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Practice Report - April 18

Mark Scheifele is ready for anything in this series preview

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG – With the Stanley Cup Playoffs set to begin on Saturday for the Winnipeg Jets, the team has been laser focused on their opponent, the St. Louis Blues.

The Jets just faced the Blues back on April 7, an impressive 3-1 win over St. Louis where they halted their division rivals 12-game win streak, holding the visitors to just 15 shots.

“It was great to run into them since they've been on a tear since the 4 Nations was completed,” said head coach Scott Arniel.

“Lots of familiarity. Their team, a few pieces have changed over the years but at the end of the day they're a Central opponent that we've seen a lot of, and we know how they go about their business.”

Speaking of 4 Nations, it was Blues goaltender Jordan Binnington who had the spotlight on him throughout the event as Canada's starting goaltender. Binnington answered his critics with a stellar performance in the championship leading Canada past Connor Hellebuyck and the United States in overtime.

“Binnington has been in this league, he's won a Stanley Cup. The 4 Nations, his spectacular play there. At the end of the day, they've been on a run, and he's been a big part of it. He's experienced at this time of the year,” said Arniel.

“On the other side with Helle, that 4 Nations was a great opportunity for him to go head-to-head, not only against Binnington but against the other goalies from the other nations and be in pressure situations much like playoff games. Those are all the kind of the learning things for him.”

Hellebuyck followed a Vezina Trophy winning season with an even better one leading all goaltenders in wins (47), goals against average (2.00) and shutouts (8). He is more than worthy of becoming the first goaltender since Carey Price in 2015 to win the Hart Trophy. For whatever reason, Hellebuyck was ranked third in a recent NHLPA poll as the top goaltender.

“For the game I know where I'm at. I play the game for myself. If I like my game, I like my game. I like our team,” said Hellebuyck.

"We've got a lot to look ahead for here. It's just making sure my game is right, and our details are right."

As great as this season was, the questions have begun and will likely continue through the first round of the playoffs about what happened last spring against the Colorado. The Jets were the best defensive team for the second straight year and their captain, Adam Lowry also carries a lot of confidence heading into the postseason.

"I think we found our real sustainable way to win games and that's by limiting chances, having real tight structure, being solid defensively and being able to score at a pretty high rate as well," said Lowry.

"Like I said, we're really looking forward to the challenge and the pressure that comes with it. It's the best time of year."

The Jets ran a full practice at hockey for all centre this morning and the lines looked like this:

There are seven members of the current edition of the Jets who played in the 2019 playoff series between Winnipeg and St. Louis. Mark Scheifele was one of those players and says he's excited to just get things started on Saturday afternoon. The Jets centreman knows they will have to be ready to go from the drop of the puck at Canada Life Centre.

"We want to play our game, that's what we want to do. We want to have a good start to the series and get some momentum," said Scheifele.

"Every game is a different beast, gotta be ready for everything and that's what we've done all year is to be ready for anything and whatever happens, happens."

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/04/18/the-winnipeg-whiteout-meets-the-hockey-guys>

The Winnipeg Whiteout meets The Hockey Guys Social media sensations invited by Jets for Games 1 and 2

By: Ben Little

When Lawson McDonald started a YouTube channel several years ago, it was just a hobby.

McDonald grew up in Winkler playing junior hockey with his hometown Winkler Flyers. After junior, he spent two years playing college hockey at the University of Nebraska Omaha in the NCAA.

In his third year, McDonald was cut from the team and he decided to try out for the University of Wisconsin-Superior.

"If I was a better hockey player, none of this would have happened," McDonald said, jokingly.

That's where he met Austin Friesen, Marten Yelle, Levi Cudmore and former Flyers teammate Will Blake — who became The Hockey Guys.

The crew shot their first video during the COVID-19 pandemic. When it generated more than a million views, The Hockey Guys saw an opportunity.

"People had never really seen hockey players doing social media stuff," said Friesen, The Hockey Guys' social media co-ordinator, who was born in Winnipeg. "But we're kind of changing that up a little bit and I think it caught fire pretty fast."

Fast forward to now, The Hockey Guys are a TikTok sensation with more than 1.5 million followers and countless experiences including a trip to the White House, mini sticks at the Daytona 500 and their own Stanley Cup parade.

They landed in Winnipeg Friday, where the Jets have invited them to attend Games 1 and 2 of their series against the St. Louis Blues.

"That's always been on my bucket list," said McDonald about the group's trip to Winnipeg. "It's going to be really fun, I'm excited to be a part of it."

Winnipeg is not the first NHL team to invite the group to attend. In fact, The Hockey Guys have worked with half of the NHL's teams to date.

Before their final season at UW Superior, new opportunities emerged for The Hockey Guys brand when NCAA student athletes could finally profit off their name, image and likeness. This allowed The Hockey Guys to turn their exposure into cash.

That year, the group was invited by the NHL and Discover Card to the Winter Classic in Minneapolis. And once their season ended, The Hockey Guys went on a "Spring Break Tour," visiting four hockey towns in seven days.

That spring break tour launched interest around the NHL, where The Hockey Guys were invited to rinks across the country. They worked with team mascots, or highlighted unique features about a team's arena, or go-to spots before the game.

"That's what the teams kind of recognized that we could do to provide value," said Friesen. "Showing the fun experience at a game."

The Hockey Guys success also attracted political attention, earning them an invitation to the White House to celebrate the Vegas Golden Knights Stanley Cup win in 2023.

Friesen said the crew received individual emails from the White House. At first, it seemed too good to be true.

“It said ‘dot gov,’ and we saw the White House stamp at the bottom of the email and were like, ‘OK, what the heck?’” said Friesen, noting the group were some of the first creators to ever be invited to the White House.

They were even congratulated by NHL commissioner Gary Bettman — perhaps, for the wrong reason, as Cudmore had been mistaken for a Vegas Golden Knight.

“(Bettman) went up to (Cudmore) and said like ‘good job,’ or ‘good to see you again,’ something like that,” said Friesen.

The Hockey Guys TikTok page is full of adventures like these. They skated in the Washington Capitals alumni game, played mini sticks against a pit crew minutes before the Daytona 500, attended Game 7 of last year’s Stanley Cup Finals and watched Team Canada win gold at the 4 Nations Face-Off.

Now, they get to bring that adventure to Winnipeg.

“I’m excited to show these guys the Whiteout... and how electric the city gets,” Friesen said.

As for a prediction, McDonald said he took the Jets to win the Stanley Cup in his playoff bracket.

Friesen took a more subtle approach.

“I’m a big, big Jets fan, so I’m going to be rooting for them all the way through, until June,” Friesen emphasized.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/04/18/let-the-playoffs-begin-2>

Let the playoffs begin

Jets looking for post-season redemption as puck drops on first round

By: Ken Wiebe

Mark Scheifele was doing his best, politely answering the string of questions that were coming his way on the eve of the Stanley Cup playoffs.

The Winnipeg Jets’ top centre was speaking in measured tones, bouncing between expressing genuine excitement about the best-of-seven series with the St. Louis Blues

and the even-keeled nature that will be required to navigate the roller-coaster ride that begins in earnest on Saturday when the puck is finally dropped.

Scheifele kept the same tone when talking about the value of past experiences, whether good, bad or ugly.

But when the subject of scar tissue was broached, Scheifele perked up and attacked the question head-on.

“That’s for the science nerds out there. That’s what brings it all back together,” said Scheifele. “And that’s what makes something that’s broken or injured heal. So, scar tissue is important.”

It seemed fitting that Scheifele relayed a lesson learned from Jets’ 1.0 legend and Barrie Colts head coach Dale Hawerchuk as he worked to tie it all together.

“I remember Dale told me this (after) my first year, we were the worst team in the CHL, and he said, ‘losing isn’t a bad thing. It’s something that you get to learn from,’” said Scheifele.

“You first have to learn how to lose before you get to learn how to win. So, I remember that all the time, and those scars are something that make you who you are. And if it doesn’t kill you, it makes you stronger.”

Some of those scars have run deep for Scheifele and the core group of this Jets team, dating back to losing Game 5 of the Western Conference final to the Vegas Golden Knights in 2018.

This isn’t a history lesson, and the Jets don’t need to be reminded that they’ve won just one playoff series since eliminating the Nashville Predators in the second round in 2018 — that coming in 2021 when they swept the Edmonton Oilers 4-0.

They’ve lived through each of the heartbreaking moments, which include getting swept by the Montreal Canadiens in the second round in 2021 after Scheifele was suspended for his hit on Jake Evans.

During the past two springs, the Jets won the series opener against the Colorado Avalanche and Golden Knights, only to lose the next four games to be ousted in five games.

“I don’t know if I look at it as scar tissue, it’s more experiences and things to draw upon. Obviously, they’re not fond memories of the last two playoffs,” said Jets captain Adam Lowry.

“You want to be able to draw upon those negative experiences and use them to your advantage. Use those trials and tribulations that you went through in order to help better you in the future.”

Those trials and tribulations ran deep, but you could argue that they were the impetus for making the improvements required to produce the most successful regular season in franchise history.

Of the many accomplishments the Jets have already celebrated are a first Central Division crown, a Western Conference title and a Presidents’ Trophy for finishing first overall in the NHL with a record of 56-22-4.

“I’m not saying that because of our past failures, you need to make amends or anything like that, but it definitely has driven us to be a better team overall and to be better individuals, just trying to get better at our craft,” said Jets defenceman Dylan DeMelo.

“The core of this group has grown together and matured together. We’ve brought in pieces to help that. There’s just a maturity factor with our overall game from two years ago and even last year.

“We’ve got a clear understanding of what we need to do to be successful and, overall this year, we haven’t wavered from that.”

Dating back to training camp, the Jets have recognized that this season will be judged by what happens in Game 83 and beyond.

That time has arrived and the final exam begins with a duel against the team that inflicted a painful memory in the opening round of 2019, when the Blues bounced the Jets in six games.

The Jets entered that season as a legitimate Stanley Cup contender and seemed to be on cruise control until a late-season stumble knocked them into second place in the Central and a date with a team of destiny.

Although the Jets have a clear appreciation of where they came up short in the past, they don’t seem to be carrying a heavy burden from those past disappointing losses.

“We’re done with last year. It’s behind us, in the sense of we’re not thinking about Colorado and what we should and shouldn’t do,” said Jets head coach Scott Arniel.

“We just went through the 82 games of building our brand, like I said, getting scars, growing callouses, doing all the things that when you get into this moment that you’ve been through.

“These are all sort of learning curves that we’ve kind of talked about in October, we’ve talked about in December and then even last week there’s things that we came across

that we knew that we were going to have to make sure that if it comes up in (the) playoffs, that we've experienced (it), we know how to handle it."

Now it's time to show it when the stakes are highest.

The regeneration Scheifele referenced seems to be at the forefront for a group that has lofty aspirations, but has also been able to navigate the treacherous terrain that brought them to this point.

That includes a 15-1 start that was the best record in NHL history, a franchise record for points, winning streaks of eight, seven and 11 games.

It also included staving off a late push from the Dallas Stars (who ended up 10 points back in the Central) and leaving the Washington Capitals in the dust in the Presidents' Trophy battle.

In short, this group has tackled whatever challenge was in front of them.

