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***Three things - Highlight reel goal from Perfetti in Jets win
Kyle Connor, Mason Appleton and Cole Perfetti lead Jets to third straight win***

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG – The Winnipeg Jets recorded their 51st win of the season beating the Vancouver Canucks 3-1 at Canada Life Centre. Kyle Connor, Mason Appleton and Cole Perfetti scored for the Jets who moved three points up on Washington for first overall and six points up on Dallas for first in the Central, the Stars have a game in hand. Connor Hellebuyck was outstanding again making 23 saves for his

KC KEEPS SCORING AGAINST CANUCKS

The last time the Canucks were in Winnipeg, Kyle Connor scored a natural hat trick in a 6:38 span in the first period to lead the Jets to a 6-1 win. With the Jets trailing 1-0 in the second period, Connor took a pass from Mark Scheifele in the neutral zone and fired a low shot past Thatcher Demko for his team leading 38th goal of the season. He is now just two goals shy of becoming the second player in Jets/Thrashers history with multiple 40-goal seasons - he would join Ilya Kovalchuk (5).

APPLETON AND PERFETTI CLOSE IT OUT

The Jets patient game paid off in the third period as they took the lead for the first time at 6:24, Mason Appleton battled hard in front of Demko to fight off Quinn Hughes and tap in his second goal in as many games.

Just under six minutes later, Cole Perfetti brought the fans out of their seats when he stepped around Derek Forbort and wired a shot under the crossbar past Demko for his 16th goal of the season. A goal that we will be seeing a lot of in the near future.

“A couple of good plays along the wall from KC and Vladdy and then just slashing across to try and push their D,” said Perfetti.

“Realized I had a little bit of extra time, and was just kind of trying to bait him, I was just waiting for him to turn his feet and was hoping he did. And then just it ended up working out nicely.”

HELLEBUYCK UP TO 43 WINS

The Jets goaltender continues to lead all statistical categories in the NHL, wins, goals against average, save percentage and shutouts and put up another solid performance. Hellebuyck made some key stops early in the first period and held the fort while the Jets were trying to get their insurance goal from Perfetti. He extended his home points streak to a franchise record 13 games. He also tied Andrei Vasilevskiy (12-0-1 from Dec. 28, 2024 – March 6) and Logan Thompson (9-0-4 from Nov. 29, 2024 – Feb. 9) for the

second longest such run this season, behind only Darcy Kuemper (14-0-1 from Dec. 7, 2024 – March 25).

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<https://www.nhl.com/news/vancouver-canucks-winnipeg-jets-game-recap-march-30>

Connor, Jets defeat Canucks for 3rd straight win Forward has goal, assist; Vancouver fails to gain in Western wild-card race

By Darrin Bauming

WINNIPEG -- Kyle Connor had a goal and an assist, and the Winnipeg Jets came from behind to defeat the Vancouver Canucks 3-1 at Canada Life Centre on Sunday.

"I thought we took the game back over in the second and the third (periods)," Winnipeg coach Scott Arniel said. "We played a lot faster, closed a lot quicker, did a lot more of what we needed to do. That was a really good third, for sure."

Mason Appleton and Cole Perfetti also scored, and Connor Hellebuyck made 23 saves for the Jets (51-19-4), who have won three straight games and four of five. Winnipeg, which has clinched a Stanley Cup Playoff berth, increased its lead atop the NHL standings to three points on the Washington Capitals and widened its lead to six points on the Dallas Stars for first place in the Central Division and Western Conference.

"[Hellebuyck] is so calm, he's so quiet, sometimes you do forget how dominant he is to lead the League in everything he is," Appleton said. "To have the success he is having and being the MVP odds-on favorite. That's a generational player. He's our backbone, he means everything to this team. We try to put our best foot in front and do what we can in front of him. But at the end of the day we know we've got the best goaltender in the world back there."

"He can save your bacon when you're a little bit off. Obviously we try to make the game as easy as we can for him. But he's a heck of a goalie and I'm glad he's a Winnipeg Jet."

Hellebuyck (43-10-3), the defending Vezina Trophy winner voted as the best goalie in the NHL, leads the League in wins, save percentage (.925), goals-against average (2.01) and shutouts (seven).

Pius Suter scored for the Canucks (34-27-13), who had points in three straight (2-0-1) and remained six points behind the St. Louis Blues and Minnesota Wild for the second wild card into the playoffs from the West. Thatcher Demko made 24 saves.

"We battled hard," Vancouver coach Rick Tocchet said. "Really proud of the guys, I thought they played hard. Came down to kind of a goal-mouth scramble. But I thought

for the most part, that's a good hockey team that has a chance to win a Cup, and I thought we went head-to-head on them really well."

Vancouver completed its six-game road trip 2-2-2 and now will play six of its final eight regular-season games at home.

"You know the big picture, obviously," Suter said. "But you can only focus on one at a time and just battle hard and make sure the next game we get two points out there. And then go from there. You can't really think too much at this point about all the other teams. You've just got to win."

Suter made it 1-0 for the Canucks at 18:55 of the first period. Tyler Myers feathered a pass through two Jets defenders, sending Suter in alone to score from the slot.

Suter, who moved to the top line in the absence of injured forward Elias Pettersson the past four games, has eight points (two goals, six assists) during a four-game point streak.

"He's been unbelievable," Myers said of Suter. "He's stepped up in a big way for us, is playing big minutes and he's playing really good hockey for us. He's played solid all year, but obviously he's getting more opportunity now with some guys out. He's been awesome."

Connor tied it 1-1 at 9:26 of the second period, entering the zone on the rush and scoring from above the slot with a wrist shot that split the two Canucks defensemen.

"[Connor's] goal is off a quick play from [Colin Miller] behind the net. ... Quick outlet pass and then bump back to speed underneath," Perfetti said. "[The Canucks] are a desperate team. They're fighting for their lives. And we knew that was the kind of effort they were going to put forth. And we knew the kind of game they played. ... They're obviously a really good team. And our game got better as it went along, and [we] started playing more direct and faster. And I think that's when we're playing our best, is when we're playing quick and fast."

Appleton gave the Jets a 2-1 lead at 6:24 of the third period when he jammed in a rebound following a scramble in front after Demko stopped Nikolaj Ehlers' spinning shot from the left face-off circle.

"You've got a 1-1 ballgame heading into the [third]. We kind of stuck to our keys," Appleton said. "We knew that if we played a good hard 20 minutes, they were a little tired at the end of a road trip and hopefully we'd be able to capitalize and get the win. That's exactly what happened."

Perfetti then pushed it to 3-1 at 12:11, deking Canucks defenseman Derek Forbort in the left circle and scoring with a high wrist shot while falling to the ice.

“When I got around him I was like, ‘I’m going to go deke him,’” Perfetti said. “And then I felt the stick go between my legs, and I knew I was going down. So I was just like, ‘I’ve got to try and get it on net.’ And luckily, it went in.”

Appleton said, “You don’t see goals like that too often. Obviously [Perfetti] is a super-skilled player. He made a great move and the finish was just as impressive. We were all wowed and looking for him to smile there.”

