

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/03/29/jets-aim-to-take-care-of-business-as-they-enter-final-stretch>

Jets aim to take care of business as they enter final stretch

By: Mike McIntyre

Winnipeg Jets captain Adam Lowry had a couple of wishes Saturday as he celebrated his 32nd birthday.

"I would like a little more space, you know," he said with a chuckle following a full team skate at the Hockey For All Centre.

Lowry was talking about the current distance between his club and the scorching-hot Dallas Stars, who began the day six points behind the Jets in the race for top spot in both the Central Division and the Western Conference.

Dallas was playing Saturday night in Seattle followed by a rematch on Monday inside the same rink. Lowry admitted he texted his father, Dave — an assistant coach with the Kraken — asking for a little help.

What was the reply?

"That they'll do their best. That's all you can ask for, right?" said Lowry.

"You know what, obviously we'd love to get some help from some teams. But as long as we kinda take care of our own business and win the games in front of us, we control what happens."

The Jets have done a solid job of that lately, downing the Washington Capitals on Tuesday (3-2 in overtime) and then following that up with an impressive 4-0 victory on Friday against the New Jersey Devils.

A four-game homestand, which began six days ago with a 5-3 loss to the Buffalo Sabres, will conclude on Sunday afternoon against a desperate Vancouver Canucks team fighting to stay alive in the playoff race.

"We certainly want to be a lot better than what we were in that game down there," said Jets coach Scott Arniel, referring to a 6-2 loss back on March. "We gave up a lot of rush chances, coverage chances that are not normally sort of in our DNA, and we need to clean that up. I think since then our team game has been a lot better."

Vancouver is coming off a wild 7-6 shootout loss on Friday night in Columbus and will be wrapping up a six-game road trip. They began the day four points behind the St. Louis Blues for the final wildcard spot in the West.

"This very well could be a team we run into in game 83 (a.k.a. the first round of the playoffs) so let's make sure that we're a heck a lot better than we were in their building," said Arniel.

The Canucks are without top centres Elias Pettersson and Filip Chytil and winger Nils Hoglander due to injuries but have been getting valuable contributions from several young players in his absence.

"It's a group there that's working hard and (coach Rick) Tocchet's pushing them. They're making that run to try to get in," said Arniel.

He wouldn't tip his hand about a starting goaltender, but Connor Hellebuyck would seem the likely candidate to make a league-leading 55th start with backup Eric Comrie on baby watch. His wife is due to give birth on April 7, but Comrie told the Free Press she was already in early labour and the hope was their son could be delivered this weekend.

The Jets beat the Canucks 6-1 at Canada Life Centre earlier this season.

"I know Vancouver's missing some key guys but they're fighting for their lives, every point is so critical for them," said Lowry.

"We saw what can happen with their transition and how dangerous they can be with their speed when we were in Vancouver. It's going to be one of those things like the last couple games where you stay above their speed in the neutral zone, smart puck decisions and things like that. Play a real structured game and that's where we'll find success."

Winnipeg is also missing a trio of players due to injuries. Defencemen Neal Pionk (lower-body) has missed seven straight games while forward Gabe Vilardi (upper-body) has been sidelined for two. Both are still considered week-to-week and are not skating.

"(Pionk) is doing a lot more off-ice, weight-room type stuff. He's getting closer. A lot closer," said Arniel.

The update wasn't as clear on Vilardi.

"It's not one of those ones where it's an automatic four-to-six. Where he is, it's week-to-week. He's a ways away. He's away from even trying to get into the weight room right now. He's more on just getting better," said Arniel.

Depth centre Rasmus Kupari is considered day-to-day after missing Friday's game.

Saturday's practice had a family feel to it, with the children of several players on hand to take part in a fun skate once the formal session was complete. No doubt plenty of parenting tips were being swapped, especially with Comrie on the cusp of being a father for a second time and Kyle Connor becoming a first-time Dad this past Wednesday.

"With our kids here, we get to spend some time with them before we go out on the road for a good week," said Jets defenceman Dylan DeMelo.

"Any time you get to share those experiences with your own they are valuable and I know my little guy is going to talk about it all day and this is probably warm up for more mini sticks when we get home."

DeMelo was asked if there are now enough children to have a full game with the parents and said they'll need to wait for Luke Schenn's trio to arrive from Nashville, where they are still in school. Schenn just moved into fourth all-time on the NHL's career hits list on Friday against New Jersey.

"He said they have a little more skill than he does right now but I am sure they are hard to play against," joked DeMelo. "No easy ice out there."

