

## **Winnipeg Free Press**

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/04/15/jets-set-to-face-blues-in-opening-round-matchup>

### ***Jets set to face Blues in opening round matchup***

By: Mike McIntyre

The Winnipeg Jets will face the St. Louis Blues in the opening round of the Stanley Cup playoffs.

This 2019 rematch was set following a series of events Tuesday night which included the Blues downing Utah 6-1 to lock down one of the two Western Conference wildcard spots, and then the Minnesota Wild rallying from down a goal with 20 seconds left in regulation to force overtime against the Anaheim Ducks, ultimately winning 3-2 and grabbing the other berth.

Those results eliminated the Calgary Flames, who needed to win their two remaining games while also getting some help on the out-of-town scoreboard.

As a result, the Blues and Jets will meet again, while the Wild will take on the Vegas Golden Knights. The other two West matchups — Colorado vs Dallas and Los Angeles vs Edmonton — were already set.

Winnipeg (55-22-4) won both the Central Division and the West this year, along with the Presidents' Trophy as top team in the NHL. That gives them home ice advantage through every round of the playoffs. They'll wrap up their regular-season on Wednesday at Canada Life Centre against the Ducks.

St. Louis (44-30-8) finished in the second wildcard spot after a late season surge up the standings which also included replacing head coach Drew Bannister with Jim Montgomery — just as Mike Yeo was given the pink slip in 2019 and replaced by Craig Berube, who ultimately led the Blues to their first Stanley Cup championship.

The NHL has not yet released its playoff schedule with the last wildcard spot in the Eastern Conference still to be decided in the next day or two between the Montreal Canadiens and Columbus Blue Jackets, with whoever prevails facing the Washington Capitals.

The other three series — Toronto vs Ottawa, Tampa Bay vs Florida and Carolina vs New Jersey — are set.

Expect Game One between the Jets and Blues to be either Saturday or Sunday. It's unlikely teams finishing the regular-season on Thursday would be forced to begin

playoffs 48 hours later, which eliminates all but three series – Winnipeg vs St. Louis, Vegas vs Minnesota and Dallas vs Colorado.

No doubt Sportsnet would love to have some Canadian content in their prime Saturday slot, but there's also a Bachman Turner Overdrive concert set for Saturday at the downtown Winnipeg rink which would have to be moved to make that possible. There's other scheduling challenges when it comes to the Blues home rink, with concerts set for Apr. 25 and 26.

In other words, it's clear as mud right now.

There's no shortage of juicy story lines between the Jets and Blues. St. Louis took their previous first-round playoff meeting in six games back in 2019, and a fierce rivalry has resulted ever since.

The two starting goaltenders, Connor Hellebuyck and Jordan Binnington, went head-to-head in February at the 4 Nations Face-Off, with Hellebuyck's American squad losing in the final to Binnington's Canadian side.

There's also a familial connection, with Jets defenceman Luke Schenn facing his younger brother, Brayden, for the first time ever in the playoffs.

Winnipeg went 3-1-0 in their head-to-head games this season, with St. Louis going 1-2-1.

Both teams also have some injury issues. Jets forward Nikolaj Ehlers is considered week-to-week with a lower-body ailment and unlikely to be ready for the start of the series. The status of Gabe Vilardi is also unknown, having missed 14 straight games but joining the Jets for practice on Tuesday for the first time since his injury. He's considered day-to-day.

St. Louis is without forward Dylan Holloway, while leading scorer Robert Thomas left Tuesday's game against Utah with a lower-body issue. His status is not clear.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/04/15/first-time-feat-for-hot-handed-perfetti>

***First time feat for hot-handed Perfetti  
Jets versatile forward set to play all 82 games***

By: Ken Wiebe

Cole Perfetti made it clear right out of the gate that he wasn't the superstitious type.

So while some folks might be hesitant talking about something before it actually happens, the Winnipeg Jets forward leaned into questions about what it will mean to him to suit up in all 82 games this season.

By suiting up in Wednesday's finale against the Anaheim Ducks, Perfetti will accomplish the feat for the first time in his career — and it's something that means a lot to him.

When you consider his first two NHL seasons ended prematurely due to injury and his third included frequent healthy scratches during the stretch run, you can clearly understand why he's viewing this as a badge of honour.

"Especially in the last couple of years there's been injuries and stuff like that," said Perfetti. "So, I feel really good about myself in the fact that making it through 82 is a cool accomplishment. So I'm happy about that. It's awesome."

Shoulder and back issues that put Perfetti on the shelf seem like nothing but a distant memory, as durability is becoming a calling card for the 10th overall pick in the 2020 NHL Draft.

The same goes for those unplanned times in the press box.

Perfetti has been consistent and played his best hockey of the campaign when the intensity has been ratcheted up.

