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<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/2025/03/13/record-within-hellebuycks-reach>

Record within Hellebuyck's reach

Jets goalie focused on being his best every night, not regular-season wins mark

By: Mike McIntyre

It was a rare moment of letting his guard down from a stone-faced Winnipeg Jets goaltender who typically protects his thought process as well as he does the net.

Connor Hellebuyck couldn't help himself when asked by the Free Press on Thursday whether the thought of making some hockey history was something to which he had turned his mind.

"I'd be lying if I said I didn't," Hellebuyck replied.

The two-time Vezina Trophy winner has 38 wins through 50 starts this season and is now 10 away from tying the all-time mark in a single year which is co-owned by Martin Brodeur of the New Jersey Devils and Braden Holtby of the Washington Capitals.

"It's not like I'm focused on it, but I definitely see it. It would be cool to achieve that," Hellebuyck continued.

"If it doesn't happen, it doesn't happen. It's one of those things where it would be cool to do it and maybe achieve that, but it's not my singular focus. It's definitely something you look at, but it's really not my focus right now. Right now I'm just taking it day-by-day."

It's going to take an epic finish to set a new benchmark, but it's certainly not out of the question. The Jets have 16 regular season games remaining, and Hellebuyck is a good bet to start at least 12 of them including Friday night's game against the Dallas Stars.

Hellebuyck is six victories away from matching his own franchise-record of 44, which he set in 2017-18, and that record seems sure to be re-written.

Not only is Hellebuyck a runaway favourite to win the Vezina for a third time, he's likely going to garner plenty of Hart Trophy votes as most valuable player in the league. With a 1.99 goals-against-average and .927 save-percentage, he is essentially lapping his peers in every measurable category.

Not that Hellebuyck wanted to spend much time discussing personal achievements. The ultimate prize is a Stanley Cup, something he continues to be laser-focused on winning. This appears to be his best chance yet with a first-place club that is 45-17-4 so far.

"I just think we're a really good team. Things are really consistent. And I've always said when things are consistent that's when my best hockey comes out," said Hellebuyck.

"That being said they're making my life pretty easy. I can see pucks and the majority of the shots are outside and we're keeping our Grade As down to a minimum. And when I'm called upon, I'm ready. And when I am called upon it's consistent. It's usually the same type of chances and the same things and I can see them develop and I can get ahead of them. It's a lot of fun playing behind these guys and I think everyone in this locker room is having a lot of fun playing the way we are."

Hellebuyck was happy with the two newest trade additions as forward Brandon Tanev and defenceman Luke Schenn are known for physical play, penalty killing prowess and shot-blocking ability. Schenn made his debut on Tuesday and led all players with five hits and five blocks, including a couple key ones in the waning minutes of a 2-1 victory.

"He's a big man. Very physical, and he blocks a lot of shots. So, yeah, that's very exciting," said Hellebuyck.

"That being said, it takes a whole team to win a Cup. That's our goal here, and I look forward to every single guy in here pitching in and continuing to grow our game into the playoffs."

Hellebuyck was back to his usual defensive self when asked if playing against American teammates from the 4 Nations Face-Off such as Dallas goaltender Jake Oettinger is extra special. He's also seen the likes of J.T. Miller, Vincent Trocheck, Chris Kreider and Jaccob Slavin in games earlier this week.

"No, I'm kind of sticking to myself, just getting back into my own swing of things and making sure this team is going in the right direction and winning every single game. And for that I've really got to focus on myself and focus on the team," said Hellebuyck.

Fair enough. Another question about whether Friday's game against the Stars had a little extra meat on the bone given the high hockey stakes was similarly swatted away.

"Every day is just another day," he replied.

"Just taking it the same way I would any other team. I never go into a game expecting to bring an even better performance because I want my best performance every single night. That being said, it is a divisional (game) and might mean a little bit more, but for me I still want that shutout and I still want that win, so things don't really change a whole lot."

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/03/13/jets-stars-showdown-a-battle-for-central-division-supremacy>

Jets-Stars showdown a battle for Central Division supremacy

By: Mike McIntyre

Scott Arniel didn't hesitate when asked how much a win over the Dallas Stars on Friday night at Canada Life Centre would mean to his Winnipeg Jets.

"It's just two more (points) up on them," the head coach smirked. "That's the math."

True enough, but don't let Arniel's literal explanation of the NHL rules fool you: this stands to be no ordinary affair between a pair of bitter division rivals, one that could be worth a lot more in the long run.

