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<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/nino-s-friends>

Nino's friends

Jets forward has a large group of friends in town this week from Switzerland

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG - Canada Life Centre was sold out for the latest Winnipeg Jets win over the top team in the NHL, the Washington Capitals and in the crowd of 15 thousand plus were five special guests from Switzerland in town to see Nino Niederreiter.

"Two of them are childhood friends and the other ones I got to know over the years," said Niederreiter following the Jets practice at hockey for all centre.

"They try to come visit every year. They went to Carolina, they went to Nashville and now here. Try to do the annual trip and give me a nice visit and try to have some fun while they are here."

During the 3-2 overtime win on Tuesday, Nino's buddies made two appearances on the scoreboard. The first time it seemed like Jets fans didn't understand who they were looking at but when they made a second showing, the group turned around and showed number 22 and Niederreiter on their jerseys and received a big applause.

"I didn't know that they were going to wear that and I saw them and said 'Oh no, here we go again' and they started turning around and showing the number'," laughed Niederreiter.

"At the beginning they had people coming up to them 'Are you guys wearing rescue jerseys or something?' and it was pretty funny."

Niederreiter said he and his friends did a bunch of things around Winnipeg including getting on the ice to do some curling.

"We had a blast. Had a nice game going but at the beginning it was very, very hard, tough to watch but got better at the end," said Niederreiter.

"I've curled before. It's pretty big (in Switzerland), unfortunately we lost this year against Canada, the women (at world's in South Korea). Definitely very popular at home and it's such a fun sport and you definitely get a big understanding when you play how hard it is."

The quintet will be joined by 25 more people from Niederreiter's home town for the Jets next game which is Friday against New Jersey. Watch for plenty of Swiss power at

Canada Life Centre as Winnipeg looks to take another step towards their first Central title.

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/03/27/focusing-on-the-final-countdown>

Focusing on the final countdown Jets next task holding first place in final 10 games

By: Ken Wiebe

Alex Iafallo kept his words per minute down to a minimum, but he certainly got his point across just as effectively.

The Winnipeg Jets winger had just been asked a question about what the focus of the final 10 games of the regular season was going to be and he kept his answer concise.

“Just keep our aggressiveness, don’t change a thing,” said Iafallo. “Obviously, the playoffs are after that, so we’ve got to keep doing things right and do them well.”

The Jets certainly did a lot of things well during Tuesday’s 3-2 overtime win and they’ll be looking to try and carry that over into Friday’s matchup with the New Jersey Devils.

After punching their ticket to the post-season on Tuesday, the Jets will continue to work on the next task, which is to try and hold off the Dallas Stars in the pursuit of the Central Division banner.

“You still have a job to do,” said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. “Like I mentioned the other night, we checked off one box. We still have another one. The next one is to win the division. So that’s what we’re after.”

As of Thursday’s NHL action, the Jets held a six-point edge over the Stars, who were facing the Calgary Flames at press time.

As of Friday, both the Jets and Stars will have 10 games left in the regular season — including a fourth and final head-to-head meeting in Texas on Apr. 10 that could have a big impact on the final standings.

“It’s always going to be something like that. It’s fun though. It’s why we play the game,” said Iafallo. “We’ve just got to keep playing our game and good things will happen. I know we’ve got a game against them (the Stars), so we’ve got to keep going down the stretch here.”

The jockeying for position in the Central Division is ongoing and there's a chance that five of the eight clubs could qualify for the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Not only are the Jets and Stars battling, the revamped Colorado Avalanche have been on fire and the St. Louis Blues are the hottest team in the NHL — winning seven consecutive games to put the heat on the Minnesota Wild in the chase for the first wild-card spot in the Western Conference.

That means scoreboard watching is part of the daily ritual for some players.

"I like to watch hockey and follow what other teams are doing," said Jets defenceman Logan Stanley. "I mean, yeah, Dallas and Colorado are both playing great and good hockey teams. We know what kind of team we have in here, though. We're going to finish out as best we can. And we'd like to win every game. Whether that happens or not, who knows. But we're just trying to make sure our game is good going into the playoffs."

Iafallo said this was the first time in his career that he's been on a team that was in first place this late in a season.

But the eight-year veteran recognizes there's plenty of work left to be done to ensure the Jets stay on top of both the Central Division and Western Conference.

