

## **Winnipeg Free Press**

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/03/26/scheifele-on-board-with-penticton-vees>

### ***Scheifele on board with Penticton Vees***

#### ***Jets centre invests in newest WHL franchise, partners with past billet family***

By: Ken Wiebe

Mark Scheifele knows a thing or two about the type of environment required to foster optimal development of a top junior hockey prospect.

So, it comes as little surprise that the Winnipeg Jets centre is getting on board as a partner with majority owner Graham Fraser, as the Penticton Vees hockey team gets set to join the Western Hockey League for the 2025-26 season.

Scheifele has a strong connection to the Fraser family, as they were his billets during two seasons with the Barrie Colts of the Ontario Hockey League.

“He’s owned the Penticton Vees for a long time,” said Scheifele. “I’m obviously a guy that played junior and had my junior career living with them, and they made my experience so special.

“Just kind of a cool opportunity to kind of even get your foot in the door a little in that sense, but to learn about that side of the game, but also just try to grow a program in the vision that Graham has.”

Fraser and Scheifele spoke often during the past decade-plus about what it was like running the Vees franchise, with Scheifele chiming in his likes and dislikes for how things get done.

“He’s a guy that wants to make an amazing experience, especially for kids leaving their home and moving there to try and chase the dream of playing pro hockey,” said Scheifele. “Our ideals on the hockey world just mesh so well. I’m a very, very small part but I’m excited to see where his vision takes it.”

Scheifele becomes the second member of the Jets to get involved in a partnership with a sports franchise this season, as defenceman Josh Morrissey was unveiled as an investor with Calgary Wild FC of the Northern Super League, back in late October.

The Vees were founded in 1961 and were a charter member of the British Columbia Hockey League. They have been a highly successful franchise, playing out of the South Okanagan Events Centre — which has also been the home of the Young Stars Classic prospects tournament that the Jets have frequently taken part in.

Scheifele also can provide some perspective on making the jump from Junior A hockey to the Canadian Hockey League, as he left the Kitchener Dutchmen after one season to join the Colts after a meeting with former Jets legend Dale Hawerchuk.

His original plan was to go the NCAA route with the Cornell Big Red and study physiology before that life-altering conversation with Hawerchuk.

“As you probably know, when you billet kids, they kind of become part of your family, too,” Fraser said in a telephone interview on Wednesday. “To the rest of the world, he’s Mark Scheifele the hockey player and, to me, he’s Mark. When he lived with us those years, we spent hours and hours at the dinner table or downstairs watching hockey and talking hockey non-stop. We’ve always had this hockey connection.

“He understands every aspect of the game. He really, really does. And he studies it. He lives and breathes it and that’s sort of what (the Vees organization) is like. We have that common bond that if we’re going to do it, we’re going to do it right.”

Coupled with the personal connection and Scheifele’s passion for the game, it made for a perfect match.

“Mark loves hockey. This will be good for him. It’s good to get involved and learn how junior hockey works, how organizations work,” said Fraser, who is also excited to see Scheifele share his personal experiences with Vees’ players. “He can now mentor the next generation of players because he’s lived it. I knew him when he was a skinny kid who ate bad and then I watched him turn into a consummate pro. He does everything to be better. How he eats, his off-ice training.

“Let’s face it, the kids playing junior all aspire to go somewhere. They all have that dream. Mark will be a voice to them, to welcome them to our program and part of what we want to do is run a top-notch major junior program. Give every kid every advantage to develop. And he can give us ideas. From a player point of view of what they’re all looking for. He can help the players and he can help us always strive to be better. He made himself one of the best players in the world. I really believe that. I watched him (do it).”

The opportunity to get a behind-the-scenes look at how the business and hockey sides converge is part of the appeal for Scheifele to get involved.

“That’s a big reason why I’m into it,” said Scheifele. “Obviously, I’d love to get into that side of things post-career. So it’s a way of learning and just trying to absorb.

“Not do a whole lot of talking, but do a whole lot of listening and learn about that side of things and take it where it may.”

Former New York Rangers goalie and Hall of Famer Mike Richter is another one of the partners with Fraser on the Vees venture.

The Vees become the 23rd WHL franchise, with Chilliwack set to join the league for the 2026-27 campaign.

Scheifele was asked if he planned to be a hands-on owner, getting involved in the day-to-day operations?

“Definitely not,” he said. “Definitely not right now.”

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/03/26/jets-answer-the-bell-in-heavyweight-bout>

***Jets answer the bell in heavyweight bout  
After going toe-to-toe with Caps, heavy lifting remains for deep playoff run***

By: Ken Wiebe

Scott Arniel stood at the podium and gave an honest answer, the joy of victory pulsing through his veins.

