

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/2025/04/09/pionk-selected-as-jets-nominee-for-masterton-award>

Pionk gets Jets Masterton nod

By: Ken Wiebe

Neal Pionk is no stranger to playing with — or through — pain.

When you play the junkyard dog style the Winnipeg Jets defenceman brings to the ice on a regular basis, there is a physical toll that isn't always easy to endure.

When Pionk received news his best friend and former University of Minnesota-Duluth Bulldogs teammate Adam Johnson had passed away after a gruesome skate-cut injury on Oct. 28 of 2023 while playing in England as a member of the Nottingham Panthers, there was an emotional burden that wasn't easy to process.

Dealing with that personal tragedy was one of the reasons Pionk has been chosen by the Winnipeg chapter of the Professional Hockey Writers' Association as the nominee for the Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy, an award handed out annually to the NHL player who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to ice hockey.

"It's a prestigious honour. Obviously a lot of guys have gone through some stuff and I've certainly had loss in my life in the last year," said Pionk. "I just thank the guys for helping me through it."

Pionk is one of 32 nominees for the award, which is voted on by members of the PHWA.

An undrafted free agent who is in his sixth season with the Jets after coming over from the New York Rangers in a trade for Jacob Trouba, Pionk is having one of the best seasons of his NHL career, chipping in nine goals and 37 points in 66 games.

Johnson was someone who kept Pionk grounded with pointed barbs and was also someone who supported him on virtually every step of his professional hockey journey.

"The first initial shock of it is tough. Tough for everyone," said Pionk. "Where it gets tough is when the noise settles down and I know some people have had it way worse than I've had. Specifically talking about his family, so that's the thing I keep trying to reach out to them. Even in the past couple of weeks, because obviously everyone reaches out right away and even a couple of weeks after that but there is a time where the noise settles down. That's where you kind of got to regroup and reach out again."

The emotional burden of dealing with that horrible loss was evident throughout last season, but Pionk has found hockey has been an important part of the healing process.

“It’s a little bit of a distraction. Kind of like I said last year, it was nice having some of the guys on the team knew him, whether it was from college or other pro teams,” said Pionk. “We could bounce stories off each other. So that was nice right away in the locker room. It kind of keeps your mind off of it. When you go home, that’s what you think about. When you come to the rink it’s a distraction, a good distraction too, because there were a lot of good memories we had.”

To help Pionk and others who knew Johnson process his passing, the Jets sent a private jet so those individuals could attend the funeral in Duluth, Minn.

During the next game, Pionk scored a goal and after he returned to the bench, he was overcome with emotion.

“To be able to be around their families and all of them share that moment,” said head coach Scott Arniel, who informed Pionk and the Jets the news after a game against the Montreal Canadiens on the night of Johnson’s passing. “Then, coming back to that St. Louis game, P scored and I think it probably hit him on the bench there when he broke down. For everybody and his teammates, how they rallied around him — and not just him, everybody felt it.

“We talked about being a family and going out and doing it for Adam and those guys. Making sure that we were sticking behind those guys, that we were supporting them as much as possible.”

Arniel is proud to see the support that has been provided throughout the organization since the tragedy took place.

“We’ve all been through it. You lose your best friend. You lose a parent. You lose a sibling. Whatever it might be. Those are extremely difficult times. You just don’t get over them in a year or two,” said Arniel. “(Pionk) is an extremely popular guy. He’ll be in the middle of most arguments. It has a lot to do with all the pools or the NFL (fantasy) thing. He’s certainly one of our leaders in this room.

“He’s been here a while and knows how we go about our business; it’s family first. Everybody knew that, and I knew that everybody would be there to have his back.”

Pionk, 29, has missed the past 12 games with a lower-body injury, but will be a game-time decision for the Jets showdown with the Dallas Stars on Thursday at American Airlines Arena.

“Yeah, we’ll see,” said Pionk, noting the final decision rests with Arniel. “I feel good, I’m ready to play and we’ll see what (Thursday) brings.”

