'Too slow:' Jets head coach bemoans team’s power play

By: Mike Sawatzky

COLUMBUS — The Winnipeg Jets went to overtime twice and held their opponents to a pair of regulation goals in two games against elite Eastern Conference teams this week. That was the good.

The flipside was less encouraging.

Winnipeg scored only twice in two games, lost both in extra time and went a combined 0-8 on the power play.

An offence that averaged 3.14 goals in its opening seven games had suddenly gone dry — albeit against the powerhouse Pittsburgh Penguins and Columbus Blue Jackets in back-to-back games on Thursday and Friday, respectively.

Winnipeg's power play was cringe-worthy.

"It was too slow," Jets head coach Paul Maurice said after a 2-1 OT loss to the Blue Jackets at Nationwide Arena. "They were real aggressive with it and they didn't come off the puck. We kept trying to settle it out and slow it down but there was no slowing that down.

"The two or three times that we got to the right pace of speed, we got a shot or at least a look or an opportunity to shoot the puck. It was just a speed issue."

The rigours of back-to-back games appeared to take effect in the last 40 minutes Friday. Winnipeg had a 24-16 lead in shot attempts through one period but the hosts held a 40-20 edge the rest of the way.

"We had lots of offence (Thursday) night," said Maurice. "The finish… We’ve got guys who can finish and were in positions last night to finish. (Friday) was going to be a grinding road game on a back-to-back and I’m not worried about that."

Veteran blue-liner Tyler Myers gave the Jackets plenty of credit.

"They’re hard on it," said Myers, who played 3:58 on Winnipeg’s penalty-killing unit Friday (the Jets killed off all eight opposition power plays in Pittsburgh and Columbus). "It seemed like anytime we got the puck they were right on us. It was tough to make a play. That’s where our PP has to dig deep and outwork the other team’s PK.

"I thought our PK was really good tonight. When our PP has some trouble, you have to balance it out with a good PK. That’s exactly how we want to kill."

Life doesn’t get any easier for Winnipeg.
The Jets have a return engagement with the Penguins tonight, but they have reason to be encouraged with their progress. After opening the regular season with two ugly losses in which they were outscored 13-5, they are now 4-3-2 and appear to be trending upwards.

The two-time defending Stanley Cup champions are a formidable test. The Pens are off to a 7-3-1 start but have has been outscored 41-34 thanks to blowout losses to the Tampa Bay Lightning and Chicago Blackhawks.

The Jets won’t be fooled.

"It’s such a fine line," Myers said. "They have a very good team, a lot of power up front and a really good power play. It’s focusing on what we have to do. Playing our game, playing the way we know we have to, to be successful, and that’s playing a simple game and making those plays that we can make at the right time."

BY THE NUMBERS: Steve Mason had an important bounce-back game against the Blue Jackets Friday after going 0-3-0 with a .846 save percentage and a 5.96 goals-against average to start the regular season. He now has a .872 save percentage and 4.84 goals-against average.

Winnipeg Sun


Five takeaways from Jets two-game road trip to Pittsburgh and Columbus

By Ted Wyman

In the big picture, the Winnipeg Jets are not going to be too unhappy about getting two of a possible four points out of a two-game road trip to Pittsburgh and Columbus.

They played gritty defensive games and got great goaltending on back-to-back nights and, though they fell 2-1 in overtime in both games, they didn’t come away empty handed.

Of course, along with the two points, they also brought home a feeling that they should have earned more. The chances were there to win both games, but a lack of offensive finish on Thursday in Pittsburgh and a train-wreck of a power play on Friday did them in.

The Jets have a respectable 4-3-2 record through nine games and head home to face the two-time defending Stanley Cup champion Penguins again on Sunday at MTS Centre.

Here are five takeaways from a road trip that featured no wins but plenty of promise.

The Jets are getting the kind of goaltending they’ve always wanted

Connor Hellebuyck made 34 saves in the loss to Pittsburgh and was a star of the game. He matched Penguins goalie Matt Murray for most of the night but was beaten by Phil Kessel on an overtime breakaway and was furious about it. The next night, it was Steve Mason’s turn. He had
his best game as a member of the Jets, stopping 35 shots in the overtime loss to the Blue Jackets. Both were excellent and gave the Jets the kind of goaltending they need to win.

**Where have all the goals gone?**
The Jets looked rusty offensively in Pittsburgh, repeatedly failing to connect on passes and struggling to control the puck. They hoped that would improve on Friday and it did, to a point, but the goose egg on the power play — the Jets went a hopeless 0-for-6 and generated precious few chances — cost them another chance to win. Top-six forwards Blake Wheeler, Mark Scheifele, Patrik Laine, Nikolaj Ehlers and Kyle Connor all went pointless in the two games. A few them look banged up and a touch slow in their decision-making. The only Jets goals in two games came from Brandon Tanev — the first five-on-five goal this season by a bottom-6 forward — and defenceman Josh Morrissey.

**The penalty killing is improving**
Hellebuyck and Mason had a lot to do with it, but the Jets killed off eight opposition power plays over the two games. Centre Matt Hendricks, who played his first two games after missing seven with an injury, played a big role, winning faceoffs and blocking shots. At one point last week the Jets were 31st in league penalty killing but have improved to 22nd, at 78.8%.

