



**AMALIE Arena Media Clips**  
**Friday, January 26, 2024**

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### **3 takeaways from the Lightning's sixth straight home win** **Eduardo A. Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

TAMPA — After stumbling through the first half of the season, the Lightning are playing their best hockey as they approach the all-star break.

Their 6-3 win over the Arizona Coyotes on Thursday night at Amalie Arena was their seventh in their last eight games. They play their final game before the break Saturday against the Devils at Amalie Arena.

They didn't leave themselves much margin for error, but over the past 16 days, the Lightning have gained momentum in the Eastern Conference standings. Thursday's win gave them 57 points, jumping them over the Maple Leafs into third place in the Atlantic Division.

"There's just a lot of excitement in the room and the guys are feeling good about themselves," coach Jon Cooper said. "There's a lot of belief in the team and the way we're playing. There were a lot of things that went against us early on and we just felt that, 'Hey, this is going to turn at some point.'"

The Lightning (26-18-5) have won six straight at home, and their 35 home points are tied with Boston for fourth-most in the league.

"We knew coming into this break that we had a lot of games at home," Lightning captain Steven Stamkos said. "We wanted to take advantage of that and we have so far."

With a three-point night, Nikita Kucherov took over the NHL scoring lead from Colorado's Nathan MacKinnon. Kucherov has 83 points on the season, one more than MacKinnon, whose Avalanche didn't play Thursday.

Over their last eight games, the Lightning have allowed an average of just 2.25 goals a game and haven't allowed more than three goals in any of the eight games.

Here are three takeaways from Thursday.

#### Breaking through early

The Lightning hadn't had much luck against Coyotes goaltender Connor Ingram, a former Tampa Bay prospect who had stopped 77 of 78 shots he faced in his previous two games against his old club.

All that went away when Darren Raddysh scored on the Lightning' first shot of the night, rifling a wrist shot from just inside the blue line above the right circle that went through traffic and beat Ingram through the five hole. Raddysh's goal came 24 seconds into the game.

"He's definitely had our number," Stamkos said of Ingram. "We just wanted to get more traffic in front. I thought the first goal is a perfect example. He didn't see it, we get some momentum from there."

For Raddysh, who has played extremely well since moving to the top defensive pairing alongside Victor Hedman, it was his fourth goal in his last nine games after going without a goal in his first 39 games this season.

#### Milestone night for the stars

Kucherov has been sensational all season, and Thursday marked his 13th three-point game in 2023-24. Coming off a hat trick in his last game Tuesday in Philadelphia, he has eight points in his last two games after going pointless Sunday in Detroit.

Each member of the Lightning's top line — Stamkos, Brayden Point and Kucherov — scored in succession. Stamkos' assist on Kucherov's goal at the 7:36 mark of the second period put the Lightning up 3-1 and gave Stamkos his 1,100th career point.

Stamkos became the 29th player in league history — and fifth active player — to record 1,100 points with the same franchise. Stamkos then recorded point No. 1,101 less than five minutes later with a one-timer from the left circle on the power play.

He also passed Joe Sakic for fifth-most power play goals (205) with one franchise, and recorded his 14th 20-goal season in his 16-year career (which includes the 56-game pandemic season in 2020-21 when Stamkos scored 17 goals).

The big three accounted for seven points for the Lightning.

Rookies bring energy in return to Bolts lineup

The play of the Lightning's stars has fueled the team's improved overall performance, but there's no question that a traditionally-veteran room has been energized by a mass influx of young players.

Forward Mitchell Chaffee drew into the lineup the day after he was recalled from AHL Syracuse and scored his first NHL goal late in the second period to put the Lightning up 5-1. Four rookies were on the ice on the goal, and Chaffee's old Crunch teammates Max Crozier and Emil Lilleberg recorded the two assists on the play.

"It's awesome," Chaffee said. "I walked to the rink with them and I'm close with them, and they're great guys. It just makes it that much better."

Crozier also sparked the Lightning late with his first NHL fight, defending himself after taking a post-whistle cross check from Michael Kesselring, He dropped his gloves with Lawson Crouse, extending the fight to a second round by jumping back up after going to the ice.

