



**AMALIE Arena Media Clips**  
**Saturday, January 20, 2024**

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## **Nuts & Bolts: Back-to-back begins in Buffalo** **Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)**

Everything you need to know ahead of Tampa Bay's matchup against the Buffalo Sabres on Saturday.

**When:** Saturday, January 20 - 12:30 p.m. ET

**Where:** KeyBank Center - Buffalo, NY

**TV coverage:** Bally Sports (check local listings)

**Radio coverage:** [102.5 MHz-FM](#), [Lightning Radio 24/7](#)

**Where to stream it:** [BallySports.com](#)

### **Lines from Thursday's Game (subject to change)**

Steven Stamkos - Brayden Point - Nikita Kucherov

Brandon Hagel - Anthony Cirelli - Nick Paul

Alex Barre-Boulet - Tyler Motte - Conor Sheary

Austin Watson - Luke Glendening - Mikey Eyssimont

### *Defensemen*

Victor Hedman - Darren Raddysh

Calvin de Haan - Max Crozier

Emile Lilleberg - Nick Perbix

### *Goaltenders*

Andrei Vasilevskiy

Jonas Johansson

### **Saturday's Matchup**

The Lightning and the Sabres are playing the second of four matchups this season and the second of two meetings at KeyBank Center...The Bolts dropped the first meeting of the season in a 3-2 overtime loss Oct. 17 at BUF...Brandon Hagel scored both of Tampa Bay's two goals in the defeat, while Anthony Cirelli, Tanner Jeannot and Brayden Point each picked up one assist...Point (5-4—9) led the Lightning in goals vs. BUF last season and was tied with Nikita Kucherov (1-8—9) for the team lead in points...Kucherov has found the scoresheet in 13 of his last 14 games vs. BUF (10-13—23) and has points in six of his last seven contests at BUF (5-7—12)...Kucherov has points in 15 of his 17 career games at BUF (10- 14—24) and has found the scoresheet in 22 of his last 24 contests vs. BUF overall (14-20—34)...Point is riding a seven-game point streak vs. BUF (5-7—12) and has scored a goal in four of the last five matchups...Point has found the scoresheet in seven of his last eight contests at BUF (4-4—8)... Steven Stamkos has picked up points in six straight games vs. BUF (4-7—11), along with 11 of the last 13 meetings (6-11—17)...Hagel has found the scoresheet in five of his six career games vs. BUF (5-4—9)...Cirelli has points in seven of his last nine contests vs. BUF (3-6—9)...Victor Hedman has points in five of his last seven contests vs. BUF (1-6—7)...The Lightning are 5-4-1 in their last 10 games at BUF and 6-2-2 in the last 10 meetings overall...The Bolts are 50-49-10 with five ties all time vs. BUF, including a road record of 26-25-4 with two ties...Stamkos (22-25—47) holds the Bolts franchise records for career goals and points vs. BUF.

### **Injuries**

Erik Cernak - Upper-body - Week-to-Week

Haydn Fleury - Upper-body - Week-to-Week

Mikhail Sergachev - Upper-body - Week-to-Week

Tanner Jeannot - Lower-body - Week-to-Week

## **The Road Ahead**

Sunday, January 21 at Detroit Red Wings

Tuesday, January 23 at Philadelphia Flyers

Thursday, January 25 vs. Arizona Coyotes

## **Lightning's Darren Raddysh unleashes NHL's hardest recorded shot** **Eduardo A. Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

TAMPA — Darren Raddysh's offensive skill set might be a secret outside the Lightning locker room, but the right-shot defenseman has been able to show off his offensive chops during the recent absence of Mikhail Sergachev.

Raddysh is playing more minutes, mainly because he now mans the second power-play unit. In Thursday's 7-3 win over the Minnesota Wild at Amalie Arena, Raddysh earned some league-wide bragging rights.

A first-period slap shot from above the right circle was clocked at 102.40 mph, making it the hardest recorded shot in the three seasons the NHL has been tracking game-by-game shot volume data through its NHL Edge platform.