NOTES: Canucks forward Jake DeBrusk had an assist to give him five points (one goal, four assists) during a five-game point streak. ... Hellebuyck extended his home point streak to a Jets/Atlanta Thrashers record 13 games (12-0-1). ... The Jets are 28-6-4 at home and have the second-most home victories in a season in franchise history (32 in 2017-18).

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/03/30/theres-no-place-like-home-6>

There’s no place like home

Jets close out four-game homestand with three straight wins

By: Ken Wiebe

When the result is in doubt, go hard to the blue paint.

Mason Appleton put the theory into practice early in the third period by driving to the net and producing the game-winner in what turned out to be a 3-1 victory over the Vancouver Canucks on Sunday at Canada Life Centre.

That allowed the Jets to close out a four-game homestand with a 3-1 record, which expanded the lead for first overall over the Washington Capitals to three points — and moved their gap over the Dallas Stars in the Western Conference to six points (though both the Capitals and Stars have a game in hand).

“It’s just a proven method that we’ve had success with all year,” said Appleton. “We know our recipe and our recipe works. It’s one of those things where you just have to keep believing in that and not try to make changes and do things differently. There’s a reason why we win and there’s a way we play and the longer we can stick to that the better our results are.”

The willingness to go to the hard areas when it’s tough to beat a goaltender is one of those important ingredients to the success that has allowed the Jets to post a record of 51-19-4 as they prepare to open a three-game road trip on Tuesday against the Los Angeles Kings.

"I did like the fact of how we scored it because that is playoff style hockey," said Jets head coach Scott Arniel. "(Lowry) was in there hacking and whacking first and then (Appleton) cleaned it up."

Let's take a closer look at this one:

THE HIGHLIGHT-REEL GOAL

Cole Perfetti delivered a dazzling goal that turned out to be the insurance marker at 12:11 of the third period.

Perfetti executed a perfect toe drag around Canucks defenceman Derek Forbort to get into Vancouver's zone alone and then he froze Canucks goalie Thatcher Demko before roofing his shot high to the blocker side.

"I was just kind of trying to bait him, I was just waiting for him to turn his feet, and was hoping he did. And then it just ended up working out nicely," said Perfetti, who is up to 16 goals this season.

"Originally, when I got around him. I was like, I'm going to go deke him. And then I felt the stick go between my legs, and I knew I was going down. So I was just like, I gotta try and get it on net. And, luckily, it went in."

Perfetti's goal brought the Jets' bench to its feet.

"Everyone kind of gives each other that 'wow' look. You don't see goals like that too often," said Appleton. "Obviously, (Perfetti) is a super skilled player. He made a great move and the finish was just as impressive."

Perfetti continues to impress with his consistent and productive play during the stretch run.

THE REVIEW

After Canucks centre Pius Suter snuck in and scored the first goal of the game with 65 seconds left in the first period, the Jets challenged the play for offside.

And while replays appeared to show that Suter had entered the zone early, there was no definitive angle to confirm that when aligned with where the puck was on the zone entry by Tyler Myers. The goal stood and the Jets ended up with a delay of game penalty.

"It's tricky because when it gets to that point. On the video that we have, it looks offside," said Arniel. "But when you touch the next frame — or go back one frame — it's amazing how close it is. Once they start looking at it that long, we figured it was going to be a goal."

“Honestly, we thought 100 per cent that it was offside. That one honestly — and you’ve seen them lots. There was a (skate) blade in the air. Where was it? Was it all the way over? Was the puck all the way over? It was tight. We would have made that call — I would have made that call again.”

THE BABY BUMP

Jets left-winger Kyle Connor continued to shine after becoming a first-time father.

After recording a pair of assists in Friday’s game, Connor scored the equalizer in the second period on Sunday.

Connor took a pass from Mark Scheifele, gathered speed through the neutral zone and then whistled a shot between a pair of Canucks blue-liners that slipped through the five-hole of Demko.

The goal was Connor’s team-leading 38th and, after adding an assist, that moved him to 90 points for just the second time of his career.

Connor is closing in on his career-high of 93 points, with eight games to go in the regular season.

THE RECOVERY

One of the unheralded plays of the game was delivered by Jets defenceman Colin Miller.

Although Canucks winger Conor Garland snuck behind him at the offensive blue-line, Miller made a smart play to knock the puck on his stick before he could sneak in and get a scoring chance.

Miller is getting into a groove down the stretch here, as he also assisted on the goal from Connor.

The veteran D-man has appeared in 56 of the 74 games so far this season and he’s been anchoring the second power-play unit in the absence of Neal Pionk, who continues to work his way back from a lower-body injury.

THE POWER-PLAY WOES

The Jets have been one of the most productive teams in the NHL on the power play this season, leading the entire league for the bulk of it.

But the issues with a two-man advantage popped up again during the first period of Sunday’s game.

With a great opportunity to open the scoring with a lengthy advantage that lasted 67 seconds, the Jets had a few opportunities but none that ended up being as dangerous as they would have liked.

“There were a couple looks, a couple that we just missed. We had some (go) wide,” said Arniel. “It was sort of a buck short and a day late.”

For a group that has enjoyed so much success at five-on-four and even six-on-five, it's strange that they haven't been more successful as of late at five-on-three.

However, the Jets have still scored four times with a two-man advantage this season.

KEY PLAY

Mason Appleton crashes the net and deposits home a rebound for the game-winner at 6:24 of the third period.

THREE STARS

Kyle Connor, Jets — Scored the tying goal and added an assist.

Mason Appleton, Jets — Provided the game-winner.

Cole Perfetti, Jets — Scored a highlight-reel insurance marker.

EXTRA, EXTRA – With a crowd of 15,225 on Sunday, the Jets recorded a fifth consecutive sellout, which was the 13th of the campaign. There are only three home games remaining in the regular season.

“You obviously want that every night. I know that sometimes you have to earn it as well,” said Arniel. “One thing about the building, whether it's at capacity or not, we've been doing a good job of entertaining them and it's been reciprocated back the other way. It is really loud when you get to ice level. And not just this four game stretch. They've been great for us all year long. Obviously, winning certainly helps that, but it's a loud building and we'd like that to continue.”

Connor Hellebuyck is up to 43 wins for the season, which leaves him six behind the single season for victories by a netminder, currently held by Martin Brodeur and Braden Holtby. Eric Comrie is expected to get at least two more starts this season, so Hellebuyck will need to run the table in order to equal the total.

The Jets went with the same lineup for the second straight game, which meant defenceman Haydn Fleury and Ville Heinola were the healthy scratches.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/03/30/with-a-little-help-from-his-friends-2>

With a little help from his friends

Niederreiter had personal cheering section this week

By: Mike McIntyre

How far would your best buddies be willing to travel to watch you work?

If the answer is anything less than 7,000 kilometres, Jets forward Nino Niederreiter has you beat. The veteran forward had his own personal cheering section at Canada Life Centre this week as a group of long-time friends from Switzerland made the lengthy trek to Winnipeg to take in a four-game homestand.

