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<https://www.nhl.com/news/jets-cole-perfetti-patience-earns-full-time-role-in-nhl-playoffs>

***Perfetti stayed patient, worked hard to earn full-time role with Jets during playoffs
23-year-old forward enjoying experience despite being held without goal in West
1st Round***

By Tracey Myers

WINNIPEG -- Cole Perfetti has been waiting for this opportunity, the chance to be a big part of the Winnipeg Jets' potential run in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

The forward said he's enjoying it.

"I think you see the physicality, the speed," Perfetti said. "There's not a lot of time and space out there. You have to make your mind up quick, make decisions quickly. You're not getting the puck as much just because everything's happening so fast, and it's on and off your stick."

The 23-year-old has yet to score against the St. Louis Blues in the Western Conference First Round but will keep looking for chances in Game 5 at Canada Life Centre on Wednesday (9:30 p.m. ET; CBC, TVAS, SN, ESPN, FDSNMW).

Perfetti has two assists in the best-of-7 series, which is tied 2-2. The closest he came to his first NHL postseason goal came in Game 3 when Blues goalie Jordan Binnington made a glove save with part of his glove being beyond the goal line. It was ruled no goal on the ice and upheld after video review.

Jets coach Scott Arniel said Perfetti isn't frustrated by the lack of production after the latter had an NHL career-high 50 points (18 goals, 32 assists) in 82 regular-season games.

"The big thing about him is that he really doesn't get down on himself; if he knows he's getting chances, he knows he's in there doing the right things," Arniel said. "Hopefully, maybe that happens tomorrow, and he gets that first one and [he's] off and running, but I like a lot of what he's doing."

"He's not a big-body man (5-foot-11, 185 pounds), but man, he's playing on the inside, he's going to the net. He's creating his own opportunities."

The No. 10 pick in the 2020 NHL Draft, Perfetti has 125 points (47 goals, 78 assists) in 222 games for the Jets, including 38 points (19 goals, 19 assists) in 71 games last season.

But when the playoffs rolled around, he got caught up in a numbers game after the Jets acquired Tyler Toffoli in a trade with the New Jersey Devils on March 8, 2024. Toffoli is a steady, proven goal-scorer and Stanley Cup winner with the Los Angeles Kings in 2014, so it was understandable Winnipeg opted to go with him in the playoffs over the inexperienced Perfetti.

Still, it was tough news to take.

"It was hard," Perfetti said. "You're there all year and then kind of down the stretch, started to get taken out of the lineup -- you're not with the group anymore as much and not playing and battling with each guy. It was hard, but I think it was good for learning. Going through that experience as a young guy, seeing what it's all about and learning how to deal with it, I think it was good for me in hindsight."

Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff said Perfetti handled the situation well and was a better player this season because of it.

"It's just the maturity as a player, as a person," Cheveldayoff said. "He used to sweat the little things all the time and you could see him wear it all the time. You learn over the course of time that a season doesn't have a smooth trajectory. You're going to have ups and downs, and it takes a mature player to start to understand that."

Perhaps Perfetti looked at the situation as a challenge. Jets assistant Marty Johnston said Perfetti likes and has overcome obstacles, from getting physically stronger and faster to going to the tougher areas of the ice. Johnston also coached him with Manitoba of the American Hockey League from 2020-22.

"I think we see now he's a playoff player," Johnston said. "He's willing to go on the inside and he's winning wall battles. That's a product of experience but also a product of physical maturity."

"He's done a really good job in those areas that don't always equate to point production. There's a trust that he and both Scott have with each other to be able to make those plays and have the ice time that he has and be put in the positions offensively, but it's because of the work he does away from the puck now."

Perfetti has learned to deal with the ups and downs of the NHL. It's gotten him prepared to play at this stage.

"If we're talking about him this whole season, his first two pro years he never got to play in the second half of the year," Arniel said. "Then the heavy hockey, kind of the playoff-type of stuff, last year he didn't get much experience at it. He's kind of living it now, so he's done a fantastic job throughout the 82 games of getting better and better and playing in the heavy games, playing in the fast games."

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sports/2025/04/29/getting-the-band-back-together>

Getting the band back together Ehlers on the mend, DeMelo healthy as Jets prepare to take back series momentum

By: Ken Wiebe

It was a sight that made observers do a double take.

Wait, is that Nikolaj Ehlers on the ice at Hockey For All Centre?

Although it's merely the next step in the recovery process for the Winnipeg Jets winger, the fact the speedy forward was out for a twirl with strength and conditioning coach Jake Wolff was a positive development for Ehlers.

After the Jets hit the ice to prepare for a pivotal Game 5 in this deadlocked series with the St. Louis Blues, head coach Scott Arniel revealed that Ehlers had been on the ice multiple times over the past several days, though he wasn't sure how many.

"We were away, so he's been on the ice," said Arniel.

Does this mean Ehlers has been upgraded from week-to-week to day-to-day?

Not exactly.

"He'll be on the ice (Wednesday) with us, and in a yellow (jersey)," said Arniel.