## **On Another Stamkos milestone night, Tampa Bay Lightning rookies shine again** **Erik Erlendsson (Lightning Insider)**

**TAMPA** – To put the Tampa Bay Lightning in modern terms, they are on a bit of a heater.

After all the ups and downs of the first half of the season that had them teetering between a playoff team and a lottery team, they have put together the type of run they needed to keep in the former and stave off the later. And after their five-game winning streak was snapped in Detroit, the Tampa Bay Lightning recovered quickly.

After defeating the Arizona Coyotes 6-3 on Thursday, the Tampa Bay Lightning have picked up victories in both games since that loss in Detroit. And, the Tampa Bay Lightning have now picked up wins in seven of the past eight games.

Since New Year's Eve, the Lightning have a record of 9-3 and won six consecutive home games. That might not be Edmonton Oilers' type of heat, but it's a heater.

Along the way, the Lightning have been led by their stars – Nikita Kucherov, Steven Stamkos, Brayden Point, Victor Hedman and Andrei Vasilevskiy. But, it's also been the steady line of rookies coming up to make their NHL debuts, and making plenty of contributions.

So perhaps Thursday's performance was the perfect blending of contrasts that populate the Tampa Bay Lightning roster and has them on the current heater.

### **THE CRUNCH CONNECTION**

Tampa Bay has seen eight different players make their debuts this season. Waltteri Merela and Matt Tomkins were the first two to do so early in the season, with Merela in the opening night lineup and Tomkins making his debut in net in Ottawa a few games later.

Since then, it's been Mitchell Chaffee (who did appear in two games with Minnesota in 21-22), Declan Carlile, Emil Lilleberg, Jack Thompson, Gage Goncalves and Max Crozier. Some got just one game, a couple got two games while Lilleberg has been with the team since January 6 (nine games including Thursday), and has been paired with Crozier for the past six games. All but Carlile made their NHL debuts.

With injuries to Mikhail Sergachev, who has been out since December 17, Tanner Jeannot, Erik Cernak and, now, Austin Watson, it has allowed spots on the Tampa Bay Lightning roster and salary cap space to open up to allow this to happen.

And the Lightning, which built up a big part of their core through draft and development, are not known for the strength of their farm system. Over the past couple of years, they've been ranked by some prospects followers as having one of the shallowest prospect pools in the league.

Success at the NHL level can raid a farm system, trading first round picks and prospects to bring in players to help the win Cups.

But as the past month has shown, the kids (in the Tampa Bay Lightning system) are all right.

"You talk about some of the winning we've done lately, I think you can attribute some of that to the energy these kids from Syracuse have been bringing us," Lightning head coach Jon Cooper said. "And guys are really cheering for them on the bench."

### **THE ROOKIE HOOK UP**

How much trust does Cooper and the coaching staff have in the players coming up from Syracuse?

On Tampa Bay's fifth goal on Thursday, four of the rookies were on the ice together to combine for Chaffee's first career NHL goal. Lilleberg started the play in the offensive zone before Crozier carried the puck down the right boards before sending a shot toward goal. The puck bounced off Arizona goaltender Connor Ingram right to Chaffee just above the crease. Chaffee collected the puck and quickly elevated the puck over Ingram at 15:18 of the second period.

"Crozier just kind of banked it off the goalie and it came out to me," Chaffee said. "I guess the biggest thing was trying to elevate the puck, get it upstairs and if found the back of the net."

Merela was also on the ice for the goal, along with Luke Glendening. That line, along with Crozier and Lilleberg, were also on the ice for Glendening's goal in the third period.

Chaffee was appearing in his fourth career NHL game. He scored 23 goals for the Iowa Wild in 2021-22, but a knee injury cost him all but 10 games last season. He signed as a free agent with Tampa Bay this season and leads the Crunch with 11 goals and is third with 25 points.

"I've kind of matured a little bit more now," Chaffee said of his time back in the NHL. "I think I can go out there and kind of play my game and play how I know I can play rather than just trying to enjoy the moment."