“It was awesome. A lot of fun with the games, and we’ve had a lot of fun getting together with Nino,” the unofficial ringleader of the group, Gian Gilli, told the Free Press on Sunday afternoon during the first intermission of an eventual 3-1 victory over the Vancouver Canucks.

Gilli and the others — Tom Eichholzer, Reto Rietberger, Andrea Basig and Sven Probst — weren’t hard to find if you attended any of the games at the downtown rink. They were all wearing bright red Switzerland jerseys with Niederreiter’s name and number on the back and quickly became fan favourites.

Whether it was dancing during TV timeouts or repeatedly stopping to chat and posing for pictures with other spectators, the group certainly took the city by storm.

“It was great to see the people here. So friendly. A very warm welcome,” said Rietberger.

Their journey began by witnessing a 5-3 loss against the Buffalo Sabres, but that was followed by three straight victories over the Washington Capitals, New Jersey Devils and Vancouver Canucks.

It also timed out well in that they got to see other Swiss stars such as Nico Hischier and Timo Meier of the Devils, and Pius Suter of the Canucks who scored the lone goal for the visitors on Sunday.

But the main attraction was Niederreiter, who goes all the way back to childhood with some of them.

“He’s a really humble guy. He’s the same guy since he’s grown up. He knows where he’s from,” said Basig, who had Niederreiter as the best man at his wedding in 2016.

“His feet are down to Earth. Always,” added Eichholzer.

The group got the full Winnipeg experience. There was some terrific spring weather early last week followed by a big snowstorm that had a familiar feeling.

“Lots of snow. Just like in Switzerland,” said Eichholzer.

They joined Niederreiter for a crash course in curling during an off-day last Wednesday out in St. Adolphe — a sport they knew well from having watched plenty of classic games against Canada over the years but hadn’t got down in the hack for.

There were dinners and card games with Niederreiter, too, plus a relaxing visit to Thermea.

“We came 7,000 kilometres here and figured if we were going to come this far, we wanted to see a lot,” said Gilli, who has served as the Chief of Mission of the Swiss Olympic Team and got to know Niederreiter years ago while organizing the World Championships.

“He’s our famous player, the captain of the national team and we have such a good connection with him.”

Rietberger, Basig and Probst have all played hockey with Niederreiter earlier in their lives and love seeing him enjoy the success that he has, now in his 14th pro season.

“Nino is a great friend. He does amazing work. One of our best hockey players,” said Probst.

They also got a chuckle out of how the Jets game-day operations crew would often show Niederreiter’s reaction to their antics during games this past week.

“It was funny to watch Nino how he was shaking his head,” said Rietberger. “When we checked the game schedule and saw at the end of the season they had four games in a row (at home), it was a pretty good week to come.”

Niederreiter said he was honoured his friends would come so far to show their support — a tradition that actually dates back to previous teams he’s played on in Nashville, Minnesota and Carolina.

“It speaks to how close of a group we are,” he said.

Niederreiter rewarded them with a goal against Buffalo and an assist against Washington while also showing off the strong two-way play which makes him such a valuable member of the Jets.

After coming over in a 2022 trade from the Nashville Predators, Niederreiter signed a three-year contract extension last season to remain in Winnipeg. The 32-year-old from Chur has 33 points (15G, 18A) in 74 games this year and is now just 39 away from hitting 1,000 for his career.

Niederreiter’s pals were to fly home Monday but are already talking about a return visit down the road. Perhaps for a playoff game at some point?

“We want the Jets to win the Stanley Cup,” said Gilli, who certainly likes their chances following a week-long, up-close viewing.

“They’re a tough team, a very good team. Unbelievable goaltender. Lots of great players. They have to stick together. It’s going to be tough.”

One of the loudest roars from the sold-out crowd Sunday afternoon came when the five men held out signs which initially read “Thank You Winnipeg Jets For Having Us” — then were flipped to reveal another sentence.

“Jets Go For The Cup.”

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/03/30/jets-mailbag-pondering-playoffs-ice-time-beating-bottom-feeders>

Jets mailbag: Pondering playoffs, ice time, beating bottom feeders

By: Ken Wiebe and Mike McIntyre

We are now less than three weeks away from the start of the NHL playoffs and the pursuit of Lord Stanley is on the minds of many hockey fans.

With the Winnipeg Jets sitting on top of the Central Division and Western Conference, it’s not surprising that our monthly mailbag was filled with questions about what could be around the corner.

From injuries, callups and lineup deployment to ideal matchups, motivation and ghosts of the past, Free Press hockey writers Ken Wiebe and Mike McIntyre are here to weigh in.

1. Who is the best 1st round playoff matchup for the Jets? Who is the worst 1st round playoff matchup for the Jets? CRAIG

WIEBE: As Jets head coach Scott Arniel said last week, this isn’t going to be a pick-your-poison situation for his team. With eight games remaining after Sunday, the Dallas Stars remain hot on the Jets trail, so a strong start will be required for the Jets to lock down the Central Division title and for them to keep an upper hand over the Washington Capitals in the chase for the Presidents’ Trophy.

Finishing second in the Central for either the Jets or Stars isn’t the end of the world and the fact remains, all three of those teams are bona fide Stanley Cup contenders, so beating one or both of those teams is likely a requirement, just to advance to the Western Conference final and remain eight wins away from the ultimate goal for all of them.

Would it be beneficial for the Jets to avoid the Colorado Avalanche in the opening round? Of course, but the St. Louis Blues are the hottest team in the NHL and wouldn’t be an easy out either. Same goes for the Minnesota Wild, who have battled adversity all season long and won’t seem to go away.

And if either the Vancouver Canucks or the Calgary Flames find a way to leapfrog their way into the second wild card, it will mean they go on a heater to end the season. So, they'll be playoff ready regardless.

The easiest way to answer the initial question is that the best first round playoff matchup for the Jets will be the second wild card team, no matter who that team might be. The worst has to be the Avalanche, though having to stare down the demon from last spring right out of the gate would represent an incredible opportunity for a Jets team that has high hopes and will need to beat four excellent teams to reach the top of the mountain.

2. Do you think the coach or captain could draw on their postseason history and criticism that the Jets are not built for the playoffs to inspire a sense of collective team pride for a winning run this year? RODGER

MCINTYRE: Motivation comes in many forms and there's no question this group is well aware of the ghosts of their playoff past and the perception out there that they are doomed to fail once again.

It's something they began talking about in training camp and I think it's a big reason the regular season has included far more peaks than valleys, and those swoons have been rather short-lived. They haven't allowed things to spiral out of control with the idea of getting themselves battle-ready for the big stage this spring.

Talk is ultimately cheap and actions will tell the tale, but no doubt their history has actually helped the cause, at least so far.