After hosting the Canucks, the Jets will play three straight in enemy territory starting Tuesday night in Los Angeles. That's followed by visits to Las Vegas (Thursday) and Utah (Saturday).

"It's always fun to be in these races. To be fighting not only for the division title and conference title, but to be the best in the league. We're pushing every day," said Lowry.

"We're just trying to have our game in a spot where we feel comfortable. Whether it's at home, whether it's on the road, I think that's our mentality we have. Coming down the stretch, obviously we want to take care of our own things and make sure we get home ice as far as we can."

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipegsun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-defenceman-luke-schenn-is-high-on-the-hit-list>

Jets defenceman Luke Schenn is high on the hit list

By Gordon Anderson

With every passing game, Jets defender Luke Schenn is making a slow climb up the NHL record books in one particularly strong aspect of his game.

The NHL started tracking hits at the start of the 2005-06 season. Since then, Schenn is fourth with 3,363 heading into the Jets' game Sunday against the Vancouver Canucks.

"It is not easy," teammate Dylan DeMelo said about the rough-and-tumble game Schenn is infamous for. "We know how valuable he's been on our group in the limited time he has been here. He is a presence out there. There is no doubt about it."

Since the start of the 2005-06 season, Cal Clutterbuck leads with 4,029 hits. Matt Martin is second with 3,922 and Alexander Ovechkin is third with 3,731.

Clutterbuck is an unrestricted free agent, Martin has played 25 games for the New York Islanders this season, and Ovechkin, well, he's also chasing down infamy, only five goals away from equaling Wayne Gretzky's career goals record of 894.

"You have to know when he is out there as he is going to make you pay a price in the corners," DeMelo said. "There is no easy ice with denying entries and denying time and space. He has done a fantastic job helping with our identity back there."

And while not as upper echelon for his ability to get in front of the puck, Schenn is 25th in career blocked shots with 1,607 since that category was tracked.

"He does all the right things, blocks shots, does everything for this group," DeMelo said. "It is great to have him, a guy that has been around in different markets, playoff runs, he's won some cups and that experience is valuable."

<https://winnipegssun.com/sports/were-pushing-every-day-jets-wary-of-the-hard-charging-dallas-stars>

'We're pushing every day': Jets wary of the hard-charging Dallas Stars

By Gordon Anderson

At the very least, the Dallas Stars are making the Jets fly the path of the true and righteous.

"We're pushing every day. Dallas has a great team, Vegas has a great team, Washington, there's a lot of great teams in this league," Adam Lowry said when asked about the pressure the Stars are applying in the division race. "We're just trying to have our game in a spot where we feel comfortable. Whether it's at home, whether it's on the road, I think that's our mentality we have."

Lowry celebrated his 32nd birthday on Saturday. Reporters on scene at the hockey for all centre offered to sing Happy Birthday. He politely declined.

"It's better left unsaid," Lowry said.

Heading into league action on Saturday night, the Stars continue to pursue the locals for the top spot in the Central Division with three weeks remaining in the season.

The Jets (50-19-4) have a league-best 104 points heading into Sunday afternoon's matchup with the Vancouver Canucks. Dallas (47-21-4) has 98 points, having played one fewer game.

"The pressure that's coming from behind continues to motivate us, push us and doesn't let us take our foot off the gas," head coach Scott Arniel said. "We just have to continue to take care of our business. We will finish off this home stand, get three or four, and then we'll move on to our next one."

The Stars were in Seattle for a Saturday-night special with the Kraken. Come Sunday morning, the Stars could be four points behind the Jets. Then again, they could be six in arrears.

Point being, the race is a little too tight for the Jets captain.

"I would like a little more space, you know," Lowry said with a laugh. "No, coming down the wire, you're always in races. It's always fun to be in these races. To be fighting not only for the division title and conference title, but to be the best in the league."

"It would be nice if Dallas could drop one or two and help us out a little bit," Arniel added.

The two teams will match up in Big D on April 10 for the proverbial four pointer, a game that could decide the division, one way or another.

HERE COME THE CANUCKS

Vancouver is six points behind the St. Louis Blues for the second wild card in the Western Conference.

The Canucks (34-26-13) were idle on Saturday night. The Blues defeated the Colorado Avalanche 2-1 on Saturday.

The Jets beat the Canucks 6-1 on Jan. 14. Vancouver responded and earned a 6-2 victory on March 18 at Rogers Arena. Vancouver is 19-13-6 on the road. The Jets are 27-6-4 at home.