The head coach of the Winnipeg Jets wasn't making a bold declaration or getting ahead of himself.

That's just not the way he operates.

But after a scintillating 3-2 overtime victory over the Washington Capitals in the battle between the two top teams in the NHL right now, Arniel couldn't contain his enthusiasm when discussing the prospect of these two teams getting back together again in June for a high stakes, best-of-seven series.

“Yeah, I mean I'm hoping that we have a rematch,” said Arniel, knowing full well that the only way a rematch could take place would be in the Stanley Cup final. “It would be really nice. At the end of the day, yeah, it is bragging rights on the line. Not that we're looking at who's going to be the best and that's our No. 1 priority.”

No, the No. 1 priority for the Jets with 10 games left in the regular season is to maintain the high standard of play that they've set for themselves.

It means reinforcing good habits and getting playoff ready.

Tuesday's outing was another great example of that.

Coming off a 5-3 loss to the Buffalo Sabres, the Jets knew what details needed cleaning up and knew the type of battle they were preparing for in facing a Capitals team that had won nine of its previous 10 games and was clicking on all cylinders.

Simply put, the Jets answered the bell, going toe-to-toe with the team they're battling for the Presidents' Trophy.

Unlike the 5-4 thriller in the U.S. capitol last month, this game was not nearly as loose defensively.

It was tight-checking and much closer to the identity both teams have established.

Stylistically, it was the type of effort required for when the post-season begins in mid-April.

"At the end of the day, that's the callouses that we talked about getting, the scars that you get over the course of the season," said Arniel. "So that when you run into the playoffs, you've been through this a few times. And I think that this was a really big test for us, running into these kinds of games.

"To go against a heavyweight team like that and come out with the two points, that's real good growth for us and real good things that we're trying to build towards Game 83 and on."

It was an all-encompassing effort, with speedy winger Nikolaj Ehlers bringing fans to their feet with his explosive rush at the end of a long shift.

Arniel explained that he moved Ehlers with Adam Lowry and Mason Appleton to use his speed as a weapon and to help support a puck-possession game, knowing that the trio would see ample time up against big and strong forwards like Tom Wilson and Pierre-Luc Dubois.

Ehlers is up to 24 goals and 61 points and looks poised for a breakout playoff performance.

"He recognizes who he's playing with," said Arniel. "He knows how to get to holes. Knows to get to spots when you're playing with those types of guys. He's a veteran player. He's been around a little while. Knows how to play in a lot of situations."

Speaking of situational play, there was defenceman Dylan Samberg exuding confidence and calm in the chaos that can come with three-on-three overtime.

After the Jets spent most of the first 70-plus seconds defending, Samberg stood behind the net after his team gained possession and quickly recognized the Capitals were in the midst of a line change.

After seeing Ehlers accelerate through the neutral zone, Samberg found him in full stride with a perfect bank pass off the wall.

Ehlers took care of the rest, pulling the Jets within a point of the Capitals (who hold a game in hand) in the chase for first overall and providing some valuable breathing room over a Dallas Stars team that simply won't go away in the race for top spot in the Central Division.

This was another signature showing for Samberg, whose emergence as a stalwart on the second pair has been a massive development for this team.

Outside of the increase in offence, his defensive durability has been essential for the Jets maintaining the mantle as the top defensive team in the NHL.

During the first period alone, Samberg was doing what he does best, getting into lanes and blocking shots — one that stung his left arm and another that stung his right.

By the time the horn sounded, Samberg had taken 26 shifts for 23:29 of ice time — only Josh Morrissey had more.

Taking on more responsibility in overtime has been the latest step forward in Samberg's progression and during the past week alone, he's supplied his first OT winner and first assist in extra time.

"He's kind of on the fly learning how to do it," said Arniel. "We got hemmed in there with them getting possession of the puck, but those guys did a good job keeping it to the outside. They just waited for their opportunity to get the puck back.

"I like the way Sammy recognized where they were at. Just a great way to end a great game."

As the Jets played a first game without forward Gabe Vilardi, there was Mason Appleton scoring for the first time in 12 games, ripping home a pass from Nino Niederreiter, who is riding a three-game point streak after working his way through a dry spell.

The absence of Vilardi, at least in the short term, enhances the importance of secondary scoring for a team that's provided it consistently throughout the course of the season.