3. What are the Jets chances for a long playoff run if Gabe Vilardi is out until next year? COLIN

WIEBE: First and foremost, there's no information available right now that suggests Vilardi's upper-body injury is going to keep him out for the rest of the regular season and the playoffs. Although the timing for Vilardi was unfortunate, given how well he has played this season, a week-to-week initial assessment from Jets head coach Scott Arniel was another way of saying additional time was required to get a better idea of the timeline. That's not to suggest the injury isn't serious, but it doesn't necessarily mean that it's going to be long-term either.

Vilardi was injured on his final shift against the Buffalo Sabres last Sunday. A review of the tape shows two potential areas where the injury occurred. Vilardi was checked into the boards in the offensive zone by Buffalo Sabres D-man Mattias Samuelsson, then he was dumped to the ice in front of the net by Alex Tuch — and it appeared he landed on his back during the awkward fall.

Without knowing more about the nature of the injury or the severity, it's difficult to speculate when Vilardi could be back, but it didn't look like a season-ender to me.

Vilardi's injury history makes it natural for fans to be concerned with him back on the shelf for the time being, but it will be surprising to me if the top-line winger isn't back for the start of the Stanley Cup playoffs.

4. If the Jets get bounced in round one or two and considering expectations, Chevy might want to take the big swing we had expected/hoped for. Does that mean Nikolaj Ehlers will probably be the bait alone or in a package? I hope not. As a follow up, could you try to make us understand why he hasn't been re-signed yet. Chatter has been for a while now to keep expectations low because he probably will be traded. I just don't get it. JOHNNY

MCINTYRE: I can't predict how the Ehlers saga ultimately ends, but I do suspect what occurs this spring will ultimately form part of the story. A deep playoff run compared to yet another early exit would very much change the narrative and perspective from parties.

In that sense, stay tuned.

I think Ehlers has personally wanted to shelve all talk to focus on this year, and it would appear to be a good personal decision given that he's on pace to have his best offensive campaign yet. I wouldn't take a lack of movement to be indicative one way or another on how this plays out.

Ehlers has certainly earned the right to test the market and see what his value might be. But I also believe he enjoys being a member of the Jets and would love nothing more right now than to win a championship with his current club.

5. Who do you see the Jets call up, if anyone, from the Manitoba Moose for the playoffs? MATT

WIEBE: Given the fact the Jets are carrying a 25-man roster these days (and with 23 healthy bodies), the need for reinforcements can likely wait until the end of the American Hockey League season, which is right around the end of the NHL season.

The taxi squad figures to include Dylan Coghlan and Elias Salomonsson on defence. Up front, you can expect Brad Lambert and Dominic Toninato to be recalled. After that, Jaret Anderson-Dolan is having a stronger second half after a tough start. Parker Ford would be near the top of the list if he wasn't dealing with a longer-term injury. Same goes for Nikita Chibrikov if he wasn't out for the season. Others with NHL experience, like Mason Shaw or Axel Jonsson-Fjallby, could be on the radar but those are my initial thoughts.

6. Do you think Scott Arniel will play Ville Heinola at all to get him some ice or is he done with the Jets? MARK

MCINTYRE: At this point, Heinola would appear to be ninth on the the depth chart when everyone is healthy. He might actually be 10th, with Dylan Coghlan (currently tearing it up with the Manitoba Moose) ahead of him.

So, in a nutshell, I'd be surprised if we see much more of Heinola this year. Perhaps he gets a game or two down the stretch if the Jets can sew up the division title and some regulars are rested. Otherwise, his only way in would appear to be a string of injuries beyond the current one to Neal Pionk.

As for the future, Heinola has one more year remaining on his contract at US\$800,000 before he'd be a restricted free agent next year. I don't believe the team is actively looking to trade him, but if the right offer or package were to come along, it might ultimately be best for everyone.

Otherwise, I guess the idea will be to try again next fall to see if he can earn a regular spot in the lineup.

7. Why do you think Morgan Barron never plays up in the Jets' lineup? He is big, smart, fast and physical yet when injury requires someone to step in on a different line (for example, Alex Iafallo against the Capitals) it is never him. Do I like Iaffalo as a player? Yes, I do but I don't get why it's always him. Maybe a bit more of a "get it off my chest" kind of thing, but if you have some insight would love to hear it. KERRY

8. Watching Barron's almost seamless move to centre from wing on the fourth line and the success he is having suggests a huge upside that Jets should nurture. With a little maturity, could the coveted second line centre be hiding in plain sight in the form of Barron? RODGER

WIEBE: This falls into a two-for-one deal and while the questions focus on different subjects, they are linked to a certain degree.

First of all, to suggest Barron never plays up in the lineup is not accurate. There was a time not long ago when Barron was a regular on a line with Adam Lowry and Mason Appleton. Now, this changed when Nino Niederreiter became a regular on that line, bumping Barron down to the fourth line with the majority of the time. There are even times in game, often coming out of a Jets' power play, when Barron takes the occasional shift alongside Lowry and Appleton — so that eliminates the "never" portion of the question.

I understand you were probably doing it for effect and your point is well taken. The style Barron plays would be conducive to future promotions. Even with his goal-scoring down a bit from the 11 he scored last season to six through 65 games this season, I've said before that he has the potential to be in the range of 15 at some point down the road.

During his time with the Los Angeles Kings, Iafallo often played alongside Anze Kopitar in a top-six role and he's been in double digits in goals in seven consecutive seasons

(while scoring nine as a rookie), so the coaching staff is going with someone who has done it before over someone who may do it down the road. Lafallo has shown well in an expanded role when given the opportunity in the past and he's off to a solid start after this latest promotion.

As it pertains to future bump-ups in the depth chart, Barron is someone who should be given strong consideration. Could that mean a future role as a 2C? That would be asking a lot at this stage of his career. But shifting Barron to the middle was a smart move by the Jets coaching staff and it's one that should pay dividends in both the short and long term. The power forward game that he plays allows him to be effective either on the wall or down the middle.

How high Barron moves up the depth chart in the future won't be known for some time and will be related to his continued development. I don't see his ceiling as a fourth-line player though — and it will be interesting to see where he eventually lands.

9. Why do the Jets have so much difficulty beating the bottom feeders? ERNIE

10. What percentage of Jets losses this year are to teams below the playoff cutoff line? It seems they do better against good teams. Am I right? If so, why does it seem they either lose or barely beat the weakest teams? RAYMOND

MCINTYRE: Here are the cold, hard facts: the Jets have played 35 games so far this year against the other 15 teams currently holding down a playoff spot (as of Saturday morning). Winnipeg's record in that span is 23-10-2, which gives them a points percentage of .685. That's pretty good, I'd say.

The Jets have played 38 games against the 16 teams who are currently on the outside looking in. Their record in that span is 27-9-2, which gives them a points percentage of .737. That's really good, I'd say.

I think this is a classic example of perception not really meeting reality. Obviously a loss to a team like Buffalo last Sunday leaves a sour taste in the mouth, but the Jets do have a better record against non-playoff teams (which I'd expect to be the case, given the quality of competition).