"No, it's an important game," Arniel would later concede. "When you have teams behind you, you want to make sure you try to keep them there."

The Jets currently occupy top spot in the Western Conference standings with 94 points and 16 regular-season games remaining. They are in pursuit of their first division title — in either the 1.0 or 2.0 era — and the No. 1 seed which would mean home-ice advantage for at least the first three rounds of the playoffs.

The second-place Stars would appear to be the only club with a realistic shot at overtaking them, given they have 86 points with 18 games remaining. That includes two head-to-heads with Winnipeg, with the final one coming April 10 in Dallas.

Winning the Central would mean facing the second wild-card team — likely either Vancouver, Calgary, St. Louis or Utah — in the opening round. Meanwhile, the reward for the runner-up looks to be going to battle with a dangerous Colorado team, which loaded up at the trade deadline by adding centres Brock Nelson (who the Jets desperately tried to land) and Charlie Coyle.

There's no such thing as an easy path in the playoffs, but one avenue sure looks a lot less risky than the other.

According to the MoneyPuck website, a regulation victory by the Jets over the Stars on Friday night would give them a 90.1 per cent chance of winning the Central. A regulation loss drops those odds to 70.5 per cent.

"It's a situation that we've talked about right from training camp, the importance of being the best in the Central Division," said Arniel. "We haven't seen them in quite a while, they've made some changes and I'm really looking forward to it."

We already know Dallas won't be at 100 per cent. Top defenceman Miro Heiskanen and veteran centre Tyler Seguin were already sidelined with long-term injuries, and now top centre Roope Hintz has joined them on the sidelines after suffering a facial injury earlier in the week.

However, the club did add power forward Mikko Rantanen in a blockbuster deadline deal last week which sent Logan Stankoven the other way. Rantanen, who is skating on the top line with Wyatt Johnston and Jamie Benn, has two goals and an assist in his first two games with Dallas. Forward Mikael Granlund and defenceman Cody Ceci were added earlier in the year from San Jose.

"Obviously, we know where Dallas is and we know the separation. We have them two (more) times and you want to take care of the games that you can to try to put as much distance as you can between the two teams," said Jets captain Adam Lowry.

"We know they're playing exceptional hockey, they've made big additions, and they've got some key guys out. Hopefully we're sharp and ready because mistakes against a team like Dallas, where they don't give up a whole lot but they're also very dangerous off the rush, very dangerous in-zone, the difference in the game could be one or two mistakes."

It's possible the Jets could also be missing a key weapon or two. Forward Nikolaj Ehlers and defenceman Neal Pionk were both absent from practice for a second day in a row as they deal with undisclosed ailments. Arniel wouldn't say if either or both will be in the lineup against Dallas.

"Make sure you come to morning skate," he said.

Dallas is near the end of an unusual road trip during which they played last Saturday in Edmonton (losing 5-4) and Sunday in Vancouver (winning 4-1), then had the entire week off before resuming things in Winnipeg and then finishing up Sunday in Denver against the Avalanche.

The Jets are coming off a hard-fought 2-1 victory over the New York Rangers on Tuesday night in a game in which they weren't at their sharpest as they played for a fifth time in eight days.

The Jets beat the Stars on Nov. 9 in Winnipeg, while Dallas took the rematch on Dec. 1 by a 3-1 score deep in the heart of Texas.

"They got the best of us last time in their building, so we need to make sure that we're good here," said Arniel.

This will be the sixth time the Jets have faced Rantanen this year, and the fourth time in Winnipeg. They saw him four times when he was with Colorado and once after he got shipped to Carolina for Martin Necas.

“He might be getting sick of coming to Winnipeg,” Lowry joked.

“It’s a unique situation but we’re really familiar with his game. Premier power forward, elite vision, great goal-scoring touch, and unbelievable at protecting the puck down low. He adds another element to an already deep team up front. He’s just one of many key guys on their team that we’re going to have to focus on, try and make it a long night for them.”

Winnipeg didn’t make the same trade deadline splash as Dallas or Colorado but did add a pair of players who have made immediate impacts in forward Brandon Tanev and defenceman Luke Schenn.

“The most important thing we can do is focus on building our game, getting better every day so that when we come up against these teams, we’re ready,” said Lowry.

“We can stay in the battle and we feel like we can beat those teams. It’s just about getting better every day so, come playoff time, you’re prepared regardless of if you made a big move or not. I think we’re real content with the team we have. We have a strong belief in this group and that we can get the job done.”