**There’s seems to be more of a commitment to team defence**
While the offence wasn’t there in either game, the Jets were hard on pucks in their own zone and did a good job clearing rebounds in front of the goalies. They got hemmed in a few times by the quick, puck-moving Penguins and Blue Jackets and lost the possession battle on back-to-back nights but they were able to weather the storms. If they can continue to limit the Grade A scoring chances, as they did in Columbus, and the goaltenders make all the saves they are supposed to make, the Jets will continue to be successful. Though they didn’t show it this week, the Jets have enough offensive firepower to score big goals when they need them in close games.

**Patrik Laine is still figuring it out**
He has a world-class shot and can change a game in an instant. He’s also a brilliant passer and has the confidence to try any play. But it can’t go unnoticed that Laine was on the ice for both overtime goals against this week and played a direct role in allowing them to happen. He had a lateral pass intercepted in the offensive zone in Pittsburgh, leading to Kessel’s breakaway goal and allowed his man, Josh Anderson, to get some separation in the slot on the winning goal in Columbus. Laine is still just 19 and does much more good than bad, but on occasion makes miscues and hasn’t been at his best this season. He also admits to feeling slower this year, the result of putting on 11 pounds of muscle in the off-season.


**Shutting down stars not enough for Jets to beat Penguins**

By Ted Wyman

JETS vs. PENGUINS GAMEDAY

PITTSBURGH AT WINNIPEG
FIVE KEYS TO THE GAME

SOLVE THE GOALTENDING
Penguins goaltender Matt Murray, who has won two Stanley Cups despite playing only one full season in the NHL, was brilliant against the Jets on Thursday night, making 30 saves, many of them of the highlight-reel variety. His stops on Nikolaj Ehlers and Kyle Connor were exceptional and the Jets did not score on any of their 11 Grade A chances. Of course, the Jets could also catch a break. With Murray playing in Minnesota Saturday night, the Penguins could give rookie Casey DeSmith his first career start in Winnipeg. The Penguins are unbeaten with Murray in net, winless when he doesn’t start.

MATCH THE SPEED
The Jets held Sidney Crosby to one point on Thursday night and kept Evgeni Malkin off the scoresheet. They skated with the high-flying Penguins and must do it again on Sunday. With the Penguins on a back-to-back and the Jets getting Saturday off to rest, the home team should have the fresher legs this time around. It wouldn’t be a huge surprise to see Jets coach Paul Maurice mix up the lines a bit to try to generate more offence.

TAKE ADVANTAGE
The Jets went 0-for-8 on the power play in games on Thursday and Friday and they absolutely have to find a way to get more organized with the man advantage. The Jets were standing still on their zone entries, making poor passes and getting beaten to loose pucks. A couple of power play goals in the last two games would likely have been the difference between two overtime losses and two regulation wins.

TAKE POSSESSION
The Jets lost the possession battle against the Penguins on Thursday and again against the Blue Jackets on Friday. The Penguins had 70 shot attempts and the Blue Jackets 71, while the Jets managed 54 on each night. It’s not going to be easy to win consistently if the other team has the puck the majority of the time.

ATTACK THE D
The Penguins will likely once again be without regular defencemen Justin Schultz and Matt Hunwick, but this is not a team that ever seems affected by injuries on the back end. They played the entire playoffs without top-blueliner Kris Letang and had a patchwork group throughout the post-season and they still won their second straight Stanley Cup. Still, the Jets generated chances with their forecheck on Thursday and they should be able to do so again.

THE BIG MATCHUP
Jets C Mark Scheifele vs. Penguins C Sidney Crosby
Scheifele was banged up in Friday’s game after taking a knee-on-knee hit from Boone Jenner of the Blue Jackets, but he managed to finish the third period. He did a good job against Crosby on Thursday and generated several scoring chances of his own. However, he went just 30% in the faceoff circle and that is always dangerous when Crosby on the ice. If Scheifele can play, his head-to-head matchup with Crosby will be key and it starts with the faceoff dot.

Sportsnet.ca
http://www.sportsnet.ca/hockey/nhl/jets-taking-calls-goaltender-michael-hutchinson/
Jets taking calls on goaltender Michael Hutchinson

By Sportsnet Staff

The Winnipeg Jets are fielding phone calls from interested teams about goaltender Michael Hutchinson, according to Sportsnet’s Chris Johnston.

“We’ve seen a number of goalies injured around the league; some under performance as well,” Johnston said during Saturday’s Headlines segment on Hockey Night in Canada. “And the feeling is he is a guy Winnipeg would be willing to move if they find the right fit.”

Hutchinson, who spent parts of the past four seasons with the Jets, is currently playing with the Manitoba Moose of the AHL. He has a 2.70 goals-against average and .918 save percentage in three games there and is making $1.3 million. He’ll be an unrestricted free agent next season.

In 99 career NHL games, the 27-year-old Hutchinson owns a 2.63 goals-against and .910 save percentage.

Connor Hellebuyck and Steve Mason have split time in the Winnipeg crease this season. They’ve allowed a combined 30 goals in nine games, entering Saturday.