"We're not getting too high or too low. I know we've said that a couple of times throughout the season, but you can feel it," said Iafallo. "Everybody puts their work in and knows their job."

A big part of that job for the Jets has been the ability to debrief and then look ahead to the next opponent.

"As big as that game was the other night, guess what? There's another big one coming Friday," said Arniel. "Dallas isn't leaving our rear-view mirror, so we've just got to keep plowing forward and that's what our group has been really good at, just focusing on what's next."

Iafallo mentioned resilience as the Jets' best trait and when that was relayed to Arniel, the bench boss said that was on his list and it could find its way to the top as early as next week.

Arniel also wasn't interested in taking a guess at how many wins or points it might take to secure top spot.

"We've just got to beat Jersey on Friday," said Arniel. "Start there."

Arniel may not be looking ahead, but that won't prevent others from doing so.

A quick look at the schedule shows that the Jets have an even split of five home games and five road games to close out the regular season, with six of them coming against teams currently above the playoff line.

For the Stars, they've got six games at home and four on the road, with just two of them coming against teams currently holding a post-season berth.

There are more pressing matters for Arniel and his coaching staff to sort through.

The Jets are still test driving some line combinations, most of whom showed well on Tuesday.

Another area for the Jets to tighten up relates to special teams.

The power-play woes of late are well documented, with a two-for-21 stretch pushing the Jets to second in the NHL (29.7 per cent), behind the Vegas Golden Knights (30.1).

On the flip side, the penalty kill is showing signs of progress, though Arniel didn't want to get into the specifics when it comes to some of the subtle adjustments his team has made in that department — saying it was “double top secret.”

“We looked at some things that we thought might be able to help us in that department and implemented them and we're getting some results,” said Arniel, referring to some homework the coaching staff did during the break for the 4 Nations Face-Off,” said Arniel.

“There are some goals still going (in) but, at the end of the day, there are some changes that we made from what we started with in the first half of the year. The guys are grasping it and making sure that they're on the right page. That's the biggest thing for me with the penalty kill, when the four guys are all on the same page. When one moves, they all move in cohesive pressure or it might be on an entry or it might be on a retrieval and trying to get the puck down the ice. It seems to be a lot better in that department.”

The Jets remain mostly in the middle of the pack on the PK (14th overall among 32 teams going into Thursday's games), but that's a modest improvement with the potential to creep into the top-10 with a strong finish.

In the first meeting of the season, the Jets thumped the Devils 6-1 on NHL trade deadline day.

Even with the Devils sitting comfortably in third place in the Metropolitan Division, you can expect they will be looking for a stronger showing in the rematch.

It's also the first game back in Winnipeg for defenceman Brenden Dillon, who signed with the Devils as an unrestricted free agent on July 1.

Dillon spent three seasons with the Jets after coming over in a trade with the Capitals and he was a popular player among the fan base, so you can expect he will get a warm reception.'

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/03/27/jockeying-for-position-on-the-depth-chart>

***Jockeying for position on the depth chart
Stanley, Lafallo make case for lineup moves***

By: Ken Wiebe

Logan Stanley has done this dance before.

For a multitude of reasons over the course of his career, Stanley has been in and out of the Winnipeg Jets lineup, whether it's related to injury or performance.

When you're jockeying for position on the depth chart, having the right attitude and putting in extra work is the rule, not the exception.

"We've got a good team and lots of good players, so it's going to take everyone down the stretch, and you just want to stay sharp," said Stanley, who is tracking to be in the lineup as the Jets face the New Jersey Devils on Friday.

"And stay mentally engaged when you're not playing and when you are playing, to try and stay into it. Try and work on your game in practice and be ready for when the puck drops."

When healthy this season, Stanley has mostly been a regular, appearing in 53 of 72 games.

But after the arrival of Luke Schenn in a deadline deal with the Pittsburgh Penguins, Stanley was a healthy scratch for five consecutive games before returning to action last Sunday against the Buffalo Sabres.

Stanley chipped in two assists against the Sabres, then had two hits and a shot on goal in 12:24 of ice time in Tuesday's 3-2 overtime win over the Washington Capitals.