And it was not lost on him in the moment that Crozier and Lilleberg had the assists on his goal.

"It's awesome," he said. "I walked to the rink with them today and I'm close with them and they're great guys. It just makes it that much better."

It just sort of shows how the youthful injection has injected some life into the team.

"It's pretty special," Crozier said of the trio connecting for Chaffee's goal. "I think Lilleberg had another really good game and Chaffee played great today, he really stepped up. It's great. I think what they're doing down in Syracuse, it's been great for our development and it's really shown."

## **MAD MAX**

Speaking of Crozier, he's been as steady as one could be in their first two weeks in the NHL.

Playing defense at this level has its fair share of challenges. But he showed on Thursday that he has the poise and self-confidence to stay within his game.

Crozier made the first mistake that led to Arizona's tying goal in the first period. Crozier had the puck on his stick at the right circle as the team was changing behind the play. Crozier waited, and waited and waited while pressure was quickly coming at him. He waited too long, and instead of trying to find Lilleberg across the zone sooner, he tried to quickly turn and go behind the net.

But the pressure disrupted the play and seconds later Clayton Keller was alone to pounce on the rebound with the left side of the net open.

That play happened on his fifth shift of the game. Crozier took 16 more the rest of the game, though it would have been more except for the penalty situation. He just stayed steady, which has been a key to his success, along with another aspect.

“We have a lot of great leadership,” Crozier said. “I think all the big guys have really been stepping up and helping us younger guys out. I think it’s shown. Everything’s kind of going the way that we want it to and everyone’s playing the way that we should be, and it’s really showing on the ice for sure.”

Crozier now has assists in consecutive games after picking up his first career point on the opening goal in Philadelphia on Tuesday. And he showed that he can stand up for himself, as well.

After Arizona scored to make it a 6-3 game at the 11:48 mark, Michael Kesselring delivered a dirty cross check to Crozier’s back, and then delivered an additional shot after Crozier was down on the ice. The two teams came together before 6-foot-4, 215-pound Lawson Crouse grabbed the 6-foot-1, 195-pound Crozier and decided they were fighting.

After a few blows were exchanged, Crozier fell to the ice but quickly got back up, not only showing he could stand up for himself, but also that he wasn’t going to give up quickly.

“He had a chance to bail out of that one and he got up,” Cooper said. “I think if he’d really looked at who he was going against he might have stayed down but it was a gritty effort for the kid. He’s been exceptional for us. He’s got a lot of swag and he’s a competitor.”

Crozier said he thinks he was a marked man by the Coyotes for a hit he delivered on Logan Cooley earlier in the game. He understood and stood up.

“I’m okay sticking up for myself,” Crozier said. “He just kind of said we’re going. So I think after taking a cross check like that I’m okay sticking up with myself. Guys stepped in for sure and got that Kesslering guy, so I’m happy I did it.”

And about that mistake made earlier in the game. Cooper didn’t hold it against him.

“What we’ve seen from, especially those two defensemen back there, they don’t back down for anything, (they’re) not fazed,” Cooper said. “And even though they would probably like to take back some of the plays they made the D zone. But that happens in this league. It’s a humbling league and times there are going to make a play that is going to end up in your net. Just go learn from it and move on. You can tell these kids aren’t fazed by it. They just go back out and start competing again, no hanging their head. I love that about those guys.”

## **ANOTHER STAMKOS MILESTONE**

It seems like it was just yesterday Steven Stamkos recorded his 1,000th career point. That, actually, is not far off base as it wasn’t even 13 months ago that Stamkos did record his 1,000th point on December 1 in Philadelphia.

As it turns out, it only took just over 100 additional games to reach the 1,100th point of his career. Stamkos picked up the point with a primary assist on a Nikita Kucherov goal in the second period that gave Tampa Bay a 3-1 lead 7:36 into the period.

“I don’t take for granted any point that I get,” Stamkos said. “I’ve been very fortunate to play with some amazing players in my career. It’s like I always say, it’s pretty cool to have done it all with one team. It also helps to do it in a win when everyone’s in a good mood. Hopefully we can keep that going.”