Previously, the hardest shot belonged to Blues defenseman Colton Parayko, who recorded a 101.95 mph shot on March 22, 2022. The hardest this season had belonged to Ducks and former Lightning defenseman Radko Gudas, who fired a 101.69 mph shot Nov. 2 against Arizona.

Midway through the first period Thursday, Lightning center Brayden Point entered the offensive zone and dropped a pass back to Raddysh, who fired a one-timer that goaltender Filip Gustavsson stopped with his blocker.

Offense isn't new to Raddysh's game. He averaged more than a point per game in 50 games at AHL Syracuse last season, recording 13 goals and 38 assists, before finding a place with the Lightning.

After going without a goal in his first 39 games this season, Raddysh scored two Jan. 4 at Minnesota and then netted the winner in overtime a week later against the Devils. He has five points in his last six games and was plus-3 Thursday against the Wild. During that stretch, he is averaging 21:41 of ice time and has 12 shots on goal.

Raddysh recently joined the top defense pair with Victor Hedman, who also possesses one of the league's hardest shots. Hedman won the hardest-shot competition at the 2022 All-Star Game in Las Vegas with a slap shot timed at 103.2 mph.

## **Departed Lightning players plan to call Tampa home after careers** **Eduardo A. Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

TAMPA — The Lightning have been forced to say good-bye to many players who were key pieces of their back-to-back Stanley Cup-winning teams. The salary cap hasn't allowed great teams to stick together.

But apparently you can't keep that championship group apart forever.

The bond departed players forged with their teammates, and their love of living in the Tampa Bay area, remains. And for the players who went elsewhere this season, most plan to spend their retirement here.

On Thursday night, forward Pat Maroon and defenseman Zach Bogosian returned to Amalie Arena in different jerseys as members of the Wild. Maroon was a part of both Lightning Cup championship teams after winning in 2019 with his hometown St. Louis Blues. Bogosian was part of the 2020 Cup team that won in the pandemic bubble, and he returned to Tampa in 2021 for two full seasons.

Maroon was traded to Minnesota in the offseason as a cap-cutting measure, while Bogosian was dealt on Nov. 8; both deals were made to help replenish the organization's late-round draft inventory.

Days after former Lightning forward Alex Killorn received a highlight-filled tribute video and emotional standing-ovation reception from the Amalie Arena crowd on Saturday night in his first game back (as a member of the Ducks), Maroon and Bogosian received similar welcomes Thursday night.

"To go on that ride with those guys the last few years and see the sacrifices that guys went through and the injuries we played through and what they did to put themselves on the line, and how close we were, there was such a good team bond and there's so many good memories," Maroon said Thursday.

"... What we had in that locker room was just so special and unique, winning the Stanley Cup, the boat parades, there's so many memories, to celebrate with the fans, bringing the Cup around town, all that good stuff."

Both Maroon and Bogosian are now averaging more minutes than they did in their final years with the Lightning. Like Killorn, both said their departures are temporary, that they plan on retiring to Tampa.

"It's really strange, especially landing (Wednesday)," Maroon said. "It was just kind of weird vibes being here for four years, the success that we had. I'll just repeat what Killer said. This is going to be home for me when the time comes. I still have my house here and I call Tampa home."

Bogosian said he's currently building a new home in Tampa: "Tampa will be home, post-career. So you know, it's a special place for me and my family. And it's obviously a great lifestyle, too, so can't really beat that.

"If you look at kind of what the guys have built over the years, whether it's starting families or winning championships, they've really got some roots here. I kind of fell into that group and it was great. So I just think what draws players back to Tampa obviously would be just the group of guys that are going to be around post-career, too. It's a super-close group of guys and I'm looking forward to it."

The Lightning's core Cup-winning group — starting with Steven Stamkos and Victor Hedman being drafted as teenagers in 2008 and 2009 — all essentially grew up together. Home-grown draft picks like Killorn and Ondrej Palat were part of the group's first Cup final team in 2015. Many of them

settled in Davis Islands, got married and had kids that grew up together. Veterans like Ryan McDonagh, Maroon and Bogosian joined the group with their own families and fit in seamlessly.

“We all live within a one-minute golf-cart ride from each other,” Maroon said. “And I think the majority of that team is probably going to stay and retire here. And I think when you build friendships over four years of time and a championship pedigree, we have bonds that will last forever, right? I think that’s why, you know, it’s just obviously the weather, the beaches. Tampa is so central to where you can get to places so easy.”