"I'm just trying to move pucks and get it into the forwards hands and play good D, play physical," said Stanley, who is battling for ice time on the third pairing with Colin Miller and Haydn Fleury. "There's lots of stuff to improve on in everyone's game, including mine. So just try to be consistent and play good defence."

Stanley completed several crisp zone exits, including a couple through the middle of the ice.

When he's making smart decisions and playing an assertive game, Stanley can be an effective player.

"I think it's been solid," said Stanley, asked to assess his performance this season. "There's room to grow everywhere in every aspect of my game."

"But, trying to ramp it up for playoffs is huge. And as a team, that's what we're trying to do."

Stanley had his ice time reduced in the third period of a game against the Carolina Hurricanes on Mar. 9, but Jets head coach Scott Arniel likes the way he's responded.

"He's been great for us since he's been back. His plays with the puck have been real good," said Arniel. "I like the way that he was real physical. First and foremost, it's making that first pass, getting back for pucks and retrievals and he's done a good job of that."

Ice time rising

One of the many benefits for Alex Iafallo being promoted to the top line is his significant increase in ice time.

Iafallo isn't a prototypical fourth-liner, as he's part of both special teams units, but as he skated alongside Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor on Tuesday, he took 19 shifts for a season-high of 17:28 of ice time.

It was just the second time this season that Iafallo played 17 minutes, the other on Dec. 31 against the Colorado Avalanche when he played with Adam Lowry's line and was tasked with trying to help contain Nathan MacKinnon.

"It's a big change," said Iafallo. "Just keep playing my game and changing at the right time."

Iafallo was held off the scoresheet but he played a big role in the Jets first goal from Josh Morrissey, whose shot caromed in off Capitals blue-liner Martin Fehervary as Iafallo battled with him in front of the net.

Arniel liked what he saw from Iafallo, though he concedes that he'll need to monitor his ice time — which means he could see a reduced role on either the power play or penalty kill.

"I'm in a little argument with my two assistant coaches, one on the power play, one on the penalty kill," said Arniel. "Because I told them it's going to get reduced one way or another. I'm just not sure which one we're going at, yet."

“But he did a great job the other night managing it. If you get into a game where it’s crazy, power plays, penalty kills, you get into the four or five on each side, then it might get a little bit tough. I’ve got to manage it, make sure we handle it correctly.”

Iafallo has 11 goals and 24 points in 72 games this season.

The tour guide

There was a smattering of red jerseys in the crowd with the Capitals in town, but five of those jerseys were Swiss national team sweaters worn by close friends of Jets forward Nino Niederreiter.

“It’s awesome. A couple of them are my childhood friends,” said Niederreiter. “I didn’t know exactly what they were going to do or exactly what they were going to wear. When I saw the five Swiss jerseys, I thought ‘here we go again.’”

“Every year, they try to do something different. This year, they went with the Swiss jerseys. When they turned around, it was priceless.”

The friends traveled more than 7,000 kilometres from Switzerland to spend time with Niederreiter.

“It’s fun. It just speaks to how close of a group (we are),” said Niederreiter. “It’s cool they came all the way this way to spend some time together. They seem like they’re enjoying the city. They went everywhere they could possibly see.”

One of the off-day activities on Wednesday was curling in St. Adolphe, which was set up by Jets head athletic therapist Rob Milette.

Niederreiter was asked for a scouting report of his work on the pebble.

“Not bad,” he said. “A lot of room to improve, but it was a lot of fun.”

Niederreiter’s friends are staying at a short-term rental property, which allows the Jets forward to stay with his game-day routine.

Niederreiter is currently riding a three-game point streak and is up to 15 goals and 33 points in 72 games this season.

New dad

The Jets had four players absent from Thursday’s skate, but all of them are expected to be available on Friday.

Arniel said that Jets winger Kyle Connor became a father on Wednesday, as his wife gave birth to a daughter.

Jets defenceman Luke Schenn was given some time to head to Nashville to be with his family, while Morrissey and Rasmus Kupari used Wednesday as a maintenance day.

Defenceman Neal Pionk (lower body) and forward Gabe Vilardi (upper body) remain sidelined with injuries and are in the week-to-week category.

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-resilient-focused-and-out-to-prove-doubters-wrong>

Jets resilient, focused and out to prove doubters wrong

By Paul Friesen

They have the NHL's third-leading goal scorer, a pair of players in the top-15 in points, and the No. 1 goalie.

