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SECTION E

Hellebuycck stands tall to record first shutout of season

Jets stymie Panthers to earn victory

JETS 3

PANTHERS 0

KEN WIEBE

SUNRISE, Fla. — This is what committed, two-way hockey looks like.

With head coach Rick Bowness back behind the bench for the first time in more than a month after taking a personal leave, the Winnipeg Jets put on a defensive clinic in a tightly-contested tilt against a team that advanced to the Stanley Cup final last spring.

By the time the buzzer sounded, the Jets had earned a 3-0 win over the Florida Panthers on Friday night at Amerant Bank Arena.

"I think it's the best defensive game all year," Bowness said. "They didn't get a (scoring) chance in the first period. That's a great team over there, that's a home game or them. For us to come out and play that hard in the first period and limit them to no chances, that's just a great effort by our team."

With the victory, the Jets extended their season-high winning streak to five as they improved to 12-5-2 on the season. They also improved to 4-0 against former head coach Paul Maurice since he joined the Panthers Florida, which had won four straight, fell to 12-7-1.

Making his 15th start in 19 games, Jets goalie Connor Hellebuycck recorded 32 saves for his first shutout of the year as he continued a stretch of impressive performances — the biggest save of the night coming with his right pad against Carter Verhaeghe on a rebound chance just past the midway point of the third period.

"Our details were so solid," Hellebuycck said. "My job essentially just became control the game, don't let anything bounce away. Control my rebounds, and when I didn't the guys were there. Just a great team effort all around."

The Jets got goals from Nino Niederreiter, Nikolaj Ehlers and Adam Lowry (shorthanded, empty net), while Dylan Samberg and Mason Appleton each had a pair of assists. They improve to 6-0-2 against Eastern Conference teams as they get set to close out a three-game road trip on Sunday against the Nashville Predators.



MARTA LAVANDIER / THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Jets goaltender Connor Hellebuycck kicked out 32 shots and looked rock-solid between the pipes.

1 The office — Another day, another goal from Niederreiter that comes from right around the blue paint. Niederreiter's sixth goal of the campaign, which opened the scoring late in the first period, came from a familiar place, as he was first to a loose puck that snuck behind Panthers goalie Sergei Bobrovsky after a shot from the left point from Samberg.

The goal doesn't happen without Lowry winning the offensive zone faceoff or Mason Appleton getting the puck back to Samberg, who chipped in his fourth assist of the season. Niederreiter is another member of the Jets on an expiring contract and he's already well on his way to the eighth 20-goal season of his career. There is mutual interest in both sides as it pertains to an extension and Niederreiter continues to provide tremendous value since coming over in a trade deadline deal last March.

"I feel like we did a lot of great things," said Niederreiter. "I think it's the most complete game we've played

all year. We didn't give them much in the D-zone. We got pucks out when we needed to, made plays when the plays were there. It was a tight-checking game, they didn't give us much as well. We just stuck to our game plan and did a lot of good things out there."

2 Highlight-reel marker — After a speedy zone entry, Ehlers made a sensational move in the high slot, walking around Panthers D-man Uvis Balinskis with a nifty move before beating Bobrovsky with a sneaky wrister midway through the final frame to make it a 2-0 game.

It was the sixth goal of the season for Ehlers, who seems to be finding his stride and putting a slow start behind him. This was another example of the explosiveness the dynamic Ehlers can bring when he's on his game. Ehlers has recorded at least a point in five of his past six games (scoring in three of them) and is up to 11 points in 19 games.

3 Thanksgiving standings assessment — U.S. Thanksgiving is one of the early markers on the NHL calendar and history has proven it to be a pretty good barometer when it comes to sorting out which teams are well on their way to qualifying for the Stanley Cup playoffs.

When the date hit on Thursday, the Jets were tied with the Colorado Avalanche for second place in the Central Division, one point behind the Dallas Stars (who are in Winnipeg on Tuesday as the Jets open a four-game homestand).

How much attention does Bowness pay to that date? Not much apparently. "I don't get beat up on those things," said Bowness. "Those things, sometimes, people get these theories. There is no theory that is 100 per cent. You don't feel comfortable, you don't feel uncomfortable. We are where we are. We have to keep pushing."

● JETS, CONTINUED ON E2
● MORE JETS, NHL COVERAGE ON E2

KEY PLAY

A dazzling third-period goal by Nikolaj Ehlers gave Winnipeg some breathing room.

