

## **Winnipeg Free Press**

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/2025/01/15/high-flying-jets-setting-standard-for-nhl-excellence>

### ***High-flying Jets setting standard for NHL excellence Opposing coaches taking notice***

By: Mike McIntyre

The Winnipeg Jets bandwagon is filling up fast these days with hockey fans and pundits who are starting to believe the high-flying club could be a true Stanley Cup contender.

At the risk of overcrowding, you might want to make some additional room for head coaches around the NHL. Night after night, game after game, there's a growing list of bench bosses who are clearly buying what the Jets are selling this season and wishing to steal a page or two from their playbook.

"What do they say, imitation is the biggest form of flattery?" Jets assistant coach Davis Payne told the Free Press on Wednesday.

Allow us to take you inside the visitor's locker room at Canada Life Centre for some recent soundbites.

"It's a good hockey club over there," Vancouver coach Rick Tocchet said Tuesday after his Canucks were crushed 6-1. "A good hockey team. They skate well. Very good. That's a fast team."

Tocchet didn't stop there, going so far as to say he wishes his struggling group might learn some valuable lessons from the one-sided affair.

"We're just too slow. We've got to take a page out of Winnipeg. One pass, beat pressure, They attack. We've got to start doing that," he said.

It was a similar story last Saturday night when the Jets — playing for a second night in a row against a rested and red-hot Colorado club — had arguably their best defensive effort of the year in a dominant 3-0 victory over their division rival.

"It was rock solid," Avalanche coach Jared Bednar said of Winnipeg's performance. "It just didn't look like we had the energy and the determination to kind of get through some of their checking."

Bednar then turned his attention to goaltender Connor Hellebuyck while also praising how the Jets play in front of their two-time Vezina Trophy winner.

"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," said Bednar. "But I think it's overall team defence and then his play, giving them a chance every night."

Winnipeg was the stingiest defensive team in the league last year, surrendering just 198 goals in 82 games for an average of 2.41. The Jets have given up 109 through 45 contests this year

for an average of 2.42 — putting them right behind the Los Angeles Kings (2.41) for tops in the NHL.

It's a different story when it comes to offence. Winnipeg averaged 3.16 goals-per-game last year, which was 15th out of 32 teams. And the power play clicked at just 18.8 per cent, which had them ranked 22nd-overall. The Jets are at 3.60 goals per game this year, third in the NHL just behind Tampa Bay and Washington. And the PP is No. 1 at 32.8 per cent.

Add it all up and you can see why there's plenty of praise coming in their direction — particularly when the Jets are skating at the downtown rink where they own a league-best 16-4-3 record.

Here's Ottawa's Travis Green after a 4-2 loss to the Jets at Canada Life Centre on Dec. 28: "They've got a dangerous team that can score on the rush."

Dallas' Pete DeBoer after a 4-1 defeat here on Nov. 9: "I think when you look at these guys and Florida, they've exposed us and we've got to be a lot better."

Utah's Andre Tourigny after a 3-0 setback on Nov. 5: "Their program is a good model. They have stability, they know what to expect of each other, they play a really, really structured game."

Last, but not least, San Jose's Ryan Warsofsky after an 8-3 trouncing on Oct. 18: "They were faster than us. They skated with the puck more through the neutral zone. They're a really good team, well-coached. You could tell why they've been in the playoffs and I'm sure they're probably headed in that direction again, so credit to them."

Winnipeg is currently on top of both the Central Division and Western Conference in terms of points (63) and point percentage (.700). They are tied with Washington in points in the race for the Presidents Trophy, although the Capitals have one game in hand.

At this current pace, the Jets would finish with 115 points. They set a franchise record in 2017-18 with 114 (52-20-10) and went all the way to the Western Conference final that spring. Last year they finished with 110 points (52-24-6) but crashed and burned in the first round of the playoffs.

To be clear, the Jets aren't letting this early success get in their heads, nor are they strutting around as if they've accomplished anything. As head coach Scott Arniel said Tuesday, being at or near the top means you're typically going to see the best from your opponent.