Ehlers has been dealing with a lower-body injury he aggravated in Game 80 against the Chicago Blackhawks on April 12 and his absence has clearly been felt in this series, both at even strength — with the second line still searching for its first goal — and on the power play, where the Jets are two-for-12 (16.7 per cent).

While it seems unlikely — though not impossible — that Ehlers could progress enough over the next few days to be an option for Game 6 or Game 7, the fact he's back on the ice suggests he could return to action at some point in the second round if the Jets advance.

DOWN AND OUT

Jets defenceman Dylan DeMelo shed some light on the illness that made him a late scratch for Game 3 of this series in Missouri.

“Pretty sick, pretty sick. I couldn’t keep anything down, couldn’t keep anything in,” said DeMelo. “That’s the PG version of what I’ll give you. It floored me for a few days and I was obviously good enough to play Game 4 and I’m feeling good now.”

DeMelo took the morning skate on Thursday and then things got progressively worse over the course of the afternoon.

“I was feeling good in Game 2. It was afterward,” said DeMelo. “Didn’t practice (on Wednesday) and that was why. I was feeling a little under the weather. Tried the morning skate and was feeling OK, but then that afternoon came and went and took me out with it.”

DeMelo did his best to catch part of the Jets-Blues Game 3 on TV back at the team hotel but he couldn’t make it through its entirety.

“I got through a period and a half because obviously it was super late and went right to bed,” said DeMelo. “As much as I wanted to watch, I wasn’t doing any help, watching and staying up late. So, I went to bed and got as much sleep as I could.”

DeMelo had to be careful to distance himself from his teammates, for fear of the virus spreading.

“I was treating it like I was in isolation,” he said. “I didn’t leave my room. I would bring what I could eat to the room. That room might be off limits for a little bit for the next people who are coming in there. You just try to stay away and hopefully everyone’s in the clear.”

During Game 4, DeMelo was back alongside defence partner Josh Morrissey and finished the contest with 30 shifts for just under 22 minutes of ice time.

DeMelo finished the game with four hits, four blocked shots, three shots on goal and nine shot attempts in his return.

“I was good enough to play and (my) energy levels were a little low, but I was in so I felt I could contribute in the type of fashion I usually do,” he said.

TO THE POINT

One of the biggest things the Blues were able to do in Games 3 and 4 were to generate goals involving the defence corps, specifically with shots from the point through screens or deflections in front.

What can the Jets’ wingers do to try and limit the offence that is being generated by the opponent on that front?

“You’ve got to be aware,” said Jets left-winger Kyle Connor. “First and foremost, you’ve got to protect the slot. When it’s down low, they like to look there first, so if you’re the

strong-side or weak-side winger, you've got to have your head on a swivel. You've got to know where your D-man is at. But also be aware of their guy in the slot.

"Everybody has kind of got little two-on-one matchups, all throughout the ice in the D-zone. You've got to constantly have your head on a swivel. But once it gets to the point, you've got to be in the shot lane and we don't want to allow them to carry the puck into the high slot. You've got to shut that off as a winger, so that's a big stressing point that we've talked about and watched video on."

In Game 4 alone, the Blues' blue-liners were involved in four of the five goals scored — point shots from Tyler Tucker (on the game-winner) and Justin Faulk (that went in off the pants of Jets defenceman Neal Pionk), Jake Neighbours's tip-in that came off a Colton Parayko knuckle-puck from the point and the goal by Brayden Schenn that came after a nifty rush by Parayko.

Nick Leddy and Cam Fowler also chipped in assists, giving the Blues' defence corps six points in Game 4.

Combine that with the five-point effort from Fowler in Game 3 and the power-play goal from Parayko, and the Blues got eight points in those two games — after combining for four in the first two games (with two helpers apiece from Fowler and Faulk).

The Jets pride themselves on producing offence from the defence corps as well, but they've been limited to two assists for Josh Morrissey, one goal from Pionk and one helper each from Luke Schenn, Dylan Samberg and DeMelo.

Increasing that production is one area that could help tip the scales as the Jets try and take momentum back from the Blues.

MORE MAINTENANCE

The Blues skated in St. Louis before flying to Winnipeg and both Brayden Schenn and Robert Thomas skipped the workout for maintenance, though they're expected to be ready for Game 5.

Thomas has generated two goals and six points while anchoring the top line, while Schenn has been a physical force and had a goal and an assist in Game 4 to record his first points of the series.

Blues head coach Jim Montgomery confirmed that Tucker wouldn't be available for Game 5 after suffering a lower-body injury during an awkward play in the corner with Jets forward Brandon Tanev.

That opens the door for veteran D-man Ryan Suter to return after he was a healthy scratch during the past two games.

"I've got to say it was hard to do when you respect the player so much and what he's done in the league for years, and how much he's helped us this year," Montgomery told reporters in St. Louis.

"You make a decision and you live with it. He's a pro, and I know he's going to be good for us. It was just a gut feel, and putting him back in, we're getting our No. 1 penalty-killing defenceman back in."

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2025/04/29/vilardi-back-in-action>

Vilardi back in action

Jets power forward to make series debut in Game 5

By: Mike McIntyre

It's a bird! It's a plane! It's...Gabe Vilardi!