And during those title runs, the Lightning shared the Cup with the community, with players taking it to their local coffee shops, fans’ homes and other stops throughout the region.

“When you do something over a period of time, you see the same faces and then you meet people at the coffee shop, you meet your neighbors and you see everyone every morning and then you build those relationships,” Maroon said. “That’s one of the reasons, too, just a nice community. These people are just so nice and welcoming here. It’s an opportunity for me — not just with the players — but it’s nice to hang out with our neighbors. We love that about it here.”

## **Lightning's win over the Wild gives them 4-game sweep at home** **Kristie Ackert (Tampa Bay Times)**

TAMPA — The Lightning capped off their first four-game winning streak of the season with a 7-3 romp over the Wild on Thursday night at Amalie Arena.

“It’s huge,” Brayden Point said of winning the eight points in this homestand. “We spent a lot of time on the road and it was great to have a stretch here where we could sleep in our own beds, reset and kind of recharge.”

The Lightning (23-17-5) will play seven of their next nine games on the road, where they are 8-12-2. After beating up on Minnesota (18-21-5), Tampa Bay heads out feeling more confident and consistent.

Nikita Kucherov had three assists (including the 500th of his career), Anthony Cirelli scored two goals (his first since Dec. 14), Steven Stamkos picked up his 205th power-play goal and Walteri Merela scored his first NHL goal. Victor Hedman, Mikey Eyssimont and Point also scored.

Goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 30 of the 33 shots he faced.

“We’ve come home and added some big wins ... our game is getting more consistent on the good side of things,” Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. “So, hopefully, we can keep that up on what’s going to be a big road trip here for us in the next couple of days.”

Thursday night’s rout of the Wild was nothing but highlights that the Lightning can take on the road with them, beginning Saturday afternoon in Buffalo.

Kucherov again

With his three assists Thursday night, Kucherov became the first player in the NHL to 75 points this season. He also hit the 500-assist milestone on Stamkos’ power-play goal.

He is the fourth player in Lightning history to reach 500 assists and the third-fastest player to the mark.

Thursday night was Kucherov’s 688th career game. Only Connor McDavid (527) and Sidney Crosby (554) reached that milestone faster.

“For sure. He’s hitting them so quick,” Point said “He’s having just another unbelievable year for us. It’s not surprising that he has 500 assists already, the way he sees the ice and the way he can make plays, but it’s so cool.”

Finally a first

After seeing action with the Lightning in November, Merela went down to AHL Syracuse and reset his game. Recalled before Thursday night’s matchup, the undrafted forward from Finland finally found the back of the net early in the second period. It took 15 games in the NHL for Merela to score — and he felt each and every one.

“It was about time,” he said with a laugh. “That was the first thought and then obviously, it’s pretty cool to see your teammates’ reaction. Everyone is just congratulating (me) and, like, everyone remembers their first goal.”

“I mean, maybe some of these guys with 500 don’t remember all of them,” Merela added, “but I think they remember the first one.

“So that’s pretty special.”

### Full power

The Lightning’s top-ranked power play continued to roll. Tampa Bay went 3-for-3 with the man advantage against the Wild. Stamkos scored his 205th power-play goal to tie Joe Sakic for fifth most among players with a single franchise. Only Alex Ovechkin (302), Mario Lemieux (236), Luc Robitaille (210) and Gordie Howe (209) have scored more.

### Points for Point

With a goal and two assists, Point reached his own milestone, posting the 40th three-point game of his career. Only four other players in Lightning history have as many: Stamkos (100), Kucherov (77), Marty St. Louis (73) and Vinny Lecavalier (53).

Point was more impressed with the team win, noting the “tightened-up defense” and the fact they had six different players score a goal.

“Nothing like scoring a goal, it really boosts your confidence,” Point said. “We really do have good depth and to see it come together in a game is really cool.”



## **Tampa Bay Lightning close out homestand in perfect fashion**

### **Erik Erlendsson (Lightning Insider)**

TAMPA – The thing about hockey teams and extended time off is, they don't usually go well together.

