeg, with Ville Heinola taking his spot on the third pairing beside Stanley. Forward Vlad Namestnikov missed a second straight game with a lower-body injury, while forward Mason Appleton and defencemen Haydn Fleury and Colin Miller also remain sidelined.

The Jets will now prepare to host the Seattle Kraken on Thursday night before finishing the homestand on Saturday against Calgary.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/01/14/morrissey-always-in-norris-conversation>

***Morrissey always in Norris conversation  
Jets blue-liner has established himself as one of the best two-way defenders in NHL***

By: Ken Wiebe

Josh Morrissey recognizes he's in a chase position when it comes to consideration for the Norris Trophy.

The Winnipeg Jets blue-liner has bridged the gap and is very much in the heart of the conversation when the NHL's top defencemen are discussed just past the midway point of the 82-game season.

On Saturday, Morrissey went head-to-head with 2022 Norris winner Cale Makar of the Colorado Avalanche. On Tuesday, he'll do battle with Vancouver Canucks captain Quinn Hughes, who captured his first Norris last June.

"I mean, I think of (Hughes) in a really high regard. I love watching him play," Morrissey said after the Jets' morning skate on Tuesday. "I try learning a lot from watching him play, to be honest. I feel like guys like him and (Cale) Makar and those guys, everyone else is chasing after."

Morrissey enters Tuesday's action fourth in NHL scoring among blue-liners, but it's his ability to generate offence while also handling the responsibilities of excelling in his own zone that has allowed him to turn heads during the past several seasons.

"He's one of the elite defencemen that join the rush. He's always up as that fourth guy. He's hard to defend," said Canucks head coach Rick Tocchet. "If you're sleeping on the tracking or the back-checking, guys like him, Hughes, Makar, he's on that list where he'll burn you."

"I really think he's an underrated defender, too, if you watch the way he defends. That's why he made Team Canada. That's why he was picked on that team."

Tocchet would know, as he's one of the assistant coaches on Jon Cooper's staff that will assemble for the 4 Nations Face-Off next month in Montreal and Boston.

Morrissey is taking his rightful place on that star-studded Canadian team and his options for defence partners are among the game's elite.

Makar is expected to spend the bulk of his time with Avalanche D partner Devon Toews, although Morrissey is a candidate to skate alongside him as well.

"We skate together in the summer quite a bit. I watch him a lot and what he's able to do on the ice, he's having a great year. It's exciting to see," said Makar. "Maybe we can maybe even play together and stuff like that. He's a special player and it will be fun to play with him."

Makar has seen Morrissey grow his game considerably during the past several seasons, as he worked his way onto many Norris Trophy ballots.

“It’s always been there for him. He’s always been good offensively, it’s just starting to click now,” said Makar. “Defensively, he’s really sound too. When he finds those areas offensively, he can really create havoc. He’s a really fun player to watch and he’s one of the best D in the league.”

There’s definitely a mutual admiration society element when it comes to Morrissey, Makar and Hughes.

Jets head coach Scott Arniel sees some similarities when it comes to Morrissey and Hughes.

“Yeah, they’re an awful lot alike,” said Arniel. “The thing about them is they always had the offensive dynamic, you know, just the ability to change a game whether it’s with a rush or offensive cycle. But the thing for me with both players is that they’re taking on the defensive side of things.

“It’s one thing to be an offensive defenceman in this league, but to take the responsibility like they both do to go out and play against the other team’s top offensive line. We’ve seen Josh killing penalties, as I know (Hughes) does for Vancouver. You can count on them in all situations, and it’s why they’re on the ice somewhere between 23 and 26 minutes a night.”

Having a minute-munching D-man who can skate and be active on the rush while not bringing a high-risk profile is a bit of a rarity, but those are boxes both Morrissey and Hughes check off.

“He’s a very elusive skater on the blue line,” said Morrissey, asked about the subtleties of Hughes’s game that he appreciates. “Obviously, when he gets the puck, he’s tough to contain up top and just his ability to spin off guys and make something out of nothing on the blue line is really dangerous. Over the last number of years, you’ve seen the growth and evolution in the game itself and for a defenceman like that, it’s a great time to be that style of player.”

Morrissey’s strides have been similar.

From breaking into the NHL beside Dustin Byfuglien to playing more of a shutdown role along with Jacob Trouba, Morrissey is now quarterbacking the top power play in the NHL and that’s coincided with a significant rise in offensive production.

That he’s been able to combine that with sound defensive play is an impressive feat, but Morrissey isn’t someone satisfied with the status quo — even when he’s delivering at an elite level.

Included in the chatter about the present-day D-men was a question about the past and valuable lessons learned along the way.

In that sense, Morrissey was reminded the run to the 2018 Western Conference final — where the Jets ended up earning nine Stanley Cup playoff victories but were ultimately seven shy of the ultimate goal — lingers as a not-so-subtle reminder of just how hard it is to win at this level.