"I'm hopeful to make a big impact," the Winnipeg Jets forward said Tuesday as he prepared to swoop into the middle of an intense best-of-seven playoff series with the St. Louis Blues that is tied 2-2.

"I don't know. I have to go out there. I'm not going to be Superman or anything like that."

Maybe not, but Vilardi's return from a five-week injury absence comes just in the nick of time for his team. The Jets are reeling after two straight blowout losses to the Blues and need all the help they can get in Wednesday's pivotal Game 5 at Canada Life Centre where they won the first two games of the first-round series.

Can the 25-year-old power forward save the day?

"I'm just going to go play and hopefully I can help (his linemates) out and help the team out," said Vilardi, who slides right back to his familiar spot on the top line beside Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor.

"Hopefully we can get back and get a win. But I'm not thinking too much about stuff like that. Just going in there, playing my game and hopefully making some good plays out there."

Vilardi last played on March 23 against the Buffalo Sabres, suffering an undisclosed upper-body ailment that was deemed week-to-week. It would mark the end of a career-best regular-season in which he had 61 points (27G, 34A) in 71 games. He began skating on his own a couple weeks ago and has been participating in full-contact practices for the past week.

"It's going to be an adjustment and I've got to be prepared for that right away," Vilardi said of the intense pace that comes with playoff hockey. "There's no working back into it. Every play matters right now, as you guys are seeing."

Jets head coach Scott Arniel won't hesitate to lean heavily on Vilardi despite missing 15 consecutive games. He was close to playing in Sunday's Game 4, even participating in the pre-game warmup, but ultimately the decision was made to give him a few extra days of recovery and conditioning.

"It's green light now. There's no holding back. This is playoff hockey. There's no (wading) his way in," said Arniel.

"First couple of shifts he's going to have to get up to speed. It's going to be a heck of a lot faster now than it was when he left us. But I've got all the confidence as I watched him the last few days in practice that he'll be alright."

Vilardi's return impacts every line. He knocks Alex Iafallo down to the second unit with Vlad Namestnikov and Cole Perfetti, while Nino Niederreiter reunites on the shutdown trio with Adam Lowry and Mason Appleton. Brandon Tanev moves to the fourth line with Morgan Barron and Jaret Anderson-Dolan, while David Gustafsson comes out.

"It pushes people back down to where they normally usually play. And it just helps us balance out some of our lines," said Arniel. "It really changes things for us in the sense of the offence that we can produce, not just from our top guys but spreading it back out through our lineup."

It will also allow Arniel to go back to using Lowry, Niederreiter and Appleton against the top two lines of the Blues, especially with the Jets enjoying last change due to being the home team.

"Obviously the last couple of years they've been together, their offensive zone time, because they do so well defensively, they don't spend a lot of time in our end of the rink," he said.

"The chemistry's there. They kind of read off each other and do the things together. So yeah, I need those guys up and doing what they do best, and that's really forcing lines to play in their end of the rink."

Vilardi also goes right back to his usual net-front spot on Winnipeg's top power-play unit, which has struggled mightily in his absence. The Jets are just 2-for-12 so far in the playoffs.

"He just becomes another threat, right. (Connor's) shot's a threat. (Josh Morrissey's) shot is a threat. (Scheifele's) playmaking ability, (Perfetti) in the pop area is a threat. Now there's a fifth one there," said Arniel.

"If you leave him alone he can do things down there, whether that's take the puck to the net himself or (Perfetti) to him to make, he's a really good passer as well. Now you've got your five threats that make it a little bit more difficult for the penalty killers to try to shut everybody off."

Connor and Scheifele lead the Jets with five points each in the series, with nobody else having more than two. The dynamic offensive duo appreciate having their regular wingman providing another offensive weapon.

"It's exciting. We know what he means to this team, means to our line," said Connor.

"It's a huge advantage for us to have him back. He's a big part of what we've talked about all year, not being a one trick pony on the power play. Being able to score and being pretty dynamic from all over the place, he just adds another element for them to be aware of."

St. Louis has taken a clear in-your-face approach with Connor and especially Scheifele over the past two games, hitting them legally — and at times illegally — at every chance they can get. Does Vilardi immediately join the hit list?

"It's a different game. It's intense," admitted Connor.

"Every play is magnified that much more. You've got to be on your game, you've got to pay attention to detail. We stress that every shift. He's aware of that. He's played in big games throughout his career, throughout his life. I just think he's the type of guy, and this is the type of game, too, where he can just step in and focus on himself, focus on his game, and he's going to be ready."

Vilardi declined to reveal any specifics about his injury, likely not wanting to provide the physical Blues team any additional intelligence. But he admitted it's been tough both physically and mentally to be sidelined for such a stretch.

"Definitely tough to watch, especially going into St. Louis. Their crowd's so into it, it's like... team vs. everybody," he said. "It's definitely tough not to be out there and feel like you're a part of the highs, the lows, whatever. Just feels (like) you're on your own. But it is what it is, I'm back and that's that."

Vilardi has battled plenty of injuries earlier in his career but was on track to play his first full season until this one struck. He had a long list of people to thank for getting him through it — from team trainers and medical staff to personal massage therapists who would come to his home every night.