"They know if they don't come out strong and play to their strengths that we can do special things against them," said Arniel.

"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. We don't always see that over 82 games, but we seem to be getting a lot of the best of the opposition. Which you expect. Our guys love the challenge of it."

Players and coaches have repeatedly acknowledged the true test will come in the playoffs — although it's important to note you have to first qualify. In that sense, so far, so very good for the Jets.

“In my experience, the old analogy it’s hard to kind of get to the top and it’s harder to stay there, and I think that’s relative to your game, as well,” said defenceman Josh Morrissey.

“You have to fight really hard to keep all those details in place and it takes hard work and a commitment to the game. That’s something we’ve done a great job of this year is being consistently close to where we want to be most nights, and we’re going to have to continue to fight really hard to even improve that here in the second half of the year.”

Especially when other teams who are having trouble beating you are now trying to find a way to join you, as Tocchet (and others) have recently alluded to.

While the Jets appreciate the kind sentiments, don’t expect them to go spilling any ingredients to their winning recipe anytime soon. In this case, they’re hoping flattery gets their rivals nowhere.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/01/15/recession-proof-power-play-leads-nhl>

***Recession-proof power play leads NHL  
Payne credits players’ ability to adapt for success with man advantage***

By: Ken Wiebe

Davis Payne stood at the lectern and handled questions about the top-ranked power play in the NHL like he was an economics professor.

After delivering an analogy about working from the top down with the man-advantage but also having strength from the bottom up earlier in the question and answer session, the assistant coach with the Winnipeg Jets who is in charge of the aforementioned power play, delivered a quote that was more than just a snappy one-liner.

“We talk about being a recession-proof power play, so that we’re always having an answer to create momentum,” said Payne.

Having a recession-proof power play in the economy that is the NHL season — where every move is placed under the microscope by opposition coaches looking for an edge or a way to limit the effectiveness of a dangerous group — has been an important asset for the Jets.

Being able to convert at a clip that remains north of 30 per cent (32.3 to be precise), which leaves the Jets more than four percentage points ahead of the Detroit Red Wings (28.1), who are second in the NHL, is important in a league in which special teams play such a big role.

Payne was quick to dole out credit to the players on both units, for their ability to adapt to a new voice and some adjustments to the principles used by previous regimes.

“The biggest thing for me is our guys have bought in and they’ve sort of accepted, not different roles, but different ways of thinking of attacking, approaching it and so far, the results have been good,” said Payne. “We’ve just passed the halfway poll so there’s still a long way to go.”

The Jets, who are 30-12-3, continue an eight-game homestand on Thursday against the Seattle Kraken — who are coming off a 4-2 win over the Pittsburgh Penguins and currently sit eight points out of a playoff spot in the Western Conference.

“It’s important to have skill in different areas of your power play,” said Payne. “So when you look at it, we’ve got skill coming from top-down. And with a guy like Gabe (Vilardi) you’ve got skill coming from the bottom-up. Maybe it’s an economic study. If it works or doesn’t work, I’m not sure. There has to be another way to attack.

“I feel like you have to have more of an answer than just hammering pucks through at certain people, because guys are committed to blocking shots, and so it is one way to sort of force them to defend from a different angle.”

*THE UPDATE(S):* Jets defenceman Haydn Fleury isn’t exactly sure how he suffered a lower-body injury against the Toronto Maple Leafs in second period of the final game before the holiday break on Dec. 23.

“Yeah, I’ve watched (the replay) a couple times now and still couldn’t really tell you how it happened,” said Fleury, who has six assists in 25 games this season. “I didn’t really feel like I caught a rut or anything. Just kind of leaned on the guy and felt something that didn’t feel great and that was that.”

After shedding his non-contact jersey earlier this week, Fleury is almost ready to return to the Jets’ lineup.