“You remember hearing guys talking, when we made the conference final, guys were eight, 10, 12 years in their career, (about) how hard it is to get there,” said Morrissey. “As a young guy it’s hard to realize how difficult that is to get to that level and get to that point. And obviously now here, I think it’s my ninth season and that’s the closest I got was year two, right?”

“So obviously you have to keep pushing every single year and that ultimate goal is to be able to win a Stanley Cup. But definitely it’s a very tough league and competitive league and when you have good opportunities you definitely can’t waste them, and that’s probably what I’ve learned.”

## **Winnipeg Sun**

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/hes-a-natural-kyle-connor-does-the-trick-as-jets-spank-vancouver-canucks>

### ***He's a natural: Kyle Connor does the 'trick as Jets spank Vancouver Canucks***

By Paul Friesen

It seems the Vancouver Canucks’ game plan against the Winnipeg Jets didn’t include being aware of Kyle Connor.

Left unchecked, the winger scored a first-period, natural hat-trick as the Jets steamrolled the Canucks, 6-1, on Tuesday.

The 28-year-old seemed as happy with his team’s stinginess as he was with its explosiveness.

“We’ve definitely matured in that aspect,” Connor said. “Not giving other teams much. That’s your foundation. And then you can respond and the offence will come.”

Connor’s goals came in a 6:38 span of the first period, the sixth hat-trick of his career and third-fastest in Jets 2.0 history.

“His hockey IQ is off the charts,” head coach Scott Arniel said of his winger’s ability to anticipate and react. “That’s where a lot of it comes from. When he has the puck, he’s got ice in his veins. I didn’t know about it until I got here. And I’ve seen it over the last few years. It’s part of his drive, that drives him every shift. He wants to score every shift. He wants to score seven goals a game.”

Playing the finale of a five-games-in-nine-days road trip, the Canucks had little in the tank against a team playing its sixth straight at home.

There’s no place for mercy in hockey, though.

“I don’t think our mindset changes,” Connor said. “We knew they were good on the road, too. Over the last couple of weeks, we’ve always talked about our starts. That’s got to be a staple for us just like our defensive game.”

A crowd of 14,000 and change saw Winnipeg improve its record to 3-1-2 on the home stand, 30-12-3 overall.

Canucks goalie Kevin Lankinen should have picked up an assist on Connor’s first, seven minutes into the game, came after Lankinen went behind his net and give the puck to Gabe Vilardi, who quickly set up Connor in front.

Six minutes later, Connor cashed in a rebound.

It took just 36 more seconds for him to complete the 'trick, and he did it in style, finishing a clear-cut breakaway with enough moves to leave Lankinen dizzy.

"It takes them out of it, completely," teammate Cole Perfetti said. "Especially when you score two in a row that fast. A 1-0 game, they're still in it. But when KC scores a second and third that fast, it is really deflating for them, and we just took over from there."

Vilardi picked up assists on all three, while Perfetti's two helpers gave him 100 points for his career.

The 23-year-old Perfetti called that a "pretty cool" accomplishment.

He was more impressed with Connor.

"You're just seeing a guy that's super confident in his game," Perfetti said. "His shot, his stickhandling on that breakaway... a guy that's in complete control. He's not second-guessing himself. When he gets those chances he doesn't get excited or anything. He's just calm and collected. His shot is unbelievable. You see he has the shots, the breakaways, the nice hands, the rebounds... he can just score in so many different ways. It's a treat to watch."

Perfetti wasn't done.

"His playmaking is off the charts, too. I'm going to go off about his goal scoring. He is always in the right spot. He just has that instinct, that ability to find the soft area, find a weak spot in the coverage. Whether it's his speed or his brain, he always finds that spot and then his shot takes over or his hands take over, whatever it is."

Arniel was equally impressed with Connor's ability to think on the fly, particularly on his breakaway.

"I was always jealous because you hear about those skill guys, those great players, they say it's like they slow down and go in slow motion," the coach said. "I was the opposite. My brain was going 100 miles an hour. But it's exactly what they say. He's thinking about probably three different moves that he might try. The normal person is probably just trying to do something as fast as possible."

The Jets added a fourth goal less than a minute into the second, on Neal Pionk's point blast.

Before the second was up the spread ballooned to five, Nino Niederreiter banking one off the goalie from behind the goal line.

Mark Scheifele added one on a Jets power play early in the third.

Shots were 33-24, Winnipeg.

Nils Hoglander spoiled Connor Hellebuyck's bid for a second straight shutout midway through the third.

Next up, a visit by Seattle on Thursday, Calgary two nights later.

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/best-team-since-josh-morrissey-compares-jets-to-2018-cup-contender>

### ***'Best team since': Josh Morrissey compares Jets to 2018 Cup contender***

By Paul Friesen

Josh Morrissey probably doesn't need reminders of the 2018 playoff run, but he's been getting them on a regular basis lately.