"We really are just staying in the moment and having a singular focus," said DeMelo.

"I'm not saying it wasn't there in years past, but it feels like this year, we clinched the Central after the Chicago game and you wouldn't have really known. It was like 'sweet, we got it.' We got the Presidents' Trophy and it was kind of like 'cool, we got it.' We're really focused on the task at hand and you've got guys that are really hungry this year."

The hunger can only be quenched by a deep playoff run and, with that in mind, let's dig into some of the juiciest storylines for this series:

Centres of attention

Scheifele is someone the Jets will be leaning on, not to carry them by himself, but as someone to lead the charge — much like he did in 2018, when he produced 14 goals and 20 points in 17 games.

Scheifele's personal scar tissue includes several injuries to go along with his suspension that contributed to early exits.

Scheifele has 38 points in 42 career postseason games and he'll need to connect often with Kyle Connor, who had 41 goals and set a career-high with 97 points.

The chatter surrounding the Jets' second-line centre job hasn't really subsided all season long, but that's of little concern to Vladislav Namestnikov.

Namestnikov has done a solid job, picking up 38 points in 78 games, but he knows he'll need to supply some complementary offence to go with his feisty play and defensive awareness.

When it comes to the men in the middle, Morgan Barron is playing with renewed confidence and could end up being an X-factor in this series.

For the Blues, Robert Thomas is a force to be reckoned with and is the clear guy who drives the engine, even with Jordan Kyrou playing a rejuvenated game and leading the team in scoring with 36 goals.

Thomas, who is one of five Blues that were on the roster in 2019 when the team won it all, is a strong two-way player and finished with 81 points in 70 games.

Had Thomas not fractured his foot in a game with the Jets back in October, he might have eclipsed 90 points.

He's got great vision and a great shot, so you can expect Lowry and his line will be tasked with trying to contain him.

Former Brandon Wheat Kings captain Brayden Schenn also figures to be someone to keep an eye on, given his propensity to go to the hard areas and deliver in big moments.

The walking wounded

There's no shortage of top-end talent in this series, but both teams are missing significant pieces up front, at least as the series starts.

The Jets will likely be without speedy winger Nikolaj Ehlers (week-to-week, lower body) for the entire series, while right-winger Gabe Vilardi (day-to-day, upper body) continues to skate on his own and figures to join the main group in the near future.

Given the number of two-day breaks on the horizon, the best guess is that Vilardi could become an option to return to action around Game 5 or 6, which means the Jets will be without their third and fifth-leading point producers for the foreseeable future.

"They're both fantastic players, obviously guys that are missing in your lineup," said Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey.

"At the same time, one of the reasons we had such a good season is our depth and our ability to have players step up in injury cases, illness, all those things, and that's something we've really taken a lot of pride in as a group is our ability to have guys step up when someone's out."

The Blues are without talented winger Dylan Holloway, who was third in scoring with 26 goals and 63 points in 77 games.

He's got game-breaking speed and quickly established himself as a top producer in his first season with the Blues after being signed to an offer sheet by general manager

Doug Armstrong — who also got defenceman Philip Broberg from the Edmonton Oilers in identical fashion.

The exact nature and severity of Holloway's injury hasn't been revealed either, though it would be surprising if he forces his way into this series.

The addition of 2023 first-rounder Jimmy Snuggerud has helped mitigate the loss of Holloway, but the Blues would be more dangerous if both guys were in the lineup.

The coaches

Arniel has ample playoff experience from his time as a player, an assistant coach and a head coach in the minors, but Saturday will be his first Stanley Cup playoff game as an NHL bench boss.

As a player, Arniel won a gold medal with Team Canada at the World Junior Hockey Championship, a pair of Memorial Cup championships with the Cornwall Royals (1980 and 1981) and a Turner Cup with the Utah Grizzlies in 1996.

Behind the bench, he was an associate coach when the New York Rangers made it to the Stanley Cup final before losing to the Los Angeles Kings in 2014, and was the head coach of the Manitoba Moose of the American Hockey League when they advanced to the Calder Cup final in 2009 before losing in six games to the Hershey Bears.

"It's an unbelievable opportunity that I've been handed," said Arniel, noting he received a bunch of well-wishes in recent days but no advice from friends and former colleagues.

"The players helped me get here this year, just (with) the way they've played throughout the season.

"For me, really I'm going to try to stay out of the way as much as possible and let those guys go out and do what they do best."

As much as he downplayed it, there's no doubt Arniel will be feeling plenty of juice when he walks down the tunnel and the game begins.

For a guy who waited more than a decade for his second chance as an NHL head coach, Arniel has pushed almost all of the right buttons so far this season, but he wants to follow that up with a lengthy playoff run.

Standing in his way is a team led by former Manitoba Moose centre Jim Montgomery, who has the Blues wondering if it might be 2019 all over again.

Since taking over from Drew Bannister, the Blues have gone 35-18-5 and they were the hottest team in the NHL coming out of the break for the 4 Nations Face-Off.

Montgomery has helped the Blues restore their structure and identity, but he's looking to exorcise a few playoff demons of his own, including the loss in Game 7 of the 2023 playoffs to the Florida Panthers when he was the head coach of the Boston Bruins team that posted the best regular season in NHL history.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/04/18/theres-nothing-like-the-whiteout>

'There's nothing like the Whiteout'
Jets home ice advantage pivotal in pursuit of the Stanley Cup

By: Mike McIntyre

Home. There's no place like it.

It's where the heart is. It's where you go to roost. It can be your castle.

It's also where the Winnipeg Jets will begin their pursuit of the Stanley Cup on Saturday evening in front of a raucous sold-out crowd inside Canada Life Centre and thousands more fans supporting them in the streets of downtown, in local bars and lounges and in living rooms and basements across the province.

"Never gets old. Best atmosphere in hockey," Jets defenceman Neal Pionk said this week as his club prepared to face the St. Louis Blues in the best-of-seven series. "I always tell my friends I've played in a lot of places, played internationally, played in some gold medal games, whatever, state championships. And this is the best. The best it gets is the Whiteout."

The Jets captured the Presidents' Trophy this season by having the best overall record in the league, which means every playoff series would begin in their own backyard. Add it all up and that's four potential home dates in each series for a maximum of 16 overall, including every winner-take-all Game 7 that would be necessary.

A packed building going bonkers over every goal, big hit or blocked shot on the biggest stage is what every hockey player dreams of. The Jets, by virtue of their historic regular season, have earned the opportunity to take advantage of that more than any of their rivals.

"Our crowd is insane. I think the second we step on the ice we've got it. We got that home ice advantage," said goaltender Connor Hellebuyck. "I know our crowd's going to bring it."

There are seemingly other practical benefits, too, from a couple extra nights in your own bed and additional home cooking every series to the familiarity of your own rink and reduced disruption to your daily routine. There can be strategic on-ice advantages as well.

Then there are the ancillary rewards such as the potential for increased gate revenue, which is a big deal for a small market like Winnipeg. Not to mention a boost for local businesses, particularly those downtown, in addition to the sense of community that develops when a large segment of the population are uniting together to root for the home team.

Add it all up and the Jets have put themselves in prime position.

There are no guarantees in life, and certainly not when it comes to playoff hockey which is as wild and unpredictable as you get in professional sports. It's what makes the NHL so compelling during this chaotic, two-month stretch every spring where the thrill of victory and agony of defeat are magnified.

Although history shows the team that wins the Presidents' Trophy has the best statistical chance of winning the Stanley Cup compared to any other individual slot in the final standings, only eight of 37 teams have done so and none in the last 11 seasons.

So much has to go right, so many factors must align, in order to get the ultimate playoff series two months from now.

The Free Press spoke this week to a number of people to get a true sense of what home-ice advantage could mean to the Jets.

Emotional:

Ask any Jets skater to explain playoff hockey and their eyes immediately light up. There's a widespread belief that Canada Life Centre, especially when whipped into a frenzy, can truly be the equivalent of having an extra player (or two) on the ice once the stakes get high.

"The Stanley Cup playoffs are amazing. We know this city is going to be roaring and ready to go," said Jets centre Mark Scheifele.

Added captain Adam Lowry: "There's nothing like the Whiteout. We've got an incredible fan base, incredible community of supporters. Just seeing the outfits, seeing the passion and the excitement they have for us, and the support they have for us, it's awesome. You wanna play well in front of them."

With a 30-7-4 record in their own barn so far this year, the Jets have feasted on home cooking. There's no statistical category to measure the impact, but Dr. Cal Botterill says there's no question it can play a role in the outcome.

"The support of fans can often feel like a man-advantage and the data usually supports the home team," said the local sports psychologist.

“The home environment usually feels better. Feelings of support and familiar surroundings often reassure us and keep us wanting to play our best.”

Lowry said the partisan crowd can also help sway momentum back to the home team when some adversity inevitably hits.

“You’re able to have the crowd bring you back into the game,” he said.

“We’ve been a really good team playing at home and we’re looking for that to continue. Obviously, the playoffs are a different animal. There’s so much more importance on every little detail. Every goal could be the difference, so any time you can control the matchups, kind of control the environment you’re in, more often than not, I think it certainly helps.”

Mental:

So much of hockey is played between the ears and, being the favourite in a series — as the home team typically is — can potentially work against you.

“If things don’t go well, pressure can build,” said Botterill.

No doubt the Blues are counting on that. Head coach Jim Montgomery was at the helm of the Boston Bruins two years ago when they had the best regular season in NHL history, then crashed and burned in the opening round. Perhaps he’s playing some mind games, but Montgomery told reporters on Friday the Jets will be feeling the heat.

“You don’t sense it until you start playing the games,” he warned.

Former NHL bench boss Bruce Boudreau knows that all-too-well. His playoff teams experienced plenty of failures, including some epic ones on home ice which haunt him to this day. His career record in Game 7s is just 1-7.

“You’re expected to win. And you have to win or people won’t view it as a successful season,” said Boudreau, who was a head coach for four different teams over parts of 15 NHL seasons, making the playoffs 10 times but only winning five total series.

Boudreau said Game 1 can be the biggest obstacle of all.

“Usually the underdog team comes in with nothing to lose and just throws everything at you but the kitchen sink,” he said. “And if you’re not ready for it, it can make it difficult.”

There’s also the fact that the majority of top teams don’t necessarily have another higher level to reach, as they’ve likely been at it for most of the season. The lower-seeded team, however, just needs to capture lightning in a bottle for a couple weeks to pull off the upset.

"I think you have to play at least 10 per cent better in the playoffs than you did in the regular season to have success. And that's where the Presidents' Trophy winner is sort of at a disadvantage. To win that, you're usually playing as good as you can most of the season," cautioned Boudreau.

His Washington Capitals were the No. 1 regular-season team in 2009-10, going 54-15-13. They lost their opening round series to the Montreal Canadiens, who barely snuck into the playoffs as the final wild card.

"We couldn't get that 10 per cent better," he said.

Tactical:

Hockey is a game of mistakes. Usually, the team that either makes the fewest and/or takes advantage of the ones made by their opponents prevails. And that's where home ice can have an impact.

Jets head coach Scott Arniel will have the benefit of last change and want to get Lowry and his linemates (Mason Appleton and Brandon Tanev) out on the ice as much as possible whenever Montgomery has either of his top two lines on the ice.