Stamkos is just the 66th player in NHL history to record at least 1,100 points. He is the 29th player to reach that mark with a single franchise, and the sixth active player to do so, joining: Sidney Crosby (PIT), Alex Ovechkin (WSH), Evgeni Malkin (PIT), Patrick Kane (CHI) and Anze Kopitar (LAK).

Stamkos added point No. 1,101 later in the second period with a power play goal from his office, hitting a couple of additional marks in the game.

The goal was his 20th of the season, giving him 14 seasons in which he has registered at least 20 goals. He is the fifth active player to reach 14 seasons with 20+ goals, joining Alex Ovechkin (18), Sidney Crosby (16), Patrick Kane (15) and Evgeni Malkin (14).

The power play goal was the 206th of his career, fifth most with a single franchise. Stamkos is now five power play goals behind Gordie Howe for 15th all-time overall.

## **HE DID IT AGAIN**

Nikita Kucherov rarely talks publicly these days, even when requested. But he does enough talking with his game.

It's been quite the race of late for the league-lead in points. Kucherov was at the top for more than 50 consecutive days. But over the past few days, he has been playing a game of leap frog with Nathan MacKinnon.

On Saturday, MacKinnon had four points to take the lead from Kucherov. On Tuesday, Kucherov answered with a four-point game of his own to retake the lead. Wednesday, MacKinnon had a five-point night (including four goals) to move two points ahead of Kucherov.

Well, Kucherov answered that with a three-point night on a goal and two assists. And he was visibly frustrated during a power play in the third period when he appeared to have a lane to the net when the play was whistled down for being played with a high stick. Kucherov fired the puck into the end boards and gave a glare back toward the official who blew the play dead.

But with his three-point showing, he moved back in front of MacKinnon for the league lead in points with 83. It's also his 14th game this season with at least three points, four more than the number of games he's been held without a point. Kucherov has recorded three points in each the Lightning's previous three home games, tied for the second longest streak in team history with Chris Kontos (3 GP in 1992-93). Steven Stamkos tops the list with four consecutive home games in 2021-22.

With two assists, Kucherov is the second player this season to reach 50 assists on the season, his fifth season with at least 50 assists, passing Stamkos for second in franchise history behind Marty St. Louis, who had six.

And, to top off another list of Kucherov accomplishments, he reached 50 assists in fewer than 50 games played for the third time in his career. He is the only active player to achieve the feat multiple times. The only other players in NHL history to do so at least three times are Wayne Gretzky (15x), Mario Lemieux (9x), Bobby Orr (6x) Paul Coffey (4x), Denis Savard (4x), Bryan Trottier (4x), Adam Oates (4x) and Peter Stastny (3x).

Despite the season Kucherov is having – he's on pace to finish with a career-high 54 goals and franchise best 140 points – he does not get talked about enough when it comes to the MVP race, or even just for the season he's put together.

"This stretch has been pretty, pretty amazing," Stamkos said of Kucherov. "Everyone looks at what MacKinnon is doing and everyone's talking about how unworldly he's playing. But I don't want to use the word surprising because I see the work that he puts in. So it's a correlation. But for sure, the level that he's played at this year is another reason why we've won seven of the last eight, and he's a huge part of that."

Should Kucherov receive more credit and recognition for what he's accomplishing this season?

"We're not the biggest market in the NHL," Stamkos said. "Although we've had a ton of success, it's still that's just the way it is. For whatever reason, you look at the teams we've had in the past and we've talked about this year's team, maybe a little transition year, but we're we're finding our way. For him to be doing what he's doing is even more impressive. I know every team has some really good players that each guy plays with but, the discrepancy in points versus our team with what Kuch has done is pretty amazing. The fact that we're right in the mix in the playoffs he should be getting more" attention.