The Winnipeg Jets defenceman has seen former blue-line buddies Jacob Trouba (Anaheim), Ben Chiarot (Detroit) and Tyler Myers (Vancouver) come through town the last several days, not to mention the appearance of Dustin Byfuglien via video for goalie Connor Hellebuyck's 300-win celebration the other night.

Enough to ignite a touch of nostalgia, perhaps?

"We had a special group that year, on and off the ice," Morrissey said before taking on Myers and the Canucks on Tuesday. "That year was my second year in the league, so to get to play with that group, learn from them, was outstanding. I have a lot of great memories, forged some really good friendships that have lasted... so look back fondly on that year, for sure, and just appreciative for those guys taking me under their wing."

Talk of that team, which reached the 2018 conference final, ignited something else: Comparisons to the current version of the Jets.

Morrissey says the way this year's team is built, its commitment to defence along with its world-class goaltending and special teams, makes this the best Jets team since the one that won two playoff rounds.

"The group of guys we have, the balance throughout our lineup, the different types of players and skill and size and competitiveness is really what's made us have a great first 40-some games here," he said. "And I believe we have, yeah, the best team since that run."

Going into Tuesday's games, Winnipeg was tied with Vegas for the most wins with 29, ranked third in points percentage with a 29-12-3 mark (.693), ranked third in scoring, second in goals against and boasted the league's No. 1 power play.

"Obviously all that means is we've got to work harder every single day to keep pushing, keeping building through the second half and not waste this opportunity," Morrissey said.

The importance of making good on these chances is one thing the 29-year-old has learned over the years.

"You remember hearing guys talking when we made the conference final, guys were eight, 10, 12 years in their career and how hard it is to get there," he said. "As a young guy it's hard to realize how difficult that is to get to that level and get to that point. It's my ninth season and that's the closest I got was Year 2.

"When you have good opportunities you definitely can't waste them."

Mirror image?

Tuesday's matchup featured two of the best defencemen in the game in Morrissey and Vancouver's Quinn Hughes, last season's Norris Trophy winner as the top blueliner.

"They're an awful lot alike," Jets head coach Scott Arniel said. "They always had the offensive dynamic, the ability to change a game whether it's with a rush or offensive cycle. But to take the responsibility like they both do to go out and play against the other team's top offensive line.... taking all those responsibilities and being an all-around defenceman is probably been the biggest growth for both those guys."

Morrissey didn't sound ready to include himself in Hughes's company.

"I love watching him play," he said. "I feel like guys like him and (Cale) Makar and those guys, everyone else is chasing after. He's produced at a pretty insane rate for his whole career."

Hughes had 17 goals and 75 assists in winning the Norris last year.

Going into Tuesday night, he ranked third in the NHL with 47 points (nine goals, 38 assists), eight points up on Morrissey (five, 34) in fourth place.

No freebies at the top

Being at or near the top of the league has a drawback, if you can call it that.

"You're getting the opposition's best every night," Arniel said. "They know if they don't come out strong and play to their strengths that we can do special things against them. That's probably been the biggest thing for me the last three, four weeks, is that the teams we're running against, they're not giving us free opportunities. They're making us grind."

Arniel sees it in how determined opponents are to try and stay out of the penalty box against the league's best power play, and how they handle Winnipeg's high-scoring attack, in general.

"You can tell because we pre-scout them and watch their systems and the things they do, and then all of a sudden there's a wrinkle or a little bit of change against us," he said. "Our guys love the challenge of it."

Morrissey used an old adage to describe the challenge.

"It's hard to get to the top and it's harder to stay there."

### **Vancouver Province**

<https://theprovince.com/sports/hockey/nhl/vancouver-canucks/jets-6-canucks-1-kyle-connors-hat-trick-dagger-kills-rip-finale-rally>

### ***Jets 6, Canucks 1: Kyle Connor's early hat-trick dagger kills any hope for trip finale rally***

By Ben Kuzma

Is this the year they're going to win it all?

At the famous street corner of Portage and Main in frigid downtown Winnipeg, the faithful rightfully gather to trace the trajectory of their beloved and high-flying Jets for good reason.

They know the NHL's leading team has the best goaltender in reigning Vezina Trophy winner Connor Hellebuyck, the top-rated power play, second-ranked defence and a high-octane first line of Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Gabriel Vilardi.

They had combined for an eye-popping 67 goals, 143 points, 24 power-play goals and 14 game-winners before facing the Vancouver Canucks on Tuesday.

It took less than seven minutes for the trio to drive home the point that these Jets are for real.

Connor struck three times on three shots in the opening 6:38 for a natural hat trick and the sixth of his career to increase his goal count to 26.