“We’re getting close, for sure. Not exactly sure when, but coming up here soon I think,” said Fleury, noting the first week of the recovery “stunk” but that he’s been progressing ever since. “I’m starting to feel good again on my edges and pivoting and all that, so it’s getting really close.”

Prior to his injury, Fleury had been enjoying a promotion to the second pairing with Neal Pionk as Dylan Samberg had been out with a broken foot.

Once he’s ready to return, Fleury will be thrust back into the competition for ice time on the third pairing.

By using his skating ability and playing a simple, yet effective game, Fleury had done an excellent job of pushing his way up the depth chart after signing a one-year, two-way deal as an unrestricted free agent.

“Yeah, I think just keep it simple to start, get into it, that’s kind of the main thing. Just don’t try to recreate where I was on the first shift,” said Fleury. “Just get into it and be simple, play hard, use my feet and let the rest take care of itself.”

*THE DEMOTION:* With Fleury getting closer to full health and fellow blue-liner Colin Miller (fractured larynx) shedding his non-contact jersey on Wednesday, the Jets loaned D-man Dylan Coghlan to the Manitoba Moose of the American Hockey League.

Coghlan has appeared in six games with the Jets this season and while he showed an uncanny ability to provide solid play despite lengthy stretches in the press box as a healthy scratch, he’s currently caught up in a numbers game.

Since Coghlan has not appeared in 10 games or spent 30 days on the Jets roster since he was recalled on Dec. 27, he is not subject to waivers for this assignment.

Based on Wednesday's line rushes, the Jets are expected to go with Ville Heinola and Logan Stanley on the third pairing against the Kraken.

Nikolaj Ehlers took a maintenance day on Wednesday, but is expected to be ready to suit up on Thursday.

Vladislav Namestnikov continues to be sidelined by a lower-body issue and could miss a third consecutive game.

*THE TRADE:* The Jets made a deal with the Chicago Blackhawks on Wednesday afternoon, acquiring defenceman Isaak Phillips for Moose D-man Dmitry Kuzmin.

Phillips, 23, was chosen by the Blackhawks in the fifth round (141st overall) of the 2020 NHL Draft and has 56 NHL games on his resume, including three with Chicago this season.

At 6-3 and 205 pounds, Phillips shoots left-handed and is known for playing a physical game, can be an effective penalty killer and clear the front of the net.

Phillips falls into the category of a depth defenceman who has the ceiling to become a third pairing guy in the NHL, depending on how the change of scenery goes for him.

During his second season with the Rockford IceHogs of the AHL, Phillips had 10 goals and 25 points in 64 games but his offensive numbers have tapered off since then.

Kuzmin, who turns 22 in April, was chosen by the Jets in the third round (82nd overall) of the 2021 NHL Draft and has one goal and four points in 21 games with the Moose this season.

### **Winnipeg Sun**

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/recession-proof-jets-power-play-has-opponents-green-with-envy>

#### ***'Recession-proof' Jets power play has opponents green with envy***

By Paul Friesen

Call it power-play envy.

One by one, NHL coaches come through Winnipeg and marvel at the Jets' power play, the top-ranked unit on the continent.

The latest, Vancouver's Rick Tocchet, sounded a bit jealous after the Jets notched their 43rd power-play goal of the season on Tuesday during Winnipeg's 6-1 romp over the Canucks.

"We've got to take a page out of Winnipeg," Tocchet said. "They attack. We've got to start doing that."

The man holding the book says there's not much he can do about that. Teams look around the NHL and steal from their most successful opponents all the time.

Jets power-play coach Davis Payne doesn't have to like it, though.

"What do they say, imitation is the biggest form of flattery?" Payne was saying on Wednesday. "But then at the same time, you don't want everybody copying what you're having some success doing. So when you see other teams, other groups, doing some similar things, it's like, huh, maybe the cat's out of the bag."

Payne's unit leads the league with a 32.3 % success rate, a full four percentage points better than Detroit, ranked second.

Not bad for a guy who was known more for racking up penalty minutes as a player: Payne eclipsed the 100-minute mark in six of his eight pro seasons, most of them in the minors.