Same goes with getting one of his two top defensive pairings — either Josh Morrissey and Dylan DeMelo, or Pionk and Dylan Samberg

On the flipside, Montgomery will have an easier time finding more favourable matchups for those players once the series shifts to Missouri. Of course, both clubs believe they are deep enough to hold their own against any matchups.

"If you're a top player and you're going against the other team's fifth and sixth defenceman, if you're our fourth line and you're out against (Robert) Thomas or (Brayden) Schenn's line, that you have responsibility, and that's where our group has been really good this year," said Arniel.

The Jets had home ice advantage last season against Colorado, led by then head coach Rick Bowness. They coughed it up in Game 2 and never recovered, losing Games 3 and 4 in Denver and then Game 5 back in Winnipeg which was followed with Bowness retiring a few days later.

The previous season, they began on the road in Vegas, snatched home ice advantage with a Game 1 victory, then proceeded to drop the next four straight including Games 3 and 4 at Canada Life Centre.

Still, Bowness remains a believer.

"Every coach would much rather have home-ice advantage," he said. "It's far better to have it than to not have it. Especially with the fans we have here in Winnipeg, they're so fantastic. A blocked shot they react. A back check, they react. They react to all the good

plays. The crowd is so knowledgeable, so energetic. That helps the players. You can feel it on the bench.”

Practical:

The New York Rangers played 10 home playoff games last year, making it all the way to the Eastern Conference Final. They reported overall revenue of US\$50 million, which included ticket sales, concessions and merchandise. That gives you a sense of just how much is at stake with each home date.

According to the NHL, gross playoff ticket revenues alone accounted for more than US\$200 million last season. They keep 35 per cent of the overall gate, while individual franchises pocket the other 65 per cent.

“For a small market like Winnipeg, every extra home game you can get helps. It’s a huge benefit to that bottom line,” said Bowness.

“I hope they go on a long run. Great ownership there. They deserve it for sure.”

It’s not just the team that benefits. Bram Strain, president and CEO of the Business Council of Winnipeg, said the local economy will reap the rewards from a lengthy Stanley Cup chase.

“It brings people downtown. There’s an obvious spin-off. The deeper we go, the better it is,” said Strain, who is a Jets season-ticket holder. “It really energizes the city.”

The Jets have donated \$312,000 to local charities from previous Whiteout street parties and this year has the potential to be bigger than ever. They will give \$5 from every outdoor street party ticket that is sold to the United Way, which means every playoff game has the potential to bring \$31,000 into their coffers. If the Jets go all the way to the Final and play the maximum number of home games the end result would be \$496,000.

They are also holding watch parties for all road games inside Canada Life Centre, with up to 15,225 paying \$10 each. All proceeds go towards the True North Youth Foundation.

“I think there’s a tremendous social benefit to the city. It gets us all together for a common good, it gets people downtown and into areas where they might not go all the time,” said Strain.

“And I think it’s a real opportunity to showcase our positives. Very often, when something comes out about the city, they tend to dwell on some sort of negative. There’s so much positive.”

Canadian Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/04/18/embracing-the-pressure-jets-look-to-make-good-on-playoff-expectations-versus-blues>

'Embracing the pressure': Jets look to make good on playoff expectations versus Blues

By: Judy Owen, The Canadian Press

WINNIPEG – Judgement Day has arrived for the Winnipeg Jets.

Despite the NHL team's long list of regular-season accomplishments, many hockey fans will only view this campaign as a success if the Jets go deep in the playoffs.

The quest begins Saturday when Winnipeg takes on the St. Louis Blues in Game 1 of its best-of-seven Western Conference first-round playoff series before a "whiteout" full house at Canada Life Centre.

"Regardless of how well your regular season goes, you're generally judged on performance in the playoffs and things like that," Jets captain Adam Lowry said. "We're embracing the pressure. We're excited for the challenge ahead."

Jets head coach Scott Arniel is well aware of the expectations.

"We're still going to be judged on what happens from Game 83 on," Arniel said after the team clinched its franchise-first Presidents' Trophy for top regular-season record.

"There's still lots to happen and, hopefully, there's a long story to go with that and it gets to be a two-and-a-half-month long story."

Winnipeg was eliminated in five games in the past two first rounds, including last year against Colorado after finishing fourth in the league with 52 wins.

The Jets carry a 56-22-4 record into the battle with the Blues – and the weight of fans' Stanley Cup dreams.

The last Canadian team to win the championship was the Montreal Canadiens in 1993.

The deepest the Jets have gone was in 2017-18, when they reached the conference final and lost in five games to the Vegas Golden Knights.

Last year's early exit left a sense of disbelief that turned into a spark to start this season.

The Jets won 15 of their first 16 games and never let go of the conference's top spot they reached on Jan. 14.

The club didn't make splashy additions at the trade deadline, instead grabbing grit and experience in forward Brandon Tanev and two-time Stanley Cup-winning defenceman Luke Schenn.

"(Tanev is) so tenacious, he can kind of bring the building to its feet, just with a forecheck and kind of with his Tasmanian Devil-like energy," Lowry said.

The series against the Blues (44-30-8) is expected to be a hard-hitting defensive matchup.

Winnipeg's crease is manned by reigning Vezina Trophy winner Connor Hellebuyck, while St. Louis counters with veteran Jordan Binnington.

Under head coach Jim Montgomery (who replaced Drew Bannister in late November), the Blues went 19-4-3 after the 4 Nations Face-Off break in February and only clinched the final wild-card spot with a last-game victory over Utah.

Binnington was 13-3-1 during that span after helping deliver a gold medal to Canada in the tournament final against Hellebuyck and the United States.

The Jets hold the edge in offensive output, with 13 players registering 10 or more goals.

Kyle Connor led the team with a career-high 97 points, good for seventh in the league. His seventh-ranked 41 goals were two more than top-line centre Mark Scheifele, who finished with 87 points. Both played 82 games.

Robert Thomas had 21 goals and 81 points in 70 games for St. Louis. He takes a 12-game point streak into the playoffs (four goals, 21 assists). Jordan Kyrou tallied a team-high 36 goals and 70 points in 82 outings.

Both clubs have key injured players expected to miss the start of the series.

Jets second-line winger Nikolaj Ehlers is week to week. Top-line winger Gabriel Vilardi missed the last 11 regular-season games but is listed as day to day and skating on his own.

Blues second-line winger Dylan Holloway missed his team's final five games. He's week to week but skating on his own.

Season series

Hellebuyck and the Jets halted the Blues' franchise-record, NHL season-longest 12-game win streak on April 7 with a 3-1 victory in Winnipeg. Manitoba-born backup Joel Hofer was in net for the visitors.

It gave the Jets a 3-1 season-series triumph, including a pair of wins in St. Louis. Backup Eric Comrie shut the door in a 4-3 shootout road win on Feb. 22 with Hofer on the other side.

Jets second-line winger Cole Perfetti collected a team-best five points (all assists) in the season series. Thomas led the Blues with three goals and five assists in his four games.

Last time out

The clubs' previous playoff meeting was in 2019, a first-round series the Blues won in six games.

It was the start of a run that propelled St. Louis to its first Stanley Cup via a Game 7 victory over the Boston Bruins.

Breakout potential

Perfetti is pumped after playing 82 games for the first time in four seasons, including a career-high 50 points. He's on the team's first power-play unit in place of Ehlers.

The Whitby, Ont., product was a healthy scratch for some games down the stretch last season and only got into one playoff match. Injuries sidelined him for parts of his first two seasons.

Blues second-line winger Jimmy Snuggerud made his NHL debut April 1 and put up a goal and three assists in his first seven games.

Montgomery has noted the "hockey sense" of the 2022 first-round draft pick (23rd overall). He's given the Minnesota-born forward time on the first power-play unit with the absence of Holloway.

NHL.com

<https://www.nhl.com/news/hellebuyck-aims-to-reverse-playoff-fortune-for-jets>

Hellebuyck focuses on positives, out to reverse playoff fortunes for Jets Vezina-winning goalie has 2-8 record over past two playoffs

By Tracey Myers

WINNIPEG – Connor Hellebuyck hesitated briefly before answering.

The Winnipeg Jets goalie was asked about being considered the third-best goalie in the League in the NHL Players' Association Poll and if his lack of Stanley Cup Playoff success is a reason for that.

"You know, we've done some great things this year. We don't need to go look at all the bad things that other people's opinions have on us," he said Thursday. "I would say let's ask questions about how our details are and how's this team feeling, what's right and what's going well in this room.

"A lot of those questions are answered through our game every single day. Our details are phenomenal. We played every single game as hard as we can. Our compete level is very, very high every single night. I really believe in this group and look forward to the next couple months."

It's probably frustrating for Hellebuyck to discuss his playoff struggles but it's also a topic that's hard to avoid. The 31-year-old has been an absolute star in the regular season, winning the Vezina Trophy as the best goalie in the NHL in 2019-20 and last season – and likely to win it against this year – but the playoffs have been another story.

He's 18-27 with a 2.85 goals-against average, .911 save percentage and three shutouts in 45 starts.

In his first postseason, he went 9-8 and took the Jets to the 2018 Western Conference Final, but since then, he's 9-19, helping the Jets win just one round (in 2019-20). In the past two postseasons, he's 2-8, each time a regular season with promise ending in the first round.

But he gets another chance to turn around his postseason fates on Saturday, when the Jets play the St. Louis Blues in Game 1 of the Western Conference First Round at Canada Life Centre on Saturday (6 p.m., ET; CBC, TVAS, SN, TNT, ALT, SN360, SN, TVAS).

The Jets (56-22-4) won the Presidents' Trophy, awarded annually to the team that finishes with the most points in the regular season. The Blues (44-30-8) had a franchise-best 12-game winning streak as part of a strong second half and clinched the second wild card from the West in their final regular-season game, a 6-1 win against the Utah Hockey Club, on Tuesday.

Hellebuyck looks destined to win his second consecutive Vezina Trophy after going 47-12-3 with a 2.00 goals-against average, .925 save percentage and NHL-leading eight shutouts in 63 regular-season games (62 starts).

But can he carry that into the playoffs? Those who know him say he will.

"Oh, he's ready for that. He's not happy with the way things have gone the last four years," former Jets coach Rick Bowness said. "He knows he's a lot better than that and the whole team has taken that attitude that, 'OK, we're going to prove that we're better than last year in the playoffs,' and he leads the charge."

Hellebuyck silenced some critics with his play for the United States in the 4 Nations Face-Off. He led the U.S. to the championship game, where it lost to Canada in overtime.

Jordan Binnington, his counterpart for Canada in the best-on-best tournament, will be there again in the first round for the Blues.

“Obviously he’s had a tremendous year, he’s a great goaltender,” Binnington said of Hellebuyck. “But it’s kind of not my job to think about that, right? It’s just focusing on myself and doing what I can to be my best, to give our team a chance to win.”

Binnington reached the NHL pinnacle in 2019 when he helped the Blues win their first Stanley Cup. Binnington went 16-10 with a 2.46 GAA, .914 save percentage and one shutout in 26 playoff games that year. Since then, he’s 4-10 in the postseason and has plenty to prove as well.