Not that the players and staff couldn't use time off every now and then because, as they saying goes, rest is a weapon. Throughout the course of the first three-plus months of the season, however, the Tampa Bay Lightning did not have much of a chance at rest. Real, rest.

Since the start of November, Tampa Bay had not had more than two days off between games, with the exception of the three-day break at Christmas. So it's not surprising that after Tampa Bay defeated Anaheim on Saturday that they had played the most games of any team in the league.

So having four days felt like a mini-vacation for the team. And it a lot of ways, it was.

But you know how it can be when returning from time off, you can feel like you need a vacation from returning from your vacation.

The Lightning, however, looked like a team that was refreshed after a little relaxation.

### **THE TOP LINE SHINES**

The trio of Nikita Kucherov, Steven Stamkos and Brayden Point cooked on Thursday night.

When the top three offensive forwards on the team are put together on a line it can sometimes be an adventure. But when they are in synch, it can be a treat to watch and a nightmare for teams to defend. On Thursday, it was the former.

While adding in that they play on the power play together, the trio combined for two goals, five assists and seven points along with a plus-6 rating. Only three of those combined points came on the man advantage.

At 5-on-5 play, the line had an expected goals rate of 1.35 according to Natural Stat Trick and 1.67 according to Money Puck. No other line on the Tampa Bay Lightning was higher than 0.26 while the highest on Minnesota was 0.53, which was the with Mats Zuccello, Marco Rossi and Kiril Kaprizov, which accounted for two of the Wild's three goals.

The line accounted for the first Lightning goal, with a good forecheck and a strong cycle before Point picked up a rebound and came up the right boards to feed Victor Hedman for a 99-mph slap shot. The goal came 55 seconds after Minnesota opened the scoring.

On the fourth Tampa Bay goal, Stamkos generated a strong forecheck play along the end boards to separate the puck from Minnesota defenseman Brock Faber. Kucherov collected the loose puck, fed Point in front for a wide open chance that was stopped, but the rebound kicked right back to Point for his 21st goal of the season to give the Lightning a 4-2 lead in the second period.

Together, the three combined for 25 shot attempts, generated 12 scoring chances and five high danger chances. The leaders led the way on a night the Lightning shook off any rust and came out with an offensive outburst.

### **LONGEST WINNING STREAK**

With the situation the Tampa Bay Lightning found themselves in with the first-half struggles, and the fact the Lightning had played more games than any other team in the league, Tampa Bay had to

string together some games. While the Lightning were right there in points, they were behind on points percentage.

At the start of the four-game homestand, Tampa Bay's longest winning streak of the season was three games, which they accomplished twice. The most consecutive games with a point was six, accomplished in the final six games of October.

Entering Thursday, the Lightning were a perfect three-for-three on the homestand, which closed out with the fourth game against Minnesota. So with the victory, Tampa Bay extended its winning streak to a season-long four games.

The victory pulled Tampa Bay even with Detroit in points, though the Red Wings have a game in hand, which will be played on Friday. Both teams are a point behind Toronto for the third spot in the Atlantic Division.

It's the start of the type of streak the Lightning need to put together if they want to be a playoff team.

"It's a tough league to win and you don't take those for granted," Lightning head coach Jon Cooper said. "But at some point, we have to dig your heels in here and win some games. And I did feel at the end of that road trip, I know we didn't get the wins we wanted, but even that Boston game, I know the score was similar to tonight, but I didn't think we were that far off. And we've come home and had some big wins . . . our game is getting more consistent on the good side of things. Hopefully we can keep that up."

A little R&R doesn't hurt, either.

"We spent a lot of time on the road just before this and to come back and have a stretch here where we could just be at home, sleeping in our own bed," Point said. "It was great to kind of reset, recharge and then the way we're playing, I really like it."

## **THE ROOKIE FINDS THE NET**

Rookie Waltteri Merela was a bit of a surprise when he made the team out of training camp. The 25-year-old undrafted free agent had 46 goals in the past three seasons in the Finnish League, but has never played in North America.