"It feels good to complete a full season and play in 82 games, and it's something that I wanted," said Perfetti. "It was a goal of mine that I set out at the beginning of the year, to finish the season and play 82, and was lucky enough to be able to."

The durability component is important as the Jets prepare to open the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs this weekend, where Perfetti figures to have an enhanced role with the news Nikolaj Ehlers is week-to-week with a lower-body injury and won't be available for the foreseeable future.

That means Perfetti will remain on the Jets' top power-play unit to go along with his even-strength minutes alongside Vladislav Namestnikov and, most likely, Nino Niederreiter.

In recent weeks, Perfetti has been used during three-on-three overtime and had his first NHL shootout attempt against the Chicago Blackhawks.

Perfetti's soft hands were on display as his smooth deke opened up the five-hole of Blackhawks goalie Spencer Knight on the play.

"As a young guy, it's hard to establish yourself and work your way up. I'm just trying to come every day and get better in every aspect and show that I can be trusted

defensively in all situations of the game,” said Perfetti. “It takes time. Slowly, I’m getting a little bit more and more.”

Perfetti knows there’s plenty of work left to be done, even after all the strides he’s taken.

“One thing that I’ve tried to focus on is just becoming more of a complete player. We’ve talked about this throughout the year, of evolving my game and adding different things in,” said Perfetti. “I’ve always been more of a point guy growing up. Having to evolve and change and being able to add elements to my game to make an impact when the points aren’t coming. It’s the NHL. It’s tough, there’s a lot of good players out here.

“I look back at the video in my head from Game 1 until now and I see the change in my game. It’s nice to look back on that and see how far I’ve come since the beginning of the year.”

Jets head coach Scott Arniel has emphasized how Perfetti has taken important steps on the mental side of the game this season and he reiterated that on Tuesday.

“You’re going to have your slumps or your moments where everything isn’t going your way,” said Arniel. “How you ride those out, how you handle those situations, (that) gets you out of them quicker. He’s done a fantastic job.

“His ability to put stuff behind him, not to get down and drag himself down, he’s been really upbeat. Whether he misses a great chance on a shift and then comes back with a solid shift or if it’s we get a couple games not scoring or making plays, he found a way to kind of make sure that he’s always contributing to our hockey club in other ways. And that’s a real good sign of a young player maturing.”

As for those increased opportunities, Arniel isn’t handing them out because Perfetti was a top prospect; it’s because of the progress he continues to make on his development path.

The transition from complementary player to play driver is well underway.

“He’s earned it, and that’s the biggest thing,” said Arniel. “Coming into the year, there were a lot of questions about our second line. And our second line, to me, has been outstanding. Those guys have carried the load for us on nights, they’ve won us hockey games.

“(Perfetti) has earned those extra opportunities. The biggest thing about it is he’s taken advantage. He’s the one guy that’s really grasped it and has really taken advantage of it and that’s what you love to see.”

With the Jets already locking down top spot in the Central Division and Western Conference, and sewn up top spot in the NHL as the Presidents’ Trophy winner, some

observers wondered what that could mean for the lineup that gets rolled out on Wednesday.

But with the Jets expected to open up at home on either Saturday or Sunday, Arniel doesn't want his regulars sitting out too long.

"We're going all in," said Arniel. "Everybody wants to play. And you know what, for us it's making sure that we're doing the right things that we've done all year long, playing the right way."

With the Ducks winning the first two games of the season series, Arniel conceded that his team would like to avoid being swept by Anaheim.

After Brad Lambert and Nikita Chibrikov were recalled from the Manitoba Moose of the American Hockey League to make their NHL debuts last April, there was some speculation the Jets might do the same thing this year with top defence prospect Elias Salomonsson.

But Arniel said the Swedish blue-liner wouldn't be suiting up on Wednesday.

Salomonsson, who was chosen in the second round (55th overall) by the Jets in 2022, has five goals and 27 points in 51 games with the Moose this season.

## **Global Winnipeg**

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11134222/winnipeg-jets-to-face-st-louis-blues-in-first-round-playoff-series/>

### ***Winnipeg Jets to face St. Louis Blues in first round playoff series***

By Russ Hobson Global News

The Winnipeg Jets now know their opponent for the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

The Minnesota Wild defeated the Anaheim Ducks in overtime and the St. Louis Blues beat the Utah Hockey Club on Tuesday to eliminate the Calgary Flames and finalize the playoff picture in the Western Conference.

The Wild claimed the first wild card spot, while the Blues get the eighth and final playoff berth in the conference to set up a date with the first place Jets in the first round of the playoffs.

It's a first-round rematch from the 2019 Stanley Cup Playoffs which the Blues won in six games before going on to win the Stanley Cup.

The Jets won the season series over the Blues with three wins and one loss.