There was plenty of blame to go around on each effort and it only added to the angst of trying to rally back against a confident club that has lost just five times in regulation on home ice.

It made the sobering and shocking 6-1 shellacking of the Canucks on final stop of their gruelling and defining five-game road trip tough to stomach. Especially the start.

"Three major blunders, and I didn't actually mind our first period, but three mistakes and it's in the net," lamented Canucks head coach Rick Tocchet. "It's a good hockey club over there and everybody on our club had a tough night.

"It's hard to be consistent and do the right things all the time, and go through people, hard to re-load and get pucks out and take them to the net. You can't do it once in a while if you want to be a good team. It's my job. I've got to get some guys committed and it's on me."

A 1-2-2 road trip record, and allowing the top Jets line to combine for nine points, also spoiled the return of Filip Hronek. He suffered a Nov. 27 shoulder injury, and also had a lower-body procedure.

His presence and poise Tuesday in a top-pairing reunion with Quinn Hughes wasn't the story or a catalyst for victory. Following an encouraging 3-0 victory Saturday in Toronto on the national Hockey Night in Canada state, Tuesday was beyond concerning.

"Obviously, a disappointing result and too early to process all of it," said Hughes. "Nobody played well."

It wasn't just the quick three-goal spree, it was failing to find a way to get back in the game against an opportunistic and defensively responsible Jets. Going too quietly into the night is never a good look.

It's why the anticipation in Winnipeg is matched by the angst in Vancouver. A frenetic fan base has been teased and tortured by the adversity, inconsistency and controversy that has plagued the defending Pacific Division champions.

They were projected for 105 points this season, four shy of their last campaign, but are more likely destined for 96 points, which could put them in playoff-positioning peril.

That point was also driven home Tuesday.

Here's what we learned as Neil Pionk, Scheifele and Nino Niederreiter also scored for the Jets while Nils Hollander had the lone goal for Canucks, who were outshot 33-24:

#### *Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea culpa*

A sure sign that it might be a rough night came early. Nikolaj Ehlers was sprung on a breakaway and failed to beat Kevin Lankinen with a backhanded effort.

It led to a series of startling first-period events that allowed Connor to strike three times in every conceivable way.

It started with Lankinen going behind the net to play the puck, which is seldom a good idea for any stopper. The bouncing puck went off the dashboard and found Vilardi at the cornerboards.

And with Lankinen out of position in an attempt to scramble back to the net, he was hopelessly out of position as Connor easily deposited the cross-ice feed into a yawning cage.

Lankinen then rebounded to stop Adam Lowry on a short-handed breakaway by going to the poke-check to thwart a backhand deke. It started with the Canucks mishandling the puck and it bounced off Brock Boeser to spring Lowry.

However, Lankinen then put a Pionk rebound into front of net and Connor easily went upstairs. And just 36 seconds later, Connor sped away and got behind the defence and went to the forehand deke.

The Canucks didn't do much to stop the bleeding.

Pionk struck in opening minute of the second period on a shot that Lankinen either never saw or tracked properly because it easily beat him to the far stick side. And when Niederreiter was allowed to gain inside position on a drive to the net and banked home his rebound from a sharp angle, it became five goals on 21 shots.

#### *Hellebuyck doesn't get rattled*

It's the positioning and poise of the Jets starter that has the NHL on notice.

There's a reason why he took incredible numbers into Tuesday's test. He led all stoppers in wins (26), goals-against average (2.02), saves percentage (.928) and shutouts (6) and improved all but one category.

It's not just that the Canucks were limited to 24 shots, it was the manner of how Hellebuyck handled himself in scrambles.

Early in the second period, Pius Suter and Teddy Blueger were hounding the net but he knew just when to get on top of the crease, when to seal up the short side and just went to stay calm and collected.

#### *Lack of shots, lack of goals*

The Canucks were defending better over a period of six games before they fell apart Tuesday.

As much as that is concerning, it's being ranked 31st in shots per game at just 25.1 and rated 19th in goals at 2.93 per outing that's a double dilemma. Tocchet juggled his lines but poor decisions with the puck are proving costly.

In the opening period, Nils Hoglander had the puck in a shooting position in the slot but tried to feather the puck to J.T. Miller instead of shooting from a high-danger. And for a guy who hasn't scored in 34 games, you'd think he would have shot first and not have any second thoughts.

And then, in the third period, he sped down the right side and didn't hesitate to surprise Hellebuyck with a high short-side effort for his third goal of the season.

The Canucks also went 0-for-2 on the power play with just two shots. They've slipped to 22nd overall at 22.2 per cent efficiency and that trend needs to reverse. In a special-teams league, they have two man-advantage goals in the last seven games on 17 chances.

*OVERTIME* — Winger Dakota Joshua has put in a couple of rehab skates while recovering from a Jan. 3 leg injury in Nashville, but they have yet to reach an elite level. He's still deemed week-to-week to return to the lineup.