But after 14 games with no points and a minus-1 rating, Merela was reassigned to the American Hockey League on November 17. While with Syracuse, Merela played in 23 games and had six goals and 16 points. As his game started to round out, the Lightning recalled him on Tuesday.

After two practices, Merela was in the lineup on Thursday, his first game back with Tampa Bay since November 16.

"It was actually a bit of a struggle at first," Merela said of playing in the AHL. "I find the game very different there. I probably struggled just with coming from here to playing a little bit less, then going there and playing more and then being kind of tired and stuff like that. But we had three days at Christmas and four days through New Years, a little break. I got to get a good reset out of it. And then after that I was playing a lot better and felt really good."

That led to the Lightning bringing him back up and right into the lineup. He responded with his first career NHL goal, making a back-post drive to finish off a pass from Conor Sheary.

“At first I thought he was going to pass it to me earlier,” he said. “I’m like, let’s see if he is going to give it to me or not. So I go to the back post and then it was a pretty awesome pass, so it was easy to tap in.”

Seeing a first goal lifts the bench.

“It’s always awesome, always so cool to see guys score their first one,” Point said. “He’s worked so hard, been up and down for us this year. So to come back and have a good game and score was awesome, we’re happy for him.”

## **THE WIZARD WIELDS HIS WAND, AGAIN**

Kucherov continues to show that, at the age of 30, he continues to get better and better.

He entered the night tied for the league lead in points and was second in assists. Kucherov is on pace to surpass his franchise record of 128 points set in 2018-19 when he won the Hart Trophy and Art Ross Trophy. As he continues to pile up the points, he’s hitting milestones.

On Thursday, he recorded his second consecutive three assist game, giving him 500 for his career, becoming the fourth player in franchise history to reach the mark, joining Marty St. Louis, Stamkos and Hedman.

With 500 assists in 688 career games, Kucherov is the third quickest active player to reach the mark. Only Connor McDavid (527) and Sidney Crosby (554) reached it faster.

“He’s hitting (milestones) so quick,” Point said. “He’s having another just unbelievable year for us. Not surprising that he’s got 500 assists already, the way he sees the ice and the way he can make plays.”

Kucherov regained sole possession of the scoring lead after Nathan MacKinnon had just one point in a loss to Boston. Kucherov has had at least a share of the NHL lead in points through play for 56 consecutive days (since Nov. 24) and for 57% of the 2023-24 season so far (58 of 101 days).

With his third consecutive multi-assist game, Kucherov accounts for six of 13 instances in Lightning history of a player notching at least three straight multi-assist games. He tops the NHL in three-point games this season with 11, the third most he’s had in a single season and seven shy of tying his own franchise record.

## **NOTES**

Tampa Bay scratched LW Alex Barre-Boulet, D Phil Myers and D Erik Cernak, who remains day to day with an upper body injury. ... Victor Hedman passed Brad Richards for the eighth most goals in Lightning history with 151. ... Point (1-2—3) has secured his 40th three-point game – only four other players in Lightning history have recorded as many: Steven Stamkos (100), Nikita Kucherov (77), Martin St. Louis (73) and Vincent Lecavalier (53). ... Steven Stamkos scored his 205th power-play goal, to tie Joe Sakic for the fifth most among players with a single franchise. He trails Alex Ovechkin (302), Mario Lemieux (236), Luc Robitaille (210) and Gordie Howe (209). ... Stamkos scored his 534th career goal to move past Frank Mahovlich and alone into 35th place on the all-time list, four behind Keith Tkachuk. ... Hedman (1-3—4) recorded his seventh career four-point outing – the most among all Lightning blueliners – and tied with Roman Josi (7) for the second most among active players behind Erik Karlsson (10).

## **MY THREE STARS**

1. Lightning RW Nikita Kucherov – Three assists to reach 500 in his career, plus-2, 11 shot attempts
2. Lightning D Victor Hedman – Goal, three assists, plus-3, seven shot attempts, three blocked shots
3. Lightning C Brayden Point – Goal, two assists, plus-2, nine shot attempts

## **The Backcheck: Bolts finish perfect homestand with a win over the Wild**

**Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)**

Kicking off the second half of the season with a four-game homestand, the Tampa Bay Lightning needed to take care of business on home ice and bank some points for the playoff push. The Bolts did exactly that, finishing the four-game stretch with a perfect 4-0-0 record after logging a 7-3 win over the Minnesota Wild Thursday night at AMALIE Arena.