The other playoff series in the Western Conference features the Minnesota Wild playing the Vegas Golden Knights, the Dallas Stars will take on the Colorado Avalanche, and the Edmonton Oilers will meet the Los Angeles Kings.

It's expected the Jets will open the playoffs on either Saturday or Sunday at Canada Life Centre. The Jets will close out the regular season on Wednesday at home against the Anaheim Ducks.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11134468/analysis-winnipeg-jets-fan-appreciation/>

***ANALYSIS: Winnipeg Jets fans, players appreciate each other as regular season ends***

By Paul Edmonds CJOB

It's Game 82 for the Winnipeg Jets on Wednesday night — the final regular-season game on their National Hockey League schedule. And it is also Fan Appreciation Night.

Typically, it's a celebration for the fans; a moment to acknowledge their patronage and support through a long, cold Prairie winter. But for different reasons, most of the gratitude this time might operate in reverse.

After posting a franchise record in wins, capturing the Central Division, Western Conference and Presidents' Trophy titles, the appreciation for watching not just great but excellent hockey for the last seven months might extend more down from the seats Wednesday than it does up from the ice.

In a season that was completely unpredicted when it started in October, the Jets have undoubtedly lived up to their mantra of being five to 10 per cent better after last year's playoff disappointment.

And therein lies the next step in what everyone – fans and players alike – understands needs to be the next layer on a record-setting campaign in the city, as playoff success is not a hope this time around for the Jets, but an expectation based on this season's game sheets.

And that's not lost on the head coach Scott Arniel either. A Jack Adams candidate for coach of the year, by the way, Arniel was pragmatic recently when he said, "We know at the end of the day that we're going to be judged from Game 83 on."

His words were an acknowledgement of what most assuredly is ahead for his team when the Stanley Cup playoffs start this weekend and the lofty forecast many have for them this spring.

But before the Jets get there and Game 83 arrives, Wednesday is Fan Appreciation Night in downtown Winnipeg, a celebration to thank everyone – fans and players alike – for the previous 82.

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/jets-ice-chips-ehlers-ruled-out-week-to-week-just-ahead-of-playoffs~3116398>

### ***Jets Ice Chips: Ehlers ruled out week-to-week just ahead of playoffs (VIDEO)***

With the Jets' playoff run starting four-five days from now, the team's forward depth will be further put to the test now that Nik Ehlers is out week-to-week with the foot injury he sustained on April 3rd and aggravated nine days later in Chicago. That means Winnipeg's third leading scorer likely won't be available until the latter stages of round one at the earliest. TSN's John Lu has more.

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/why-change-anything-first-place-jets-not-looking-to-hold-back-in-season-finale~3116360>

### ***'Why change anything?': First place Jets' not looking to hold back in season finale (VIDEO)***

As Presidents' Trophy winners, the Jets have nothing more to accomplish in the regular season. Playing their final game of the campaign on Wednesday, Winnipeg says that they are full speed ahead, and won't look to rest bodies as they want to be in the groove come the playoffs.

### **Winnipeg Sun**

<https://winnipegsun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/deja-blues-all-over-again-get-set-for-jets-vs-blues-in-playoff-redux>

### ***Deja Blues all over again: Get set for Jets vs Blues in playoff redux***

By Paul Friesen

The St. Louis Blues clinched the eighth and final playoff spot in the Western Conference on Tuesday with a 6-1 win over Utah.

Claiming the second wildcard playoff spot, they'll face the first-place Jets in Round 1, beginning in Winnipeg during or just after the Easter weekend.

The way the Blues earned their spot – they stormed back from eight points below the playoff line after the 4 Nations Face-Off break and won 12 straight at one point – is reminiscent of their 2018-2019 season.

That year they also fired their coach and made a second-half charge that culminated in a Stanley Cup title, with the Jets strewn in their wake after a first-round meeting.

St. Louis finished this season with a 44-30-8 record. The Jets are 55-22-4 going into their final regular-season game against Anaheim on Wednesday.

That it took the Blues all 82 games to clinch their spot wasn't lost on Jets coach Scott Arniel.

"I can't believe it, it's like us trying to win the Central. It takes you whatever it was, 80 games," Arniel said before Tuesday's games. "I can't believe we're sitting here and we're still trying to figure out who it is. We've got a lot of kites in the air right now on the pre-scout, on the travel, on the hotels, all that stuff."

They can begin making game plans and booking flights first thing, Wednesday.

The matchup will be the first playoff encounter between brothers Luke Schenn, a Jets defenceman picked up at the trade deadline, and Brayden Schenn, the St. Louis captain.

"It's definitely been talked about," Brayden said upon a visit to Winnipeg to play the Jets earlier this month. "That would be a first, and a little different."