These days, teams go into a game against Winnipeg, see what his power play is doing, and roll up their sleeves.

Payne and his fellow coaches try to anticipate their plan, then come up with a counter-punch.

"Yeah, you always try to think one step ahead," he said. "It's, 'OK, this is how this team likes to kill penalties. They know how we're coming in ... the things we might throw at them. What would be their response?' I would ask (his Winnipeg colleagues), 'If I'm coming at you here, what's your response to it?'"

"I'd like to think we could get ourselves a step ahead of that."

It helps to have multiple talented options.

Check out what Detroit head coach Todd McLellan had to say when the Red Wings recently came to town.

"Sometimes a power play only has one or two scoring options. The rest are facilitators or play-makers," McLellan said. "This power play has five guys that can shoot the puck past the goaltender, so it makes it a little more difficult to plan. They don't often show you the same look twice."

It could be Kyle Connor or Nik Ehlers on a one-timer from the flank, Mark Scheifele from the slot, Gabe Vilardi with his patented spin move down low or Josh Morrissey and Neal Pionk from the point.

And just when you're convinced it'll be one of them, they'll sneak a pass to someone else.

Payne says the biggest thing is all of them embrace the different ways to attack.

At one point he compared it to an economy.

"We've got skill coming from top, down," he said. "And with a guy like Gabe, you've got skill coming from the bottom, up. Maybe it's an economic study. If it works or doesn't work, I'm not sure."

Whether or not the analogy works, the power play is.

Payouts have come in 29 of 45 games.

Payne says the man handing out many of the bills, Vilardi, compares favourably to others he's used in similar ways over the years, like Dustin Brown in Los Angeles and Drake Batherson in Ottawa.

"You have to have more of an answer than just hammering pucks through at certain people," he said. "Because guys are committed to blocking shots, and so it is one way to force them to defend a different angle."

Instead of a hammer, the Winnipeg power play is more of a multi-tool.

When you've got one this effective, teams are so worried about getting nicked by it they do whatever they can to stay out of the penalty box.

The solution: Force them to take one.

"Attack nets, attack the inside, hang onto pucks," Payne said. "And force the defender into a situation where he has to take a penalty to keep you from scoring."

Going into the Vancouver game, Payne had just seven chances to pull out his weapon over the previous six games.

He got three chances against the Canucks, and it performed like it did against Detroit and like it has all season, clicking at some 33%.

Don't just judge it by that number, though.

"It's always the one that everybody looks at," Payne acknowledged. "But for me, it's key moments. What does your power play generate in key moments? This becomes key moments in tight games, key moments late in games, key moments in playoff series. Those are the moments that are really critical."

It was time for one more economic analogy.

Payne wants his power play to be so varied, it can't be stopped for any length of time.

"We talk about being a recession-proof power play," he said. "So that we're always having an answer to create momentum."

So far, the cash register has been ringing.

Opposing coaches?

They're turning green.

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-demote-defenceman-coghlan-as-bodies-heal>

## ***Jets demote defenceman Coghlan as bodies heal***

By Paul Friesen

In a sign their blue line is getting close to full health, the Winnipeg Jets on Wednesday loaned defenceman Dylan Coghlan to the Manitoba Moose of the AHL.

‘Jack of all trades’: What Hronek brings in return to Canucks’ lineup

Coghlan’s departure makes room for Haydn Fleury, who has resumed practice after suffering a lower-body injury just before Christmas.

“Not exactly sure when, but coming up here soon,” Fleury said of playing again. “I’m starting to feel good again on my edges and pivoting and all that, so it’s getting really close.”

Colin Miller, who suffered a fractured larynx when he took a puck to the throat against Detroit on Jan. 4, is also nearing a return.

The return of both would leave the Jets with eight healthy defencemen on the roster, two more than they typically dress for games.

Fleury has six assists in 25 games this season, Miller a pair of goals and six assists in 34 games.

Coghlan is pointless in six NHL games.