## **NOTES**

Tampa Bay Lightning scratched Alex Barre-Boulet and Erik Cernak. ... Tampa Bay moved into third place in the Atlantic Division, moving past idle Toronto. ... Anthony Cirelli played in his 400th career game. ... Raddysh opened the scoring for the Lightning 24 seconds into the game, the second-fastest goal by a defenseman to start a contest in franchise history behind Cory Sarich's marker 12 seconds into a 4-3 victory against the New York Islanders on Dec. 14, 2002. ... Tampa Bay scored six goals in consecutive games for the seventh time in team history and first since April 21-24, 2022 (3 GP).

## **MY THREE STARS**

1. Lightning RW Nikita Kucherov – Goal, three points, six shots on goal
2. Lightning C Steven Stamkos – Goal, assist, five shots on goal, 1,100th career point
3. Lightning RW Mitchell Chaffee – Goal, assist, plus-2, three hits



## **Lightning players on the importance of mental health**

### **Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)**

With the Tampa Bay Lightning and the Lightning Foundation set to host their fourth Hockey Talks Night this Thursday against the Arizona Coyotes, a few players were kind enough to sit down and share their stories regarding mental health.

The night is dedicated to raising awareness and helping end the stigma around mental health.

#### **Brandon Hagel**

For Brandon Hagel, Hockey Talks Night hits very close to home. Over the course of just one year, Hagel lost two of his uncles, both of whom took their own lives after silently battling with mental health struggles.

“Sometimes you can just never tell,” Hagel shared. “That’s obviously what went on in my family and that’s kind of just why it’s a big part of my life. I was lucky enough to actually have not had the experience of losing a family member at that time.

“It was in 2017 and 2018 when they passed, pretty well a year apart. It affected us big time, but it also brings you closer as a family.

“Life’s short. You never know what’s going to happen. It impacted our lives terribly, but it also brought us closer as a family. We know they’re always watching.”

When Hagel started battling some mental health issues of his own, he knew how important it was to get help. Like many others in the same situation, the first thing that went through his head was, ‘What are people going to think about me?’

But through his past experiences, Hagel knew how important it was to reach out and get help, so he did. Now, he maintains that it was the best decision he could have made.

“I was able to get help and it really did help me out when I was going through that,” said Hagel. “That’s just something I would put on everyone. If you need to reach out, it’s always there.

“That’s kind of why I do it (share my story). I want people to be happy. It changed my life, getting help, and it changed my life in different ways.

“I knew I needed it. I was going down the wrong path and fighting something because of what happened to my uncles. I was just not going the right way. I was going the wrong way.

“Finally, one day, I realized that. And the person that was able to help me out, I’ve never had a better connection or a better person to be able to talk to.”

Hagel’s biggest message regarding mental health is clear. Is it hard to reach out and ask for help? Of course, it is. Is it worth it to see past the fear and find someone to talk to? Absolutely.

“Sometimes you’re not comfortable,” said Hagel. “You’re always going to have that in the back of your head. But if you put both feet in, I think you’ll really enjoy it.

“I’m so grateful for the platform that I have and for me to be able to share this story and maybe help other people. I was like anyone else. I was worried to put two feet in and go get some help, but that’s why I want to push it as much as I can to help other people, because it really did change my life.”

Hockey Talks Night isn't an easy night for Hagel. The memories it brings back are hard to deal with. But if the game can help raise awareness for those who need it, he's all for it. On Thursday night, he'll be playing for his uncles.

## **Tyler Motte**

About six years ago, Tyler Motte was diagnosed with anxiety and depression on a day that he still considers one of the hardest of his life. Reaching out for help for the first time was a challenge for Motte, who was encouraged by his wife to find some support.

As an athlete, he didn't want others to see him as anxious or depressed. When he heard the diagnosis for the first time, he wrestled with the fact that these were things he'd be dealing with for the rest of his life. At first, it felt like he made the wrong choice with the way the diagnosis made him feel.

Looking back now, it wasn't easy, but he knows he made the right decision and wants to help others feel confident that they should do the same.

"I think, without taking that first step, and probably taking those two steps back with the diagnosis, I would never have been able to take however many steps I've taken forward," said Motte. "It was probably one of the hardest days of my life hearing that from a personal standpoint. There's been hard days reflecting on how and why you were where you were and how and why you want to get to where you're going to get to.