"I think that's just the cliché team mindset that everyone needs to step up a little bit," said Appleton. "Obviously, (Vilardi) is having a heck of a year and he's a great player for our team and, until he's back, it's a collective group mindset. We all need to be a little better, give a little more, and pick up that slack with him out."

There were no signs of champagne spraying in the dressing room as the Jets punched their ticket to the post-season with 10 games remaining.

One goal has been accomplished, but plenty of heavy lifting remains for the Jets to get where they hope to be come June.

“You have to be appreciative of what we’ve done, obviously,” said Arniel. “At the start of the year, our first goal — we have a few goals — was to eliminate eight teams (in the Western Conference). And we did that after 60 minutes.

“You have to applaud our players for doing that. Would’ve liked to have done it against Buffalo but, at the same time... to win the game and get that extra point, it’s sort of the cream on the top.”

## **Winnipeg Sun**

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-scott-arniel-hopes-callouses-lead-to-cup-final-rematch-with-washington-capitals>

### ***Jets' Scott Arniel hopes callouses lead to Cup final rematch with Washington Capitals***

By Paul Friesen

The dust hadn’t even settled on what Scott Arniel called a “heavyweight battle” between the top two teams in the NHL when the Winnipeg Jets coach allowed himself to dream.

“I’m hoping that we have a rematch,” Arniel said on Tuesday night. “It’d be really nice.”

Of course it would. If there’s another game between the Jets and Washington Capitals this season, it would be Game 1 of the Stanley Cup final in June.

It would also mark the rare occasion when the first-place teams in both conferences — assuming the Jets and Caps remain on top — meet for all the marbles.

That’s how high the Jets need to fly to make this season as memorable as possible.

Eight more points and they’ll match last year’s 110. A dozen more and they’ll hit 114, the franchise-record total they amassed in 2017-18, when they won two playoff series for the one and only time.

Those milestones would be footnotes. Reaching the Cup final is the footstep that’ll leave a print for generations to come.

Arniel sees games like Tuesday’s, a 3-2 overtime win, as a test of his team’s resilience — giving up the tying goal late in the third — its toughness and its ability to handle playoff-style hockey.

Sure, short-term bragging rights were also on the line as the teams continue to jostle for first place, overall.

But far more important is the addition of one more layer of grit in preparation for the real thing.

“That’s the callouses that we talked about getting, the scars that you get over the course of the season,” is how Arniel put it. “So that when you run into the playoffs you’ve been through this a few times. To go against a heavyweight team like that and come out with the two points, that’s real good growth for us, real good things that we’re trying to build towards Game 83, on.”

The Jets have 10 more chances to add callouses and scars. Some games likely won’t provide any. Some might even provide chances to rest and heal.

On Tuesday they clinched a playoff spot in a game that had a playoff feel.

Alex Ovechkin’s tying goal with four minutes to go left one of those scars Arniel was referring to. It also produced a wordless exchange between the coach and the player he used to coach as a Washington assistant in the four years before he came to Winnipeg.

“He came by the bench, gave me the biggest smirk,” Arniel said, chuckling.

Asked if he returned the smirk after the game, Arniel said he didn’t get the chance.

“I didn’t get to see him. He was farther down the bench.”

If he gets that chance a few months down the road, the Jets boss should be outright beaming.

#### *Mixed reviews*

Arniel liked what he saw with the move of Nik Ehlers to a line with Adam Lowry and Mason Appleton. They didn’t dominate, but they did hold their own.

“They had some real good zone time, and they kept the (Pierre-Luc) Dubois line down in their end of the rink,” the coach said. “That goes a long way. He (Ehlers) recognizes who he’s playing with. He knows to get to holes. Knows to get to spots when you’re playing with those types of guys. He’s been around a little while. Knows how to play in a lot of situations.”

Ehlers scored the three-on-three overtime winner.

As elated as he was about that, he wasn’t separating his shoulder patting himself on the back, calling his new line’s game just “okay.”

“We had some really good shifts,” Ehlers said. “And then personally I was maybe throwing the puck away a little too much. We’ve got to keep building. You don’t know how long you’re going to be together, but we’ve done a really good job, so that’s obviously exciting for us.”

Appleton had his own take on the new threesome.

"There were some entries that were really nice that just didn't quite click at the end," he said. "It's our first game together in a long time. We'll build on this and keep getting better, but there were some really good shifts and some average."

Their next chance to build: at home against New Jersey on Friday.

### *Getting greasier*

Appleton scored late in the second period while on the ice with Nino Niederreiter and Cole Perfetti.

Their coach singled out some heavy, hard-area play from those two as well.