But like Hellebuyck, he’s not focused on the negatives.

“Mentally, (Binnington) has incredibly positive thoughts,” Blues coach Jim Montgomery said. “His self-talk is incredibly positive, and he sees himself doing great things in big moments. It’s a mindset and, thank God he’s our goaltender.”

This season, Binnington was 28-22-5 with a 2.69 GAA, a .900 save percentage and three shutouts in 56 games (54 starts).

“He’s won a Stanley Cup. The 4 Nations, his spectacular play there. At the end of the day, they’ve been on a run, and he’s been a big part of it,” Jets coach Scott Arniel said. “He’s experienced at this time of the year.

“On the other side with ‘Helly,’ that 4 Nations was a great opportunity for him to go head-to-head, not only against Binnington but against the other goalies from the other nations and be in pressure situations much like playoff games. Those are all kinds of learning things for him. For Helly, he’s proven how great of a goaltender he is.”

Hellebuyck went 2-1-0 with a 1.59 GAA and .932 save percentage in three starts at 4 Nations. Those performances convinced ESPN NHL analyst and Hockey Hall of Famer Mark Messier that he’s is ready for these playoffs.

“Getting through the 4 Nations and how well he played there has got to be a huge boost for him,” he said. “You know, we always say that coaches don’t carry around five-gallon buckets of confidence and hand it out at will. You know, confidence is earned by success and failures. For me, the kind of year that he’s stitched together for himself this year is really, really, really impressive.

“(At) 4 Nations, at the highest level he didn’t back up an inch, never flinched. If I’m Winnipeg, I’m really, really excited about that.”

Hellebuyck believes in his game. So do the Jets. So do those who have seen what Hellebuyck has done this season, with Winnipeg or the U.S.

"When we were starting the 4 Nations Face-Off, that was a big storyline because of the pressure," ESPN play-by-play broadcaster Sean McDonough said. "To me, exactly what (Messier) said, hopefully (Hellebuyck) has shed this question about whether he can handle that kind of pressure in the big moments because I haven't played in Stanley Cup Playoff games, but I've called a bunch of them now.

"The 4 Nations Face-Off was as pressure-packed and as intense as any playoff game. I would put it right there with Game 7 that we did last year between Edmonton and Florida. So, for him to play at the level he did in the 4 Nations under that kind of pressure and intense scrutiny, I think bodes very well for the way he's going to play in the playoffs. He's the best goalie in the world."

<https://www.nhl.com/news/winnipeg-jets-st-louis-blues-western-first-round-series-preview>

***2025 Stanley Cup Playoffs: Jets vs. Blues Western 1st round preview
Presidents' Trophy winners look to ride Hellebuyck past Thomas, St. Louis***

By Tracey Myers

The first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs features 16 teams in eight best-of-7 series, which start Saturday. Today, NHL.com previews the Western Conference First Round between the Winnipeg Jets and the St. Louis Blues.

(1C) Winnipeg Jets vs. (WC2) St. Louis Blues

Jets: 56-22-4, 116 points

Blues: 44-30-8, 96 points

Season series: WPG: 3-1-0; STL: 1-2-1

Game 1: Saturday at Winnipeg (6 p.m. ET; CBC, TVAS, SN, TNT, truTV, MAX, FDSNMW)

The Jets and Blues will meet in the Stanley Cup Playoffs for the first time since the 2019 Western Conference First Round. The Blues won that best-of-7 series in six games and went on to win the Stanley Cup for the first time in their history.

Winnipeg lost the 2024 first round in five games to the Colorado Avalanche after finishing with 110 points. This season it won the Presidents' Trophy, awarded annually to the team that finishes with the most points in the regular season, and is hoping that success carries into the postseason.

"It's a good matchup, and it's going to be huge for us to get off to a good start here at home," Jets forward Alex Lafallo said Wednesday after signing a three-year, \$11 million

contract (\$3.67 million average annual value). "Obviously, big, big specialty team, matchup, so we got to be ready for that and keep our mindset pushing forward.

"We know [what] we're going to get. We know what we expect from ourselves, so drop of the puck, we've got to be ready to rock. And ready to succeed in every zone, pushing the puck forward and just getting on their defense."

It won't be easy against the Blues, who went on a franchise-record 12-game winning streak from March 15-April 5 to give themselves a chance at a playoff berth. They hired Jim Montgomery as coach to replace Drew Bannister on Nov. 24, when they were 9-12-1, and are back in the playoffs after a two-season absence, clinching the second wild card with a 6-1 win against the Utah Hockey Club on Tuesday.

"This is what you play for," Blues captain Brayden Schenn said. "This is what you train for in the summer, and this is what you play for all year, to have a chance at the Stanley Cup. Just have to get in and anything can happen. We saw that years ago and we've been on a good run here.

"At the same time, [we] just can't be happy that we're in. Winnipeg's obviously a good team and going to present a good challenge for us. I don't think anyone gave us a chance, really, at the end of the day, where we were. I'm glad we kept it together. Too many good pieces in this locker room to not get in the playoffs. We felt if we played hard for one another, we could get the job done. It just took 82 games."

Game breakers

Jets: It's been quite the season for Kyle Connor. The forward had an NHL career-high 97 points (41 goals, 56 assists) in 82 games, four more than his previous best in 2021-22. The 28-year-old also led Winnipeg with 28 power-play points. Connor is the second player in Jets/Atlanta Thrashers history with multiple 40-plus goal seasons (two); Ilya Kovalchuk is first with five. The Jets have had plenty of scoring this season, but Connor has led the pack.

Blues: Is there a hotter player going into the playoffs than Robert Thomas? The forward ended the regular season on a 12-game point streak (25 points; four goals, 21 assists). That includes two four-point games (against the Montreal Canadiens on March 25 and the Colorado Avalanche on April 5). Thomas led the Blues with 81 points (21 goals, 60 assists) in 70 games.

Goaltending

Jets: Connor Hellebuyck is the reigning Vezina Trophy winner, awarded annually to the League's top goalie, and he's probably going to win it again this season. It's hard to argue otherwise. The 31-year-old is 47-12-3 with a 2.00 goals-against average, .925 save percentage and an NHL-leading eight shutouts in 63 games (62 starts). His shutouts are the most in the League since 2021-22, when Jacob Markstrom had nine with the Calgary Flames.

Blues: Jordan Binnington's numbers aren't as strong as they've been in past seasons, but he was good and keeps showing his mettle on big stages. Just look back at the 2019 Stanley Cup run or the 4 Nations Face-Off in February, when he helped Canada to the championship. The 31-year-old was 28-22-5 with a 2.69 GAA, .900 save percentage and three shutouts in 56 games (54 starts) in the regular season. He'll be up to the task in this series.

Numbers to know

Jets: Mark Scheifele has the most postseason goals in Jets/Atlanta Thrashers history with 21. Connor (15) is next, and Adam Lowry is third (11).

Blues: Pavel Buchnevich became the fifth player in Blues history with four consecutive 20-goal seasons from the start of his tenure with St. Louis, joining Pierre Turgeon (five from 1996-97 to 2000-01), Doug Gilmour (five from 1983-84 to 1987-88), Jorgen Pettersson (five from 1980-81 to 1984-85) and Brendan Shanahan (four from 1991-92 to 1994-95).

They said it

"I'm happy that a lot of the things that we talked about in training camp, we accomplished. Obviously, the Presidents' Trophy wasn't one of them that we talked about but I'm really proud to be a part of this team. We're still going to be judged on what happens from Game 83 on. There's still lots to happen and hopefully there's a long story to go with that and it gets to be a 2 1/2-month long story." -- Jets coach Scott Arniel on their season

"I thought as soon as I coached the first game against the (New York) Rangers (a 5-2 win at Madison Square Garden on Nov. 25). I saw how much depth of talent was here. I thought, if we can get to the right places in our habits and our game management, that we'd be able to do this. But like I've said all along, it took longer than I expected." -- Montgomery on the Blues making the playoffs

Will win if ...

Jets: They keep the regular-season mindset. OK, that's hard to do when you face elimination in a best-of-7 series, but they have to approach this round with the same confidence and attitude they did throughout the season. They can be motivated by last season's early postseason exit but not consumed by it. The Jets have a whole lot going for them. They'll have the "Winnipeg Whiteout" greeting them at home, starting with Games 1 and 2, and they need to take advantage of it.

Blues: They stick with the game they've played since February. The Blues entered the 4 Nations Face-Off eight points out of a playoff spot. They went 19-4-3 out of the break and didn't look back. The Blues are physical and are playing as a strong, collective group. They just need to shore up their 27th-ranked penalty kill (74.2 percent) that will face the top power play in the League (28.9 percent).

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/jets-notebook-next-man-up-mentality-to-be-tested-vs-blues/>

Jets Notebook: Next-man-up mentality to be tested vs. Blues

By Jacob Stoller

WINNIPEG — Walking into a playoff series without two 60-plus point scorers stings.

And unfortunately for the Winnipeg Jets, life without Gabriel Vilardi and Nikolaj Ehlers could become the norm throughout their first-round series against the St. Louis Blues.

Ehlers, who has been sidelined with a right-foot injury since Saturday's game against the Chicago Blackhawks, was listed as "week-to-week" by Jets coach Scott Arniel on Tuesday.

Vilardi hasn't played since sustaining an undisclosed upper-body injury against the Buffalo Sabres on March 23rd. He hasn't taken part in a full team practice since.

Right off the bat of the 2024-25 playoffs, the Jets are forced to adopt a next-man-up mentality. Playing short of two top-six forwards — who are also weapons on the power play — puts a microscope on not only the team's depth but Arniel and his staff's willingness to make adjustments.

The latter has been a source of pride for the Presidents' Trophy winners, who managed to stay atop the league's standings all year despite various stretches where they were without Dylan Samberg, Adam Lowry and Neal Pionk.

"Now, it's obviously a bigger stage," Arniel said after Friday's practice. "But I expect them to do the exact same things they have been doing to this point."

All eyes turn to Alex Iafallo and Cole Perfetti.

Iafallo has filled in admirably for Vilardi, recording seven points in 11 games and providing a defensive conscience to the top-line duo of Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor.

Perfetti, on the other hand, is the key to Winnipeg having a second wave of attack beyond Scheifele's line. Fresh off a career-high 50-point campaign, the 23-year-old played some of his best hockey down the stretch — recording 25 of those points in his final 33 games — and has found a way to be engaged in all areas of the ice.

On paper, both Perfetti and Iafallo have shown enough to make Arniel confident enough in keeping his top-six depth chart (relatively) the same. But this time of year, things can change in an instant.

"The one thing about playoffs, especially if you get in a long series, you have to make adjustments," Arniel said.

But when push comes to shove, will Winnipeg make the hard decisions?

If Scheifele and Connor struggle against Robert Thomas' line and their makeshift second line of Perfetti, Vladislav Namestnikov and Nino Niederreiter can't generate anything — will Arniel split up his dynamic duo, creating a more balanced top-six?

While Scheifele and Connor have been attached by the hip virtually all year, the way Blues coach Jim Montgomery rolls his lines may pose a matchup nightmare.