"I'm very appreciative of them. My family. It's tough. Whenever you get injuries it sucks," he said.

“We’ve talked about playoffs, everything’s amplified with the pressure, but I’ve got a lot of good people in my life and it’s a good group of guys aside from hockey. It’s a family in here and everyone’s been super supportive.”

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/arts-and-life/2025/04/29/winnipeggers-take-shot-with-hockey-tune>

Winnipeggers take shot with hockey tune

By: Eva Wasney

Go, go Jets, go / The Whiteout is here / The Stanley Cup is so near

A pair of creative Winnipeg Jets fans have turned their passion for the team into a campfire anthem inspired by the NHL playoffs.

Go, go Jets, go! is a catchy, easy-listening piece of fan art with lyrics and melody by Winnipeggers Freya Hansen and Gary Wallace.

“It’s meant to be a light, positive message so we can all get together and get behind the team,” says Hansen, who grew up in Saskatchewan and became a Jets booster when the team returned to Winnipeg in 2011.

This is the amateur poet’s third attempt at recording a Jets-related song. While previous drafts involved hockey-fied lyrics to popular rock songs, Hansen decided to pen an original ditty for this year’s playoff run.

She asked Wallace, a friend from bridge and a hobbyist composer, to come up with some music to accompany the lyrics about her favourite players and their notable skills — from Mark Scheifele skating very well to Kyle Connor scoring goals and goals to Connor Hellebyuck blocking, stopping and saving pucks.

“I’ve always been a Jets fan and I thought, ‘Hey, this is a project which I’d like to try,’” Wallace says.

The song is the retiree’s 148th original composition and his first on the topic of hockey. Wallace — who performs at open mics and with his church choir — typically writes about nature, spirituality and his family, and records the songs in his basement on a reel-to-reel tape recorder.

Go, go Jets, go! came together in a matter of days and is now available on YouTube ([wfp.to/gojetsgosong](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfp.to/gojetsgosong)). Sharing the song online represents a personal milestone for Hansen.

“It has been a lifelong goal of mine to turn one of my poems into lyrics and have it recorded. I’m really happy with the result,” she says.

Both Hansen and Wallace hope the song inspires others to come up with their own Jets-inspired art.

The gentle, strumming ballad could also serve as a much-needed balm for the frayed nerves of Jets supporters following the team's recent back-to-back losses in St. Louis.

"I'm trying to stay hopeful that they'll win two more games," Hansen says.

Winnipeg Sun

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/im-not-going-to-be-superman-just-super-will-do-for-jets-vilardi>

'I'm not going to be Superman': Just super will do for Jets' Vilardi

By Paul Friesen

Welcome back to the lineup, Gabe Vilardi. Your mission: strengthen the entire Winnipeg Jets lineup, put some pop in the power play and reverse the momentum of a playoff series threatening to go off the rails.

Jets' Arniel giving Vilardi total 'green light' in return from injury

Oh, and do all this in an environment that won't look, feel or sound anything like the one you last played in.

After spending five weeks on the injured list, the Jets winger jumps into the Winnipeg-St. Louis series for Game 5 on Wednesday.

But he won't be wearing a cape and making the leap from the top of a downtown building.

"I'm not going to be Superman or anything like that," Vilardi said on Tuesday. "I'm just going to go play and hopefully... help the team out. I'm hopeful to make a big impact."

Vilardi's last game was a March 25 home-ice showdown between the NHL's top two teams, the Jets and Washington.

As intense as that night was, it pales in comparison to this no-holds-barred, first-round series against the Blues.

With the series tied at 2-2, Thursday's is the swing game, the Jets trying to hold back the St. Louis tidal wave that's produced back-to-back, lopsided losses.

"It's going to be an adjustment," Vilardi said. "And I've got to be prepared for that right away. There's no working back into it. Every play matters right now, as you guys are seeing."

Most of those plays that matter went against the Jets in the last two games.

Jets head coach Scott Arniel says the return of his No. 3 goal scorer will be felt beyond the first line, where he rejoins Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor.

The domino effect sees Alex Lafallo dropped to the second line, Nino Niederreiter to the third, reunited with Adam Lowry and Mason Appleton.

"It pushes people back down to where they normally play," Arniel said. "And it just helps us balance out some of our lines. It makes the Lowry line, who have been so good for us for the last few years, gets them back together.

"It really changes things for us... the offence that we can produce, not just from our top guys but spreading it back out through our lineup."

Arniel says he won't limit or monitor Vilardi's ice time. The 25-year-old is a full-go, including on the No. 1 power-play unit.

"It's green light now," the coach said. "There's no holding back. This is playoff hockey. We've got to go."

It's hockey that barely resembles most regular-season games. Everybody seems bigger, faster, stronger.

Vilardi, a \$6-million man on the financial ledger, has watched the price being paid from up high.

"It is tough, definitely tough to watch," he said. "Especially going into St. Louis. Their crowd's so into it, it's like (our) team versus everybody. It feels like that when you're in that building. It's definitely tough not to be out there and feel like you're a part of the highs, the lows. Just feels like you're on your own.