"Nino did a great job of getting to the net and playing heavy," Arniel said. "(Perfetti) had the puck a lot. I liked the way he held onto it... took it to the front of the net. Those are all the things we've talked about, him evolving as a player. And that's the stuff in playoffs that you have to do. You have to go into those greasy areas. He's been really good at that."

The biggest line shuffle was caused by the injury to Gabe Vilardi, forcing Alex Iafallo to the top line with Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor.

Vilardi's injury is "week-to-week," taking the Jets' No. 3 scorer out of the lineup potentially up until, maybe even including, the start of the playoffs.

"Until he's back, it's a collective group mindset," Appleton said. "We all need to be a little better, give a little more, and pick up that slack with him out."

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/news/local-news/jets-playoff-run-poised-to-deliver-economic-boost-to-winnipeg>

### ***Jets playoff run poised to deliver economic boost to Winnipeg***

By David P. Stein

A deep playoff run by the Winnipeg Jets would provide a significant economic boost to local businesses, particularly in the hospitality and retail sectors.

As excitement builds, bars, restaurants, and hotels near Canada Life Centre would see a surge in customers, with fans gathering for pregame meals, postgame celebrations, and watch parties. Local sports apparel stores would also benefit, as demand for Jets jerseys, hats, and memorabilia spikes.

“Every time the Jets make the playoffs, our sales skyrocket,” said a manager at a downtown sports shop. “People want to show their support, and they’re willing to spend.”

The positive impact extends beyond game days. An extended playoff run keeps fans engaged for weeks, increasing foot traffic in the downtown core. Ride-sharing services, parking lots, and public transit see increased usage, while hotels accommodate visiting fans and media.

Furthermore, with large crowds and heightened emotions, cities have also seen tensions escalate during deep playoff runs. The 1994 and 2011 Stanley Cup Finals in particular both resulted in riots in Vancouver, causing millions in damage and numerous arrests. Similarly, in 2008, postgame celebrations in Montreal turned violent after a Canadiens victory, leading to police intervention. Winnipeg authorities will likely prepare contingency plans to ensure fan celebrations remain safe and controlled.

Tourism Winnipeg estimates millions of dollars flow into the city during a deep playoff run, reinforcing the Jets’ value to the local economy. With the team’s passionate fanbase and a strong on-ice product, businesses are hoping the Jets can make a long push toward the Stanley Cup, bringing excitement and revenue to the city.

### **Sportsnet.ca**

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/why-this-seasons-jets-are-poised-for-better-playoff-performance/>

### ***Why this season’s Jets are poised for better playoff performance (VIDEO)***

Ken Wiebe joins Kyper and Bourne to discuss why this season’s Winnipeg Jets are better positioned for a successful playoff run than in previous years.

### **The Athletic**

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6230038/2025/03/27/winnipeg-jets-path-to-division-title/>

### ***Jets’ path to division title and beyond: Opponents, head-to-head records, strength of schedule***

By Murat Ates

The Winnipeg Jets became the first team in the Western Conference to clinch a playoff spot when they beat the Washington Capitals on Tuesday.

It was an intense, animosity-filled game, played at such a high level that Jets head coach Scott Arniel called for a rematch between the No. 1 and No. 2 teams in the NHL.

as soon as the game was done. The only way that rematch could happen, of course, is if the two teams meet in the Stanley Cup Final.

Winnipeg hopes to accomplish some milestones in the meantime.

A division, conference or Presidents' Trophy title would be the first in Winnipeg's NHL history. These Jets want to make as much of that history as they can.

Last year's team finished fourth in the league but behind Dallas in the Central Division and Western Conference. In 2018, the Jets came even closer, finishing second in the NHL but behind division and conference rival Nashville. (Comically, the Predators raised a "regular-season Western Conference champions" banner after Winnipeg beat them in the second round of the playoffs.)

Could this finally be the year Winnipeg wins its division, conference, finishes No. 1 in the league — or even wins the Stanley Cup?

If it's the Presidents' Trophy you're after, the Jets are one point behind Washington. The Capitals have 11 games left to play compared to Winnipeg's 10 and the third-easiest strength of schedule, according to Tankathon. They won't rest their stars until Alex Ovechkin breaks Wayne Gretzky's scoring record and have 40 regulation wins compared to the Jets' 38; the odds are in Washington's favour.

The roads to the Central Division and Western Conference crowns both go through Dallas — with a pit stop against Vegas on April 3.