How does this injury compare to some of the injuries that Pionk has gone through before?

“Pretty similar,” he said. “I just feel like we were in a good position and it was significant enough for me to take some time off to let it heal before the playoffs. That’s kind of where I’m at right now.”

Pionk has been a full participant at practice in recent days and was running the second power-play unit on Wednesday morning, a sign he looks ready to return.

One of the things Pionk has appreciated in recent weeks was the opportunity to remain on the road with his teammates while working on his recovery.

“Absolutely. It lets me have a pulse of where the guys are at and it’s fun being around the guys, especially on the road,” said Pionk. “Just hanging out, playing cards or whatever it is. You feel like you’re not left out, you feel like you’re part of the team.”

As for the potential of playing his first game in a month against a team pushing the Jets for top spot in the Central Division, Western Conference and Presidents’ Trophy, with four games remaining in the regular season, Pionk plans to let his instincts take over.

“From a mental side of things, (it’s) just getting back to the battle level. You don’t really get that doing (conditioning) skates and practising on your own,” said Pionk. “There’s a competitive side and it’s natural in me. It will come out during the game, but that’s the mental thing that you have to prepare for.”

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/04/09/biggest-game-of-the-season-so-far>

Biggest game of the season, so far Jets face Stars in Central Division showdown

By: Mike McIntyre

DALLAS — It’s been said everything is bigger in Texas. From the size of the sprawling state to ten-gallon hats and heaping portions of world-famous barbecue served up at local establishments, there’s no shortage of examples to be found.

You can now throw early-April hockey games into the mix. Thursday’s showdown at dusk between the Winnipeg Jets and Dallas Stars is El Grande, with significant playoff implications on the line.

“No better time to get ourselves a road win,” Jets coach Scott Arniel said Wednesday.

Here’s everything you need to know to get you ready for Winnipeg’s game of the year, at least so far. Warning: There’s going to be a little bit of math involved.

The 53-21-4 Jets enter play with a four-point lead over the 50-22-6 Stars for top spot in the Central Division and Western Conference. Both teams have four games remaining.

Winnipeg's magic number to clinch the No. 1 seed is five points. As in, any combination of ones they gain and/or ones Dallas loses. You've likely heard the term "four-pointer" thrown out for a divisional clash, and that's exactly what this is.

By the time the final buzzer sounds inside American Airlines Center, the Jets could be six points (with a regulation win), five points (with a shootout/overtime win), three points (with a shootout/overtime loss) or two points (with a regulation loss) points ahead of the Stars heading into their final three games.

Winnipeg's remaining contests are at Chicago on Saturday and then home against Edmonton on Sunday and Anaheim on Wednesday. Dallas hosts Utah on Saturday, then hits the road for its final two in Detroit on Monday and Nashville on Wednesday.

Should the clubs be tied at the end of their 82-game regular-season marathon next Wednesday, the first tiebreaker is regulation wins. The Jets currently have a 42-41 advantage in that department. If that were to be even, the second tiebreak is regulation and overtime wins, which the Jets lead 52-48.

The best-case scenario for Winnipeg is a clean victory over Dallas which would guarantee they'd finish no worse than tied in the final standings. The Stars would then have to win their final three games in regulation while the Jets would have to lose their remaining trio, also in regulation, for Dallas to grab the tiebreak by a 44-43 advantage.

We won't fry your brain with all the other potential scenarios other than to serve up a reminder as long as the Jets can find a way to get five points over their final four games — such as going 2-1-1 or 1-0-3 — then it doesn't matter one lick what the Stars do in theirs. Gain less than five points on their own and Dallas would need to leave some on the table along the way.

The Jets should be a confident group following Monday's impressive 3-1 victory over the St. Louis Blues which was much more dominant than the final score would indicate. The Stars, meanwhile, could be reeling following a historic collapse on Tuesday against the Vancouver Canucks in which a 5-2 lead with 60 seconds left to play ended in a 6-5 overtime loss.