They're four lines deep and have a pretty good stable of defencemen to choose from every night.

But if you ask Winnipeg Jets players and coaches what this team's strongest trait is, they don't point to any of those things. At least, the three we asked on Thursday didn't.

First up, Dylan DeMelo.

"Just knowing our identity, knowing how we have to play," the defenceman said. "I don't think there's any grey area. And then when it wavers, we're pretty good at snapping it back."

The words that best describe that identity: "Resilience, maybe," DeMelo said. "It's a roller-coaster of a year. Emotions are high. Emotions can be low. It's a team that stays even-keel, stays in the moment. Doesn't look too far (ahead) or look back. Stay present. Staying in the fight."

Coincidentally – or not – winger Alex Iafallo used the same word when asked about the Jets' strongest trait.

"Resilience, maybe. Coming back in a couple of those games at the last seconds," he said. "Everybody just sticking together."

Iafallo, too, pointed at the ability to keep the keel even.

Our final subject on the matter was the head coach.

Scott Arniel gave the question a moment's thought and delivered an answer that wasn't far removed from the themes his two players mentioned: Short-term, laser focus.

"Right now probably the biggest thing is getting ready for the next opponent," Arniel said. "As big as that game was the other night (against Washington), guess what? There's another big one coming Friday. Dallas isn't leaving our rear-view mirror, so we've just got to keep plowing forward. That's what our group has been really good at, just focusing on what's next."

Having Dallas still on their tails helps with that focus. Keeps them "on the edge," as Lafallo put it.

Having clinched a playoff spot with the overtime win over the Capitals on Tuesday, the Jets still have 10 to play, beginning Friday against visiting New Jersey. Each one, a chance to fix or perfect something, perhaps.

Each also another chance to draw on that competitive edge to win.

"We don't take these games off, by any means," DeMelo said. "We haven't done anything, really. Now we're trying to clinch the Central (Division), trying to clinch first in the conference. There's a lot to play for. We're not taking our foot off the gas."

"We're going to keep pushing, make sure that our game is right come playoff time."

That's another word that keeps surfacing when discussing this team's season: Playoffs.

The historic 15-1 start, the possibility of finishing atop the standings for the first time, giving up the fewest goals – you get the impression nobody's going to be telling their grandkids about those things some day.

DeMelo has been with the Jets for four post-seasons. He has just 19 total games to show for it – four or five per year. You don't need Einstein to calculate how many rounds they've won.

Comparing this team to his others – he reached the second round once, with San Jose seven years ago – the 31-year-old begins not with the high-end talent, but the high-end buy-in.

"It's a tight group," he said. "Guys that are willing to do all the small things to help this team win. Whatever role they're in, they're giving everything they've got. There's no crying about ice time or opportunities."

DeMelo has seen a transformation of sorts, too, to a team on pace to be the stingiest in hockey for a second straight season.

“That’s what wins at this time of year,” he said, again peeking a couple weeks ahead. “Guys having career years is something that’s sticking out this year, as well. We have a goalie in the Hart (Trophy) conversation. That’s unique. I’ve never been around that before. A lot of things have to come together for your team to be where it’s at.”

There’s one other thing that’s unique to this team. We’ve touched on it before, but DeMelo brought it up again: The notion of showing the hockey world a dirty spring-time town that has a hard time shaking winter would celebrate an early-summer championship parade like nobody else.

For him and teammates who’ve committed, long-term, that’s a real thing.

“We’ve always said how unique it would be to have a winner here in Winnipeg,” DeMelo said. “Everybody doubts us. It would be great to stick it to everybody else that we can be a winner here in a market that people don’t think we can do it in.”

Resilience and focus, meet your chip on the shoulder.

<https://winnipegssun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/arniel-trying-to-keep-everybody-happy>

Family matters: Jets' Daddy Arniel trying to keep everybody happy

By Paul Friesen

There was a distinct family theme at the Winnipeg Jets practice on Thursday.

Arniel explains decision to put Iafallo on top line for injured Vilardi

Luke Schenn got the day off to visit his in Nashville, Kyle Connor got the day off after he and his wife started theirs the night before, and Connor Hellebuyck brought his son to the rink.

Like all families, not everybody agrees all the time, either.