To take a closer look, consider Winnipeg's 10 remaining games:

5 home games, 5 on the road

6 games against current playoff teams, 2 against bubble teams, 2 against non-playoff teams

21 previous games against upcoming opponents this season, with a combined Jets record of 12-7-3

vs. New Jersey	1-0-0
vs. Vancouver	1-1-0
at Los Angeles	0-1-1
at Vegas	0-1-1
at Utah	2-1-0
vs. St. Louis	2-1-0
at Dallas	2-1-0
at Chicago	2-0-0
vs. Edmonton	2-0-0
vs. Anaheim	0-1-1

Winnipeg's games against Vegas on April 3 and Dallas on April 10 will be for more than bragging rights; they'll go a long way toward cementing first place in the division and

first place in the West. The Jets maintain a six-point lead on Dallas and an eight-point lead on Vegas, although each team has one extra game left to play compared to Winnipeg.

It's worth considering strength of schedule here, too. Tankathon gives Winnipeg the 10th-toughest remaining schedule. Their 10 opponents have a combined points percentage of .565. Meanwhile, the Golden Knights have the 24th-toughest schedule (.534 opponents' points percentage) and the Stars have the 29th-toughest schedule (.520 opponents' points percentage.)

Is that enough for the Stars or Golden Knights to gain the upper hand? Dallas, for example, could get within four points of the Jets by beating Calgary on Thursday. If the Stars also beat Winnipeg on April 10th, they'd only have to make up two extra points in each team's other nine games.

Honestly, I still think the gap is too much for either team to make up without help from the Jets. After writing about how Winnipeg is a Stanley Cup Contender, despite recent adversity, and then watching Winnipeg elevate its game against Washington, it's hard for me believe in such a dramatic collapse. As it stands, I think Winnipeg is heading toward home-ice advantage until a potential Stanley Cup Final.

Winnipeg hasn't been out of the first round since beating Edmonton in the all-Canadian "North Division" in 2021. It hasn't won a first-round series in a building full of fans since 2018. Every advantage is meaningful, even if home ice doesn't necessarily guarantee success.

The Jets are 2-2 in playoff series they've started on the road and 1-4 when starting at home. (This does not count the Jets' 2020 qualification-round loss to Calgary because I stubbornly do not consider anything outside of a 16-team field as the playoffs.)

It would be a reach to blame the Jets' losing record with home-ice advantage on the whiteout or the crowd noise or the pressure. Small samples can lead to strange stats — as one example, Winnipeg is 1-2-0 in playoff games wherein the national anthems have been performed by the Hoosli Ukrainian Male Chorus, and we all know those guys rock. In the end, Winnipeg's playoff success is going to come down to the quality of its play vs. the play of its opponents.

Who will the Jets play in round one?

Here are Winnipeg's most likely first-round opponents, according to MoneyPuck:

St. Louis	39.2%
Minnesota	21.4%
Calgary	19.9%
Vancouver	15.8%
Colorado	14.1%

The percentages are pulled from MoneyPuck's table. I've assumed the Jets finish first in the division to pull numbers for St. Louis, Vancouver, Calgary, and Minnesota, and assumed the Jets finish second in the division in pulling numbers for Colorado. Take the specific percentages with a grain of salt.

In practical terms, Winnipeg will probably finish first in the division. If it does so, its opponent will be whichever team finishes with the second wild-card spot. That's currently a four-team race between St. Louis (which holds the spot now), Minnesota (two points ahead of St. Louis), Vancouver and Calgary. The Blues are still Winnipeg's most likely opponent, but seem like the team to avoid.

I think MoneyPuck is underselling St. Louis' odds of passing the Wild. If that were to happen, it would lead to the first Winnipeg-Minnesota playoff series since the Jets beat the Wild 4-1 in the first round of 2018. (Jets fans will remember what happened in 2019 against St. Louis and would probably prefer the Wild.) Winnipeg would be the prohibitive favourites against Minnesota, Calgary, and Vancouver — and favourites against St. Louis, too, despite the Blues' scorching run.

If the Jets were to make good on that status, making it out of the first round, their reward would be whoever survives the Dallas-Colorado slugfest. We've already taken a look at the Central Division arms race, concluding that the Stars appear to have the edge, but it's realistic to believe any of Winnipeg, Dallas and Colorado could beat any of the other two in a seven-game series.

That discussion may be premature — Winnipeg has been through all kinds of heartbreak in recent quests to get out of the first round — but the Jets appear to be a more mentally resilient team than the ones beaten by Colorado and Vegas in recent years.

On Tuesday against Washington, the Jets won a playoff-style battle with the only team ahead of them in the standings. When the Capitals got physical, the Jets didn't back down. They stood up for themselves and each other and stayed tenacious on pucks all over the ice.