3 STARS

1st: C. Hellebuycck, 32-save SO

2nd: Dylan Samberg, 2 assists

3rd: Nikolaj Ehlers, 1 goal



Steinbach star earns top billing in coaches' poll



MIKAELA MACKENZIE / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Steinbach left side Sienna Driedger was named Manitoba's top female high school volleyball player in a varsity coaches poll.

MIKE SAWATZKY

STEINBACH — Sienna Driedger took an MVP turn in 2021 when she led the Steinbach Sabres to a junior varsity girls provincial AAAA volleyball crown.

Two years later, the Grunthal product and her teammates have designs on a AAAA varsity girls title, which would be the school's first since 1968.

It's a good bet Driedger will be the star of the show.

"We're going in very determined and we have kind of a really good mindset," says Driedger of the No. 3-seeded Sabres, who will be favoured in their provincial quarter-final matchup today. "I think everybody really wants to win, but also we're playing good teams from here on out, so you never know. We've just gotta go and kind of leave it all on the floor and lean on each

other. Everyone has a vital role to play, whether they're on the court playing or calling things out from the bench."

Driedger, a six-foot left side who serves as Steinbach's captain, has been voted the No. 1 player in the annual *Free Press* top-10 coaches' poll.

Her longtime teammate, setter Isabelle Voth, was voted No. 2.

The high regard opponents have for Driedger is no surprise to Sabres head coach Amy Toews.

"She has one of the most aggressive attacks I think I've seen at this level," says Toews, who played middle at the University of Manitoba from 2006 until 2011. "She's got a fast swing. She's got a hard swing. It's high and at angles that I have not seen. She can just hit sharper angles than any other female I've really seen at the high-school level, so how is a team supposed to defend that?"

"She's really hard to defend. We'll go back and watch a video of teams that we've played and they're all kind of pinching up on her because they know that she can hit those sharp angles, but then she goes and hits a deep corner too, right?"

For all of her offensive prowess, Driedger's ability to improve her all-around game could be just as impressive.

"I used to be a player who was very much offensive heavy and my back-court struggled," says Driedger, who was seventh in the 2022 poll and the lone Grade 11 player honoured.

● CONTINUED ON E3

VARSITY GIRLS VOLLEYBALL ● FROM E1

“In the past kind of couple of years I’ve really taken the time to work on my back row as well and so I’d say now in my Grade 12 year, more than any other time, I felt like that is a more rounded part of my game.”

Driedger has also been a much sought-after U Sports prospect and recently committed to attend Trinity Western University in Langley, B.C., next year. The Spartans, a perennial national power currently ranked second in Canada, have reached the last two national championship games, winning once.

“She’s just a really well-rounded player,” says Spartans head coach Ryan Hofer of Driedger. “She has a great arm. She has a lot of shots. She has great ball control and she’s a solid jumper. I feel she’s solid in all of the areas — it might not be one. She’s a good height and her freaky skill might be that she’s just really good at all the different phases of the game.”

Driedger, who has been inspired by former Trinity Western star Hilary How, says going to school in B.C. feels like a great move.

“I’ve always wanted to play university and for a long time I thought, ‘OK, I’m just gonna stay home and play somewhere local,’” she says. “But

after kind of going out to training — I was there last January — and I’d been talking to them for a long time and after hearing about the program and everything like that, it very much felt like a home away from home. So, then going away from home was less daunting in a sense.”

But first there’s business at hand. All season, Steinbach has been locked in a heated battle with the Lord Selkirk Royals, currently No. 1, and the second-seeded Collège Jeanne-Sauvé Olympiens for provincial supremacy.

“I think everyone’s really put in the work,” says Driedger. “There’s a lot of strong teams this year and so that’s been really fun for us and I think it’s been a good challenge.”

Adds Toews: “(Driedger) thrives in those competitive moments and she’s a leader for the other girls on the team in those competitive moments, because it can be nerve-racking, especially for some of the Grade 11s on our team who haven’t necessarily experienced that kind of competitive environment before. She’s really level-headed on the court. I mean, that’s why she’s captain, right? She kind of brings everybody up with her.”

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MIKAELA MACKENZIE / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Steinbach left side Sienna Driedger will be playing for Trinity Western University in Langley, B.C. next year.

The Free Press’s Varsity Girls Volleyball Top 10

This list was compiled with voting from a panel of high school coaches



1. Sienna Driedger, Steinbach Regional, Grade 12, 6-0, left side: A powerful attacker who controls the court with her game. A complete player and strong leader.

2. Isabelle Voth, Steinbach Regional, Grade 12, 6-0, setter: University of Winnipeg commit is a quick, athletic setter who runs a strong offense.