The blue-line shuffling this season is in stark contrast to last season, when the Jets defence corps remained virtually unscathed.

“It’s weird,” Fleury said. “Especially this year with all the games coming so fast with the 4 Nations (tournament) – I don’t know if there’s anything to that. They said at the start of the year that we have a ton of depth and that showed ... it’s still showing. Without the depth that we have we wouldn’t be in the position we’re in right now.”

The first team to 30 wins, the Jets play host to the Seattle Kraken on Thursday.

The Jets also made a minor-league trade on Wednesday, sending Moose defenceman Dmitry Kuzmin to Chicago for fellow blueliner Isaak Phillips.

Phillips, a fifth-round draft pick in 2020, has two goals and 10 assists in 56 NHL games.

Kuzmin, Winnipeg’s third-round pick in ’21, has yet to play an NHL game.



## **Canadian Press**

<https://globalnews.ca/news/10960202/kyle-connor-winnipeg-jets-home-life/>

### ***Recently married and soon to be a dad, Jets' Connor enjoying life on and off the ice***

By Judy Owen The Canadian Press

Kyle Connor laughs when asked what was more difficult — preparing for his wedding last summer or the hockey season?

The Winnipeg Jets star left-winger married longtime girlfriend Ally Petack in front of about 150 friends and family in their home state of Michigan in July.

He had a few assists.

“If I needed to have my input valued, then it was there,” Connor said in a recent interview. “It was a big day for me but, obviously, for a girl it’s another thing. It’s their dream pretty much, so it was good and very special.”

That happy occasion was followed up by the Jets’ strong start to the NHL season, and then news in November that the couple is expecting a daughter on March 31.

It’s a lot of positive vibes on and off the ice for Connor, who leads Winnipeg in scoring with 59 points in 45 games after recording his sixth career hat trick in the team’s 6-1 win over the Vancouver Canucks Tuesday night.

He and Mark Scheifele both have 26 goals for the club that sits first in the Western Conference (30-12-3).

“We’ve had success, but we’re still very hungry as a team,” Connor said. “The kind of culture that we’ve built here is to never be satisfied.”

He doesn’t correlate his happy home life to his production with the puck this season, but acknowledges things are going well.

“I’m definitely in a good spot in my life where I’m happy about it,” Connor said.

“You’re playing the sport you love and, obviously, everything outside of hockey is awesome for me. We’re having a lot of fun.”

Ally Connor has volunteered with the Winnipeg Jets Hockey Academy, a play-based program that helps students in socially and economically challenged schools with hockey and life skills.

She plans to be in the stands for an elite competition next month, watching her husband suit up for the United States in the 4 Nations Face-Off in Montreal and Boston.

When the couple returns from the event that runs Feb. 12-20, the countdown to their family addition will begin in earnest.

Kyle Connor said he and Ally started dating in 2019, meeting through mutual friends in Detroit. They connected on numerous levels, with both enjoying spending time with family and being outdoors, especially on the lakes in Michigan.

The Jets' players, wives and girlfriends are their family away from home as they navigate this next chapter in their lives.

"There's a lot of new fathers here, lot of new guys that have gone through it," Connor, 28, said. "You pick their brains, but at the same time you just want to be your own man and figure it out.

"I'm sure the time will come when I'll need their support and they'll be there."

He has two brothers and a sister, but he'll be the first to enter parenthood.

Jets captain Adam Lowry said the team is going through a bit of a baby boom.

The wives of Eric Comrie and Dominic Toninato are also expecting. Last summer, Neal Pionk's wife had their first child and Dylan DeMelo and Haydn Fleury became fathers for the second time.

"I think it's great that not only can the mothers, the wives support each other as they go through it together — we're gone a lot — but a lot of the guys are going through that experience together and they can gripe about not sleeping," Lowry said.

"Normally you'd be surrounded usually by your family and your hometown or whatnot, but being away it's nice to have that support system of guys going through similar situations."