"At the end of the day, it's a cliché, but it's us. It's us going into Dallas. Whatever happened (Tuesday) night, we still have to win that hockey game," said Arniel.

Dallas has now gone winless in its last three games (0-1-2) following a run of 8-0-2.

"We've got some help on the out-of-town scoreboard, for sure," said Jets captain Adam Lowry. "But we've been talking about it all year, we take care of our games and how we

play, and kind of the results will follow themselves. And I think if we do that, we'll put ourselves in a great spot."

This is the fourth and final regular-season meeting, with the home teams winning all three so far. The Jets stood tall on Nov. 9 (4-1) and March 14 (4-1) inside Canada Life Centre, while the Stars had the advantage on Dec. 1 (3-1) in their barn.

Winnipeg could get a boost with forward Nikolaj Ehlers and defenceman Neal Pionk being game-time decisions to return to the lineup from their respective lower-body injuries. Ehlers has missed the last two outings while Pionk has been out for a dozen. Forward Gabe Vilardi will miss an eighth game in a row with an upper-body issue. Dallas is without a couple key players in defenceman Miro Heiskanen and veteran centre Tyler Seguin.

"A real critical game for us against one of the best teams in the league in the Stars. It's another game that should be easy to get up for," said Lowry.

"We're excited. It's gonna be playoff style. They're a team that's really ramping up near the end too, and we're all fighting for positions, so it'll be important when you get off to a similar start to last game. I know we didn't get rewarded with any goals in the first period, but you know that style of play is really conducive to winning."

The Jets are 17-7-0 so far against the Central Division this year while the Stars have gone 15-5-3. Winnipeg will be seeking its 25th road victory of the year, which would be tops in the NHL. Goaltender Connor Hellebuyck is also looking for his 45th victory in net, which would break his franchise record that he tied Monday night. Other potential milestones in play include Mark Scheifele needing one more point to set a regular-season high and Ehlers and Kyle Connor need two points to establish new offensive benchmarks.

Why is finishing first is so important? Aside from the fact it would be the first division title in Jets history it would also mean avoiding Colorado in the first round of the playoffs. The surging Avalanche might just be the most dangerous third-place team in recent NHL history — considering the fact they're fifth-overall in the league with 100 points.

They're also on the cusp of getting a massive emotional boost with captain Gabe Landeskog, who hasn't played a game in three years, on the verge of an incredible return from injury. He was assigned to their American Hockey League team on Wednesday to ramp up his conditioning.

There's no such thing as an easy post-season matchup but finishing first and playing the second wild-card team — likely to be one of the St. Louis Blues, Minnesota Wild or Calgary Flames — would appear to be the less treacherous path at this point.

Not that the Jets seem particularly worried about that right now.

“There’s a belief in this room that when we play as well as we can, we can beat anyone on any night,” said Lowry.

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/we-can-beat-anyone-on-any-night-jets-prepare-to-take-on-dallas>

'We can beat anyone on any night': Jets prepare to take on Dallas

By Gordon Anderson

Along the way to becoming an elite team themselves, the Jets have beaten the elite teams in the league.

And the quality of the opponent is no different on Thursday when the Jets butt heads with the host Dallas Stars in a late-season divisional game.

Jets captain Adam Lowry says the team lives for the spotlight that comes with big games played under bright lights.

“When we play as well as we can, we can beat anyone on any night,” Lowry said. “And I think Scott Arniel has done a good job of making sure we know the importance of the games.”

A victory in regulation by the Jets (53-21-4) would widen the gap over second-place Dallas (50-22-6) in the NHL standings to six points.

Come Friday morning, both teams will have three games remaining in the regular season. The locals have won two of three from Dallas.

In games against other top NHL teams this season, the Jets are two for two against the Washington Capitals; the club snapped the St. Louis Blues’ 12-game win streak earlier this week; they beat the league’s fourth-best team, record wise, 4-0 in Vegas earlier this month, and took three of four from the fifth-ranked Avalanche.