"With (Jordan Krou) being with (Brayden Schenn), and then there's (Pavel Buchnevich) and (Robert Thomas), that's two heavy, heavy lines of offence," Arniel said on Thursday.

Hellebuyck

Remember when Connor Hellebuyck said after last year's first-round collapse that he felt he should play more of a team game and was putting too much on his shoulders?

Scrunch that up and toss it in the garbage.

"I scrapped that real fast," Hellebuyck said after Thursday's practice. "Not saying that I am putting everything on my shoulders, but my goal throughout my entire career is to get a shutout every single night. That is what makes me, me. And that is what I feed off of."

The Jets need a motivated Hellebuyck. And boy, are the stars ever aligning for a revenge tour: the way the last two playoffs went. Losing in the gold medal game at the 4 Nations. Plus, the recent NHLPA player poll, where he was voted in as the third-best goalie in the world, trailing Andrei Vasilevskiy and Igor Shesterkin.

"Obviously people aren't watching the Winnipeg Jets enough," Cole Perfetti said after Tuesday's practice.

One thing to note — the poll was conducted before the Christmas break.

Home ice (dis)advantage?

Winnipeg will have home-ice advantage throughout the playoffs.

"It limits travel to start a series," Lowry said after Thursday's practice. "You're able to keep your routine. Obviously, the start times are all over the place, but you control the matchups in-game. If you don't have the momentum, you're able to have the crowd bring you back into the game. There's a lot of different factors playing at home. We've been a really good team playing at home and we're looking for that to continue. Obviously, the playoffs are a different animal."

While the Jets have the third-best home win percentage over the last three seasons (.711), they've won just one of their four home playoff games through that span.

Blues notes

- Montgomery confirmed on Friday that Robert Thomas — who exited Tuesday's game against the Utah Hockey Club with a lower-body injury — is good-to-go for Game 1. During the Blues' post-4 Nations break heater, Thomas led the NHL in scoring with 40 points in 26 games.
- From the trade deadline to the end of the regular season, St. Louis ranked first in penalty kill percentage (87.8 per cent). Through that same span, the Jets' power play ranked 23rd (17.4 per cent).

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/why-this-years-winnipeg-jets-are-different-heading-into-stanley-cup-playoffs/>

Why this year's Winnipeg Jets are different heading into Stanley Cup Playoffs

By Jacob Stoller

WINNIPEG — A meeting between Mark Scheifele, Josh Morrissey, Adam Lowry and Scott Arniel last summer set the course for this season.

A few months after being hired as the Winnipeg Jets' head coach, Arniel called his captain and two assistants — all of whom reside in Calgary for most of the off-season. He wanted to fly out and sit down..

The foursome gathered at a fine-dining Italian restaurant, Mercato's, for a lengthy lunch in mid-August. The conversation was centred around how this Jets team, fresh off consecutive years of strong regular seasons and disappointing first-round exits, could go from a bubble team to a legitimate Stanley Cup contender.

Scheifele, Lowry and Morrissey — three players who have each spent over a decade with the organization — delivered a unified message to Arniel.

"The message from us was 'hey, we are all well into our careers, we've got a great team, a great leadership group and great players. We want to be pushed to try to take that next step,'" Morrissey recounted. "The expectation was that he coaches us as if we're pushing to be a championship team."

The players believed that execution had to be demanded at a higher level.

"Looking back now and when you look at all the steps we've taken, I think that meeting is where it all really started," Lowry told Sportsnet.ca

If you've listened to Jets players and coaches speak publicly this season, you'll notice that they often discuss their habits. Their non-negotiables are painted on one of their dressing room walls.

Structure. Embrace hard areas. Win 50/50 battles. 10 per cent more.

"The 10 more per cent more idea, it applies to everything we do," Lowry explained. "Whether it's a workout or a recovery, it's like what can you do to try and make you a better player, better teammate and better part of this organization?"

They've rallied around the sentiment.

"We're not driven by results. We're driven by the process," Dylan DeMelo told Sportsnet.ca. "It's easy in an 82-game season, when you win four or five games that you maybe deserved to lose and be all smiling and happy. But it's like well, did we really play a good game? And vice versa. Maybe you lose 2-1, but you had a great game and you just couldn't score. Well, what are you going to do... sulk about it? Or are you going to break it down for what it was, take the positives out of it and move on?"

That line of thinking explains DeMelo's noteworthy comments during the team's winning eight straight games to start the year.

"It's great that we've got a great start but we really haven't done crap, to be honest with you," DeMelo said in late October.

At the time, despite what their record entailed, the Jets players knew they weren't consistently sticking to their identity.

"There were times during those long winning streaks where we were getting absolutely ripped apart by our coaching staff because we weren't playing good hockey," DeMelo said. "We were playing loose."

After that winning streak ended, they responded with seven straight wins and started to inch closer to that 'stingy' — as they call it — brand of hockey.

"We went 15-1 to start the year, and I don't think we even really appreciated how impressive that was," Morrissey said. "We were just kind of in the moment, rolling, looking at it like 'hey, the end goal is for us to have a championship-calibre hockey team. And obviously, the ultimate goal is to make that happen but day in and day out — what you do, how we prepare, how we push each other — that's where our focus has been all year."

During training camp, Winnipeg's coaches organized focus groups to facilitate team-building discussions. Arniel was taken aback that every group came back and said that part of their identity, first and foremost, was going to be how they defended as a team. It was clear that everybody was pulling on the same rope.

“To be in hockey games, we had enough skill to score goals but everybody knows that when it comes to Game 83 and on, the teams that defend the best are the ones that usually end up at the end of the day holding (the Stanley Cup),” Arniel said on Wednesday after Winnipeg won its second straight William M. Jennings Trophy.

Mind you, it’s not just the team’s defensive players delivering.

Scheifele and Kyle Connor have taken great strides in their work away from the puck, while also getting a sprinkle of penalty kill time added to their workload. Nikolaj Ehlers demonstrated an ability to simplify his game when he played alongside Adam Lowry on the team’s shutdown line. Cole Perfetti evolved into an asset defensively.

Having your top offensive weapons buy in like that is a recipe for success.

“My first year with San Jose, we went to the Cup Finals and it’s because of the buy-in from our group and from everybody,” DeMelo said. “It wasn’t just the third and fourth lines playing stingy. It was Joe Thornton, Joe Pavelski, Patrick Marleau and Logan Couture leading the charge and playing just as hard and as detailed in the D-zone as they were in the offensive zone. Everybody was buying in to the way you have to play in order to win.”

Not only has Winnipeg’s defensive metrics improved from last season, but they’ve also consistently improved throughout their Presidents’ Trophy campaign.

“Adding Luke (Schenn) and (Brandon Tanev) at the end added more to that grit style of play,” Arniel said. “The games aren’t fancy and wide open in the playoffs, they’re tight and they’re heavy, and we like to feel that we’re built for that. We’ve gone into the games this year at different points of the season where we’ve run into those games that are heavy, and our response has been really good.”

Last spring, the team’s defensive structure dissipated in the first round. They were never able to get into a rhythm, even during their Game 1 win — a 7-6 game that was far from the template of ‘Winnipeg Jets’ hockey.

But this time around, they’re not only a better version of themselves on the ice — but off of it as well. They’re going to take it one day at a time.

“Win or lose, you have to stay even-keeled, especially in the playoffs,” DeMelo said. “You’re playing the same team. Things happen. You might be up 1-0. You might be down 1-0. There are injuries. Ebbs and flows of series’. How are you going to react? You’ve got to stay in the moment and focus on what you’ve got to do to be the best version of yourself.”

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/breaking-down-which-teams-can-pull-off-round-1-upset-in-stanley-cup-playoffs/>

Breaking down which teams can pull off Round 1 upset in Stanley Cup Playoffs

By David Morassutti

For most teams heading into the Stanley Cup Playoffs, there is always renewed optimism, with some subscribing to the "just get in and anything can happen" theory.

The optimism can be seen as shortsighted, but history shows that the belief is justified in some cases.

When the NHL implemented the new division realignment in 2013, Round 1 has seen some great matchups. However, the lower seed has been on the wrong side of the matchup in this format, which is to be expected.

Since 2013, the lower seed owns a 36-60 record against the higher seed and the last three seasons haven't been too kind to the underdog. In that time, those teams posted a 7-19 record.

So while the likelihood of seeing a Round 1 upset is not too high, it's not impossible either.

With that being said, let's take a look at the matchups involving each wild-card team and the division winners in Round 1, and determine which teams are most likely to provide us with some early drama.

All playoff odds referenced are courtesy of MoneyPuck.

Will the Presidents' Trophy curse hurt the Jets?

The Winnipeg Jets had their best season in franchise history and are the first Canadian team to win the Presidents' Trophy since the 2011-12 Vancouver Canucks.

Just don't ask the Canucks how that worked out for them.

Winning the Presidents' Trophy is a prestigious honour, but with it comes a cautionary tale.

Since the trophy was first awarded in the 1985-86 season, eight winners have lost in the first round; the same number have gone on to win the Cup. The last team that finished at the top of the league standings and won the Stanley Cup was the Chicago Blackhawks in 2012-13.

Guaranteeing home-ice advantage throughout the post-season is a nice perk for Winnipeg, but the team is looking to overcome some unfortunate post-season luck.

After back-to-back years ending in first-round exits, the Jets don't have an easy road in their pursuit of a Cup—well, no team really does.

Unfortunately for the Jets, the reward for finishing in first place is a meeting with the St. Louis Blues, the hottest team in the NHL.

Since the NHL returned from the 4 Nations Face-Off break, no team has earned more wins than the Blues, who went 19-4-3 over the final 26 games. A 12-game winning streak helped propel the team into a position to clinch the final wild-card spot in the Western Conference.

St. Louis became just the 10th team in NHL history to qualify for the playoffs after being eight or more points out with 26 or fewer regular-season games to go.

The Jets broke the Blues' 12-game winning streak and are 3-1 against their Central Division rival this season.

One thing the Blues will be hoping for is a reclamation of their 2019 Cinderella run to the Stanley Cup Final. Eight of the five players on the roster were a part of the 2019 Cup-winning team, so the team does have experience to pull off a run.

The real question is, where can the Blues find an edge over the Jets?

In most areas, Winnipeg has the advantage over St. Louis, but one area where there will be questions is in goal.

There is no doubt that Connor Hellebuyck will be the favourite to lock down another Vezina Trophy after posting a 46-12-3 record with a 2.02 goals-against average and a .924 save percentage.

Those numbers haven't translated over for Hellebuyck in the Stanley Cup Playoffs, especially the last two seasons. The 31-year-old is 2-8 with a 4.28 goals-against average over his last 10 post-season starts.

His counterpart, Jordan Binnington, knows what it takes to win on the big stage, and the Blues will need him to be at his best in this series. The 31-year-old has a 20-20 record in 41 career playoff games with a goals against average of 2.73 and a save percentage of .910.

Binnington also got the edge over Hellebuyck in the final of the 4 Nations Face-Off, so the Blues goaltender can hold that over him.

MoneyPuck.com has the Jets at a 69.2 per cent chance to advance to Round 2, the third-best odds of all the playoff teams, but the Blues have proven that they are capable of beating the odds.