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/like-a-look-in-the-mirror-jets-stars-bring-playoff-feel-to-friday-tilt>

'Like a look in the mirror': Jets, Stars, bring playoff feel to Friday tilt

By Paul Friesen

It might not be the Stanley Cup Playoffs just yet, but Friday’s clash between the Winnipeg Jets and Dallas Stars has a similar feel.

For starters, there’s a haze of uncertainty, perhaps even secrecy, surrounding what could be two key Jets injuries.

A day after assistant coach Marty Johnston said forward Nik Ehlers and defenceman Neal Pionk missed practice simply for “maintenance” reasons, head coach Scott Arniel returned to the post-practice podium on Thursday with a different message.

Both missed a second straight day and the coach couldn’t say they’d even play on Friday.

“Uh, we’ll see where he is,” Arniel said, regarding Pionk. “I go day-to-day here.”

He even brought up the possibility of newly-acquired Luke Schenn taking Pionk's spot next to Dylan Samberg against the Stars.

And Ehlers?

"Same camp," Arniel said, wearing a grin that comes with not wanting to spill the beans. "Make sure you come to morning skate."

Whether or not Ehlers and/or Pionk play doesn't change what's at stake.

A win by the division-rival Stars would put them squarely in Winnipeg's rear-view mirror, six points back with two games in hand and another head-to-head matchup scheduled for Dallas next month.

"We understand the magnitude of it," defenceman Dylan DeMelo said. "Both teams playing real well and having really good years. And with the additions both teams made, it's going to be a great test for both teams."

The Stars made one of the biggest splashes at last week's trade deadline, acquiring star forward Mikko Rantanen.

By comparison, the Jets only caused ripples with the additions of Schenn and winger Brandon Tanev.

Those contrasting moves aside, these two have a lot in common.

They're neck-on-neck for third place in goal scoring, while in goals allowed per game they're first (Winnipeg) and third (Dallas).

"We look at that team and it's like a look in the mirror," DeMelo said. "A lot of the same qualities that we have. Hard to play against, stingy, really good skill throughout their lineup that can make you pay. Well-coached, just like us. And a team that always plays us hard."

Put that mirror up against their special teams and this is what you'll see: the Jets with the No. 1 power play vs No. 15 for Dallas, the Stars with the No. 1 penalty kill vs No. 15 for Winnipeg.

That's downright eerie.

Captain Adam Lowry was ready with a few more striking comparisons, starting with the depth at forward.

"And one of the best American goalies in Jake Oettinger," Lowry said, not having to mention his team has the best in Connor Hellebuyck. "Both teams have a premier

defenceman, then with (Miro) Heiskanen, us with J-Mo (Josh Morrissey). Both teams have filled the net this year, offensively, but been real stingy defensively.

“Even with how well we’ve played this year, that’s why the division is still such a tight race.”

Fatigue shouldn’t be a factor: the Jets have had two days between games, the Stars four.

Don’t discount the desire to send a message in case they have a date in the playoffs.

These teams haven’t met since early December, but expect the feeling-out process to last mere seconds.

“It’s going to be high intensity, physicality – a little bit of everything,” DeMelo predicted.

“Hopefully we’re sharp and ready,” Lowry added. “Because mistakes against a team like Dallas, where they don’t give up a whole lot but they’re also very dangerous off the rush, very dangerous in-zone – the difference in the game could be one or two mistakes.”

The Stars come in shining, 8-2 in their last 10 games. The Jets are 6-3-1.

They’ve split two previous meetings this season, the home side winning both.

“These are always highly contested games,” Arniel said. “They got the best of us last time in their building, so we need to make sure that we’re good here. When you have teams behind you, you want to make sure you try to keep them there.”

A Jets win would do just that, barring a highly unlikely late-season collapse. Finishing in first place affords the chance to face a wildcard team in the first round of the playoffs, instead of another division rival like Colorado.

“If we can win, (we) get a bigger stranglehold on them, you could say,” is how winger Gabe Vilardi put it. “Especially with how tough it is to go and win in their barn. Yeah, it’s a big game.”

Not as big as they’ll be in late April.

But probably as big as they get in the middle of March.

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-hellebuyck-on-pace-to-come-oh-so-close-to-nhl-record>

Jets' Hellebuyck on pace to come oh-so-close to NHL record

By Paul Friesen

Sixteen games left on the schedule, 10 wins away from getting into the NHL record book.

Winnipeg Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck may not allow many pucks to cross the goal line behind him, but he acknowledges reaching the single-season record of 48 victories by a goalie is a goal that's crossed his mind.