"But it is what it is. I'm back, and that's that."

On the power play, it means the return of another weapon on what was the No. 1 unit in the league this season, but has been No. 2 in this series.

"Now you've got your five threats that make it a little bit more difficult for the penalty killers to try to shut everybody off," Arniel said.

Vilardi led the Jets with 12 power-play goals this season.

“He’s tipped countless goals throughout his career and this year,” Connor said. “So it’s a huge advantage for us to have him back. He’s a big part of what we’ve talked about all year, not being a one-trick pony on the power play.”

The Jets have lacked horsepower in the last two games, scoring a combined three goals.

The 12 they gave up is even more of a concern, but the two can go hand-in-hand. This team protects leads better than it chases deficits.

While ideally Vilardi would have a game or two to get back up to speed, the Jets have no such luxury.

“It’s a different game,” Connor said. “It’s intense. Every play is magnified that much more. You’ve got to be on your game, you’ve got to pay attention to detail. We stress that every shift. He’s aware of that. He’s played in big games throughout his career, throughout his life.”

Arniel: “First couple of shifts he’s going to have to get up to speed. It’s going to be a heck of a lot faster now than it was when he left us. But I’ve got all the confidence as I watched him the last few days in practice that he’ll be alright.”

Vilardi alone can’t be the difference, though, and his coach pointed that out too.

“We need him to do what he does best,” Arniel said. “But at the same time we still have a lot of guys that, we all have to elevate our game. There’s a level that we have to get back up to again and make sure that we stay at it.”

Being at home again should help.

So should the man wearing No. 13.

He doesn’t need to be Superman.

Just super would do.

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/parental-guidance-advised-demelos-illness-mirrored-jets-play-in-st-louis>

Parental guidance advised: DeMelo’s illness mirrored Jets’ play in St. Louis

By Paul Friesen

Winnipeg Jets defenceman Dylan DeMelo took some time on Tuesday to describe just how sick one has to be to miss a playoff game.

“Pretty sick,” DeMelo said. “I couldn’t keep anything down, couldn’t keep anything in. That’s the PG version of what I’ll give you. It floored me for a few days... I’m feeling good now.”

The 31-year-old missed Game 3 in St. Louis, holed up in his hotel room mustering what energy he had to scream at the TV when overtime in the Toronto-Ottawa game delayed the broadcast switch to the Jets-Blues.

“I was like, oh come on here. Somebody score so we can get it going,” he said. “I got through a period and a half... it was super late and went right to bed. As much as I wanted to watch, I wasn’t doing any help, watching and staying up late. So I went to bed and got as much sleep as I could.”

DeMelo didn’t miss much, the Blues running up a 7-2 rout.

He’d return for Game 4, but not before a couple days of doing his best to keep whatever he had from spreading to teammates.

“I was treating it like I was in isolation. I didn’t leave my room. I would bring what I could eat to the room. That room might be off limits for a little bit for the next people who are coming in there.

“You just try to stay away, and hopefully everyone’s in the clear.”

Health-wise, they seem to be, so far.

But another decisive loss in Game 4, this time 5-1, had the Jets feeling less than 100 percent as they returned home.

Two days has helped them re-set their temperature going into Wednesday’s Game 5.

“It’s what we’ve talked about, what we’ve stressed – learn from it, move on and get ready for the next one,” forward Kyle Connor said. “We’ve got a great opportunity here in front of us. It’s a best-of-three series, two at home.”

-Friesen

<https://winnipeg.sun.com/sports/hockey/nhl/winnipeg-jets/friesen-jets-to-hit-long-playoff-road-or-ditch-of-futility>

FRIESEN: Jets to hit long playoff road, or ditch of futility

By Paul Friesen

Two straight blowout losses may have left the Winnipeg Jets with a bad case of the Blues.

They're counting on a return to home ice putting the rock 'n roll back into their game.

Their first-round playoff series tied at 2-2 after a Sunday afternoon loss in St. Louis, the Jets host the pivotal fifth game late on a whiteout Wednesday, well aware they're one win away from a night-and-day mood change.

"There's some disappointment and that's OK," defenceman Dylan DeMelo said of the way the series has turned in the Blues' favour. "It's all a part of it. Take it for what it is and move on and be ready to go. Guys are excited. I'm excited we get to play Game 5 and our home crowd."

While the Blues have the momentum, the Jets are taking some solace in the fact they have yet to play their best for an entire game.

Even 5-3 and 2-1 wins in Games 1 and 2 had stretches where they seemed off. Some of that was due to St. Louis's play.

Not all of it, say the heavy series favourites.

"To be 2-2... that's really encouraging for our group, that we haven't shown our best," DeMelo said. "We're confident that if we put a good effort and play our best hockey, we give ourselves a really good chance to win. We've said that all year. For us to get back to that, get to our team game, everybody pulling the rope the same way and making sure we're ready to go."

While one hand is pulling the rope, the other can be pushing a teammate.

"Like we've been doing all year," forward Kyle Connor said. "I expect that (Wednesday) night."

Trouble is the Blues have been trying to pound the Jets into submission.