Canadiens looking for repeat of 2010

The Montreal Canadiens were the final team to qualify for the Stanley Cup Playoffs, and will now prepare for a tough matchup against the Washington Capitals.

It's just the second time these two teams have met in the post-season, and it's hard not to draw comparisons from the first time they went toe-to-toe.

Back in 2010, the Canadiens entered the Stanley Cup Playoffs as the eighth seed in the Eastern Conference with 88 points, which led to a first-round matchup against the Capitals.

Washington was the top team in the league, winning the Presidents' Trophy with 121 points. With 33 points separating the Capitals and Canadiens, the odds were certainly against Montreal, which at one point was trailing 3-1 in the series.

However, Jaroslav Halak played hero for the Canadiens, helping the team win the next three games, allowing just three goals in that stretch to pull off the massive upset.

Fast forward to this year, and while it's not a 33-point difference in the standings, the Canadiens do come into the series as a serious underdog.

Getting to the post-season was not guaranteed for this Canadiens team as they sat 31st in the league on Dec. 1, but started to hit their stride in their return from the 4 Nations Face-Off. The Canadiens went 15-5-6 — the fifth-best record in the NHL during that stretch — to secure their spot.

The Capitals went 2-0-1 against Montreal in the season series but now face some question marks heading into the post-season. Both starting goaltender Logan Thompson and emerging forward Aliaksei Protas are injured heading into the playoffs.

Would their absence be enough to help the Canadiens close the competitive gap? Unfortunately for the Canadiens, there is still a lot of talent on this Capitals team that makes this a difficult matchup.

Yes, the Canadiens have enjoyed career-best seasons from Nick Suzuki, Cole Caufield and Calder Trophy candidate Lane Hutson, but they will need more players to step up their game.

Can Sam Montembeault provide his team with his own Halak-esque effort? The Canadiens will need improvement from Montembeault, who has a 2-3 record, a 3.49 goals-against average and a .893 save percentage against Washington.

With a 30.1 per cent chance to make it to Round 2, according to MoneyPuck.com, the Canadiens will need to find a way to put some doubt into the minds of the Capitals.

Wild getting healthy at right time, but is it enough?

Another team that went down to the wire to clinch a playoff spot, the Minnesota Wild, are a team that has been tough to gauge.

Injuries to top forwards Kirill Kaprizov and Joel Eriksson Ek put Minnesota in danger of missing the playoffs. The team's identity is built on its defensive game and strong goaltending led by Filip Gustavsson.

However, the Vegas Golden Knights have had the Wild's number this season, winning all three games in the season series and outscoring Minnesota 12-4.

There aren't many holes on this Golden Knights roster led by Jack Eichel, who had a career-best 94 points this season. This is also a roster that has 17 players from the 2023 Cup-winning team, so experience will be on Vegas's side.

Currently, MoneyPuck.com has given the Wild the worst odds to move on to Round 2 at 27 per cent, and it's tough to argue with that assessment based on how this matchup looks on paper.

Senators ready to add to Leafs' playoff misery?

The Battle of Ontario is back, and it has taken 21 years for the Toronto Maple Leafs and Ottawa Senators rivalry to return to the post-season stage.

In this series, we have a Leafs squad that is under immense pressure to go on a deep playoff run after seven first-round exits over its last eight appearances. The Senators are back in the post-season for the first time since 2017 and will be looking to continue their run of success against Toronto this season.

A 3-0 record against the Leafs this season certainly has the Senators feeling confident in their ability to continue that success in the playoffs.

The formula for the Senators to pull off the first-round upset will need to be simple. Find a way to suppress the Leafs' firepower, and hope that Brady Tkachuk is ready to carry the torch in the playoffs, especially on offence.

Ottawa also spent a pretty penny on Linus Ullmark to be a difference-maker for them this season, and he got them to the playoffs. Ullmark recorded a shutout against the Leafs in their first meeting this season and allowed two goals on 23 shots in the second meeting.

However, the Leafs did record a win against Ullmark in the playoffs last season, scoring three goals on 33 shots. During his time with the Boston Bruins, Ullmark didn't have a stellar playoff record, going 3-6 with a 3.59 goals against average and a .887 save percentage in 10 appearances.

Another player who will need to come through in this matchup for Ottawa is Shane Pinto going up against Auston Matthews. In the two games Matthews played against Ottawa, Pinto went head-to-head against him 23:28 at five-on-five, limiting the star forward to just three shots on goal and one high-danger chance.

In those minutes, Matthews also saw a lot of the Senators' top pairing of Jake Sanderson and Artem Zub. The Leafs will certainly try to get Matthews away from that matchup if they can.

Considering the Senators' struggle to score, ranking 21st in the league in total offence and 30th in shooting percentage at five-on-five, they have to find a way to limit the Leafs' star players, and Pinto will likely play a big part in trying to shut down their top forwards.

Of course, the longer this series goes, the more confidence Ottawa will gain, but they have just a 40 per cent chance to move on to Round 2. However, being the favourite hasn't always worked out for Toronto. So while an upset will be tough to pull off for the Senators, they are certainly capable of it.

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/banking-on-jets-vs-blues-to-go-7-and-are-avalanche-too-deep-for-stars/>

Banking on Jets vs. Blues to go 7, and are Avalanche too deep for Stars? (VIDEO)

NHL betting analyst Jonathan Davis joins By The Books to handicap the Western Conference series' in Round 1 of the Stanley Cup Playoffs, why he likes the Jets and Blues to go 7 games, and why he thinks the Avalanche are just too deep for the Stars.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/jets-set-to-take-off-on-a-new-mission-to-end-canada-s-cup-drought~3118539>

Jets set to take off on a new mission to end Canada's Cup drought (VIDEO)

The Jets dominated the regular season and finished with the best record in the league. With their playoff past filled with regret, can Winnipeg use its previous disappointments as motivation to end Canada's Stanley Cup drought?

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/hellebuyck-focused-on-team-success-as-chance-to-extend-magnificent-season-awaits~3118538>

Hellebuyck focused on team success as chance to extend magnificent season awaits (VIDEO)

Connor Hellebuyck bounced back in a big way this season following last year's playoff disappointment and the high expectations he puts on himself is what fuels his desire to be the best. TSN's John Lu reports.

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/why-mark-scheifele-is-the-key-to-jets-playoff-success~3118068>

Why Mark Scheifele is the key to Jets' playoff success (VIDEO)

Craig Button joins Domino's That's Hockey to explain why he thinks Mark Scheifele is the key to the Jets making a deep playoff run, and how important it is for Winnipeg to get off to a quick start in their series against the Blues.

CBC Manitoba

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/winnipeg-jets-whiteout-st-louis-blues-1.7514026>

As Jets' playoff run starts, here's what you need to know about Winnipeg's whiteout parties

Jets take on St. Louis Blues Saturday at 5 p.m. CT at the Canada Life Centre for Game 1

CBC News

While temperatures are forecast to rise over the weekend, a whiteout will be blowing through True North Square on Saturday, as the Winnipeg Jets face the St. Louis Blues in Game 1 of their first-round NHL playoffs series.

Here's what you need to know if you're heading downtown for the game tomorrow.

When does the puck drop?

Puck drop for Game 1 is at 5 p.m. CT on Saturday at the Canada Life Centre in downtown Winnipeg, with the sold-out street party near the arena starting two hours before.

Tickets for the Game 2 whiteout party, scheduled to start two hours before the 6:30 p.m. contest on Monday, are also sold out. Game 1 and Game 2 tickets for the Party in the Plaza, held in True North Square, are sold out too.

The Jets will travel to St. Louis for Game 3 and 4 to face the Blues at the Enterprise Center. Game 3 is on Thursday, with an 8:30 p.m. CT start, and Game 4 goes Sunday, April 27 at noon.

If needed, Game 5 will see the series return to Winnipeg on Wednesday, April 30, with a start time TBD.

Are any other jets coming out for the party?

As the Jets hit the ice on Saturday, jets will also be hitting the skies above Winnipeg.

Two Royal Canadian Air Force CF-18 Hornet fighter jets will be flying over the Canada Life Centre and the street party outside shortly after the 5 p.m. puck drop on Saturday, the Canadian Armed Forces says.

The RCAF is "proud to share in national sporting events," like the Jets' first playoff home game this year, the Forces said in a news release earlier this week.

Which roads and sidewalks will be closed?

The City of Winnipeg is closing some roads downtown early Saturday to prepare for the first whiteout party. Some roads will remain closed through the Easter weekend until Tuesday, to allow for cleanup after Monday's whiteout party.

Southbound Donald Street between Ellice and St. Mary avenues, will close at 6 a.m. on Saturday and reopen at 7 a.m. Tuesday. The city says the street won't reopen between games on Sunday.

Graham Avenue will close in both directions between Hargrave and Smith streets from 6 a.m. Saturday to 7 a.m. Sunday. Graham will be open Sunday, but will close again at 9 a.m. on Monday for Game 2's whiteout party, reopening at 7 a.m. on Tuesday.

Sidewalks will also close along these routes starting at noon on Saturday and will reopen early Tuesday morning, the city said.

Are there any changes to public transit?

Winnipeg Transit buses that run along Graham Avenue will be rerouted between Kennedy and Smith on Saturday starting at 6 a.m.

Service will run as usual on Sunday, but Graham buses will be rerouted again on Monday starting at 9 a.m., returning to normal service Tuesday.

If your usual stop is along that stretch of Graham, the city suggests hopping on the bus at Graham and Vaughn Street, or Graham and Fort Street.

The Winnipeg Transit Plus loading zone on Donald at Graham will be moved temporarily to eastbound Portage Avenue, next to the Radisson Hotel, the city said.

The Millennium Library Winnipeg Transit Plus loading zone is temporarily moving to the eastbound front driveway of the Winnipeg Police Service headquarters, and the City Place Winnipeg Transit Plus loading zone is moving to northbound Hargrave on the north side of St. Mary.

The Millennium Library Parkade's entrance at Donald Street will close at 6 a.m. on Saturday, and again at 9 a.m. on Monday. Regular hours start up again on Tuesday.

What's open and closed for Easter weekend in Winnipeg

VideoManitoba's long weekend forecast: blinding whiteout for Saturday, warm for Easter. The downtown library will be closing early on Saturday, at 3 p.m., and again on Monday, April 21 at 4:30 p.m. It is closed on Easter Sunday.

How are local businesses preparing?

Dwight Benson, general manager at the nearby Elephant & Castle on St. Mary Avenue, said his restaurant and pub is doubling its staff Saturday, as it expects its usual volume of customers to double.

"We're very prepared this year, so we're excited," Benson told Radio-Canada in an interview Friday.

Game days are always busy at the bar, but during whiteout season, "it's an all-day party," he said.

The pub is throwing its own party to celebrate the Jets' playoff run, starting at 11:30 a.m. Saturday.

"The longer they go, the better for us. So hopefully we get through this first round with St. Louis — which I have no doubt on — but the longer we go, the better," said Benson.

"Go, Jets, go."

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipegsun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/this-team-shows-up-connor-promises-different-playoff-vibe-from-jets>

'This team shows up': Connor promises different playoff vibe from Jets

By Paul Friesen

It's a whole new season, but for Kyle Connor this first-round playoff series against St. Louis does have a familiar feeling.