## **Global Winnipeg**

<https://globalnews.ca/news/10959128/connor-nets-first-period-hat-trick-as-winnipeg-jets-demolish-canucks-6-1/>

### ***Connor nets first period hat trick as Winnipeg Jets demolish Canucks 6-1***

By Christian Aumell & Russ Hobson Global News

Stringing together wins hasn't been easy for the Winnipeg Jets in 2025, but you sure wouldn't know it seeing how they shredded the Vancouver Canucks Tuesday night.

Kyle Connor netted a natural hat trick in the first period as the Jets blasted the Canucks 6-1 at the Canada Life Centre. It's the first time Winnipeg has secured two wins in a row since a four-game win streak in late December.

Connor also had an assist for a four-point night as the Jets became the first team in the league to 30 wins.

"The bounces just seem to be going the right way, especially early," said Connor. "We've had those nights where, you know the other night, we're hitting posts and they're not going your way. So, just one of those nights where (I'm) able to bury a couple."

It was Connor's sixth career hat trick and his first of the season. Connor's three goals in the first 13:37 of the game is the second-fastest hat trick to start a game in franchise history and the three goals he scored in the span of just 6:38 is third-fastest in Jets 2.0 history.

It's the tenth time this season the Jets have scored six or more goals which is tied for best in the NHL. The Jets struck for three goals in the opening stanza alone.

“We had talked, I think, a couple weeks ago about our starts,” said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. “And we’ve been getting a lot better at it, getting kinda out of the gate. I thought we did that tonight as a group.

“Just like a lot of what we did in that first period. Kinda got off to playing our game right away and certainly was the difference.”

The Jets had 20 shots in the second frame which is a new season-high for a period.

Cole Perfetti recorded a pair of assists for his 100th career point as his line with Rasmus Kupari and Nino Niederreiter scored twice in the victory.

“I thought they were really good, I really did,” Arniel said. “I thought they were good. I liked a lot of how Koop uses his speed, but then Nino uses his size. Fetts used his hockey IQ and vision, and it was a good chemistry there.”

Gabriel Vilardi recorded three assists, while Mark Scheifele scored once and added a helper to extend his point-streak to six games.

The Jets got on the board just under seven minutes into the game thanks to a blunder by Vancouver goalie Kevin Lankinen.

After Winnipeg dumped the puck into the Vancouver end, Lankinen wandered behind his net to retrieve it but under some pressure from he tried to steer it to the corner. Unfortunately for the Canucks, Vilardi was waiting in the corner to pick it off and send the puck in front to a wide open Connor for his 24th of the season.

He was just getting started.

Later in the first, Connor caught a hard clearing attempt from Dylan Samberg with his hand at the Winnipeg blue line, dropped it and sent it over to Vilardi streaking up the ice. He crossed the Vancouver blue line and dropped it off to Neal Pionk who fired a shot on net. Lankinen stopped it but the rebound eluded the Canucks in front of the goal as Connor found it, put a deke on Lankinen and tucked it in for his second of the night at the 13:01 mark.

36 seconds later the hats came pouring onto the ice.

On the very same shift, the Jets’ top line transitioned the puck out of their own end and as they did so, Connor snuck behind the Canucks’ defenders as Vilardi hit him with a breakaway pass. Connor then put a nasty move on Lankinen before depositing his third of the night.

It was the third time in franchise history that a player had scored three goals in the first period and in doing so in 13:37, Connor scored the second-quickest hat-trick from the opening puck drop in franchise history (Sean Monahan scored three goals in the first 11:24 on Feb. 19, 2024).

Vilardi’s three assists in the period brought his season point total to 41, matching his career-high that he set in 63 games with the Los Angeles Kings in 2022-23.

Shots after one period were 8-6 in Winnipeg’s favour and less than a minute into the second, shot number nine made it 4-0.

Quinn Hughes was late getting to a dump-in behind his net as it rolled past him and into the near corner where Perfetti collected it. He sent the puck back to the point where Pionk one-timed it and beat Lankinen clean 39 seconds into the period.

Winnipeg had two power play opportunities in the period to try and add to their lead or to get Connor another goal, but they were not able to convert.

No matter, they would just score at even strength for the fifth time when Niederreiter got in on the fun at the 15:06 mark. Niederreiter carried the puck into the Vancouver end before dropping it off to Kupari, who then sent it toward the net. The Swiss winger caught a piece of it before Lankinen stopped it but Niederreiter then banked the rebound in off the back of Lankinen to make it 5-0.

Winnipeg managed to get a whopping 20 shots on goal in the second to hold a 28-16 edge in shots through 40 minutes.

Early in the third, the Jets earned their third power play of the night and this time they made quick work of it.