11. How do you see Jakob Chychrun's extension with the Capitals forecasting a potential Pionk deal, and does this type of price tag have the Jets considering other options there? NIK

WIEBE: With the Capitals in Winnipeg on Tuesday, the organization announced Chychrun had signed an eight-year extension worth \$72 million (\$9 million AAV) that kicks in next season. There are similarities and differences when it comes to Chychrun and Pionk, but it's fair to wonder if this will be held up as a comparable if Pionk gets to market on July 1 as a pending unrestricted free agent (which Chychrun would have been if he hadn't been extended).

Let's start with age. Chychrun turns 27 on Monday, while Pionk turns 30 during the offseason. So the age gap must be considered when looking at the term for Pionk. That's not to say he can't get eight years from the Jets, but if they went seven with Mark Scheifele and Connor Hellebuyck, it seems unlikely that the Jets would go with the maximum term for Pionk.

It's also important to remember the Jets are the only team that can offer Pionk the maximum term, so on the open market he could only get seven years.

This season, Chychrun has 18 goals and 44 points compared to nine goals and 36 points for Pionk, who remains week-to-week with a lower-body injury. During their careers, Pionk has played 533 games and Chychrun is set to play his 535th game on Sunday. Chychrun has a decided edge in goals (94 to 44) but the points are similar (260 to 252 for Chychrun).

Pionk plays a more physical game despite Chychrun having an edge in size and stature. The Jets D-man also has a 22-9 edge in playoff games. Chychrun is finishing off a deal with an AAV of \$4.6 million while Pionk is wrapping up a deal that has an AAV of \$5.875 million.

It's hard to envision Pionk's next deal reaching \$9 million, but with the salary cap set to rise significantly during the next three seasons, right-handed shooting blue-liners will be getting paid at a premium. So, you can count on Pionk getting a raise, even if how big that could be remains a bit unclear. Pionk has expressed his desire to stick around and I suspect both sides will work hard to find a way to keep him in the fold. When looking at the right side of the depth chart, the Jets have Dylan DeMelo and Luke Schenn under contract for next season, with Salomonsson expected to push for NHL duty.

12. With the cap going up, what does this do to small market teams like the Jets? The only direct income would be from ticket sales so there must be other sources. So they can spend up to the increasing cap but how can it be paid for? JOHNNY

MCINTYRE: The Jets have spent to, at or near the cap in recent years, and general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff has indicated he expects that to continue as long as this window of competition remains open, which I believe ties in directly with the contract extensions handed out to Connor Hellebuyck and Mark Scheifele. There's a belief they owe it to those players and other core members to build the best possible product around them.

Is that going to be challenging with a rapidly rising cap? Certainly, especially with the state of the Canadian dollar (all players are paid in American money) and global and economic uncertainty right now.

There are other revenue streams including broadcast rights fees, expansion fees — the NHL is going to add at least two more teams eventually, maybe four — and even a form of revenue sharing between clubs.

However, this hammers home why True North has repeatedly stated it needs to firm up its season ticket base, especially in terms of corporate support, so it can continue to spend freely with the idea of one day bringing a Stanley Cup to Winnipeg.

Fortunately, attendance is up nearly 1,000 fans per game this year, no doubt aided by the team's strong play. There's still work to be done in that department, but the trend is going in the right direction.

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/perfetti-scores-a-pretty-goal-as-jets-defeat-canucks-3-1>

Perfetti scores a pretty goal as Jets defeat Canucks 3-1

By Gordon Anderson

Cole Perfetti brought the sellout crowd to its feet with a highlight-reel goal as the Jets beat the Vancouver Canucks 3-1 on Sunday afternoon.

After Mason Appleton gave the Jets a 2-1 lead at 6:24 of the third period, Perfetti turned Vancouver defenceman Derek Forbort into a human pretzel grasping at shadows with a slick outside-to-inside move, before beating Thatcher Demko over the right shoulder at 12:11.

Demko picked up the loss, stopping 24 of 27 shots.

"When I got around Forbort. I was like, I'm going to go and deke Demko, and then I felt (Forbort's) stick go between my legs, and I knew I was going down," Perfetti said. "So, I was just like, I have got to try and get it on net. And luckily, it went in."

"Well, pretty impressive," Jets head coach Scott Arniel said of the goal. "I'm not sure that defenceman was ready or expecting him to do that. He made a great move, but then, that was a heck of a shot."

The diminutive winger says his growing confidence allows him to believe plays like that are well within his grasp.

"It's never worked out to be a goal, but I've got around the defender a couple times, but, yeah, it's just kind of more confidence and just experience of understanding when you know the timing of everything, and you know it's not a play that you're going to make most of the time, but once in a while, it's nice to do that," Perfetti said.

The goal was Perfetti's 16th of the season. The Whitby, Ont., native is three goals shy of his career high. He sniped 19 goals in 71 games last season.

"You don't see goals like that too often," Appleton said. "Fetts is a super skilled player. He made a great move, and the finish was just as impressive. We were all wowed and looking for him to smile there."

Appleton's winner brings his goal total into double digits with 10. The marker was his third game-winning goal of the season.

The #22 in Jets colours is the 12th skater to hit double digits in goals. Brandon Tanev is included in the overall total, but nine of his goals came with the Kraken.

Neal Pionk needs one to reach the double-digit plateau. Pionk's career high is 10 goals, set during the 2022-23 season. Last year, the Jets had 13 players reach the 10 goals or more plateau.

Kyle Connor also scored for the Jets (51-19-4). Connor also picked up an assist and is two points away from 90.

The Jets improved their record to 11-6-2 when tied after 40 minutes.

The Capitals lost 8-5 to the Buffalo Sabres on Sunday afternoon. Winnipeg increased its lead to three points over the Caps in the pursuit for the Presidents' Trophy, heading into league action on Monday.

Jets goaltender Connor Hellebuyck stopped 23 of 24 shots for the victory.

Pius Suter scored for the Canucks (34-27-13). The Canucks are 19-14-6 on the road.

The Jets beat the Canucks 6-1 on Jan. 14. Vancouver responded and earned a 6-2 home victory on March 18.

The Jets squandered a five-on-three early in the first period when Aatu Raty and Teddy Blueger took consecutive minors 53 seconds apart. The Jets power play, ranked second in the NHL with a 29.5 per cent conversion rate, has fallen on hard times lately.

"There were a couple looks," Arniel said of the two-man advantage. "There was a couple that we just missed. We had some wide. That seam play to Scheifele, it was a hot one. Lafallo had a great look. Ehlers had a good chance. We never got the shots off. It was sort of a buck short and a day late."

Since March 9 against the Hurricanes, the power play has converted three times on 26 occasions.

The Jets went 0-4 on the power play. The Canucks whiffed on three power-play chances.

The Jets open a three-game road trip, starting Tuesday evening in Los Angeles. The Jets are in Las Vegas on Thursday night and Salt Lake City on Saturday evening.

Suter beat Hellebuyck to the blocker side for his 22nd goal of the season at 18:55 of the first period, giving the visitors a 1-0 lead. The Jets challenged for offside at the blue line but the call on the ice was allowed to stand.