“Against these elite teams we’ve been able to beat, we’ve done a good job frustrating them, not really giving up a whole lot, and being patient in the game,” Lowry said. “When the Stars beat us earlier this year, it was a close game, and we started pushing a little bit, and they’re a little more patient. And that’s the difference.”

Both wins against Washington occurred in overtime. The victory over St Louis wasn’t solidified until Lowry scored into the empty net late in the third, two of the wins vs. Colorado were one-goal games and two losses to the Golden Knights were one-goal games.

The Jets are 17-4-4 in one-goal games and 6-6 in games decided by two goals. Lowry says expect more of the same against big 'D.'

"When you're playing against elite teams, you've got to be comfortable in these tight games, comfortable where there might not be a lot generated by either side, and then just, you know, wait for your opportunity," the captain said. "It stems from the belief in this group, the belief in your line mates, your teammates, going out there knowing we can get the job done."

Dallas is on a three-game losing streak. They are 7-1-2 in their last 10. The Jets have won two of their last three. They are 6-4-0 in their last 10.

HELP IN OTHER PLACES

Along the current path the Jets have received unexpected performances in unexpected places.

A perfect example was Tuesday's stunner in Dallas as the Stars coughed up a 5-2 lead to the Vancouver Canucks in the last minute of the game. The Canucks won 6-5 in overtime. The Stars also lost at home to the stumbling Penguins last Saturday.

"We got some help on the out-of-town scoreboard, for sure," Lowry said. "But we've been talking about it all year, we take care of our games and how we play, and kind of the results will follow themselves."

The unexpected decisions on the scoreboard mean zilch if the Jets don't land in Texas and leave on the charter having checked two points at the departure gate.

"We have to win that hockey game in Dallas," Arniel said. "I've mentioned they've been sitting behind us all year long, they're having a heck of a year, and no better time to go get ourselves a road win."

RECORD WITHIN

The Jets are 17-7-0 against the Central Division. Five of the eight teams in the Western Conference playoff picture are teams from the Central.

"When it comes to the Central, it could be in November, it could be in December, it could be tomorrow night, but they're all playoff-type battles," Arniel said. "Everybody knows the importance. They know the importance and they talk about the same type of thing about having to be good in the Central to have any kind of success."

GAME-TIME DECISIONS

Jets defenceman Neal Pionk is hoping to play against Dallas.

"I will leave (the decision) up to (Scott Arniel)," Pionk said. "It's his decision at the end of the day. I feel good, I'm ready to play and we'll see what (Thursday) brings."

Pionk's most recent action was on March 11 against the New York Rangers. He played 16:18 before leaving the playing surface altogether. To date, the club is 7-5-0 in Pionk's absence.

Arniel was asked if Pionk is a go for puck drop.

"He's possible," Arniel said. "Everybody is going to be a game-time decision there."

Nikolaj Ehlers missed practice on Wednesday, but Arniel says Ehlers is a last-minute decision.

"Ehlers is getting closer," Arniel said. "Game-time tomorrow, he'll just rest it up, give him an opportunity tomorrow he'll probably skate tomorrow in the morning skate."

Rasmus Kupari is with the team on the trip. Kupari was wearing yellow at practice on Wednesday.

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/prestigious-honour-neal-pionk-the-jets-nominee-for-the-bill-masterton-award>

'Prestigious honour': Neal Pionk the Jets nominee for the Bill Masterton Award

By Gordon Anderson

Neal Pionk went public with his private thoughts.

The Jets d-man was voted the Jets nominee for the Bill Masterton Trophy, as voted by the local chapter of the Professional Hockey Writers Association.

"It's a prestigious honour," Pionk said. "Obviously a lot of guys have gone through some stuff, and I've certainly had loss in my life in the last year and I just thank the guys for helping me through it."

The trophy is awarded to the player who best represents the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship, and dedication to hockey. The nomination was made public on Wednesday.

In the last year and change, Pionk has had personal and private challenges away from the game.

Pionk's former teammate Adam Johnson died after his neck was cut by a skate blade on Oct. 28 of 2023. Johnson was playing for the Nottingham Panthers against the Sheffield Steelers in the Elite Ice Hockey League.