Connor is one of seven Jets who did this six years ago, going into the playoffs with sky-high expectations after a franchise-record regular season — only to crash and burn against the charging Blues.

"A little bit of history there in 2019 that is still in this room," Connor said. "We thought we had a great team. They ended up winning the Stanley Cup. They've almost had a, I

don't want to say similar year, but they had the coaching change and then they had that second half. So we're aware of a team that is coming in hot."

The Blues did change coaches this year, just like in '2019, rebounding from a bad start to enter the playoffs on a high.

But Connor says this isn't the same Jets team, not by a long shot.

And not just because it beat that 2019 team's wins and points totals, winning the President's Trophy as the NHL's best during the regular season.

This one, Connor vows, plays its best when it matters.

"You've seen throughout the big games down the stretch that this team shows up," is how he put it. "There's no question that it's going to be that way."

The Jets' leading scorer with 41 goals and 97 points knows it's a different animal in the post-season. He and Mark Scheifele will have less room to work their magic. Their patience will be tested.

But it was during the season, too.

The team passed every test.

"The way we've prepared, I don't think that's going to change in the playoffs. It's going to just elevate us."

Connor isn't even leaning on regular-season results against the Blues.

The Jets went 3-1 against them, including a 3-1 win less than two weeks ago that ended St. Louis's 12-game win streak.

None of that is important to No. 81.

"I used to think that it was," Connor said. "But last year with our series with Colorado, we'd won all (three) in the regular season."

They also out-scored the Avalanche 17-4, only to be ousted in five games in the first round.

"It's such a different dynamic in the playoffs," Connor said. "There's different pressures, different factors... everybody's up for those games."

That results in a pretty big change in the style of game.

“The physicality is probably the easy one that you see,” Morgan Barron said. “Everybody’s finishing hits. The top guys... and right down through the lineup. The game just tightens up. You have to make decisions quicker. As it goes on, it will continue to get more gruelling.

“The longer you (go), the harder it gets. But that’s the challenge we’re hoping to face.”

Over the last two years, the Jets haven’t looked rugged enough to handle the difference.

Losing defenceman Brenden Dillon last summer didn’t help that look.

GM Kevin Cheveldayoff hopes he’s more than made up for it with trade-deadline pickups Luke Schenn on defence and Brandon Tanev up front.

“They’re tailor-made for the playoffs,” Connor said. “I think that’s why we got them. I’m sure Chevy would say the same thing. Their games breed playoff intensity. Brandon, the way his speed can create havoc – he’s just a bull in a china shop. Runs around, hits everybody. You see him blocking shots a couple home games ago, getting the crowd going. They were loving it.

“It’s those little things that can turn the edge and turn momentum... a huge impact in the series. I’m glad we have them.”

Even with the additions, this is a very similar team to last year’s.

Barron sees something that’s changed, though.

“We probably have a little more confidence as a group, given the way the season ended and our consistency,” he said.

Barron wasn’t around six years ago, like Connor was. That team had some swagger, too.

So did last year’s, going into the playoffs with seven straight wins.

A lot of good that did.

The Jets won’t advance because they’ve added a couple of players who like to hit.

They’ll advance if every player acts a little taller, a little heavier and a little tougher, able handle what’s about to be thrown at them.

<https://winnipegssun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/jets-early-playoff-exits-apr-19-2025>

'Makes you stronger': Jets looking to soothe scar tissue of early playoff exits

By Gordon Anderson

Once again, the Winnipeg Jets have another chance to apply a salve to soothe over the scars of playoff defeats.

Going into Saturday's playoff opener against St. Louis, Jets forward Mark Scheifele recalled some advice he received years ago from his junior coach, Dale Hawerchuk.

"I remember Dale told me this my first year, we were the worst team in the in the CHL, and he said losing isn't a bad thing," Scheifele said. "It's something that you get to learn from. You first have to learn how to lose before you learn how to win. I remember that all the time. Those scars are something that make you who you are. And if it doesn't kill you, it makes you stronger."

Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey chipped in with his two cents worth about the squad's negative playoff experiences in recent times. Now, he didn't receive the fatherly Hawerchuk treatment, but his words were similar.

"Any time you're in the playoffs, whether it's momentum swings, whether it's in a game or series, all those different things you can learn a lot and take that to help you grow and it's just more experience you can draw on in situations," he said.

Since the Jets made their run to the Western Conference final in the spring of 2018, the NHL Stanley Cup playoffs have been a constant no-fly zone. The team hasn't really come close to buzzing the tower since losing in five games to Las Vegas seven seasons ago.

The club was bumped out of the playoffs in the first round on three occasions; cancelled in the second round once; lost in the qualifying round and didn't qualify for the postseason during the 2021-22 campaign.

Overall, their post-season record is 7-15 since the Golden Knights put the sword to the club.

To a man, both Scheifele and Morrissey say the team is not concerned about the lack of post-season success, either last year, or any other year for that matter.

Head coach Scott Arniel confirmed as much.

"We're done with last year," Arniel said. "It's behind us in the sense of we're not thinking about Colorado and what we should and shouldn't do."

Arniel said the now-completed 82-game regular season was a chance to “build the brand” for the playoffs.

The bench boss says the team has been tested in every way possible through injuries to key players, all the while employing different skill sets needed for finding success. The club beat the Capitals twice and found success against Western powerhouse teams in Dallas, Colorado and St Louis.

“Different games have different looks to them, some are wide-open offensive type of games, others are defensive games,” Arniel said. “Some are heavy games. Throughout that 82-game stretch, I felt we’ve done a good job of making sure that competitive part is really good.”

The Jets employed 29 players to get through the regular season. Six guys played in 82 games.

A Western Conference crown, a Central Division title and a Presidents’ Trophy as the league’s best-regular season outfit suggests the roster has enough niche players who possess the ability to play the game any way you want to slice it.

“Defending well, playing as a five-man unit, taking away time and space, all those things have made us a good team. And our special teams, just continue to build on it,” Morrissey said. “The reason we had a great season is our depth. Obviously great individual players, but our team game and our structure.”

<https://winnipegson.com/sports/paint-brush-or-shovel-grinders-like-jets-morgan-barron-can-turn-a-game>

Paint brush or shovel, grinders such as Jets' Morgan Barron can turn a game

By Paul Friesen

One of the most tried and true adages of playoff hockey has the unsung hero making the difference.

While production from the top lines can cancel each other out, a fourth-liner steps up with a goal that ends a series or gives a team new life.

Step right up, Winnipeg Jets forward Morgan Barron.

“I subscribe to the feeling we can make a difference all season, too. The moments are just more memorable,” Barron was saying on Friday. “Those top lines are probably going to be playing against each other a lot. I put our top guys up against anybody’s in the league. But if we can win our matchups at the bottom of the lineup, that’ll go a long way.”

While grind-line goals aren't usually oil paintings, Barron scored a couple down the stretch that could have been framed and hung in the Louvre: on a partial breakaway against St. Louis and off an individual rush the next game in Dallas.

Given the fewer turnovers and less open ice in the playoffs, he's ready to put the brush down and pick up his shovel again against St. Louis, starting on Saturday.

"You're going to take what's given," he said. "Those quote-unquote fancy goals, that's obviously not something I'm trying every other shift. But if the play's there you're going to take it."

The 26-year-old Barron will start the playoffs anchoring a fourth line with Jaret Anderson-Dolan and David Gustafsson on the wings.

He's the most grizzled of the three, with 256 NHL games under his belt. Just five in the playoffs, though: two years ago in the first round against Vegas.

Gustafsson has played seven, Anderson-Dolan four with the L.A. Kings.

The one lesson Barron takes from his post-season experience: don't get too far ahead of yourself. Stay in the moment.

"Especially that Vegas series... we played one of our best games of year in Game 1, and even the first period or two of Game 2," he recalled. "Then all of a sudden..."

It was eerily similar against Colorado last year, although Barron didn't play.

"Ultimately the series shifts pretty quick and then all of a sudden you're heading home after five games. Whether you win the first game, lose the first game, play in eight overtimes, whatever it is, you just need to be able to move past that game and onto the next one every time.

"We've done a great job of that... more than in years past. It felt like we didn't have those lulls that we had in prior seasons."

Another tried and true hockey adage: from here on, the lulls are fatal.

<https://winnipegssun.com/sports/which-of-these-four-potential-jets-outcomes-would-constitute-playoff-success>

Cup final or bust: time for Winnipeg Jets to raise the bar

By Paul Friesen

Mark Scheifele shared some interesting insight from the late, great Dale Hawerchuk on Friday.

The Winnipeg Jets assistant captain recalled his old junior coach telling him losing isn't always a bad thing. It can be necessary. Their Barrie Colts were awful in his first season, and the mentor was providing his pupil with a lesson.

"You first have to learn how to lose," is how Scheifele remembered it. "Before you get to learn how to win."

When it comes to the Stanley Cup playoffs, the Jets have the former down pat.

Beginning on Saturday, we'll see if they've absorbed the latter.

Because all the regular-season platitudes in the world won't mean a thing if they don't find their swing.

Head coach Scott Arniel himself said not long ago the one Presidents' Trophy he won, as an assistant with the New York Rangers in 2015, is collecting dust in his basement.

What does his team have to do to count this one a success?

Let's dust off the various possibilities.

A FIRST-ROUND EXIT

This team has been there, done that, the last two years, after various levels of regular-season success.

A third springtime strikeout would undo all the good will it's piled up since October.

Crowds are bouncing back after they hit rock-bottom last season. The entertainment value of some high-end talent is no doubt one reason.

The other is hope.

That four-letter word is behind every Jets flag flying in a front yard, flapping from a car window or hanging off the back of a Winnipeg firetruck this week.

It's behind every Go-Jets-Go sign in the parking lot of a business and every Jets-related item on a restaurant menu, including the Perfetti Cake Shake advertised at a joint along Portage Avenue.

This town is starved for a winner.

Anything resembling what happened the last two years would leave it throwing up through another four-letter word.

A SECOND-ROUND EXIT

Getting past the St. Louis Blues might exorcise a six-year-old playoff demon, but it wouldn't be enough on its own to spark dancing in the streets.

Sure, it would get the first-round monkey off their backs.

But the next monster they'd face could well be Colorado, causing recurring nightmares that are fresher, just 12 months old.

Besides, what do you get for winning a playoff round – the equivalent of a participation ribbon and a “thanks for coming out.”

It's a step, perhaps, and would placate some fans.

But at that rate of progress, by the time they win the Stanley Cup players like Scheifele and Connor Hellebuyck will barely be able to lift the thing over their heads.

A CONFERENCE FINAL APPEARANCE

In previous playoff previews, this where we set the bar. Mainly because it's where the Jets themselves set it back in 2018.

If that seems like a lifetime ago, it's because it is. Just ask Patrik Laine. Or Jacob Trouba. Or Blake Wheeler.

That playoff run was supposed to be the start of something special. Instead it was an off-ramp to playoff irrelevance.

If someone had suggested they'd win just one playoff series over the next six seasons, we'd have committed them to filling potholes every spring. Come to think of it, maybe that's the task some Jets players should have been assigned when they bowed out so early. You know, for a lesson in hard work.

This current group has hard work down in spades, though.