"We felt we had a bit of a stinker in their barn, and we are looking to get another crack at them to show we are better than that," Jets D-man Dylan DeMelo said. "And continue to build on our overall game in the last stretch here."

Alex Iafallo and Nikolaj Ehlers scored for the Jets in the road loss. Connor Hellebuyck stopped 16 shots in defeat. The six markers allowed tied a season high for the most

goals allowed in a road game. Hellebuyck surrendered five in a 6-4 loss on Oct. 28 in Toronto.

“Yeah, well, we certainly want to be a lot better than what we were in that game (against Vancouver) where we gave up a lot of rush chances, coverage chances that are not normally in our DNA, and we need to clean that up,” Arniel said. “Since then, I think our team game has been a lot better.”

Vancouver has played in a league-high 13 overtime games. The Jets have played in four.

“Tocchet is pushing them,” Arniel said. “They’re a dangerous team, and they’re finding ways to score goals or staying in games. They just find a way to hang around. And they’ve taken a bunch in overtime so it’ll be one of those games that if we come out, and we’re not at our best, there certainly can take advantage of us.”

Puck drop is 2 p.m.

WALKING WOUNDED

Neal Pionk has missed seven games as he attempts to return from a lower-body injury.

“Nothing yet going on the ice,” Arniel said about Pionk. “He’s doing a lot more off-ice, weight room type stuff. He’s getting closer. A lot closer.”

Forward Gabriel Vilardi picked up an injury in the loss to the Buffalo Sabres last Sunday.

“It’s not one of those ones (injuries) where it’s an automatic four-to-six weeks,” Arniel said. “Where he is, it’s week-to-week. He’s a ways away. He’s away from even trying to get into the weight room right now. He’s more on just getting better.”

The Hockey News

<https://thehockeynews.com/news/flying-under-the-radar-nikolaj-ehlers-quietly-excels-as-jets-look-to-snap-first-ever-cup>

Flying Under The Radar: Nikolaj Ehlers Quietly Excels As Jets Look To Snap First Ever Cup

By Jared Clinton, Features Writer

Nikolaj Ehlers doesn't own a fur coat. In fairness, who does these days? But that this even arises in conversation with the Winnipeg Jets winger has little to do with Ehlers expressing his sartorial wants or needs. It doesn't even have anything to do with bundling up when the mercury starts to dip in Winnipeg and Ehlers has to fend off the bitter, blustery and blistering cold. Rather, the gap in Ehlers' closet comes up because he's daydreaming, envisioning “probably the wildest Stanley Cup party you'll ever see.”

That's when one of the most iconic photos in Winnipeg's sports history comes up.

The snapshot dates back to 2019, not long after the CFL's Winnipeg Blue Bombers won their first Grey Cup since 1990. It was at the parade that Chris Streveler arrived decked out in his championship finest: a fur coat, cut-off shorts and no shirt. Keep in mind, this was in the middle of November. It's that image, and the celebration that surrounded it, that gives Ehlers some fodder for his fantasy of the scenes on Portage Ave. when the Winnipeg Jets win a Stanley Cup. And if that were to come to pass this season, how would Ehlers feel about recreating Streveler's look? "It was cold when he did it," Ehlers laughed. "But, you know what? Maybe I'll give him a shout and see if he still has that."

Given how this season has gone for the Jets, it's well within the realm of possibility that Ehlers could be making that phone call, too. After all, Winnipeg was in the thick of the Presidents' Trophy race entering the home stretch, and Ehlers has played an integral part in helping the Jets in their pursuit of top spot.

There is, though, a tendency to forget about the 29-year-old when giving the Jets' roster its plaudits. That's through no fault of his own, either. But when Mark Scheifele is setting the franchise goal-scoring record, Josh Morrissey is putting his name in the Norris Trophy conversation and Connor Hellebuyck is further laying his claim to the title of Best Goaltender In The World, there's not much spotlight left to share. And we haven't yet mentioned Kyle Connor or Gabe Vilardi – or that Ehlers has shared the ice with Blake Wheeler, Patrik Laine and Dustin Byfuglien during his time in Winnipeg.

But this season, again, has seen Ehlers slip under the radar, oh-so-quietly scoring at a point-per-game pace. It's an offensive output that has put him in line to better his career-best totals of 29 goals and 64 points, and it's going hand-in-hand with a year in which plenty has fallen Ehlers' way.