Arniel says he's seeing signs that Winnipeg is ready to take the next steps. The Jets didn't give up an inch against Washington on Tuesday. If that game was a Stanley Cup preview, hockey fans will be fortunate, but Winnipeg knows the road to that kind of rematch is a long one with a lot of adversity in it.

"Those are the callouses that we talked about getting," Arniel said. "The scars that you get over the course of the season, so that when you run into the playoffs you've been through this a few times."

The Jets go into this final 10-game stretch with an 86 percent chance of winning the division (compared to 14.2 percent for Dallas and 0.2 percent for Colorado) so it seems likely history will be made.

How much history will be up to them.

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6233825/2025/03/27/nhl-attendance-tracking-analysis-jets-penguins/>

## ***NHL 2024-25 attendance check-in: Almost league-wide gains as season nears its finale***

By Harman Dayal and Hailey Salvian

Twenty NHL teams have seen an increase in their average attendance since the calendar flipped to 2025. In contrast, only six teams have seen a decline at the box office during this time frame, with nearly all of the dips being negligible.

The takeaway: Most NHL teams are filling seats easily down the stretch of the 2024-25 season. This isn't a surprising trend — the league's second-half attendance has typically been stronger in years past. It's still a healthy indicator, however, given how large a driver ticket sales are for overall hockey-related revenue.

With approximately 85 percent of the season completed, we're going to take an updated look at each team's home attendance numbers.

We'll break down these numbers in a couple of ways in this piece. The first separates how close teams are to playing to a full house on a nightly basis so far this season. The second analyzes home attendance figures from a similar point last season, allowing for a direct comparison for each franchise.

From there, we will be able to see which teams have made the biggest gains and losses year over year.

A few disclaimers for our readers regarding these attendance figures:

1. Attendance figures used are from Hockey-Reference and include all games played through Monday, March 24.
2. In the event of a discrepancy in arena capacity size, we went with the official number supplied by a team's media guide or arena website (when available).
3. Utah Hockey Club isn't included in this piece, as we covered their unique situation in detail in our November attendance look. Because of the club's relocation from Arizona to Salt Lake City and the different buildings involved, this exercise doesn't work for them.

4. Some teams have played overseas or outdoor games that technically counted as “home” appearances. We’re excluding those games from the average attendance figures.

#### *Biggest climbers*

##### *Winnipeg Jets: +996 fans/game (7.5 percent increase)*

The positive momentum has continued for the Jets, both on and off the ice.

After a 3-2 overtime win against the Washington Capitals on Tuesday night, Winnipeg clinched a playoff spot for the third straight year. The Jets have the second-best record in the league, with an NHL-best 49 wins through 72 games.

The team is also up year-over-year at the gate, and since our last attendance update in January (+178). Now, it’s not a massive victory lap for attendance in Winnipeg. Its actual attendance number (14,219) is the second lowest in the league, given the size of Canada Life Centre.

But these are still significant improvements from last year, when team chairman Mark Chipman sounded the alarm on the attendance. Beyond just their play, the Jets have done well to improve their game-day experience, with improved food and beverage offerings and an upgraded sound system.

And The Athletic’s Jets writer Murat Ates can attest to the vibes in Winnipeg being much better this season.

“The building seems like a more fun place to be this year,” he said. “The crowds have gotten snarky in a good way again, too, with chants such as ‘U.S. backup’ (at Jake Oettinger) hearkening back to the old days.”

##### *Florida Panthers: +569 fans/game (3.0 percent increase)*

The reigning Stanley Cup champions are contenders once again, which is an obvious reason for the Panthers to be risers year-over-year. Matthew Tkachuk has emerged as one of the most marketable players in the league, even appearing on “The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon” after the 4 Nations Face-Off. He’s not the only reason for an uptick in attendance, but it certainly doesn’t hurt.

Florida’s attendance has also improved over the last few months after another splashy trade deadline by GM Bill Zito — adding Brad Marchand — and as fans gear up for another deep playoff run.

##### *Washington Capitals: +474 fans/game (2.7 percent increase)*

This one is really easy to understand.

The Capitals have the best record in the league and were the first team to clinch a playoff spot last week. Oh, and Alex Ovechkin is closing in on Wayne Gretzky’s long-standing NHL goal record.

Capital One Arena has announced sellouts for every Capitals home game in March, with the Ovechkin countdown reaching single digits early in the month.

With a goal against the Jets on Tuesday night, Ovechkin is now only six goals away from history.