The Jets evened the game at 9:26 of the second when Connor's shot from the slot snuck between the legs of Demko for his 38th goal. Connor scored 38 goals in the 2019-20 season. His career high is 47 goals, set during the 2021-22 season.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/are-the-canucks-playoff-hopes-all-but-over~3107050>

Are the Canucks' playoff hopes all but over? (VIDEO)

After another tough loss for the Canucks with just eight games left and still chasing a wild card spot, is Vancouver's playoff hopes all but over? Do the Jets match up better with the Blues or the Wild in a first round playoff series? TSN Hockey analyst Martin Biron joins SportsCentre to discuss.

CTV Winnipeg

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/winnipeg/video/2025/03/31/conversation-on-winnipeg-jets-playoff-tickets/>

Conversation on Winnipeg Jets playoff tickets (VIDEO)

Rob MULLOWNEY, Sr. VP Ticket Sales & Service from True North Sports & Entertainment joins us to discuss how fans can get Winnipeg Jets playoff tickets.

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11106038/analysis-winnipeg-jets-late-season/>

ANALYSIS: Final stretch of Jets' season could hinge on next two games

By Kelly Moore Global News

ANALYSIS: Final stretch of Jets' season could hinge on next two games - [imageView image in full screen](#)

As good as the Winnipeg Jets have been, winning nine of 12 games to close out March, everything the team has fought for over the first six months of the schedule could come down to the next two games.

It would be somewhat of a misrepresentation to say Winnipeg is currently clinging to top spot in the Central Division — but a six-point lead over Dallas could evaporate rather quickly this week. And then a narrative of fighting for their first-place lives would be accurate.

The white hot Stars are playing Seattle, Nashville, Pittsburgh, and struggling Minnesota over the next seven nights. In contrast, the Jets will be going into two of the most difficult buildings in the NHL to take on a pair of opponents they have yet to beat this season.

The LA Kings smothered the Jets to the tune of a season-low 14 shots back in late November at CryptoDot.Com Arena. Winnipeg didn't muster up a whole lot more offence six weeks later at Canada Centre, with just 19 shots in a 2-1 overtime loss.

The Jets have also dropped eight straight regular season decisions to the Vegas Golden Knights.

So Tinseltown and the Strip are where the blacktop ends and the playoff-style gravel road begins, figuratively speaking.

Tuesday and Thursday night are going to determine just how battle-tested the Winnipeg Jets are.

And as much as Scott Arniel has tried to limit Connor Hellebuyck to no more than four consecutive starts this season, circumstances would dictate the need to be going with your very best until it's "mission accomplished."

For everything Winnipeg has achieved to date... April is finally here. A time of reckoning.

These final two-and-a-half weeks of the season will be the perfect platform for the Jets to re-enforce their status as a legitimate Stanley Cup contender.

Sporsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/how-cole-perfetti-evolved-into-difference-maker-for-jets/>

How Cole Perfetti evolved into difference-maker for Jets

By Jacob Stoller

WINNIPEG — Cole Perfetti has arrived.

He's no longer a streaky player that scores in bunches and then fades away. He's not a passenger in the top six, nor is he simply a power-play merchant.

Perfetti has evolved into a legitimate top-six forward who can be a difference-maker.

And nothing encapsulates Perfetti's progression more than his goal on Sunday afternoon, which cemented the Winnipeg Jets' 3-1 victory over the Vancouver Canucks.

With less than eight minutes remaining in the third period, Perfetti deked out Derek Forbort, slipping the puck through the legs of the Canucks defender, before roofing the puck top corner past goalie Thatcher Demko while falling to the ice.

"Everyone kind of gives each other that 'wow' look," Mason Appleton said. "You don't see goals like that too often."

A few weeks ago, Perfetti might not have attempted such a move in a one-on-one situation. However, Perfetti's confidence has been compounding over the last two months, with the 2020 first-round pick recording nine goals and 21 points over his last 25 games.

"When the confidence isn't there, you're a little more hesitant and a little slower with the decision making because you don't want to make a mistake," Perfetti told Sportsnet.ca on Friday morning.

The 23-year-old's recent surge began with a hat trick against Utah on Jan. 24. While Perfetti rode a 14-game goal drought into the matchup, he told reporters beforehand that he believed he was taking positive strides and striving to become a "prick" to play against.

But make no mistake — the five-foot-11 forward wasn't announcing that he was shapeshifting from a playmaker to a grinder.

"It kind of got (interpreted) further than what I intended," Perfetti clarified. "It was more so about trying to be hard to play against when I'm on the ice. It's hard, I'm a smaller guy and I've got to be smart with how I use my body and stick. I have to use every bit of leverage that I can get."

A clear sign of his improvement is his increased effectiveness in winning puck battles along the boards. He's not shying away from the dirty areas of the ice.

"He used to do a lot of cutbacks and he used to get hammered into the walls," head coach Scott Arniel said Friday morning.

Lately, he's been embracing contact to make plays.

"A lot of the game is spent on the wall. Guys in this league are so good at it that it looks easy but really, it's a hard thing to do and a big part of the game," Perfetti said.

"In junior and growing up, you could go into a puck battle with one hand and fish the puck out. Guys are stronger (in the NHL). They've got better positioning, they're better with their sticks. You've got to go into every puck battle with the understanding that it's a big deal."

Perfetti is also attacking the net more frequently.

Over this 25-game stretch, Perfetti has recorded 9.73 five-on-five scoring chances per 60 minutes, which places him in the 96th percentile across the league.

"The other night against Washington, twice he drove it inside to the crease to the net-front area," Arniel said. "To me, that's a player that's changed his game."

And that doesn't happen overnight.

It's a byproduct of a player learning — the hard way — what happens when you rely solely on your skillset. At this time last year, Perfetti was an occasional healthy scratch, having been replaced in the top six by Sean Monahan and Tyler Toffoli. He watched four of the team's five playoff games from the press box.

"When you come into the league, very few guys come in and just produce right away," teammate Vladislav Namestnikov told Sportsnet.ca on Friday.

"You have to find yourself and as time goes on you learn. You learn things like how sometimes you don't need to make that extra play, you can just chip it out. That's all part of maturing. The most important thing for him is that he now knows what he needs to do to help (our team) win games."

Better yet, Perfetti knows how to ensure his production doesn't taper off.

"I think what we've talked about is the mental part of it," Arniel said Sunday. "He recognizes that he's going to have highs and lows, he's going to have slumps, he's going to be in situations where he's going to have a bad game or a bad shift or a bad period. He's been able to get himself out of it this year faster than he's ever been able to."

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/positive-results-elude-canucks-despite-hard-working-road-trip/>

Positive results elude Canucks despite hard-working road trip

By Iain MacIntyre

By any measure other than the National Hockey League playoff race, this was a solid road trip for the Vancouver Canucks.

Undermanned and outgunned in most games, and with a couple of uncharacteristically weak goaltending performances by Kevin Lankinen, the Canucks managed to score 21 times in six games against mostly desperate teams and go 2-2-2 on a difficult trip in which Vancouver's record did not reflect the grit with which it played.