Selected by the Jets in the first round of the 2015 NHL draft (17th overall), Connor joined the team full-time in 2017-18, leading the league's rookies in goals with 31. His seven-year, US\$49.9-million contract runs through next season.

Lowry's not sure if Connor's positive personal life has impacted his success on the ice.

"I feel like Kyle is so stoic that sometimes it's such a hard read to know how things are going, whether it's good or bad," Lowry said.

"He kind of comes in and he's always so even keel. But I think good things away from the rink kind of allow you the peace of mind when you come to the rink to solely focus on hockey."

It might also just be Connor's evolution as he matures, Lowry said.

"I think it's one of those things where he's just taken another step into kind of becoming that superstar, all-star, that we view him as."

Connor has more of a leadership role on the team.

"He's been a little more vocal in between periods," Lowry said. "I don't know if he's focusing on trying to take that next step.

"You can certainly feel like when we're not playing at our best or things aren't going well, he's a guy that you can sometimes kind of feel that fire burning and you want to follow a guy like that."

**TSN.ca**

<https://www.tsn.ca/video/~3063122>

### ***What should Jets do at NHL trade deadline? (VIDEO)***

The Jets crushed the Canucks for their third win in four games and are pulling away in the Central. What should Kevin Cheveldayoff look for at the trade deadline? Domino's That's Hockey weighs in.

### **The Hockey News**

<https://ca.sports.yahoo.com/news/kraken-wrap-road-trip-winnipeg-014158878.html>

### ***Kraken Wrap Up Road Trip in Winnipeg with Key Matchup Against Jets***

By Caroline Anne

The Seattle Kraken will close out their first road trip of 2025 with a highly anticipated matchup against the Winnipeg Jets Thursday night, marking the second of three meetings between the two teams this season. The Kraken are looking to bounce back after a narrow 4-3 overtime loss to the Jets at home on October 24, 2024. This game is the lone matchup between the teams in Winnipeg this season, and the Kraken will be eager to improve their record against the Jets, who have historically been a tough opponent.

#### ***Kraken's Road Struggles Against Winnipeg***

The Kraken have struggled against Winnipeg with a 2-5-3 record and a 1-3-1 mark on the road. The Jets have had a standout year and are currently sit on top of the Central division. The Kraken have a chance to use Tuesday night's win in Pittsburgh as momentum to change the narrative, but several key factors need to improve to pull off a win in the Great White North.

#### ***Key Players to Watch***

The Kraken come into tomorrow's game with the second-most goals by defensemen in the NHL, an impressive feat that highlights their ability to generate offense from the back end. A key player in that category is Oliver Bjorkstrand, who has been one of Seattle's most consistent contributors. Bjorkstrand, currently on a three-game point streak, has two goals and one assist in his last three outings. Alongside him, Kaapo Kakko has also been in fine form, riding a three-game point streak with two goals and two assists.

Jaden Schwartz, who leads the Kraken with 6 goals and 9 assists for 15 points in 32 career games against Winnipeg, has been another standout player. He'll be a key figure in the team's efforts to secure a win in Winnipeg. Meanwhile, Andre Burakovsky, who ranks second on the team in points (12) and assists (8) in 21 career games against the Jets, will be looking to build on his own strong history against the Jets.

Brandon Tanev will be a key figure for Seattle. With 15 points (8 goals, 7 assists) this season, he's also a physical force, ranking third on the team in hits (96) and blocked shots (75). A former Jet, Tanev has 3 points (1 goal, 2 assists) in 10 career games against Winnipeg and will look to impact both ends of the ice.

Kyle Connor is the player to watch for Winnipeg. He recently scored a natural hat trick in the first period against Vancouver on January 14 and has 59 points for the season. Connor has been especially lethal against Seattle, tallying 14 points (7 goals, 7 assists) in just 10 games against the Kraken.

Puck drop at Canada Life Centre is scheduled for 5PM PT. The Kraken's next home game is Saturday, January 18th as they host the Los Angeles Kings at 7PM PST.