Which is why building a road to Round 3 and then stopping would still feel like just that: an unfinished road.

REACHING THE STANLEY CUP FINAL

This is the first time we've set the bar this high, but I doubt there's a player or member of the organization who wouldn't agree.

This season won't feel like a success unless the Jets are squaring off with the Eastern Conference champ for all the marbles sometime in June.

The first-place finish, overall, and the way they did it – coming red-hot out of the gate, sparring with Washington throughout, fending off a late charge from division-rival Dallas – raises expectations.

Defence wins championships, and this one has given up the fewest goals in the NHL for two straight years. It has the best goalie for a second straight year. It can score. And when it's healthy – if it gets there – it's four lines deep.

So fasten your seat belts and prepare for Jets Playoff Flight 2025.

Put your tray tables in the upright position, deposit your regular-season results into the air-sickness bag in the pouch in front of you and get re-acquainted with hockey that matters.

"It's been a great regular season," forward Morgan Barron, sitting next to me in the dressing room, said on Friday. "But you and I sat here a few months ago and talked about it. We know we're going to be judged based on Game 83 and on. And we've talked about that as a group."

"It's a great opportunity. We've given ourselves home-ice advantage throughout the playoffs... but the work starts now."

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6291325/2025/04/19/nhl-playoffs-winnipeg-jets-believe/>

It's time to believe: Why not the Winnipeg Jets? Why not now?

By Murat Ates

There was once a Winnipeg Jets team that had put together a tremendous regular season, finishing much higher than anyone expected when the season began.

It had the world's best goaltender, Josh Morrissey as a Norris Trophy-contending No. 1 defenceman, a captain named Adam Lowry who everyone believed in, and star scorers like Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor who boasted all-world offensive ability. Its coach was widely respected, its team defence had taken great strides and, despite the great

quality of its opponent, the consensus in the Jets dressing room when the playoffs began was “Why shouldn’t this be our year?”

That was Morrissey’s rhetorical question, standing in the hallway outside the Jets’ workout room, in a one-on-one conversation last April.

He’d spoken with Stanley Cup champions, good friends, and rivals around the league. He had tough conversations and been told that no one knows with certainty that the Stanley Cup will belong to them when any given playoffs begin. The key, he’d been told, was to make it to the Round of 16 as many times as possible, understand the opportunity might never come again each time, and play your heart out while you had the chance.

“You don’t go into the playoffs, ‘This is the year we’re going to win,’” he said. “But the more opportunities you give yourself, if you do it the right way and have good teams, you never know when it might come. Why couldn’t it be our year?”

It took 10 days for Morrissey’s dream to end. For Scheifele and Connor to be outscored by Valeri Nichushkin and Artturi Lehkonen. For Adam Lowry to be left behind Nathan MacKinnon. For Connor Hellebuyck’s Vezina Trophy-winning season to turn into 24 goals against in five devastating games.

And for Morrissey, still seething from his Game 5 loss, to name his next hope.

“I hope this stings,” he said.

This year’s version of the Winnipeg Jets were even better than the one that came before them. They put together a historic start, winning 14 out of their first 15 games. They demanded relentlessness from one another, asking new head coach Scott Arniel to challenge them — to hold them to the standards of elite teams. Connor scored a career high 96 points while his defensive game soared. Scheifele took a Team Canada snub so personally he went on a midseason offensive tear and set a new career high in points. None of it matters now.

This year’s version of Lowry, Nino Niederreiter, and Mason Appleton re-established themselves as one of the hardest matchup lines to play against, taking on the opposition’s best players and winning, while Cole Perfetti emerged as a top six scorer and Dylan Samberg developed into a force inside the top four. Hellebuyck wrote chapters’ worth of goaltending history, leading all starters in wins, shutouts, save percentage, goals against average, and goals saved above expected. None of that matters now, either.

Gabriel Vilardi and Nikolaj Ehlers teamed up for some of the most beautiful goals in Jets 2.0 history. None of those matter — and now Vilardi and Ehlers are hurt.

Both power play units excelled. The penalty kill came on late, partly due to Samberg's return to health, partly due to adjustments made by Arniel and his staff during the 4 Nations break. For most of the season, the team stayed remarkably healthy — and remarkably consistent — and ultimately finished the season in historic fashion, too. They set a new franchise record with 116 points. They won their first-ever Presidents' Trophy, Western Conference, and Central Division titles. They won their second straight Jennings Trophy, giving up the fewest goals in the league.

None of these matter — not now, anyway. We can reflect on them when the playoffs are done, whether that's two months from now or 10 days as it was when another great Jets team got picked apart. The 2024-25 Jets were always going to be judged by what they accomplished in the Stanley Cup playoffs — by what they learned from the pain of last year's easy defeat.

Winnipeg's playoffs start today. The impetus for this season's success may have come in Morrissey's (and so many Jets players') call to arms. Its results may have depended on habits built in the offseason, renewed at training camp, and refined through 82 games and a league-best 116 points.

That's only prologue. What matters now is the Jets' ability to dictate the game against an excellent opponent when the games get harder than they've been all season.

"Regardless of how well your regular season goes, you're generally judged on performance in the playoffs," Lowry said. "The Blues are one of the hottest teams in the league and had an incredible run down the stretch to get in. We're looking forward to the challenge ... That atmosphere. The emotion. The pressure. We're really excited about this group."

"This is why you work all year — to get a chance in the playoffs," Morrissey said. "This is what you're preparing for. For us, being at home here Games 1 and 2 and to be in front of our fans, it's incredible. You can feel the energy in the city whenever we're in the playoffs this time of year."

Why should this season be any different for Winnipeg?

I spoke to several NHL sources throughout the week — agents, a scout, and player on opposing teams who were granted anonymity — to ask them what makes this Jets team different. We all remember the Spittin' Chiclets podcast calling last year's Jets "frauds." Are these ones destined to go down to St. Louis the same way Colorado beat Winnipeg — or are the Jets legitimate Stanley Cup contenders? It turns out, there's a consensus.

"I think the Jets are built to make a run this year," said an agent.

"Lowry's line has got to be the best third line in hockey right now," said the scout.

“Don’t doubt Hellebuyck with a chip on his shoulder,” said an Eastern Conference player.

The consensus is that these Jets are for real. The scout called it a testament to Winnipeg’s ability to retain key players, starting with Hellebuyck and Scheifele. He said there’s value to continuity and praised GM Kevin Cheveldayoff for making smart decisions about his core players.

“I think some of what you’re seeing is the fruits of Winnipeg’s labour, keeping the group together,” he said. “You can see that with the Pionk and Lafallo extensions. There are times when you talk to professional hockey players and they sound like mercenaries. When I check in on the Jets, it always sounds like they know they’re playing for something bigger than themselves.”

That concept came up more than once. An agent (who has players in Winnipeg) spoke to the idea that the Jets appear to love playing for each other.

“The guys love playing for Arniel,” he said. “When I check in, I don’t get a sense they’re feeling the pressure. It’s a focused group that’s very ‘together.’ There’s just a belief that they should win every game.”

Good vibes don’t necessarily win championships but the consensus is that yes, these Winnipeg Jets are different. Some sources thought it was sensible to doubt last season’s model; others praised Colorado for elevating its game to an incredible level. An amusing disagreement was who should get the credit for the Jets’ success, with some sources pointing to Connor, Scheifele, Hellebuyck, and Morrissey as top-end talent that the Blues can’t match and others pointing to Winnipeg’s depth.

“Winnipeg’s X-factor is that they’ve developed from within,” said a player agent without any Jets players. “If anyone outside of Winnipeg isn’t aware of how dominant Dylan Samberg has become, that’s about to be showcased. Cole Perfetti is running hot, too, giving them great secondary scoring.”

I asked if Winnipeg did enough at the trade deadline. A rival player pointed to Colorado’s success adding players and wondered if the Avalanche would be a tough out in Round 2. Mostly, I was told that Cheveldayoff has the hardest job in hockey.

“I think they have a lot of great cap hits and savvy additions by trade. I heard Luke Schenn has been unbelievable in the room. He’s calm but he’s been there (to the Cup) and he knows how to lead guys there ... Every time I reflect on (Cheveldayoff’s) tenure in Winnipeg I think he’s done a great job of making difficult decisions and finding opportunities.”

So there’s this Winnipeg Jets team that’s put together a tremendous regular season, finishing much higher than anyone had expected when the season began.

It has the world's best goaltender, Morrissey as a Norris Trophy contending No. 1 defenceman, Lowry as captain, and star scorers like Scheifele and Connor who have elevated their all-around game. Its coach is becoming widely respected, its team defence was the best in the league and, despite the great quality of its opponent, the Jets consensus is, "Why shouldn't this be our year?"

The Blues are a formidable opponent. Vilardi, Ehlers, and Rasmus Kupari will all miss Game 1. The playoffs upon which everything Winnipeg has done this year will be judged could end in 10 days or two months. But the Jets believe. League sources who have been critical of the Jets believe. It has to start somewhere.

Why not Winnipeg? Why not now?

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6284399/2025/04/18/nhl-playoffs-bandwagon-guide-stanley-cup/>

Which NHL team should you root for in the playoffs? The 2025 bandwagon-hopper's guide

By Sean McIndoe

It took a bit longer than expected — thanks for the suspense, Columbus — but we've got our 16 playoff teams. That means we've also got our 16 teams that missed, and those fan bases have a choice to make.

Stay neutral, and just root for the best playoff hockey possible? A very valid option. Root against your team's rivals, and hope they lose in a way that makes them sad? We've all been there. Sit on the sidelines and sulk, acting like you don't even care who wins? A bit unseemly, but understandable.

And then there's the most controversial option: Pick a new team, just for the postseason. Yes, it's the dreaded bandwagon pick, a path some fans find untenable. If that's you, feel free to check out now. But if you're open to at least considering a bandwagon pick, you want to at least take the right one. That's where this post comes in, as we'll rank the 16 playoff teams from worst to best in terms of bandwagonability.

We're looking for a fun team with good storylines and some rootable characters, ideally one with a realistic chance to win without feeling like a pure front-runner pick. It can be a tough needle to thread, but some teams do it better than others. Let's start from the bottom and work our way up to the best options.

1. Winnipeg Jets

Why you should get on board: This is the best team that Winnipeg has had in its NHL history, which spans two different franchises and includes a 15-year gap where they didn't have a team. It's been a story of ups and downs, with more of the latter. But now

it's finally all clicking into place, with a balanced team led by Connor Hellebuyck, who should be the MVP but will probably get robbed.

That should be enough to get you on board, but the stakes are even higher in Winnipeg. With recent attendance issues raising some uncomfortable questions about their long-term outlook, this could literally be a make-or-break year for the Jets — their best chance in a generation to not just win the team's first Stanley Cup but ensure the NHL's future in the city.

Also, Jets fans are awesome and the Whiteout is super cool. Get in on this.

Why you shouldn't: They did finish first overall, so you don't get cool underdog points for this pick. But even that's misleading, because everyone secretly thinks the Stars and/or Avalanche are the real Central powerhouse.

Bottom line: This feels like an appropriate time to snap Canada's 32-year Cup drought, and the Jets are the only team that could unite the nation in doing it. Prepare for takeoff.