Just nine seconds after Tyler Myers was called for hooking, Connor sent the puck down low to Nikolaj Ehlers who quickly got it in front to Scheifele. He made no mistake for his 26th of the season to make it 6-0.

Vancouver finally got on the board just over nine minutes into the period when Logan Stanley misplayed the puck just outside the Winnipeg end, allowing Nils Hoglander to pick it up and start a 2-on-1. He carried the puck in and ripped a shot high over Connor Hellebuyck's shoulder to make it 6-1.

Hellebuyck finished with 23 saves to secure his 27th win of the season.

Ville Heinola replaced Dylan Coghlan in the lineup, while Vladislav Namestnikov missed a second straight game with a lower-body injury.

Winnipeg will look to make it three straight wins when they continue their lengthy homestand Thursday against Seattle.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/10959686/analysis-winnipeg-jets-upgrade-roster/>

### ***ANALYSIS: Is Jets' roster upgrade already in the dressing room?***

By Paul Edmonds CJOB

At this point in the season, it certainly wouldn't be too early to start thinking about potential upgrades to the Winnipeg Jets' roster.

As they continue to roll along leading the Central Division and challenging for first overall in the league, forecasting possible improvements is, in fact, prudent for a team and organization that undoubtedly feels it has a chance to win and play into June.

And if, for consecutive seasons, the second-line centre position is an area designated for improvement, we should all watch with interest to see what transpires between now and the

NHL trade deadline on March 7 for Jets management to fill the void, much like they did last year in acquiring Sean Monahan from Montreal.

But what the last two games have shown us is that perhaps the search for an enhancement at the 2C position might not need to be carried out any wider than Winnipeg's own dressing room walls. Quite literally, the Jets may have already found him in captain Adam Lowry.

In their latest two wins over Colorado and Vancouver, Lowry's move up the depth chart to play with Nikolaj Ehlers and Alex Iafallo has been conspicuous, resulting in a line that can score while being hard to score against.

Even Jets head coach Scott Arniel admitted the look and composition of that trio has got him thinking and liking what he sees.

Now, if Lowry is the answer to the Jets improving their second-line centre spot, it would make the task of finding a veteran, experienced third-line centre to replace him that much easier with a market likely flush with that type of player and ultimately less expensive in terms of parting with assets or draft picks to get him.

So no, it's not too early to start exploring possible upgrades to the Jets roster, but in terms of enhancing the team's second-line centre spot, the search might have already ended before it really started.

### **The Athletic**

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6056565/2025/01/14/jets-free-agents-samberg-ehlers-pionk/>

### ***Jets free-agent stock watch: What's Dylan Samberg's price? Who will cost more or less next year?***

By Murat Ates

A striking number of Winnipeg's pending free agents are playing bigger minutes and scoring more points than they have at any point in their career.

Gabriel Vilardi, Nikolaj Ehlers, Neal Pionk and Dylan Samberg are all on pace for new career-high point totals. Vilardi, Pionk and Samberg are doing it while playing the heaviest workloads of their career. Mason Appleton, Vladislav Namestnikov and Rasmus Kupari have carved out bigger roles for themselves since the last time they signed contracts, while Alex Iafallo's role has changed a lot since he played big minutes with Anze Kopitar.

How will this affect their offseason paydays? What will each player earn — and how does this season's performance change their previous projections?

Today, we take an analytical approach. We've gone under the hood with Evolving Hockey's contract model to project contract values for Winnipeg's nine most impactful free agents. Their model predicts how much money a player will make using a variety of factors, with Game Score and average ice time leading the way. They take a player's three most recent years of performance, weighing the most recent games most heavily, in building a model that lets a career year change the game for a player's price tag.

Evolving Hockey put together contract projections for Winnipeg's 2025 free agents before this season started, based on the previous three years' worth of data. We've built a simple way to update those projections based on the Jets' current season. Vilardi and Ehlers are getting rewarded for their power-play prowess, for example, while Lafallo suffers because his role continues to be less than it was with the Los Angeles Kings.

Which Jets players have had the biggest, best and worst impacts on their own future paydays?

*Nikolaj Ehlers, 28 (UFA)*

TOI Past: Average all-situations ice time, 2021-22 through 2023-24

TOI Now: Average all-situations ice time this season

PTS Past: Average points per 82 games, 2021-22 through 2023-24

PTS Now: Average points per 82 games this season

Ehlers is finally playing on the top power-play unit and is on pace for the first point-per-game season of his career. This is an important, early takeaway in this exercise: opportunity dictates production — an enormous part of it, at least.

Ehlers has been an elite five-on-five point producer for a long time at \$6 million AAV, scoring nearly as many five-on-five points (111) as team leader Kyle Connor (120) in the three seasons before this one despite playing 953 fewer minutes than Connor during that same time span. That's incredible stuff, given Connor's offensive excellence, but Ehlers' career high has been stuck at 64 points since 2016-17. Ehlers is playing fewer five-on-five minutes than in past seasons and producing slightly less per minute of ice time, but his power-play opportunity puts him on pace to finish with 75 points in 74 games this year.