The Winnipeg Jets will begin their quest for the Stanley Cup against an old playoff nemesis.

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<https://winnipegsun.com/sports/cant-take-it-for-granted-jets-niederreiter-driven-by-childhood-dream>

### ***'Can't take it for granted': Jets' Niederreiter driven by childhood dream***

By Paul Friesen

In an 82-game regular season, some are harder to get wound up for than others.

For a team that's clinched first place, overall, in the NHL and has its sights set on a long playoff run that begins in less than a week, Game 82 against an also-ran could easily be one of those.

Winnipeg Jets forward Nino Niederreiter counters that by channelling his inner child growing up in Switzerland as he gets ready for Wednesday's home game with Anaheim.

"Since you're a little kid you dream about playing one NHL game," Niederreiter was saying on Tuesday. "You can't just take it for granted."

The 32-year-old also likes the idea of going into the playoffs with the good feeling that comes with winning.

The Jets are coming off a 4-1 loss to Edmonton on Sunday that saw head coach Scott Arniel rest several veterans, giving the game a bit of a glorified pre-season feel.

The coach says he made those calls because his team was playing on back-to-back nights and a third game in four days, with plenty of travel thrown in.

For the coach, Wednesday will be more of a tuneup for the playoffs.

"We're going all-in," Arniel said after an optional practice that didn't look optional at all – virtually all healthy players took part. "Guys don't want to be not playing from now all the

way until, if Saturday is our first game or Sunday in the playoffs. Everybody wants to play. It's making sure that we're doing the right things that we've done all year long, playing the right way.

"And actually Anaheim beat us twice, so there's another little shock... try to make sure we get a game against them."

Expect players like Adam Lowry, Josh Morrissey, Neal Pionk and goalie Connor Hellebuyck back in the lineup against the Ducks.

The old adage about not being able to flip a switch at playoff time might be in play, too.

"I'm going to use it as a nice tuneup and get feeling good and feeling ready for Game 1," forward Cole Perfetti said.

Niederreiter feels the same, treating the game as part of his preparation for the first round.

"Just mentally, the excitement of knowing the post-season is around the corner," he said. "You don't know the opponent, yet. So once you know, that's where you start dialing in, getting into the system and all that stuff."

Going into Tuesday night, three teams remained in the running to be Winnipeg's first-round opponent as the Western Conference's No. 8 seed: St. Louis, Minnesota and Calgary.

Six Jets players – Niederreiter, Perfetti, Kyle Connor, Mark Scheifele, Alex Lafallo and Dylan DeMelo – have another good reason to want to be in the lineup Wednesday: it would give them a full 82-games on their 2024-25 resume.

Niederreiter has an even bigger target in mind.

"Personally, it's another game towards 1,000 games," he said. "It's something which I'm proud of hopefully achieving. Hopefully I get a step closer."

He's currently at 968 regular-season games, some 967 more than he dreamed about as a kid.

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/hard-to-believe-nhl-players-rank-jets-hellebuyck-a-lowly-no-3>

### ***'Hard to believe': NHL players rank Jets' Hellebuyck a lowly No. 3***

By Paul Friesen

Connor Hellebuyck is not the best goalie in the NHL or even the second-best, according to the players who face him every game.

The annual NHL Players Association poll has the Winnipeg Jets netminder ranked third, behind Tampa Bay's Andrei Vasilevskiy and Igor Shesterkin of the New York Rangers.

"That's crazy," Jets forward Cole Perfetti said upon learning of the poll results, Tuesday. "I don't have much to say on that, other than obviously people aren't watching the Jets enough if that's the case. His numbers prove it. His play proves it. He's the backbone of the Presidents Trophy team and he's been the best goalie all year. That's hard to believe."

Backstopping the NHL's top regular-season team, Hellebuyck is the odds-on favourite to win his second straight Vezina Trophy as the league's best, as voted on by general managers.

Players are less impressed. Just 15.6 percent chose him as the best overall goalie. Vasilevskiy got 31.1 percent of the votes, Shesterkin 23.6 percent.

"Hellebuyck's the best goalie in the league," Jets defenceman Dylan Samberg said. "He's shown that all year. Vasilevskiy has been on a tear here. But Bucky has been solid for us all year. So we're going to go with consistency."

The poll results come a year after players ranked Hellebuyck fourth among people they'd want between the pipes for a must-win game.

His lack of playoff success could be blamed for that.

His numbers this season – he has the most wins (46) and the best saves percentage (.924), while he's tied for the No. 1 goals-against-average (2.02) – make these results more of a surprise.

Like last year's poll, Hellebuyck is the only Jets player to crack any top-five list.

Not even Josh Morrissey made the grade as one of the NHL's best overall defencemen, nudged aside by runaway winner Cale Makar of Colorado, as well as Quinn Hughes in Vancouver, Victor Hedman of the Lightning, Nashville's Roman Josi and Adam Fox of the Rangers.