If the team played with this level of engagement, effort and offensive resourcefulness over the previous five months, these six games at the start of spring wouldn't feel like a failed rescue mission.

But "if" is the universal lament in professional sports (and life) and at the end of March the only measure that really matters for a hockey team is its playoff standing. And Sunday's 3-1 loss to the NHL-leading Winnipeg Jets left the Canucks six points adrift of the final two wild-card spots with just eight games remaining.

If it isn't hopeless, then hopeless is banging at the front door as the Canucks return to Vancouver to open a three-game homestand Wednesday against the Seattle Kraken at Rogers Arena.

As impressive as their effort was on Sunday at the end of an 11-day final exam, the Canucks failed to seize the opportunity in front of them as the Jets scored the only two goals of the third period.

After getting Pius Suter's 22nd goal of the season to lead 1-0 — and still tied going into the final period after Kyle Connor fooled goalie Thatcher Demko with a shot between his pads — the game was still there for the Canucks with 20 minutes to play.

But Mason Appleton had body position on Quinn Hughes and pushed in a rebound for the Jets at 6:24 before Cole Perfetti dismantled Derek Forbort one-on-one and shot over Demko's shoulder at 12:11.

The Canucks rallied six-on-five to score in the final minute of regulation in St. Louis and New Jersey earlier in their trip, but the two-goal deficit in Game 6 in Winnipeg looked to be too much as soon as Perfetti scored. Vancouver's notable six-on-five achievement on Sunday was getting caught with seven skaters on the ice with 1:20 remaining.

After that, coach Rick Tocchet chose not to pull Demko again so his team could skate five-on-five with an empty net, and likely give Winnipeg another goal that would count against Vancouver's penalty killers.

"Really proud of the guys," Tocchet told reporters after the game. "I thought that they played hard. Came down to, you know, kind of a goalmouth scramble (on Appleton's winning goal). That's a good hockey team that has a chance to win a Cup, but I thought

we went head-to-head really well. I thought the guys played really hard tonight. Really proud of them.”

Winnipeg goalie Connor Hellebuyck, a lock for the Vezina Trophy and candidate for the Hart, stopped 23 of 24 Canuck shots after getting ventilated during a 6-2 loss in Vancouver two weeks ago.

That highlight win launched the Canucks on their trip, and the team still had momentum even after losing 4-3 in overtime to St. Louis on March 20 dropped Vancouver a point behind the Blues for the final playoff spot in the Western Conference.

But the Blues have won five more games since then — and nine straight overall. St. Louis may never lose again, which is why the Minnesota Wild look like the more catchable team however remote the chances of the Canucks (or anyone) making up a six-point deficit in two weeks.

Vancouver may have to win out, and even then it might not be enough.

The Canucks followed the OTL in St. Louis with one of the most disappointing results of their season, somehow blundering their way to a 5-3 loss to the New York Rangers despite outshooting the home team 39-12.

Resiliently, the Canucks bounced back to beat the New Jersey Devils (4-3 in a shootout) and New York Islanders 5-2 before collecting just one of the final four points available in Columbus and Winnipeg. The Canucks’ failure to hold a two-goal, third-period lead against the Blue Jackets, who won 7-6 in a shootout on Friday, may haunt them for a while.

The Canucks have scored first in 40 of 74 games, but have won just over half of them (22-10-8).

By far the most impressive aspect of the trip was the way the Canucks’ depleted group of forwards manufactured goals.

Missing their top two centres Elias Pettersson and Filip Chytil, as well as in-form winger Nils Hoglander, Suter and Kiefer Sherwood further elevated what were already breakthrough seasons for them. A pending unrestricted free agent, Suter had eight points in the six road games, and Sherwood seven.

Top wingers Brock Boeser and Jake DeBrusk kept contributing with five points apiece, minor-league call-up Aatu Raty scored three times in four games, top prospect Jonathan Lekkerimäki had a tying goal and the shootout winner in New Jersey, and big defencemen Forbort and Tyler Myers stepped up at times with key offensive plays.

Overall, the last four games (2-1-1, 15 goals) were an interesting test case for life without Elias Pettersson, whose absence could become permanent if Canuck

management decides after the season that the key to resetting this team and its leadership is trading Pettersson before the no-move clause on his \$92.8-million-US contract activates on July 1.

“Guys worked really hard this road trip and we've got to continue that mindset,” Myers told reporters in Winnipeg. “We can't get discouraged or get negative. We're going back home to get some momentum in our own building and we've just got to keep pushing. You never know what can happen and we've just got to come together and focus on one game at a time.”

“You can only focus on one at a time and just battle hard and make sure the next game we get two points out there,” Suter said. “And then go from there. You can't really think too much at this point about all the other teams. You've just got to win.”

Canadian Press

<https://www.chrisd.ca/2025/03/30/winnipeg-jets-vancouver-canucks-game-recap/>

Perfetti Adds the Wow to Winnipeg Jets' 3-1 Win Over Canucks

By Judy Owen, The Canadian Press

Cole Perfetti got rewarded for not giving up.

Perfetti's third-period goal in a 3-1 Winnipeg Jets' victory over the Vancouver Canucks on Sunday had the sellout crowd cheering and his teammates impressed.

The 23-year-old product of Whitby, Ont., moved the puck through defenceman Derek Forbort's legs and then fired a wrist shot past Vancouver goalie Thatcher Demko.

“I've tried it a couple times here and there. It's never worked out to be a goal, but I've got around the guy a couple times,” said Perfetti, who recorded his 16th goal of the season.

“But, yeah, it's just kind of more confidence and just experience of understanding when you know the timing of everything. ... Not a play that you're going to make most of the time, but once in a while it's nice to do that.”

Kyle Connor had a goal and an assist and Mason Appleton also scored in the team's third consecutive victory.

“I think everyone kind of gives each other that wow look,” Appleton said of the players' reaction to Perfetti's goal.

“You don’t see goals like that too often. Obviously, ‘Fetts’ is a super-skilled player. He made a great move and the finish was just as impressive. We were all wowed and looking for him to smile there.”

The Jets gained some valuable space between their nearest competitor in the NHL standings.

Winnipeg’s 106 points (51-19-4) leads the Western Conference and Central Division, six points ahead of idle Dallas. The Stars have a game in hand.

The Jets also remain first overall in the league after Washington (103 points) lost 8-5 to the Buffalo Sabres on Sunday. The Capitals have a game in hand.

Connor Hellebuyck made 23 saves for the Jets in front of a fifth straight sellout crowd of 15,225 at Canada Life Centre.

Pius Suter scored his 22nd of the season for the Canucks (34-27-13) and Thatcher Demko stopped 24 shots as the team ended its six-game road trip with a 2-2-2 record.

Vancouver is still fighting for the second wild-card spot in the conference, six points back of both the Minnesota Wild and surging St. Louis Blues, who didn’t play Sunday. The Canucks and Wild each have a game in hand on the Blues.