The rearguard says the game of hockey, and the people around the sport, helped him process the death of a friend in such a tragic manner. Pionk eulogized at Johnson's funeral in early November of that same year.

"It's a little bit of a distraction," Pionk said. "It was nice having some of the guys on the team knew him, whether it was from college or other pro teams, we could bounce stories off each other. So that was nice right away in the locker room. It kinda keeps your mind off of it. When you go home that's what you think about. When you come to the rink it's a distraction, a good distraction too, cause there were a lot of good memories we had."

Pionk and Johnson spent two seasons with the Sioux City Musketeers of the United States Hockey League and two additional seasons with the University of Minnesota-Duluth Bulldogs of the National Collegiate Hockey Conference.

Head coach Scott Arniel says Pionk is a worthy candidate for the award.

"He's an extremely popular guy," Arniel said. "He's certainly one of our leaders in this room. He's been here a while and knows how we go about our business; it's family first. Everybody knew that, and I knew that everybody would be there to have his back. To see our guys help support him, not just at the time when it happened, but up until this day it's something that I know he recognizes it and he's gotten help along the way."

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/32-thoughts-montreal-electrified-by-stud-prospect-ivan-demidov/>

32 Thoughts: Montreal electrified by stud prospect Ivan Demidov

By Elliotte Friedman

11. On that topic, we are taping some playoff preview stuff right now. Here's Winnipeg owner Mark Chipman with as strong as an endorsement I've ever heard, for Kevin Cheveldayoff: "We've never even come to the last year of one of his contracts and we won't. This is Kevin's job. When you're fortunate enough to work alongside somebody who cares as much as Kevin does, who knows as much as Kevin does, you hang on to those people...in any other business, you don't just move off from people because things didn't go the way it expected to occur in a certain year or two...Kevin has grown every year, and got better at his trade every year. And honestly, I'm not starting over with somebody else. I'm at an age where I feel certain he will outlast me in this organization."

16. The Jets enter Wednesday's games three points clear of Washington for first overall. We've discussed before how honest their exit meetings were after losing to Colorado.

During a recent trip to the Manitoba capital, a few of them went more in-depth, saying the focus was, “Could everyone get one per cent, five per cent or 10 per cent better?”

“You're just trying to figure out what went wrong,” captain Adam Lowry said. “Obviously, we had a really good regular season. We ran into a really good Colorado team and they seemed to be able to flip the switch and take their game to another level. We weren't able to match that and you have to do some reflection... (Nathan) MacKinnon's line really had their way with our line. He's a world-class player. He plays with world-class teammates. At the same time, that's what we (go against) all year. How do we find a way to keep them off the board more?”

Head coach Scott Arniel said the players themselves learned a big lesson from Colorado's best. “We saw a Stanley Cup champion team...they lost to Seattle the next year. We saw a team that was very, very upset...We had finished the year really well and we went in there, I don't know if you'd call us the favourites. But we went against Colorado and we saw their experience. We saw their ability to play to the moment. We saw Nate McKinnon dumping pucks in. We saw third- and fourth-line players become huge factors for their group. There are elite players doing things that maybe they don't always do for 82 games. They were playing a pretty strong team game. That was something we have to get to. That was why (we had) to be able to do this over 82 games. We know there's still another level, we've done it a few times this year. Those are the lessons we're going to use. Hopefully that is going to be good for us come playoff time.”

Arniel was particularly happy with a 3-2 win over Washington on March 25, calling it the kind of intense, fight-for-ice game that you're going to have to win in the post-season.

17. During the summer, Arniel flew to Calgary to meet with Lowry, Josh Morrissey and Mark Scheifele. What they discussed there became the bedrock of training camp. There weren't a lot of roster changes, but Lowry wasn't concerned about that.