His drop in overall ice time lets some air out of it but it's not enough to stop Ehlers' breakthrough on the man advantage from having a big impact on his projected UFA contract.

Evolving Hockey offseason projection: 5 years, \$7.6 million AAV

The Athletic updated projection: 5 years, \$8.4 million AAV

*Alex Lafallo, 31 (UFA)*

Lafallo is on the opposite trajectory to Ehlers, getting four fewer minutes per game this season than he did in the three seasons leading up to it. He's also playing with a different caliber of linemate than he did for much of his Kings career, where his three most common linemates were Kopitar, Adrian Kempe and Phillip Danault in the two seasons before Winnipeg acquired him.

Lafallo is still a smart forechecker with a good stick who makes great reads in the defensive zone. He's capable of scoring when he gets chances close to the net. He plays on the Jets' second power-play unit and has gotten more opportunity alongside Ehlers and Adam Lowry. Mason Appleton got hurt, but Lafallo's fourth-line job with Morgan Barron and Kupari has scaled his point totals way back. I think we've all expected a pay cut from his \$4 million AAV; the drop-off is probably more severe based on his role in Winnipeg compared to the one he had in L.A.

Previous projection: 3 years, \$3.3 million AAV

Updated projection: 3 years, \$2.5 million AAV

*Gabriel Vilardi, 25 (RFA, arbitration rights)*

Evolving Hockey already projected a substantial raise for Vilardi based on his accomplishments heading into this season, but he's taken an even bigger step this year. Vilardi's power-play brilliance, combined with a first-line job alongside Mark Scheifele and Connor, has helped him achieve a 71-point pace this season while playing almost three extra minutes per game compared to his previous three seasons. His \$3.4 million AAV is on pace to double next season — or head north of \$7 million, depending on the new cap maximum. I don't think too many Jets fans will complain about it if or when it does.

It's possible the pending RFA with arbitration rights signs a one- or two-year contract instead of signing long-term. He's not eligible for UFA status until July 1, 2027. Either way, he's helped his cause this season more than every player on our list but one.

Previous projection: 4 years, \$5.5 million AAV

Updated projection: 4 years, \$7.1 million AAV

#### *Mason Appleton, 29 (UFA)*

Appleton is dealing with a lower-body injury right now, but that hasn't stopped him from becoming a key figure in Rick Bowness and Scott Arniel's Jets teams. He plays a key role on Lowry's shutdown line while producing enough offence to play at a 30-point pace in most seasons. Some of his roughly 15 minutes per game comes from the penalty kill; he doesn't play on the power play and isn't a great bet to add that job to his resume.

For our purposes, Appleton's nightly workload and point-scoring rates have been consistent enough that his UFA projection is unchanged. The \$2.2 million AAV winger is on his way to a sizable raise that could even hit \$4 million, depending on next year's cap maximum.

Previous projection: 4 years, \$3.7 million AAV

Updated projection: 4 years, \$3.7 million AAV

#### *Vladislav Namestnikov, 32 (UFA)*

Namestnikov's three-year average prior to this season includes games in Detroit, Dallas and Tampa Bay. His point production arc perfectly mirrors the opportunity he got in each city: a 35-point pace playing 15:14 per game in Detroit gave way to a 22-point pace playing 11:50 per game in Tampa Bay. He's played a big role in Winnipeg and was on pace for 38 points in 82 games before his injury last week.

Namestnikov's biggest jump came last season, so most of the leap in projected AAV from his current \$2 million was already baked into Evolving Hockey's projections. He'd still be a bargain second-line centre at that price point (and still slightly miscast in that role, despite delivering good value for his price).

Previous projection: 3 years, \$3 million AAV

Updated projection: 3 years, \$3.3 million AAV

#### *Morgan Barron, 26 (RFA, arbitration rights)*

Barron won't see a substantial raise until he plays a role bigger than a penalty-killing fourth-line winger. His playing time has dropped slightly this year compared to his previous three-year average and he's been snake-bitten on offence, too, leading to a drop in projected AAV compared to last summer.

If Barron is to make Appleton-type money someday, the best thing he could do is earn (and then receive) an upgrade to Appleton-type minutes. In the meantime, the pending RFA makes \$1.35 million and has arbitration rights, a minimal case for a raise with only one more year before UFA eligibility in 2026. It seems likely he'll provide value from a fourth-line role until at least that time; for now, his projected contract has decreased since the offseason.

Previous projection: 2 years, \$1.7 million AAV

Updated projection: 2 years, \$1.3 million AAV

*Rasmus Kupari, 24 (RFA, arbitration rights)*

Kupari won Winnipeg's fourth-line centre job at training camp and is on pace to play a full NHL season for the first time in his career. That should have a more positive impact on his contract projection than the negative impact of reduced production and average playing time; be sure to apply some common sense to the math in this case.