Target No. 1 in Game 4 seemed to be Mark Scheifele.

Jets coach Scott Arniel says it comes with the playoff territory.

"That's all of our guys, and not just our top players," Arniel said. "They're playing a physical brand of hockey. We know that if you're going into the corners and you're going to touch the puck, they're going to try to go through you."

"We'd like to do a little bit more of it the other way."

Arniel likes the way Scheifele has handled the heavy going. He and Connor lead the Jets with five points apiece.

All but one, though, came in the first two games.

“He’s been one of our best forwards,” the coach said of Scheifele. “He has to continue to do that.”

Gabe Vilardi comes off the injury list to join Scheifele and Connor on the top line for Game 5.

Some scoring from Winnipeg’s second line would go a long way to taking some of the heat off the first.

Centre Vlad Namestnikov went the last 16 regular-season games without a goal and is still looking for his first of the playoffs.

Cole Perfetti has gone 10 games, including playoffs, without one, but his coach doesn’t see any frustration building in his game.

“If he knows he’s getting chances, he knows he’s in doing the right things,” Arniel said. “Hopefully, that happens (Wednesday)... he gets that first one, and off and running.”

With Vilardi back, Alex Iafallo (one goal) takes his Swiss-Army-Knife abilities to Line 2 on Wednesday.

Injured winger Nik Ehlers has been skating, but he’s still at least a few games away from taking his rightful place there.

The Jets have to improve in goal and without the puck, too, if they want to live up to their regular-season hype and bury the memory of the last two playoff years.

'I'm not going to be Superman': Just super will do for Jets' Vilardi

“They made an emphasis about getting to our net, and getting shots and volume there,” DeMelo said of the Blues. “They executed it very well. So now it’s our turn to try to counteract that.”

This was supposed to be a long playoff road for the Jets.

Either they straighten themselves out and stay on it, or the Presidents’ Trophy they nailed down as the top team through 82 games will be corroding in the ditch of underachievement.

“We’re just trying to go out there and win Game 5 and be the best version of ourselves we can be on the ice and see what happens,” DeMelo said. “I know the sense is if you win that game you win the series, or if you lose the game you lose the series.

“Just means you have a bit of a head start.”

Someone will take that head start into Game 6 in St. Louis on Friday.

Sportsnet.ca

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/how-have-the-blues-had-so-much-success-against-jets-hellebuyck/>

How have the Blues had so much success against Jets' Hellebuyck? (VIDEO)

Steve Valiquette joins Kyper and Bourne to discuss what has gone wrong for Winnipeg Jets netminder Connor Hellebuyck and how the St. Louis Blues have figured him out in Games 3 and 4.

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/how-can-jets-regain-swagger-vs-blues/>

How can Jets regain swagger vs. Blues?

By Jacob Stoller

WINNIPEG — Hockey folk often compare a playoff series to a chess match.

Teams, like chess players, test out what they can and can't do against the opponent. The playoffs are all about making adjustments based on how your opponent reacts. Coaches become grandmasters, matching lines up like a chess player places a knight to control the most dangerous squares.

But here's where chess and playoff hockey differ: Logic determines who wins in chess, while momentum and individual performances are the catalyst in a tight playoff series.

That's why, even though the series is tied 2-2, the Winnipeg Jets are hardly on a level playing surface against the St. Louis Blues.

The Jets lost their mojo in St. Louis during Games 3 and 4, with the Blues flat-out outplaying them and outscoring them 12-3. Winnipeg looked nothing like the defensively sound, five-man unit that it was in the regular season. They were loose defensively, struggling to stay on top of their opponents and blowing coverage assignments. And St. Louis made them pay, capitalizing off the rush and down low in the offensive zone.

They looked like a shadow of the defensively sound juggernaut that picked up its second straight William M. Jennings Trophy in the regular season.

How do the Jets regain their swagger? It comes down to five things.

Connor Hellebuyck needs to bounce back

Winning the Presidents' Trophy wasn't what had many believing these Jets were different from seasons past.

Connor Hellebuyck was.

Not the version of No. 37 we've seen over these last few playoffs. But the lights-out, workhorse goaltender he was in the regular season, where he pushed his way into the Hart Trophy conversation.

Hellebuyck was nothing short of abysmal over Winnipeg's last two games, sporting an abysmal .744 save percentage and a 7.13 goals-against average. Eric Comrie came out to relieve Hellebuyck in each game.

Simply put, the two-time Vezina Trophy winner needs to find a way to fight through net front traffic and find pucks. The defenceman in front of him might not be doing him any favours (which we'll get to shortly), but that doesn't excuse this bad of a performance.

"Am I going to be better? I am going to be better," Hellebuyck told reporters on Monday. "I've studied goaltending extremely hard. I've probably studied the most out of anyone in this world, so I know what to do and how to get my best game."

Play harder in front of the net

The Jets are losing one of the most crucial games within a game — the net front battle.

Hellebuyck isn't getting enough help in front of him, with the Jets' undersized blue line struggling to clear out the traffic in front of him.