3. Megan Carpenter, Lord Selkirk, Grade 12, 5-10, left side: Strong attacker with a variety of shots and a big back-court presence.

4. Reegan Aitken, Collège Jeanne-Sauvé, Grade 12, 5-11, middle: Big net presence. A quick and agile blocker who reads the offence well. A dynamic attacker.

5. Mackenzie Lyburn, Vincent Massey (Brandon), Grade 12, 5-10, left side: A strong, fast attacker. Solid passer and defensive player.

6. Anna Filippin-Buller, Collège Jeanne-Sauvé Grade 11, 5-11, left side: Plays a complete game in the front and back row. A dynamic attacker and solid defender.

7. Julia Martens, Westgate, Grade 11, 5-9, setter: Strong leader on the court who runs a well-planned and varied offence. Great defender and server.

8. Zoey Purvis, Lord Selkirk, Grade 11, 6-1, setter/right side: versatile player who can run the offence or lead the attack. A strong server.

9. Bethany Carter, Collège régional Gabrielle-Roy, Grade 12, 6-0, left side: Strong leader who dominates the game offensively and defensively.

10. Danika Nell, Vincent Massey (Winnipeg), Grade 12, 6-0, left side: Solid player on serve receive with a heavy attack and big block.

Honourable mentions: Darya Rom (Dakota); Jersey Hansen-Young (Vincent Massey-Brandon); Carley Catellier (Lord Selkirk); Callie Andres (Steinbach Regional)

Canucks fall to U.S. in Parapan goalball final

SANTIAGO, Chile — Canada defeated the United States 4-3 on Friday to win gold in women’s goalball at the Parapan American Games.

Emma Reinke had a hat trick for the Canadians, who secured a berth at the 2024 Paris Paralympics with the victory. Amy Burk had the other goal.

“This is what we came here to do,” said Burk, a four-time Paralympian. “We’ve been working so hard over these past couple of years and to finally have it all come together is amazing.”

“Today’s game was the calmest our team has been.”

Lisa Marie Czechowski scored twice for the Americans and Eliana Marie Mason added a single.

It was Canada’s first Parapan Am title after three consecutive bronze medals. Brazil blanked Argentina 10-0 in the third-place game.

In men’s goalball, Canada took the bronze with a 6-2 victory over Argentina. Blair Nesbitt led the way with a hat trick.

“We had the belief we could accomplish the medal,” he said. “After a tough loss (to the U.S.) that prevented us from qualifying for the Paralympic Games, we just stayed as a team and believed in each other.”

“We executed a bit better today but it was the belief in each other that was the key.”

Mason Smith had two goals for Canada and Doug Ripley added a single. Leonardo Jazmin and Mario Velardez tallied for Argentina.

Brazil beat the United States 12-2 in the final to win gold and secure a Paralympic berth.

In wheelchair basketball, the Canadian women’s team, which includes Winnipegger Bethany Johnson, earned silver after a 62-56 loss to the United States in the gold-medal game.

Kady Dandaneau of Pender Island, B.C., led Canada with a team-high 19 points, 21 rebounds and five assists. Lindsey Zurbrugg scored 17 points for the U.S.

“Obviously, super disappointed. I thought we played well. I thought we played, communicated, had good teamwork — some of the shots didn’t fall,” said Tara Llanes of North Vancouver, B.C. “I thought we executed the game plan that we wanted to execute. They had some good shots; I can’t take that away from them.”

In women’s badminton, Winnipeg’s Olivia Meier made it to the semifinals Friday but fell 2-0 (21-10, 21-14) to Ana Carolina Reis of Brazil.

Meier will face Jenny Ventocilla of Peru

with the bronze medal on the line today.

Meanwhile, Canada’s track cyclists had a podium-filled day.

Mel Pemble of Victoria captured gold in the women’s 3,000-metre C1-3 individual pursuit after finishing 0.109 seconds ahead of American Jamie Renee Whitmore in the final. Paula Perez Caballero took bronze.

“I feel really surprised,” said Pemble. “I went out with a really good plan and everything that could have happened, happened.”

Alex Hayward of Quispamsis, N.B., claimed his second gold of the Parapan Am Games by beating Colombia’s Alejandro Perera Arango in men’s 3,000-metre C1-3 individual pursuit. Calgary’s Mike Sametz won bronze.

Keely Shaw of Saskatoon earned silver in the women’s 3,000-metre C4-5 after losing out to American Samantha Bosco.

— The Canadian Press



CANADIAN PARALYMPIC COMMITTEE

Bethany Johnson earned silver with the Canadian women’s basketball team.



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