The NHL's most complete player? No sign of Mark Scheifele amongst the Sidney Crosbys, Aleksander Barkovs, Nathan MacKinnons and Connor McDavids of the world. Auston Matthews and Anze Kopitar tied for fifth in that category.

The best playmaker? Nope. That honour goes to Nikita Kucherov, with McDavid, Leon Draisaitl, Artemi Panarin and Crosby behind him.

The other categories – best faceoff man, smartest overall player (both Crosby) and best overall skater (McDavid) – didn't include anybody from Winnipeg near the top, either.

The home of the Jets, though, claimed third place for the best ice for a third straight year, behind the home of the Habs in Montreal and the Oilers in Edmonton.

<https://winnipegsun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/ready-for-more-rubber-jets-samberg-has-that-not-so-loving-feeling>

### ***Ready for more rubber: Jets' Samberg has that not-so-loving feeling***

By Paul Friesen

For NHL defencemen, blocking shots might be the most hated part of the job – and the most respected part.

For the Winnipeg Jets' Dylan Samberg on Sunday, it was also the most painful.

Samberg collapsed like a felled tree when he took a shot off the side of his leg against Edmonton on Sunday, writhing in agony on the ice for a dozen seconds or more while the Oilers threw the puck around and eventually scored.

Yet the 6-foot-4, 216-pound oak of the Jets blue line was back at practice on Tuesday.

"Just went dead," Samberg said of his leg, explaining how the puck hit the nerve that's exposed outside of his shin pad. "I was trying to get back up, but I had no feeling in that leg. So I couldn't move it. You have all this padding, and somehow it always seems to find that little spot that you don't have padding.

"But you're just hoping for the best, that it hits you in the right spot. Just part of the job."

As bad as it hurt, the 26-year-old said he knew it wasn't as bad as the time he broke his foot doing the same part of his job.

Seeing him back on the ice ready to do it all over again got the attention of teammates on Tuesday.

"He's nuts," is how forward Cole Perfetti put it. "He's a tough guy. That was a hard shot and it's crazy that he was skating today. I was scared for a couple of seconds there

when he was lying down. Obviously, it's great to see him in good spirits and feeling good and ready to go."

Head coach Scott Arniel says he expects the same effort and sacrifices from players against Anaheim in Game 82 on Wednesday. That's just how they've rolled all season.

"Nothing changes," Arniel said. "If you go out and try to play a different game it just gets you into bad habits or it might get you hurt. I know Sammy's not going to change his way of thinking and how he plays. He's going to get in front of shots. He has a lot of pride in the penalty kill and what he needs to do and I wouldn't expect any less."

## **The Hockey News**

<https://thehockeynews.com/nhl/winnipeg-jets/latest-news/jets-playoff-start-times-to-blame-for-past-postseason-failures>

### ***Jets' Playoff Start Times to Blame for Past Postseason Failures?***

By Carter Brooks

It's no secret that the Winnipeg Jets have failed to meet expectations in past postseasons. But could some of that lack of success be due to their allotted annual postseason draws?

When crafting the 1,312-game NHL regular season, the master scheduler Steve Hatze Petros, senior vice-president of scheduling and broadcast business, ensures that each of the 32 NHL markets maintains a consistent start time to its 82-game schedule.

No, each team has a variety of start times across the board, but as the regular season wears on, trends tend to develop.

For instance, most teams maintain an average evening start time of 7:00 PM locally throughout the season.

But for whatever reason, all of those familiarities go out the window for the Stanley Cup Playoffs - or, the most important time of the year, hockey-wise.

Building game-day routines for 82 games, including wake up times, meal plans, workouts, naps, rink arrivals/departures and returns, among other habits seem to be completely disregarded come the two-month chase for hockey's greatest trophy.

Broadcast rights play a massive role in the scheduling, as does arena availability.

As it stands, Winnipeg, the league's Presidents' Trophy-winning club, is expected to begin its postseason on Saturday, which is already an arena conflict as Bachman-Turner Overdrive is set to perform at 7:00 PM on Saturday at Canada Life Centre.

A rock group from Winnipeg, BTO certainly wouldn't be opposed to a reschedule for its hometown show, especially considering the level that the Jets have played at all season and the importance of a strong start.

Ending the 2024-25 campaign with a test against Anaheim at home on Wednesday, Winnipeg will be able to rest and prepare on both Thursday and Friday, before starting Round 1 on Saturday.

Whether that game is an afternoon start or the late-night Hockey Night in Canada affair remains up in the air.

The only thing it will likely not be is the prime time, 6:00 or 7:00 PM evening showdown that the team has gotten to know over not only this season, but its entire existence since moving back to Winnipeg.