“I think what's made our team so good over the years is the continuity of the players we bring back year-in, year-out. We understand the structure, we understand the expectations, and we're able to accommodate those new players coming in. They know what's expected here, how we practice, how we play, the mantra of the 10 per cent better, and things like that. And then we have a meeting once the team's made, what are things players want to own? What are things that we want to hang our hat on? And I feel like from that meeting moving forward, we've really carried those messages into the games, and the results have followed.”

“Josh and I spend a lot of time together in the summers and that's something that we talk about a lot,” Scheifele said. “That's an everyday thing, whether it's in the gym, whether it's treatment, whether it's on the ice, it's not about I need to change my game completely, it is a matter of how can I make this a little bit better and this a bit better — faceoff is a little better, D-Zone battle is a bit better. When someone comes back and

improves a little bit in every area, all of a sudden it pushes everyone's level up. That's what we've done here this year."

"We've had a successful year, but it's never felt like we've been too high or too low," Morrissey added. "We're working towards Game 83...It feels like our group has taken a step from a sense of maturity. And that's why I feel confident we're ready to go into the playoffs."

18. One of the words the Jets use is relentless. "The way I view it, the 10 per cent more is a critical," Lowry said. "But as we're heading to the ice, the word relentless is plastered on the wall above it. When we're at our best, when we were playing the style we expect, we're relentless. We're a great skating team. We're hard on the forecheck. We smother teams in the neutral zone, and then defend really hard...We have a few star players that really carry the mail offensively, but defensively, we're a real stingy team. That's all four lines, all three defence pairings, and both of our goalies. We're relentless in our puck pursuit on the forecheck, on the backcheck. It's a real long night when we're playing that way."

19. A couple more on Winnipeg. Asked a few Jets what makes Lowry mad. The most consistent answer was if a teammate gets cheap-shotted. Does he get mad in the room? Answer: Nowhere near as much as you'd think. Lowry laughed.

"No one likes to get embarrassed, right?" he said. "You make a mistake on the ice or you do something wrong. Generally, we know what we did wrong. But now you have someone yelling at you or calling you out in front of 18 other guys. And sometimes there's a time and place for that because he might have made the mistake, but 12 other guys have made a mistake, and now you need to make a point where, as a team, this isn't our standard, but...It doesn't help them. People get defensive...We're not mad at you. We just expect this. We expect you to play a certain level. I expect you to hold me accountable. I think it's just a lot easier for people to receive the information when it comes from a place where they can let their guard down. They can kind of mentally think about it, and they don't have to respond instantly, right? So I think the great thing about our locker room is we're such a tight-knit team that people feel comfortable telling people when things aren't going their way or when they feel like something needs to change, you can have those conversations. It doesn't take weeks for it to become a habit or things like that."

20. Finally, Arniel had some great comments about the 4 Nations and how it affected four of his players. Scheifele was not selected for Team Canada. Morrissey came down with that awful flu going around and missed the final. Kyle Connor was scratched for the final. Connor Hellebuyck and Team USA lost the championship in overtime.

"I knew that (Scheifele) was in the mix and I told him as much. He was doing everything possible. He really wanted to play on that hockey team." He was going to replace Sidney Crosby if Crosby's injury kept him from playing.

“That was a big disappointment for me. I really felt he deserved an opportunity. No discount to any of the players that were there and obviously Canada winning was special. But at the end of the day, I was really hoping that just because of what he's done in this league, what he's done for the Winnipeg Jets and then the year he's having. So I know he was really down, but he's done a great job of trying to prove people wrong. And he's trying to play to the best of his abilities every single night. With Josh, that was a tough phone call. He called me from Boston the afternoon (of the final). He had tried to get to the warmup and kept throwing up. And I knew how devastated he was. (Connor) not playing that game. It came down to numbers, whatever it might be. And then (Hellebuyck), losing in overtime. I did get to talk to them all. Just the experiences, what I'd of mentioned to those guys that you're around greatness. You're around great players, great situations and absorb that stuff because we're going to need it in Game 83 and on from you guys. That's the stuff they can bring back for themselves individually or for our group. That was stuff that we needed. And at the end of the day, it didn't work out perfect for all of them, but they were in those situations, which was to me is the best part for their growth.”