"I'd be lying if I said it didn't," Hellebuyck said on Thursday. "It's not like I'm focused on it, but I definitely see it. It would be cool to achieve that."

With a 38-9-3 record going into Friday's game against Dallas, Hellebuyck is eight wins better than the second-place netminders – Jake Oettinger of the Stars and Andrei Vasilevskiy of Tampa Bay – this season.

The record is shared by New Jersey's Martin Brodeur (2006-07) and Braden Holtby of Washington (2015-16).

Brodeur started an astounding 78 games his record-setting season, Holtby 66 to tie the mark.

Hellebuyck has started 50 of the Jets' 66 games. If he continues to get the net at the same rate, he'll start 62 games this season.

If he continues to win at the same rate, he'd reach 47 wins – one shy of the mark.

Playing him more often than they have been isn't likely something the Jets would do with the playoffs looming.

Allowing just one goal in five of his last seven starts, Hellebuyck leads the NHL in both goals-against-average (1.99) and saves percentage (.927) and is the heavy favourite to win a second straight Vezina Trophy as the top goalie.

The best he's ever played, though?

"I just think we're a really good team," the 31-year-old said. "Things are really consistent. And I've always said when things are consistent that's when my best hockey comes out. They're making my life pretty easy."

"And when I'm called upon, I'm ready."

Hellebuyck's previous high was 44 wins in 64 starts in the 2017-18 season.

He'll go for No. 39 this year against division-rival and second-place Dallas on Friday, as big a game as the Jets have played this season.

"I never go into a game expecting to bring an even better performance," Hellebuyck said. "Because I want my best performance every single night. That being said, it is a divisional and might mean a little bit more. But I still want that shutout and I still want that win, so things don't really change a whole lot."

The bigger games, of course, are still to come in the one place Hellebuyck hasn't shone, of late: in the playoffs. His record the last two seasons is 2-8.

Last week's addition of shot-blocking defenceman Luke Schenn, the goalie says, is just another piece in the puzzle.

"He's a big man. Very physical... so, yeah, that's very exciting. That being said, it takes a whole team to win a Cup. That's our goal here, and I look forward to every single guy in here pitching in and continuing to grow our game into the playoffs."

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6200528/2025/03/14/stars-at-jets-how-to-watch-new-dallas-star-mikko-rantanen-in-central-division-duel/>

Stars at Jets: How to watch new Dallas Star Mikko Rantanen in Central Division duel

By Sarah Jean Maher

The Dallas Stars are all in. The Winnipeg Jets are on top of the league. The playoffs are still six weeks away, but tonight could feel like the postseason as the Central Division foes face off at Winnipeg's Canada Life Centre to help kick off this weekend's NHL action.

The Western Conference-leading Jets enter Friday's matchup with a 45-17-4 record, leading the league in wins. The Stars are right behind them and boast a 42-20-2 record. This marks the third matchup of the season between the division rivals.

How to watch Dallas Stars at Winnipeg Jets

Venue: Canada Life Centre — Winnipeg

Time: 8 p.m. ET, Friday

TV (Canada): TSN3

TV (U.S.): NHL Network

Streaming: Victory+, Fubo (try for free)

Watching in-person? Get tickets on StubHub.

Winnipeg's Kyle Connor is among the league's top scorers with 81 points, and Mark Scheifele is top-five in goals (35). Connor Hellebuyck leads all NHL goalies in goals-against average (1.99), save percentage (.927) and shutouts (6).

The Stars made a big splash at last week's trade deadline, acquiring star forward Mikko Rantanen from the Carolina Hurricanes in a sign-and-trade with an eight-year, \$96 million extension and shipping out 22-year-old Logan Stankoven plus conditional first-round picks in 2026 and 2028 and third-round picks in 2026 and 2027.

Rantanen was a Hurricane for only six weeks, including the 4 Nations Face-Off break. Carolina initially acquired the Finnish forward from the Colorado Avalanche at the end of January but wasn't successful in extending his contract. Rantanen said, "Looking at it, Dallas was maybe a better fit for me." Pierre LeBrun recently spoke to Stars GM Jim Nill and Avalanche GM Chris MacFarland about how the Rantanen sweepstakes came to fruition.

While the Stars and Avalanche loaded up, the Jets had a quieter deadline, which beat writer Murat Ates says was a missed opportunity.

The three clubs headline a very competitive Central Division, but which team is best built to win the Stanley Cup? Ates breaks down who has the edge, according to The Athletic's Stanley Cup checklist.