“I’m in a little argument with my two assistant coaches,” the head of it, coach Scott Arniel, said. “One on the power play, one on the penalty kill.”

The object of the disagreement: The amount of time forward Alex Iafallo should be spending on the ice.

With the injury to Gabe Vilardi, Iafallo has been bumped up to the top line. He also plays on both special teams.

But trying to keep up with new linemates Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor can take a lot out of a former fourth-liner.

"If you get into a game where it's crazy, power plays, penalty kills, you get into the four or five on each side, then it might get a little bit tough," Arniel explained. "We do have other players that we've talked about using in different spots. I just have to manage him."

Averaging some 12.5 minutes per game this season, Lafallo shot up to more than 17 minutes against the Capitals.

"It's a big change," he acknowledged. "Just trying to have the right changes, coming off the ice ... changing at the right time. Sometimes you've got to read and react."

Whether he comes off the power-play or the penalty kill, stay tuned.

THE 30-MINUTE MAN

Managing ice time for someone like defenceman Josh Morrissey is another kettle of fish.

"He wants to play 30," Arniel said. "He wants to go out every other shift."

Morrissey hasn't been far off that mark in a few recent games, going 27-plus minutes three times over the last five outings and nearly 29 minutes one night.

The dilemma for someone that good: "If we're chasing a game he's going to be out there a ton," Arniel said. "I guess even in the tight ones."

The coach has noticed something else, too. Morrissey's fuel gauge is wired differently than most.

"He's an elite athlete. He seems to recover as quick as anybody," Arniel said. "He looks like his tank is empty, he comes off at the end of his shift, and 30 seconds later he's back up and going 100 miles an hour. He just seems to respond to big minutes."

NEW LEVEL FOR STANLEY

Sticking with the blue line, the Jets have liked the play of Logan Stanley since his return to the lineup the last two games, brought on by Neal Pionk's injury.

"He's been great for us since he's been back," Arniel said. "His plays with the puck have been real good. I like the way that he was real physical. Him and Millsy (Colin Miller) the last couple games have been real good. First and foremost it's making that first pass, getting back for pucks and retrievals and he's done a good job of that."

Stanley says he's noticed the pace and intensity of games has picked up.

"Playoffs are right around the corner," he said. "We're trying to sharpen up our game and be the best we can ... everyone else is trying to do the same."

THE LAST WORD

"He loves it. Maybe it's just a new set of clothes, something different to try on and see if it fits." – Arniel on the enthusiasm Nik Ehlers has shown in playing with new linemates Adam Lowry and Mason Appleton.

Canadian Press

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/nikolaj-ehlers-winnipeg-jets-1.7495517>

With free-agency looming, Nikolaj Ehlers focused on playoffs for high-flying Winnipeg Jets Fleet-footed Danish winger on pace for career-best points total

By Judy Owen

Nikolaj Ehlers knows he's on the verge of a career-high season for points, but a big celebration isn't around the corner.

The speedy Winnipeg Jets forward views it as part of his evolution since joining the NHL club in 2015-16 after being drafted ninth overall in 2014.

"It would mean a lot, of course, but I also think the reason that I'm at this point is because I don't think too much about that stuff," Ehlers said after Thursday's practice.

"When you focus on what you can control, when you work on your things, when you let the game teach you and just keep doing your best, those things will come eventually."

Ehlers has 61 points heading into Friday's home game against the New Jersey Devils, three shy of the 64 points he recorded in 82 games in 2016-17.

This season's feat is notable for its pace.

Ehlers has suited up for 63 games after missing nine in December with a lower-body injury. His 61 points also matches last season's output through 82 games.

His progress and production could lead to a big payday, but he's also not thinking about that.

Ehlers, who turned 29 last month, is a pending unrestricted free agent. He's playing in the last year of a seven-year, US\$42-million contract with an annual salary-cap hit of \$6 million.

The six-foot, 172-pound left winger's name has been included among the league's top pending UFA forwards such as Mitch Marner of the Toronto Maple Leafs, Sam Bennett

of the Florida Panthers and Brock Boeser of the Vancouver Canucks. All three are under age 30.

"Obviously, it means that I'm doing something right," Ehlers said of being mentioned in that group.