"Hearing the diagnosis and the words associated with it, like how I had been feeling and when I know that I'll be feeling those ways in the future, it's kind of hard to redefine those words for yourself.

"But, like anything else, it's a day-to-day process. You keep working at it and things do get easier. You become more equipped to handle the tough times and the bad days. Ultimately, hopefully, you can help others that are feeling the same way."

Motte has certainly helped a lot of people that are going through similar challenges. While playing with the Vancouver Canucks, he shared his story a couple times to support Hockey Talks Night. At first, he didn't realize how many people would hear his story. Thankfully, a lot of people did. And that was exactly what many of them needed to help them on their journey.

"They were kind of a driving force behind the Hockey Talks Night," Motte said. "I think doing it on what was ultimately a bigger scale than maybe I realized at the time, that part was a little frightening to me because I hardly had my friends and family know, let alone a fanbase or a city or really anyone who had the Internet at that point.

"But there were a lot of people that would reach out on social media or whatever it was. It's impossible to contact and communicate with everybody, but seeing the number of people who were not only appreciative of me sharing the story, but who had been going through it themselves or had known friends and family that were going through it, I think that really opened my eyes to the amount of people that mental health does impact.

"I think that allowed me to feel more comfortable in my own shoes, so I'm grateful for those people who did reach out or the one-on-one communication I've had with people about it. It's a tough conversation to have, but I think ultimately the more times you have it, the more you allow others into your community and into your support system."

Motte says reaching out was the best decision he could have made, and he continues to urge others to do the same. Whether that's reaching out for help or checking in on those close to you, both can have a major impact on someone's life.

"I think that was something I'm still working on today, but that was the biggest thing for me, was knowing when to reach out and knowing when to tell my friends and family that I wasn't in the best place," shared Motte. "Ultimately, everyone wants to help you get there, but sometimes it's just being in a position to listen and hear what's going on."

"How can you be available? A lot of times, it's just lending an ear, letting someone vent a little bit and hopefully creating an environment that supports people's mental health and supporting each other in a positive way. I think that's something I've learned and am continuing to learn. I want to ultimately be there for others."

"Obviously, being on a new team and a new organization, you try to find that fit a little bit, but you also have to understand the ways that you can help the room and the ways that the room can help you. That's obviously still an ongoing process. I do know it's something that's going to be with me. There's not necessarily a cure or fix for it, but I think what really helps me push on is knowing that, or hoping that, I can help other people find better days."

## **Nick Paul**

While playing on the lacrosse team in high school, one of Nick Paul's favorite teammates didn't show up to school. This teammate had a happy-go-lucky personality and was seemingly always in a good mood, consistently cracking jokes with his friends.

When this teammate didn't show up for school, Paul and his friends assumed he was just sick. The following day, the news came out that the young man had taken his own life.

"It was hard, especially at that age," said Paul. "You don't really think about that. I didn't have any dealings with that before."

"I think, honestly, just my family kind of talking to me and telling me it's okay to show emotion and kind of walking me through that [was big]. Then, the lacrosse team and the people at school all worked through it together and talked about it and being there for one another."

"I had a really good support system, and I was very lucky. I know it's not always that way with people that are going through situations like that. But luckily, there's resources that you can call. There's resources that you can go and see and talk about things."

After Paul's teammate passed away, he could hardly believe it really happened. No one ever saw it coming. It was at that moment that he decided if he ever had a platform to raise awareness for mental health, he was going to do it.

That opportunity presented itself during his second year in the Ontario Hockey League.

"I went to the hospital there in North Bay and people through the team connected me with the right people," Paul shared. "We had a meeting and I expressed what I wanted to do and what my vision was and my past experience."

"They were awesome. They helped me through everything. They helped me set up 'Points for Paul' at the time. They were awesome. They helped me go through all that."

“I went to schools and spoke a little bit. I’ve always been one to try to get in the community. They were all on board for that and helped me do that. It was great.”