San Jose Sharks: +309 fans/game (2.3 percent increase)

Macklin Celebrini has helped perk up the Sharks' attendance with almost 14,000 fans per game at this point in the season. The 18-year-old is a true centerpiece for a rebuilding franchise and is second in rookie scoring — only two points behind Montreal defender Lane Hutson — with 52 points in 58 games. His 21 goals lead all rookies.

His linemate Will Smith (fourth in rookie scoring) helps too. Not to mention, their friendship is endearing to fans even outside of San Jose.

#### *Biggest declines*

*Pittsburgh Penguins: -1,187 fans/game (6.6 percent decrease)*

The Penguins continue to be one of the biggest fallers at the box office this season, and it's not hard to understand why.

Sidney Crosby could clinch a 20th season averaging at least a point per game, which would pass Wayne Gretzky (19) for the most in NHL history. Crosby is on an eight-game point streak and is still a reason to watch the Penguins. But, that only goes so far when we're talking about a spoiled fan base watching another losing season.

The team's 16,667 average attendance is the lowest since 2006-07, when the team was playing at Mellon Arena. With the old rink's capacity in mind, that number was close to a sellout. So we're actually looking at 2003-04 — the pre-Crosby era — to find a building this empty in Pittsburgh.

*Los Angeles Kings: -757 fans/game (4.2 percent decrease)*

The Kings are a tad perplexing. The team is good — seventh in the league standings — and its numbers have improved from the mid-November attendance check-in (up to 17,189 from 16,931). But still, only the Penguins have fallen off more in the year-over-year box office.

Maybe there's no big reason for this. Sometimes there are fluctuations in attendance over an 82-game season. Not to mention, the Kings do well relative to other teams, with almost a 95 percent capacity rate, better than 11 other teams.

Or maybe there's a bit of wait-and-see going on with the fan base. Sure, the team is good now, but will it be when it really matters? Or are the Kings on another path to lose to the Edmonton Oilers in the first round for a fourth straight season?

Beyond that, the Kings have a roster full of good players and some obvious names (Drew Doughty and Anze Kopitar), but not a must-see superstar. It might take that big brand-name player or a real playoff run to get fans — beyond the usual attendees — charged up about the team again.

*New York Islanders: -477 fans/game (2.9 percent decrease)*

The Islanders are interesting as there's been an uptick in their crowd sizes since the November and January check-ins, but there's still a year-over-year drop at UBS Arena.

It makes sense for them to be trending downward overall; the Islanders haven't won a playoff series since 2020-21 and have one of the oldest rosters in the league. But it also makes sense for there to be more fans showing up in recent months because they've been much better in the second half of the season.

The team went on a seven-game win streak through January and into February and has put itself only one point out of a wild-card spot. Fans might continue to show up if the Islanders can make a push for the playoffs down the stretch.

*Chicago Blackhawks: -254 fans/game (1.4 percent decrease).*

Chicago is still top-10 in the league-wide attendance with 18,516 average fans. But that figure has dropped slightly from last season.

Last year's attendance saw a notable bump from Connor Bedard's arrival, but with another difficult season on the ice — the team has already been eliminated from the playoffs — the crowd sizes have begun to shrink.

The Blackhawks had only their third sellout of the season on March 23 against the Philadelphia Flyers, one of the team's "Best Day Ever" kids-themed game nights. They also have had four crowds under 17,000, well under the United Center's capacity.

*Teams to watch*

*Ottawa Senators*

When we did our early season November check-in, the Senators were only hitting 89 percent capacity. They've bumped that up to 94 percent average capacity for the season and have seen the largest increase in average attendance of any NHL team since our January check-in.

Ottawa hasn't dipped below 17,000 fans for a home game since late January. During those nine home games, the Sens have averaged 18,332 fans, which is just over 98 percent of capacity. The big difference is that the team is finally winning, with the Senators on track to make the playoffs for the first time in eight years.

Their overall attendance this season is down ever so slightly, but there are a few key factors to explain that:

- The Sens got off to a disappointing 8-11-1 start. Couple that with the franchise's lengthy playoff drought, and you can understand why the first-half attendance was a little bit soft.
- Ottawa hosted the World Juniors this year, which meant some locals saved their hard-earned dollars for those games.
- The Senators didn't have any home games during the second half of December, when teams usually have an easier time selling tickets because of the Christmas holidays.

It'll be interesting to track whether the recently improved home attendance will translate into significant gains next season. Can sustained on-ice success outweigh the headwinds of the club's poor arena location?