"Right now, I've got other things to worry about, other things to focus on rather than all of that stuff. I'm here trying to get to the exact same thing all the other teams are in this league, and we've got a really good shot at it this year, so I don't think about that for even a second."

Playoff spot clinched

The Jets have already clinched a spot in the Stanley Cup playoffs and sat atop the Western Conference and Central Division with 102 points (49-19-4), six ahead of the Dallas Stars, who played the Calgary Flames on Thursday.

Winnipeg was also one point back of Washington for first overall in the league. The Capitals faced the Minnesota Wild on Thursday.

Ehlers scored the winner in Tuesday's 3-2 overtime victory against Washington.

Jets head coach Scott Arniel said Ehlers is playing better without the puck like the team's other top-skilled players, but he's also coachable in other areas.

"I constantly talk to him about putting his speed on display every chance he gets and he does that," Arniel said. "He puts fear in the other team's defencemen because he builds up that speed and gets coming.

"The other night [against Washington] there was three guys chasing him and nobody was going to catch him on that goal. When he does that, he can be extremely dangerous."

Arniel elevated Ehlers to the top power-play unit this season, and he has showed his willingness for the new role.

"His one comment was, 'As long as you teach me and show me what I need to do and what I'm supposed to do.' And he's grasped it and it's really helped us," Arniel said.

"His quickness to get across and support pucks when other teams get aggressive, his skill-making, his ability to find people and then that shot from sort of the bumper spot has been everything we had hoped."

Ehlers has six power-play goals this season.

"Personally, the part that I've been the most proud of has been the even-strength game that I've been able to play, and that's exciting for me," Ehlers said.

Jets veteran centre Vladislav Namestnikov has been on the second line with Ehlers and Cole Perfetti most of the season, although an injury to top-line winger Gabriel Vilardi last Sunday has caused some juggling.

Namestnikov said Ehlers has shown a combination of skills this season.

"In a way he's stepped up his two-way game," Namestnikov said. "He's very responsible defensively and then he takes that to the offence with his speed. He's just electric."

Winnipeg forward Nikolaj Ehlers becomes the highest-scoring Danish player in NHL history

Ehlers, the league's highest-scoring player from Denmark, has 225 goals and 293 assists for 518 career points in 668 regular-season games.

"He's always been one of the top players in the league so it's no surprise to see him up with those guys," Namestnikov said of the coveted pending UFAs.

"All that stuff agents and GMs take care of, but hopefully he stays here with the Jets."

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11102547/analysis-playoffs-nhl-march-winnipeg-jets/>

ANALYSIS: March victories have real impact on NHL playoffs

By John Shannon CJOB

The Stanley Cup playoffs begin on April 19, 22 days from now. Not that long ago, we were reveling in the Jets being 15-1 to start the season. But I digress.

The 16-team Stanley Cup tournament begins on the third Saturday in April, but I would submit we are already in playoff mode. Teams fighting to get into the post-season and teams fighting for seedings have made this month the best month of hockey on the calendar outside of the playoffs.

Take last night, for instance, a typical 10-game night. Of those games, nine had some sort of playoff implication. Or tonight, all six games might affect what the seedings are. And it's the same thing night after night.

All these games, all these regular season games, have created the realization that this part of the schedule has true value.

Now, that may sound like a "Captain Obvious" moment to some. But this isn't a league where load management becomes a factor, and the competitive level of late-season games declines.

Right now, three teams are fighting in the Atlantic for first, five teams in the East are looking for a wild card spot, and the potential of six Canadian-based teams in the Stanley Cup playoffs is real. Crazy.

Really, it speaks to the NHL's playoff system. When the original Jets joined the league in 1979, 16 of 21 teams made the playoffs. It was almost laughable to think that only five teams missed the post-season. Now, 32 teams deep, the NHL allows that same number of teams, 16, to play for the Stanley Cup. And it has made the Cup the most difficult trophy in North American sports to win.

So, when asked at the recent general managers' meeting, commissioner Gary Bettman was adamant that there was no need to change the format of the playoffs because it's pretty darn good. Yes, there are matchups in the first round that some would like later, but so what? Don't finish second — win the division.

It all points back to the value of the regular season. And what we are witnessing every night of the schedule is teams realizing how important a March victory can be in prepping for the post-season.

It truly is hockey's version of March Madness.