His calculated projection drops from \$840,000 to a league-minimum \$775,000 deal. I think the first estimate is more realistic but Kupari is not on pace to break the bank this summer. The next player on our list just might, though.

Previous projection: 2 years, \$1.7 million AAV

Updated projection: 2 years, \$1.3 million AAV

*Neal Pionk, 29 (UFA)*

Pionk is playing more and scoring more this season than he did at any point in the three seasons leading up to Evolving Hockey's original five-year, \$6.1 million AAV contract projection. It helps that he's fully recovered from a broken foot that ailed him through most of 2022-23 — and, from a playing time perspective, it may help that the rest of Winnipeg's defence has not always been healthy; Pionk is often first in line to pick up the slack.

Critics of Pionk's play in his own end remain, and if you're one of them, be wary: Teams pay defencemen for ice time and point production more than they do for their impact on shot attempts or expected goals. Offence is where Pionk excels; he'll set new career highs in points if he keeps his current pace, scoring well at five-on-five and on the second-unit power play.

He's defended better this season than in recent years but Pionk's projected contract is soaring and it's all about ice time and points.

Previous projection: 5 years, \$6.1 million AAV

Updated projection: 5 years, \$7.8 million AAV

*Dylan Samberg, 26 (RFA, arbitration rights)*

Samberg's contract situation gives him more leverage than the average RFA. There is a nightmare scenario in which he forces his way to 2026 UFA status by filing for arbitration and signing the one-year deal that comes from it. He'd have the right, as Jacob Trouba and Andrew Copp did before him, but I don't think the Minnesotan is headed down that same path.

Samberg plays over 20 minutes per game this season, compared to the 15.3 minutes he used to average on the third pair. He gets more time with Winnipeg's best forwards at even strength as a result and has done a good job putting the puck in their hands; look no further than Ehlers' highlight-reel goal against Colorado. I expect the Jets to sign him to a long-term deal; in the meantime, he's playing more, scoring more and on pace to earn a lot more than was projected

for him before the season began. I'd bet on Samberg to outperform his next deal but it will be more expensive based on the quality of his play.

Previous projection: 4 years, \$2.8 million AAV

Updated projection: 4 years, \$4.1 million AAV

### *Summary*

Winnipeg has nine key free agents to sign or let walk this offseason. Several of them were already on pace for big raises from their previous contracts and now, thanks to bigger roles, power-play minutes and the Jets' overall offensive success, many of those raises will be even bigger than previously projected.

(We've left Dylan Coghlan and Haydn Fleury, among others, out of this discussion but their cap hits are unlikely to change much.)

Here is a summary table. Sort it as you see fit.

Remember that all of our calculations are based on this year's \$88 million cap maximum. That figure is set to increase to at least \$92 million and may even increase well beyond that. Set your expectations accordingly.

### **TSN.ca**

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/hellebuyck-generating-hart-trophy-buzz-in-winnipeg-he-belongs-in-that-conversation~3061619>

### ***Hellebuyck generating Hart Trophy buzz in Winnipeg: 'He belongs in that conversation' (VIDEO)***

Connor Hellebuyck was serenaded with MVP chants last Friday while he was being honoured for earning his 300th NHL win. The Jets netminder is setting career bests in goals against average, save percentage and goals saved above expected, and his Hart Trophy case has only gotten stronger. TSN's John Lu has more.

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/domino-s-that-s-hockey-does-any-player-deserve-mvp-more-than-hellebuyck~3061647>

### ***Domino's That's Hockey: Does any player deserve MVP more than Hellebuyck? (VIDEO)***

Connor Hellebuyck made 22 saves against the Avalanche to pick up his sixth shutout of the season. The Jets goaltender leads the league in goals against and save percentage, begging the question, is there anyone who deserves MVP more than Hellebuyck? Bruce Boudreau joins Domino's That's Hockey to discuss.

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/biron-outlines-hellebuyck-s-path-to-the-hart-trophy%7E3062625>

### ***Biron outlines Hellebuyck's path to the Hart Trophy (VIDEO)***

Connor Hellebuyck is now the co-favourite right now to win the Hart Trophy, which we haven't seen a goaltender do since Carey Price in 2015. TSN Hockey analyst Martin Biron looks at the

Jets goaltender's case for the Hart and outlines what he needs to do the rest of the season to win the award.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHZjVoaDKZE>

***How big is the gap between the Jets & Canucks? (VIDEO)***

The Winnipeg Jets are amongst the class of the NHL after a torrid start to the NHL season. How big is the gap between them and the Vancouver Canucks team they face on Tuesday night? TSN Director of Scouting Craig Button joins Domino's That's Hockey to discuss.