The Jets played 41 games at Canada Life Centre this past season, 20 of them featured 7:00 PM start times. Thirteen others were played at 6:00 or 6:30 PM for the Sportsnet and Amazon Prime broadcasts. Winnipeg hosted three 5:00 PM Sunday starts, as well as five other weekend afternoon games (2:00 PM).

So, of the 41 home contests, 33 were played within the 6:00 to 7:00 PM window, locally.

Things certainly changed while on the road - as they do for each NHL club - but being so centralized among a North American-based league has hurt Winnipeg in terms of travel, scheduling, time zones and game-day habits/practices.

With Toronto and Ottawa already having clinched playoff berths and Montreal still pressing to do so, the Canadian contingent of Eastern Conference postseason teams continues to grow.

Edmonton has locked itself in within the Western Conference, while Calgary still has a good shot at earning its way to the dance.

It appears the only chance that Winnipeg would have at hosting prime time games would be if both the Oilers and Flames earned their way into the playoffs. That would almost ensure the Canadian broadcast to feature a late-night start time on alternating nights featuring both the Oilers and Flames in the West and the hope of alternating prime time starts on alternating nights with Toronto (which will likely face Ottawa) and Montreal.

That will leave Winnipeg as the odd team out, geographically. Based on its opponent, arena availability and travel opportunity, the league's No. 1 team will likely be forced to begin its week night playoff games in the late-game slot, meaning 8:30, 8:45 and 9:00 PM central start times, with festivities wrapping up around midnight, locally.

Once again, that would serve as a major change for players, coaches, staff and fans alike, who are used to seeing the final buzzer come far before 10:00 PM, even with the possibility of overtime or a shootout.

Winnipeg won its lone 6:00 PM start home game of the playoffs last year, before dropping two 8:45 PM home games as well as two non-prime time road games to Colorado.

2023 wasn't much kinder to Winnipeg either. Despite picking up a win in Vegas in a 9:00 PM start, the Jets dropped every game following that, including two 9:15 PM starts, a 3:00 PM start and an 8:45 PM start.

There wasn't much different back in 2020 either, with Winnipeg's four-game series loss to Calgary coming at the hands of an 8:30 PM start, a 2:30 PM start, a rare 5:30 PM start and a 9:45 PM start. 2019 did feature 6:00, 6:30, 7:00 and 7:30 start times against the Blues, but even against a team situated far more east than Winnipeg, did the two clubs have to play two 8:45 PM starts in the series.

With just one single game coming within Winnipeg's typical 6:00 to 7:00 PM start time window over the past two playoff experiences, it would be fair to say the schedule has played a role in the Jets' lack of success.

Now, seated at the very top of the standings, Winnipeg has done all it could to provide itself with home-ice advantage through the full four-round postseason, to which 16 total games could be played at Canada Life Centre.

Sure, the geographical location of the Jets' opponents will play into the start time equation, but despite the franchise's record-setting season, the playoff schedule will likely cause major disruption to the ordinary, once again forcing Winnipeg into new routines and habits just in time for the biggest tests of the entire year.

It is expected the full first round schedule will be released on Thursday, with pieces coming on Wednesday.

## **The Athletic**

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6281495/2025/04/16/winnipeg-jets-nhl-playoffs-blues/?onboarded=true>

### ***Winnipeg Whiteout is almost here: What we know about Jets' Round 1 series vs. St. Louis***

By Murat Ates

Nikolaj Ehlers was born in the middle of a playoff run. Now, thanks in part to Saturday's "freak accident" trip over a linesman, there's a chance he will never play a starring role in one for Winnipeg.

Ehlers is out week to week, per Scott Arniel. It's an open-ended timeline, leaving the door open for an eventual return. Will it take one series win? Two? Is there a chance Ehlers takes more than a few weeks to heal? Arniel didn't say.

This is the reality of Ehlers' foot injury, initially suffered against Vegas on April 3 and then aggravated by Saturday's backward fall over the skate of linesman James Tobias.

The Winnipeg Jets are a deep, contending team that could win often enough to see Ehlers return during these playoffs. They're aided in that quest by the No. 1 seed they locked up on Saturday night.

They also have positive news on two other injury fronts: Defenceman Dylan Samberg was back at practice on Tuesday. Samberg described the way Connor McDavid's slapshot struck a nerve that took the feeling out of his right leg, saying, "My leg just went dead, but it was just a precautionary thing to not come back out." He's expected to play in Game 1 on Saturday or Sunday, pending the announcement of Winnipeg's playoff schedule (more on that in a moment). Gabriel Vilardi was also back on the ice for the first time since his upper-body injury against Buffalo on March 23. Arniel upgraded Vilardi's status to "day to day"; his Game 1 availability remains in doubt.