Luke Schenn was brought in to clean up those messes, but even he hasn't been as imposing in front of the net. Winnipeg's top-four — Josh Morrissey, Dylan DeMelo, Neal Pionk and Dylan Samberg — need to punch above their weight.

"Box out, give our goalies some looks and try to have sticks there," DeMelo said on Tuesday when asked about what they can do to improve in front of the net. "A very simple game plan, getting it low to high or slinging it from the sides, getting traffic and getting tips, getting some bounces off some bodies that pucks are going by. They're going to the net and getting rewarded for it."

Jets' top offensive players need to elevate their game

We're talking about Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor, in particular.

Mind you, the Jets are 2-17 in games where both Scheifele and Connor are held off the scoresheet.

The Jets wouldn't be in this series still if it weren't for those two, who combined for nine points through Games 1 and 2, and Winnipeg outscored St. Louis 4-0 during five-on-five play.

But Games 3 and 4 were a whole different story. St. Louis smothered Winnipeg's top offensive duo — Scheifele was on the receiving end of nine hits over the last two games — and outscored them 5-1 during five-on-five play.

Look up and down the Jets lineup and you'll find plenty of (useful) meat-and-potato players. But with Nikolaj Ehlers out — and Gabriel Vilardi's effectiveness in question, given that Game 5 will be his first game in over a month — the offensive onus falls almost entirely on Scheifele and Connor.

Win the special-teams battle

For a second straight year, the Jets can't get any momentum from their special teams.

Winnipeg finished the regular season with the NHL's best power play (28.9 per cent) and the 13th best penalty kill (79.4 per cent).

Thus far into the playoffs, the Jets are converting on just 16.7 per cent of their power plays and converting on just 66.7 per cent of their penalty kills.

Assuming Hellebuyck bounces back and the Jets sort out the mess in front of him, their penalty kill should rebound just fine. But the power play? It's looking eerily similar to the passive man-advantage attack they had last year.

Part of that, of course, has to do with the Jets' top unit being short both Ehlers and Vilardi. Vilardi is set to return for Game 5, which could be a game-changer.

"He just becomes another threat, right?" Arniel said after Tuesday's practice. "(Connor's) shot is a threat. (Morrissey's) shot is a threat. (Scheifele's) playmaking ability, (Cole Perfetti) in the (bumper) is a threat. Now there's a fifth one there."

Generate more secondary scoring

Without Ehlers and Vilardi, the Jets have largely been a one-line team.

Five of Winnipeg's 10 goals in these playoffs have come from Scheifele and Connor.

While Ehlers — who remains "week-to-week" with a lower-body injury and skated on his own on Tuesday — is a massive loss in the Jets' top-six, the return of Vilardi for Game 5 could provide a positive trickle-down effect.

"It pushes people back down to where they usually play," Arniel said. "And it just helps us balance out some of our lines."

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/article/analyzing-hellebuycks-playoff-struggles-and-how-jets-can-help-him-rebound/>

Analyzing Hellebuyck's playoff struggles and how Jets can help him rebound

By Adam Vingan

Moments after letting in his fifth goal Sunday afternoon, Connor Hellebuyck drifted toward the Winnipeg Jets' bench. Teammates offered supportive stick taps to his leg pads, knowing they could have done more to help. He patted partner Eric Comrie on the back before putting down his gear and taking a seat for the remainder of the St. Louis Blues' series-tying win.

Hellebuyck's early exits have become a familiar sight over the Jets' past two playoff runs. The presumptive Vezina Trophy winner and Hart Trophy candidate has been pulled in three of his past nine playoff starts. By contrast, Hellebuyck failed to complete just one of his 122 starts in the past two regular seasons.

"I thought the first two games, our goaltending was better than theirs," Jets coach Scott Arniel told reporters. "(Next) two games, their goaltending was better than ours. Plain and simple."

The Blues scored 5.49 goals above expected on Hellebuyck in Games 3 and 4 — the first time in more than three years that the Jets pulled Hellebuyck from consecutive starts. (It last happened April 15-16, 2022, according to NHL Stats and Information.)

"You don't win 47 games and then come the playoffs switch everything up," Hellebuyck told reporters Monday. "I know how it needs to look. I like a lot of things. I'm not going to go and make huge changes. That being said, I'm going to be better. That's my job, and that's the foot that I'm putting forward. I can't be giving up this many goals."

Screens were a major issue for Hellebuyck last post-season when he allowed 10 goals on 38 screened shots (.737 save percentage) in the first round against the Colorado Avalanche. Hellebuyck has given up three goals to the Blues on 16 screened shots, which translates to an .813 save percentage that ranks 15th out of 16 goaltenders who have played at least three games in these playoffs. (He saved 92.7 per cent of those shots during the regular season.)

St. Louis has also scored three times off deflections. That does not include goals that ricochet off defenders; Justin Faulk's goal Sunday that caromed off Neal Pionk's backside, for example, does not factor into the total.

"He's the best goalie in the world," Pionk told reporters, "but he can't stop what he can't see."