Today, Paul is still giving back. Working with the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, Paul and the Lightning Foundation launched “Points by Paul.” The program was also active during his time with the Ottawa Senators and the Bolts forward wanted to make sure he was making a similar impact with his new team.

With each point Paul records on the ice, he donates \$150 to the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay in a continued effort to help those impacted by struggles with mental health.

Paul has firsthand experience going through some of those struggles, citing the numerous times he was going up and down between the AHL and NHL while with the Senators organization. Playing in the NHL was everything he imagined, but getting sent back down to the AHL was an emotional roller coaster at times.

“Going up and down, it's not easy,” said Paul. “Your dream is right in front of you, and you get to taste it and touch it a little bit. Then, all of a sudden, it's right back down. Then, you get up again and get teased a little bit and you're back down. It kind of plays with your emotions. You're putting everything you have into it and sometimes things just don't go your way.

“That's life. It's a roller coaster. There's going to be ups. There's going to be downs. But if there's no downs, the ups wouldn't really be that great. I think, through life, there's always going to be low spots, but it's how you're able to deal with it.

“Do you have a support system? Are you able to call someone? Are you able to talk to someone about how you're feeling and what you're going through? I think that's a big thing. I was lucky enough that I had my family with me and people around me that were really supportive. That's how I got through it, just working through it.”

## **Victor Hedman**

At one point or another, Lightning fans have probably seen Victor Hedman wearing a hat or hoodie with NOSOLO branding. Hedman is an ambassador for NOSOLO, a company committed to raising awareness for all things related to mental health.

With every sale, NOSOLO donates 20% of the proceeds to NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness), an organization that envisions a world where all people affected by mental illness live healthy, fulfilling lives supported by a community who cares.

“Mental health is a real thing,” said Hedman. “You can always see if someone is hurt on the outside if you've got an open wound or whatever, but what's going on, on the inside, is kind of tough to pick up. It's been a big problem in our society.

“It goes through everyone. I'm sure we all have someone that has gone through it without us knowing it. We just want to end that and make sure that people can talk to one another.

“It feels like it would be tough for us to talk about it. We're hockey players that play this tough sport. If you can't talk about how you feel, you can go down a dark hole very quickly. To kind of end the stigma about that is what really talks to me, and this is where words can speak louder than actions.

“We've just got to make sure that we try to help everyone close to us and try to make sure they feel okay talking about their feelings and how they feel.”

As a father of two, Hedman realizes that mental health struggles aren't exclusive to a certain age group. NOSOLO has recently sent representatives to speak to audiences of 600 middle schoolers to raise awareness about mental health.

"If you're not really feeling it or you're feeling down or you're sad, I think it's important for us to talk about that," said Hedman. "You talk to your kids and tell them it's okay to be sad. They're still very young, but it's okay to have feelings and it's okay to show it. That's how I go about my business and how I feel about it.

"Like I said earlier, we're supposed to be these tough guys playing hockey, but it's okay to have bad days. It's okay to feel down and feel sad, but make sure that you find someone to talk to."

For Hedman, even just wearing a NOSOLO hat can have enough reach to help someone in need.

"We're just trying to find ways to help," Hedman shared. "I've been in contact with a family down here who lost their daughter and were going through a tough time. They saw me wearing the hat and their brand and they reached out to JT. It's helped them tremendously.

"Just a small thing like that, wearing that hat, helped that family to start talking about it rather than holding it inside. I think that helps a lot."

Hedman knows it's hard to put yourself in someone else's shoes, but you never know what the person next to you may be going through. Instead of holding his issues inside, he's learned it's better to speak up. With an issue like mental health that's extremely important to him, he's urging others to do the same.

"I know that today's today and tomorrow's tomorrow," said Hedman. "You've just got to take it day by day and try to live your fullest. You just want to do it with good mental health. If you feel sad and feel down, I've learned to talk about it instead of kind of closing it inside.

"It's just one of the things that I think helps people feel better about themselves, knowing they're not alone in this battle. That's kind of the way I go about it and how I try to live my life and teach my kids as well."