26. Bettman did not like “Future of Winnipeg” questions while discussing the TV deal. “It’s not an issue,” he said. “I don’t understand why people are questioning that.”

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/jets-ice-chips-buoyed-by-big-win-over-blues-jets-turn-attention-to-stars%7E3109411>

Jets Ice Chips: Buoyed by big win over Blues, Jets turn attention to Stars (VIDEO)

The Jets' magic number to clinch the Central is five, which sets the stage for Thursday's four-point game against the Stars. TSN's John Lu tees up the game between two teams coming off different results.

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/will-jets-embrace-the-pressure-when-they-face-stars-in-central-showdown-on-tsn~3113606>

Will Jets embrace the pressure when they face Stars in Central showdown on TSN? (VIDEO)

The Central division will essentially be on the line when the Jets visit the Stars Thursday night. Gino Reda is joined by Jets on TSN analyst Kevin Sawyer to discuss how Winnipeg handles big games, whether or not the Jets should put Connor Hellebuyck's record-tying quest over rest and Alex Iafallo's unsung impact on the team this season.

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/hot-or-not-all-winnipeg-jets-edition~3112846>

Hot or Not: All Winnipeg Jets edition (VIDEO)

Jets goaltender Connor Hellebuyck should win the Hart Trophy this year. Hot or Not? Craig Button joins SportsCentre to weigh in on this and more in a special Jets edition.

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/the-talking-point-why-connor-hellebuyck-should-win-the-hart-trophy~3112814>

The Talking Point: Why Connor Hellebuyck should win the Hart Trophy (VIDEO)

Connor Hellebuyck leads the league in wins, goals against average, save percentage and shutouts. Craig Button explains why he should win the Hart Trophy this year in Wednesday's Talking Point.

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6268537/2025/04/10/nhl-western-playoffs-hope-concern-2025/>

Why NHL Western Conference playoff teams have reason to hope — and panic

By Shayna Goldman and Harman Dayal

No playoff contender is perfect. Every single team has a reason to be hopeful this spring. But all 16 teams have red flags casting doubt over their chances — whether it's due to their roster strength, recent play, injuries or path forward.

After looking at the Eastern Conference on Tuesday, it's time to shift West.

The playoff picture is almost set. The Blues essentially ended the wild-card race with an 11-game win streak. As teams jostle for position within those eight seeds, let's take a look at what is working for these Stanley Cup hopefuls and what might hold them back.

Central Division

Winnipeg Jets

Reason for hope: Connor Hellebuyck is playing on another level this season. Through 60 games, he has saved a league-leading 45 goals above expected (third in the analytics era). The Jets are still leaning on him heavily, but his workload within those games has been eased. Hellebuyck is facing fewer shots (41 unblocked per 60 minutes of play, the lowest since his rookie season) and scoring chances (2.77 expected goals against, the lowest rate since 2017-18) thanks to improved team defense.

The Jets are one of the best defensive teams in the league. They are super stingy in shots and chances against and do a great job breaking out of their own zone.

Pair that stout defense with a solid offense, and the Jets are a contender to watch. At the top of the lineup, there is a lot of balance between Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor, who are both top 10 in goal scoring. The impending returns of Gabriel Vilardi and Nikolaj Ehlers will help spread the wealth across the top six.

Reason for concern: The Jets unraveled last year in Round 1. This group has to prove it has the chops to improve when it matters most. That is especially true for a couple of players, like Ehlers, whose regular-season success hasn't translated into the playoffs.

As for Hellebuyck, the question is whether the pressure or his workload has gotten to him — the latter seems to be the best explanation at this point. So, while the team's defensive efforts have eased his workload within games, he has still played 77 percent of the Jets' games this year.

The other concerning element is the Stars are creeping up the standings behind Winnipeg, which makes Thursday's matchup all the more important. If the Stars steal the top seed, the Jets will have to face the Avs for the second straight year.