What does this mean for Winnipeg's playoff chances against the St. Louis Blues? How will Arniel deploy his lines once Vilardi returns? When might Ehlers come back? Can the Jets avenge their 2019 playoff loss, and when will their series start?

Here's everything we've learned about the Jets' 2025 Stanley Cup playoff drive so far.

#### ***First up: the Blues***

Winnipeg will face the Blues in Round 1, with the series beginning at Canada Life Centre this weekend. This 2019 rematch was achieved in dramatic fashion: Joel Eriksson Ek sent the Minnesota Wild to overtime against the Anaheim Ducks with just 22 seconds left in the third period and Minnesota's net empty to clinch the first wild-card spot in the West.

Winnipeg went 3-1-0 against the Blues this season, with one of its wins in a shootout. St. Louis revamped its game upon hiring Jim Montgomery late in November. The Blues were one of the NHL's top teams down the stretch, outscoring their opponents 99-60 since the 4 Nations Face-Off — an even better spread than the Jets' 71-55 advantage in that same time frame. When they played at Canada Life Centre on April 7, both teams defended brilliantly, but the Jets kept the pressure up until Kyle Connor stole the puck from Pavel Buchnevich and Alex Iafallo buried Connor's rebound in the third period for the game winner.

No team earned more points in the standings from the 4 Nations break through today than St. Louis (41); the Blues also led the league in goals per game with 3.81 while running the seventh-best power play and eighth-best penalty kill during that time frame. Winnipeg creates more scoring chances, but both teams have been stingy defensively, backed by excellent goaltending.

We'll deep-dive the matchup in the coming days. In the meantime, one reasonable takeaway is that the Blues are a great team playing inspired hockey under a new head coach, just as they were back in 2019. Another would be that this Jets team is far more resilient than the one that saw Kevin Hayes stop his own breakaway attempt and Jacob Trouba try woefully to eat a puck against the endboards as the seconds ticked down.

#### *Game 1 could be Saturday or Sunday at this point*

There is currently a BTO concert scheduled at Canada Life Centre on Saturday. There is also an agreement for that concert to be moved, if it becomes necessary to start Game 1 against the Blues on Saturday. The Enterprise Center in St. Louis has building conflicts of its own: a Brooks & Dunn concert on April 25 and a Katt Williams performance on April 26.

There are combinations that work with Games 1 and 3 on Saturday and Monday in Winnipeg. There are combinations that work with Games 1 and 3 on Sunday and Tuesday in Winnipeg, too. We're all guessing until the NHL sorts out its game of scheduling Tetris; expect an official announcement on Wednesday.

#### *Winnipeg's Game 1 forward lines and defence pairs*

Arniel will likely get Vilardi back as an option during Round 1. Game 1 seems like a long shot, given Vilardi took the ice for the first time on Tuesday. Ehlers won't be available, while Logan Stanley appears to have re-emerged as a front-runner for left-side duties with Luke Schenn on the third pair.

Here are projected Jets lines, based on what Arniel chose on Saturday against Chicago — with Ehlers healthy — and the options he went with on Sunday when he rested Josh Morrissey, Neal Pionk, Adam Lowry and Schenn against Edmonton:

Kyle Connor  
Mark Scheifele

Alex Iafallo  
Nino Niederreiter  
Vladislav Namestnikov  
Cole Perfetti  
Brandon Tanev  
Adam Lowry  
Mason Appleton  
David Gustafsson  
Morgan Barron  
Jaret Anderson-Dolan  
Injured: Ehlers, Vilardi, Kupari  
Healthy: Toninato  
LD  
RD  
Josh Morrissey  
Dylan DeMelo  
Dylan Samberg  
Neal Pionk  
Logan Stanley  
Luke Schenn  
Healthy: Miller, Fleury, Heinola  
G  
Connor Hellebuyck  
Eric Comrie  
Healthy: Chris Driedger

Arniel doesn't plan on resting his top-end talent against Anaheim on Wednesday, saying the Jets are "all in" with their lineup. The Jets have the opportunity to set a new franchise record in points — they're tied with the 2017-18 edition at 114 — but Arniel's decision is more about keeping his players in rhythm. His players want to play — or, put another way, they don't want to not play: otherwise, the break between Sunday against Edmonton and Game 1 against St. Louis would be too big a disruption. Thus, Wednesday night's game will provide an enormous clue about Arniel's Game 1 plans.

For now, the tweaks will be minor. Niederreiter is first in line to join Vladislav Namestnikov and Cole Perfetti on the second line. If Niederreiter gets that job, Brandon Tanev will play the shutdown role with Adam Lowry and Mason Appleton, perhaps appropriately reminiscent of the 2017-18 Lowry-Tanev-Andrew Copp line. Whether it's Iafallo up top, Niederreiter and Namestnikov on line two, Tanev on line three or Barron on line four, Winnipeg has traded for at least one player per line who strikes me as the ideal kind of "annoying" to play against.