Take early November, for instance. Entering the season, Ehlers' 457 career points put him in pursuit of a meaningful milestone, as he trailed idol-turned-national teammate Frans Nielsen for the most points by a Danish NHLer. After a four-point effort against the Columbus Blue Jackets on Nov. 1, highlighted by Ehlers' first hat trick in six years, he went out two nights later and registered a goal and an assist against the Tampa Bay Lightning – his 473rd and 474th points – to surpass Nielsen on the all-time list. Two months later, Ehlers was celebrating his 500th point, making him the first Dane to hit the mark. "When you get into the league, your dream is to play in the league and stay in the league," he said. "To be able to now hit that mark was pretty awesome, really cool, and I'm very, very proud of it considering that those are guys that I look up to."

"Look at my numbers, you can see that the power play has not been the big factor."

That Ehlers set the league scoring record for his compatriots is made all the more fitting by its timing: it was just in September he starred as Denmark secured its spot in the 2026 Olympics, sealing qualification with two points in the clinching game against

Norway. To Ehlers' thinking, it's no coincidence he's been able to use that as a launchpad toward a career year. "To play some games for Denmark, get that kind of success playing for them and qualifying for the Olympics, that puts you in a good, positive mindset," he said.

That's not the only thing that has helped Ehlers build and maintain momentum. First and foremost, he started the campaign healthy. Before last season, he'd injured his neck, and the ailment cost him his pre-season and nagged him throughout the year. Arguably more important for his production, however, is that he has been a fixture on the NHL's top power play.

At times throughout Ehlers' 10 seasons in Winnipeg, at least among the fandom, his power-play usage has been a bugbear. In part, that's because his incredible speed – there's a good reason he's nicknamed 'Fly' – makes him a one-man zone-entry machine. Yet nailed-on first-unit duty has been elusive, as he's flitted from special-teams starter to second-unit hand with regularity over much of his time with the Jets. That is, until this season, where the minutes he's spent away from the top group can be counted on one hand. And Ehlers has made his power-play time count.

Through 57 games, he'd registered six power-play goals and 21 PP points. The former was just one short of his career high, while the latter was already eight clear of Ehlers' previous best. Whether contributing on the power play has bled into the rest of his game is a tricky question, with the answer residing somewhere between yes and no. "You don't want to need the power play to get that going," he said. "Overall in my career, if you look at my numbers, you can see that the power play has not been the big factor."

As one of the longest-serving Jets, Ehlers knows how much a Cup would mean to fans in Winnipeg.

He's right, too. Since his second season in the NHL, Ehlers has been one of the league's best even-strength producers. His 373 points are the 29th-most among the nearly 300 players who've played 500 games over that span. And Ehlers has produced at that level while getting relatively modest ice time. No other player among the top 50 in even-strength scoring since 2016-17 has averaged fewer minutes than Ehlers, and his per-60-minute scoring rate is elite. He ranks 16th among 500-minute skaters, a fraction behind Evgeni Malkin and Steven Stamkos and ahead of Patrick Kane, Brayden Point and Mikko Rantanen. Ehlers is also ahead of teammates Scheifele and Connor.

That's one major reason Ehlers will be essential to the Jets' title pursuit, and he understands and welcomes the pressure. To hear him tell it, though, the weight of expectation is less external than internal. Sure, the Jets hear the noise, including the naysayers who view Winnipeg, which has only escaped the first playoff round once in the past six seasons, as a paper tiger in a stacked Central Division. It's the Jets' own standard that matters most, however.

“Are we happy with how last season ended? And the year before that? And the year before that?” Ehlers said. “Any team that doesn’t stand with the Stanley Cup at the end of the year is disappointed. We have something to prove to ourselves.”

And to be the last team standing, holding the Cup high with Winnipeg, might be more meaningful to Ehlers than just about anyone else. He’s the third-longest-tenured Jet on the roster. He’s played more games for the franchise all-time than all but six players. And whereas other major members of this roster have re-signed in Winnipeg – Scheifele and Hellebuyck inked twin seven-year deals in October 2023 – Ehlers is set to become a UFA at season’s end. That means there is no guarantee he’ll be back. No guarantee what the future will hold. No guarantee this won’t be his last chance to bring a championship to Winnipeg.

"Any team that doesn't stand with the Stanley Cup at the end of the year is disappointed."

Given all that, Ehlers’ real fantasies aren’t about festivities, fur coats or the future. It’s delivering a lasting memory to the Jets faithful. “To give (a Stanley Cup) to a city that lost NHL hockey for 20-some years when they are bleeding hockey,” Ehlers said, “it would be a dream come true.”