Interestingly, the Jets have been better at preventing deflections and screened shots in the playoffs, albeit in a smaller sample than the regular season. The Blues deserve credit for being so good at getting their deflections on net, doing so on five of their eight attempts (62.5 per cent) in the series. They were a perfect 4-for-4 in Games 3 and 4, scoring on three of them. St. Louis had the highest deflection success rate in the league this regular season at 56.8 per cent but scored the third-fewest deflection goals (13).

"I think there is a blueprint of how teams want to play us," Hellebuyck told reporters. "That being said, it's not like we don't have an answer for it."

Hellebuyck, however, has given up significantly more rebounds on screened shots. Twelve of the Blues' 16 screened shots (92.3 per cent) on Hellebuyck have generated rebounds, compared to the 61.1 per cent he posted in that category during the regular season. Although the Blues have not been credited with a rebound goal in the series, Hellebuyck is giving them ample opportunity to cash in on one.

One thing to keep an eye on as the series continues is where the Blues are targeting Hellebuyck. Nine of St. Louis' 15 goals (60 per cent) against Hellebuyck have beaten him high glove. His .571 save percentage on shots aimed at the top right corner of the net is a vast departure from the .896 save percentage he recorded before the playoffs.

Hellebuyck's regular-season accolades speak for themselves, but his post-season play over the past three years is cause for concern. He has lost 10 of 14 starts and allowed a combined 12 goals above expected.

His belief in himself, though, has not wavered.

"You don't want to go into a game playing with fear," Hellebuyck told reporters. "If you play with fear, that's when you start actually making mistakes and wanting things back. We go out, we play our game and you continue to be better every single shift and every single game and every single day. That's my mindset moving forward, and I'm looking forward to it."

Watch Hellebuyck try to get back on track when the Jets host the Blues in Game 5 at 8:30 p.m. MT/ 9:30 p.m. ET.

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/nhl/video/can-hellebuyck-bounce-back-how-to-handicap-jets-vs-blues-game-5/>

Can Hellebuyck bounce back? How to handicap Jets vs. Blues Game 5 (VIDEO)

Betting analyst Paul Caponigri joins By The Books to discuss how he sees Game 5 of the Winnipeg Jets and St. Louis Blues shaking down, which might hinge on Connor Hellebuyck's ability to exorcise the playoffs demons and bounce back.

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/jets-ice-chips-vilardi-set-to-return-to-winnipeg-s-top-line-in-game-5~3124830>

Jets Ice Chips: Vilardi set to return to Winnipeg's top line in Game 5 (VIDEO)

After being out for over five weeks, Gabriel Vilardi is set to return for the Jets in Game 5 against the Blues. Vilardi will find himself with familiar faces on Winnipeg's top line alongside Kyle Connor and Mark Scheifele to balance out the forwards even strength and ideally spread out the offence through all four lines. TSN's John Lu has more on that, and when another injured star could be making his return.

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/what-are-the-keys-to-a-hellebuyck-bounce-back~3124527>

What are the keys to a Hellebuyck bounce back? (VIDEO)

The Blues took care of business in St. Louis, chasing Connor Hellebuyck in back-to-back games to even up their first-round series with the Jets. What are the keys to a Hellebuyck bounce back in Game 5? Can Gabriel Vilardi contribute in his return? TSN Hockey analyst Martin Biron joins Domino's That's Hockey to discuss.

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11156917/analysis-winnipeg-jets-playoff-turnaround/>

ANALYSIS: Jets require more from everyone on roster to turn series around

By Paul Edmonds CJOB

Leading up to Wednesday's important Game 5 in their series against the St. Louis Blues, Winnipeg Jets head coach Scott Arniel wasn't shy about detailing where his team needs to be better. He isolated three areas, pointing to goaltending, his star players and "our grinders; our meat and potato guys."

Which brings us to an interesting starting point in Winnipeg, tied 2-2 with the Blues in the first-round series, possibly finding the win column again for the first time in three games, as this lunch-bucket group of Jets does require more from everyone.

Yes, Connor Hellebuyck is priority number one for a bounceback, although I would suggest the criticism he's shouldering is a little harsh — unless you believe backdoor tallies and deflections off your defenceman's rear-end should be routine stops.

And, of course, unless your best players are your best players, winning in the Stanley Cup playoffs is next to impossible. So, without question, Mark Scheifele, Kyle Connor and Josh Morrissey need to drive offensive play for Winnipeg to be successful.

But Arniel's distinct mention of his club's ham-and-egg guys isn't discriminating, as through four games in the series and 10 goals in total, the forward group consisting of Nino Niederreiter, Mason Appleton, Vladislav Namestnikov, Morgan Barron and Adam Lowry has accounted for one goal, an empty netter at that, in the first game of the series.

And on the back end, the defensive corps has amassed just two primary assists, although Neal Pionk did score one of the team's three total goals in St. Louis last weekend.

That kind of production isn't enough to get the Jets past the finish line, or as Dylan DeMelo put it Tuesday, "a head start" to winning this now best-of-three series.

So, while the focal point this week has been goaltending and top-line production, the hard truth is everyone needs to be better, especially the meat-and-potato guys.

And if they can deliver a hearty helping of protein and carbs Wednesday night, it might also be the gravy on top to the Jets serving up a timely victory.