"That's a part of those guys," Arniel said. "That's their DNA ... You need it over the course of 82 games but in the playoffs, you really see it."

Without Vilardi to start and without Ehlers for what could become weeks, the Jets will need to get by on a bit more of that grit and determination. Iafallo's first-line promotion has been a revelation in that regard, with the progressive demonstration of forechecking and net-driving skills that have always been there. Now Niederreiter is headed for an elevated role, while Lowry's shutdown line — already one of the most heavily relied-upon defensive groups in hockey — will become all the more important.

"The difference was our line gives up three against the (Nathan) MacKinnon line," Lowry said after Game 5 last year. Winnipeg has lost some of its margin for error in the form of Ehlers and Vilardi's injuries, so Lowry's importance soars anew.

It may be a good thing that the St. Louis-born Lowry has something to prove.

#### *More injury news, potential lineup wrinkles, matchup concerns*

Iafallo's strong play gives the Jets a decision to make when Vilardi returns.

Could the Jets ease Vilardi in, perhaps giving him a second-line assignment with Namestnikov and Perfetti, allowing Niederreiter to play on Lowry's wing? The Jets have hesitated to play Vilardi or Perfetti at centre, preferring to keep as much speed as possible in the middle of the ice. Arniel could run Namestnikov between Perfetti and Vilardi while giving Jordan Kyrour's line to Lowry and Robert Thomas' line to Scheifele as he did at home earlier this month. The Jets won the flow of play battle in both the Lowry vs. Kyrour and Scheifele vs. Thomas matchups, ultimately getting Iafallo's game-winning goal.

Arniel says he hopes to have the "headache" of picking between Vilardi and Iafallo on his top line sooner than later. We know defence prospect Elias Salomonsson won't play against Anaheim. Connor Hellebuyck is expected to start, warming up for the playoffs after getting Sunday off. Rasmus Kupari is day to day on his way back from concussion protocol.

On defence, it's possible Stanley doesn't get the third-pairing job alongside Schenn. We may see Haydn Fleury at times, while Colin Miller also provides an all-right-handed option. The Stanley-Schenn pairing gives up a lot in terms of footspeed, and the idea of them going head-to-head with the Kyrour or Thomas lines could be frightening to Jets fans.

If that's a concern, take confidence from Arniel and defence coach Dean Chynoweth's control of matchups. Stanley played just 1:03 against Thomas and 1:36 against Kyrour on April 7, with the Blues' star forwards getting a steady diet of minutes against Winnipeg's top two pairs.

#### *The most negative thing we can say*

There's a chance Ehlers has played his last shift as a Winnipeg Jet.

If there was ever a season that put Ehlers in position to silence playoff critics, it was this one. He was great at five-on-five — again — and a key cog on Winnipeg's top power play for the first time. Perfetti's emergence and Namestnikov's doggedness, combined with Arniel's matching of the Lowry and Scheifele lines, gave Ehlers a thoroughly winnable secondary scoring role with established chemistry. If five-on-five offence dried up, challenging Ehlers' approach, his linemates could pick up the slack and the power play could provide confidence.

His week-to-week absence means any playoff return will require Ehlers to ramp up to incredible pace and intensity from a relative standstill. Ehlers has struggled to manage the feat in the past; he missed two playoff games in 2021 and four in 2023, contributing to a career playoff stat line of just 14 points in 37 games. Some stories end sadly; Ehlers may not get the chance to put his Jets playoff demons to rest. He's a pending UFA and his future remains up in the air.

*The most positive thing we can say*

These Jets are better and more playoff-ready than any of the recent versions before them. Ehlers is one player; the Jets are a better team than they were against Colorado in 2024, Vegas in 2023 or St. Louis in 2019. They've controlled a bigger share of the play than the Blues have at five-on-five, despite St. Louis' dominant stretch run. They're a more complete team with star players still wearing the scar tissue of last season's defeat. St. Louis was the least desirable among the three teams that entered Tuesday night as potential opponents, but Winnipeg is as undesirable an opponent as any team in the league.

As subscriber Adam B. put it earlier this week, these Jets are angry.

What better place than here, what better time than now?

This is the best Winnipeg Jets team since the one that made the Western Conference final. There's a chance it's the best Jets team of all time. It's made history, winning the city's first Central Division title, regular-season Western Conference title and Presidents' Trophy in city or franchise history. If there was ever a year for a playoff run in Winnipeg, this is that year.

There's plenty of adversity in the form of injuries, recent failures and an old playoff nemesis at the top of its game. There's also a tremendous Jets team better prepared to turn adversity from an excuse into a reason that its success was worth celebrating.