### *Philadelphia Flyers*

The Flyers have improved their average attendance by nearly 1,400 fans per game since our early-season check-in. However, this is more of a seasonal trend than an exciting big-picture sign, because the club's attendance arc throughout last season was nearly identical and Philadelphia's year-over-year attendance numbers are basically flat. It's easier to attract fans to Flyers games in the second half of the season when football isn't dominating the local sports conversation: a phenomenon that's true for many NHL cities in the U.S.

That said, it's still notable that Philadelphia's attendance is holding steady and gradually increasing. The Flyers sold off pieces at the deadline and have had an abysmal 5-14-3 record, the worst mark in the NHL, since Jan. 28. Despite on-ice misery, the Flyers have packed at least 18,000 fans for every game during their last two homestands. That could be a positive sign for ownership that fans should stay loyal through this potential rebuild.

### *Columbus Blue Jackets*

Columbus' second-half attendance has been much stronger, which is the same trend we saw last season. This appears to be a market where the end of the college football season helps sports fans turn more of their attention toward the Blue Jackets.

Their year-over-year attendance numbers are flat, but it bears mentioning that this doesn't include the outdoor game at Ohio Stadium against the Red Wings. This event was a smashing success, drawing a monster crowd of 94,751 and generating excellent TV ratings.

Let's see if the improved on-ice product this season can translate to improved attendance numbers next year.

### *Calgary Flames*

The scrappy, underdog Flames are still in the thick of the playoff race, making them one of the league's better stories this season.

Calgary's attendance is up slightly compared to last season and has been gradually climbing compared to our early and midseason check-in numbers. The Flames' surprisingly competitive season obviously helps that cause; it'll be fascinating to see if the box office demand continues increasing down the stretch with high-stakes games carrying huge playoff implications.

Long term, all eyes are on the Flames' new arena development. The early renderings for Scotia Place, which is expected to be ready for the 2027-28 season, look gorgeous. And if the Flames can continue building an exciting young core in time for that arena launch, it could be the perfect recipe for a major boost in attendance/revenue.

### *St. Louis Blues*

Last year, the Blues sold out 40 of their 41 home games. St. Louis' average attendance of 97.7 percent this season is still very healthy, but sellouts have been harder to come by, with only five of the club's first 12 home games drawing a full crowd. There was even a stretch from mid-January to early February where the Blues couldn't get a single sellout in nine home games.

The Blues are the hottest team in the NHL since the 4 Nations Face-Off, however, and that's led to renewed fan interest. St. Louis has sold out Enterprise Center in four consecutive games. Looks like the franchise is finishing strong on and off the ice.

### **Daily Faceoff**

<https://www.dailyfaceoff.com/news/pressure-is-on-winnipeg-jets-connor-hellebuyck-perform-playoffs>

### ***The pressure is on for Jets' Connor Hellebuyck to perform in the playoffs***

By Tyler Kuehl

The Winnipeg Jets became the second team in the NHL to clinch a spot in the Stanley Cup Playoffs. Now, the narrative turns to how far they can go.

While the team has some strong scoring threats—Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor, and Nikolaj Ehlers—the Jets' success will rely on goaltender Connor Hellebuyck's performance.

Sure, Hellebuyck is well on his way to another Vezina Trophy, and is unquestionably one of the best goaltenders of this generation. However, his performance in recent postseasons has resulted in many being concerned about what the Michigan native will do once the playoffs start.

It was less than a year ago when the Jets entered the first round of the playoffs against the Colorado Avalanche, and were ousted quickly, much thanks to lackluster play from Hellebuyck.

On Wednesday's edition of Daily Faceoff LIVE, Frank Seravalli and Tyler Yaremchuk discuss the importance of Hellebuyck's performance in these coming playoffs.

Frank Seravalli: . I was at almost every one of those 17 games in 2018, and if you had told me then that this Jets team...with Hellebuyck and the success that he had in net and the belief that he had in himself, that we'd be staring at these last two springs, I'd be shocked. I mean, this is a guy that is one of the ultimate competitors in the league.

4-Nations was a really good reminder that in clutch pressure situations that he can still be the guy. I mean, he was magnificent in that tournament for the U.S. ... So, he obviously has the capability and the talent to do it. When you talk about the success of the Jets in the playoffs, it doesn't necessarily hinge on Hellebuyck. It hinges on their ability to defend. It was an absolute track meet against the Colorado Avalanche last year in round one, and that's not conducive to how the Winnipeg Jets want to win. So, if they can find a way to fix and sure up the play in their own end and in transition, they're going to be way better off.