“You know the big picture, obviously,” Suter said. “But you can only focus on one game at a time and just battle hard and make sure the next game we get two points out there, and then go from there.

“You can’t really think too much at this point about all the other teams. You’ve just got to win.”

Suter scored from the slot with 1:05 remaining in the opening period, a goal upheld after a Winnipeg challenge for offside.

Canucks head coach Rick Tocchet praised his players for their effort.

“I thought they played hard,” he said. “Came down to kind of a goalmouth scramble.

“But I thought for the most part — that’s a good hockey team that has a chance to win a (Stanley) Cup, and I thought we went head-to-head with them really well.”

Connor tied it at 9:26 of the second to record his team-leading 38th goal of the season. He’s reached 90 points for the second time in his career, three points off his career-best.

After Appleton scored the 2-1 goal at 6:24 of the third, fourth-year winger Perfetti dazzled with his marker just under six minutes later.

“Pretty impressive,” Jets head coach Scott Arniel said of Perfetti’s goal. “I’m not sure that defenceman was ready or expecting him to do that. He makes a great move, but then, that was a heck of a shot.”

Winnipeg ended its four-game homestand going 3-1-0 and head out for a three-game road trip, starting Tuesday against the Los Angeles King. The Canucks host the Seattle Kraken on Wednesday.

Vancouver Province

<https://theprovince.com/sports/hockey/nhl/vancouver-canucks/jets-3-canucks-1-connor-hellebuyck-outduels-thatcher-demko-playoff-chase>

Jets 3, Canucks 1: Connor Hellebuyck rebounds to outduel Thatcher Demko in pivotal tilt

By Ben Kuzma

Thatcher Demko is always up for a big challenge.

The Vancouver Canucks starter has had his moments against the Winnipeg Jets and needed a memorable one Sunday to keep his club in perilous pursuit of the final Western Conference wild-card playoff position.

If that wasn’t enough of a test in a Sunday road matinee to end a six-game, 11-day grind, he had to outduel reigning Vezina Trophy winner Connor Hellebuyck.

The workhorse Jets starter is favoured to double up on the award because he leads all goaltending statistics and was motivated to rebound from allowing six goals on 22 shots in a 6-2 drubbing on March 18 at Rogers Arena.

Both goalies came to play Sunday and Demko delivered in a save-for-save showdown before the Jets snapped a 1-1 deadlock and prevailed 3-1. The issue was settled in the third period when Mason Appleton got to the net to jam home a rebound at 6:24. Teddy Blueger was then foiled on a 2-on-1 break before a pretty play by Cole Perfetti put the game away.

“We battled hard,” said Canucks head coach Rick Tocchet. “I’m really proud of the guys. It came down to a goal-mouth scramble. That (Jets) is a good team and has a chance to win the Cup, and we went at them pretty well. We just have to worry about the next game and it just seems like we’ve had a lot of these.

“Lately, we’ve been coming up with some nice moments but today we just came out on the wrong side. I liked our game and we had some chances, but they get a puck on net and outmuscle us and get that (winning) goal.”

Perfetti then put the puck between the skates of Derek Forbort, and while falling forward, put his shot over Demko's shoulder.

The result keeps the Canucks at 81 points and six shy of catching the red-shot St. Louis Blues, who have won nine straight. The Canucks do have a game in hand but are only a point up on the Calgary Flames. They have two games in hand on Vancouver and three on St. Louis.

Here's what we learned as Pius Suter was the lone Canucks goal scorer, while Kyle Connor also scored for the Jets, who had a 27-24 shot advantage:

Demko's dancing not enough

The final period started with a Demko dance in the crease to keep it close.

A point shot deflected off the stick of Nino Niederreiter and down toward the net. It went off the goalie's deflector, pad and skate but stayed out of the net. Demko then did some more timely acrobatics to keep an Alex Lafallo centring pass from a wide angle from slipping between his legs and crossing the goal line.

A challenge by the Jets on the play was unsuccessful.

"We battled right to the end and couple of unfortunate breaks in the third," said defenceman Tyler Myers. "And then it's hard to come back because that team defends pretty well. It was tough to get to the net, but we've got to stay positive."

"Given the situation we're in, we had situations for more (2-2-2 road trip) and guys worked hard. We can't get discouraged or negative. We're going home to get some momentum and keep pushing. You never know what can happen."

Connor is the 'Canuck Killer'

He probably has a better nickname, but this one sure fits.

The speedy Jets winger pulled his club even in the second period by doing what he does best. Connor sped into the offensive zone, and when Forbort reached with his stick to defend, he used him as a partial screen in the high slot before whipping a wrist shot past Demko on the stick side for his 37th goal of the season.

Connor also struck for a natural hat trick in a span of 6:37 of the first period on Jan. 14 en route to a 6-1 rout of the Canucks.

He has 36 points (16G, 20A) in 28 games against the Canucks and eight of his 13 games against Vancouver have been multi-point games.

Suter is the super shooter

Call him whatever you want. 'Glue Guy' or 'Swiss Army Knife'.

It comes with versatility to play centre or wing. It comes with smarts and consistency at even strength, being a key cog on a vastly improved power play, and proving twice in the opening period that he knows how to find the soft spots and pull the trigger.

Pressed into a first-line pivot role with Filip Chytil and Elias Pettersson injured, Suter has looked comfortable and effective.

His first early snapshot effort hit the crossbar to signal being in that special zone. His second wrister found the short side on Hellebuyck to open scoring for his career-high 22nd goal of the season. The pending unrestricted free agent has never scored more than 15. He's going to get paid.

When you have a great feel for the game — seven points in the previous three games will help — then naturally knowing where to go is followed by making a sweet feed or finding the net. With traffic in front of Hellebuyck, he backed off, took a Filip Hronek feed and struck iron. He then went one better.

Suter appeared to stay onside but after scoring, but there was an unsuccessful Jets challenge to see if his trailing stake still touched the blue-line on a pass from Tyler Myers. He had bolted through the slot to quickly snapped a short-side shot on Hellebuyck.

In the second period, Suter used his speed down the wall through the neutral zone to force Luke Schenn to take a penalty.

"He has taken a leadership role," lauded Tocchet. "He has really stepped up for me in all situations."

Added Myers: "He has been unbelievable. Stepped up in a big way and playing big minutes (21:04 on Sunday) and he's been solid all year. He has been awesome."

Penalty kill is the thrill

Seeing is believing and success allows some dreaming.

If the Canucks hope to overcome long odds of advancing to the post-season — a Blues losing streak would certainly help — their penalty kill will play a big part. It has been a revelation.

In a season gone sideways with a plethora of injuries, locker-room drama, and too much adversity, the league's fourth-ranked kill continues to be the story. It has kept them in games and been the difference to win games with a remarkable run of 18-for-20 in the last nine outings.

It was put to a supreme test in the first period against the league's second-ranked power play and top unit on home ice. What started as an Aatu Raty penalty became a 5-

on-3 advantage for 1:07 when Blueger took a minor. Demko shut the door with a blocker save off Nikolaj Ehlers before twice turning aside Iaffalo.