Minnesota opened the scoring 5:17 into the first period when Brock Faber collected the puck at the right point and sent a crafty pass across the offensive zone and onto the tape of Joel Eriksson Ek, who fired a quick shot past the outstretched blocker of Andrei Vasilevskiy to give the Wild a 1-0 lead.

But Tampa Bay didn't blink and answered immediately with Victor Hedman netting his eighth goal of the season just 55 seconds later to even the score at 1-1.

With the Lightning's top line controlling the puck on an extended shift in the Minnesota zone, Brayden Point sent a pass to the point for Hedman, who hammered a one-timer past Filip Gustavsson to tie the game with 13:48 remaining in the opening frame.

Those would be the only two goals of the first period, with both teams recording 11 shots on net in a pretty even 20 minutes of hockey.

After each team scored just one goal in the opening frame, the Lightning and Wild picked up the offense in the second period, combining for five goals with Tampa Bay holding a 4-3 lead after 40 minutes.

With 16 seconds of power-play time rolling into the start of the second period, the Lightning took advantage with Anthony Cirelli netting his ninth goal of the season just as the Wild penalty was set to expire.

Taking a nice pass through the neutral zone from Point, Cirelli accelerated into the offensive zone and ripped a shot past the blocker of Gustavsson to give the Bolts a 2-1 lead exactly 16 seconds into the period.

Only 3:04 later, Walteri Merelä capitalized on his opportunity after being recalled by Tampa Bay on Tuesday and playing in his first NHL game since mid-November.

Following a dump into the Minnesota zone by Nick Perbix, Conor Sheary quickly jumped on the puck near the left boards and saw Merelä streaking towards the Wild net. Sheary sent a pass across the offensive zone right onto the tape of Merelä, who tallied his first career NHL goal and point with a quick one-timer to the far post.

With the Lightning starting to pull away, Marco Rossi got Minnesota back within one when he scored his 13th goal of the season at the 10:52 mark of the second to make it a 3-2 game.

But, once again, Tampa Bay had an immediate answer and restored the two-goal lead with Point logging his 21st goal of the season less than two minutes later.

Aggressive on the forecheck, Steven Stamkos darted behind the Wild net and sent Brock Faber to the ice with a solid body check, allowing Nikita Kucherov to grab the puck and quickly send a pass to the front of the net for Point, who was denied on his initial shot but stuck with it and buried his own rebound top shelf to make it a 4-2 game with 7:19 left in the second.

As it looked like the Bolts were going to head to the locker room with a multi-goal lead after 40 minutes, Jake Middleton found the back of the net with less than 20 seconds remaining in the period to shrink the lead to 4-3.

Starting the final period on the power play, the Lightning went back up by two when Stamkos took a pass from Kucherov and fired a one-timer past Gustavsson 1:09 into the third period, pushing the score to 5-3. The Bolts wouldn't look back from there.

Mikey Eyssimont scored Tampa Bay's third power-play goal of the night and made it a 6-3 game 5:50 later when he watched a rebound off a shot from Cirelli go straight into the air before patiently waiting and jamming the puck home once it got below the crossbar for his seventh goal of the year.

Cirelli capped things off and picked up his third point of the night with 2:08 remaining in regulation when Brandon Hagel sent a pass to the front that went off the skate of Middleton and right to Cirelli, who hit the 10-goal mark on the season with Hedman recording the secondary helper.

Vasilevskiy picked up his 13th win of the season with 30 saves on 33 shots against.

### **Bolts by the Numbers**

- Nikita Kucherov recorded three assists and continues to lead the NHL with 75 points on the season (28-47—75). With his third assist of the game, Kucherov picked up his 500th career helper, making him just the fourth player in Lightning franchise history to record 500 assists with the club, along with Martin St. Louis (588), Steven Stamkos (564) and Victor Hedman (544).

- Kucherov hit the 500-assist mark in his 688th career game, requiring the third-fewest games among all active NHL skaters to hit the milestone, trailing only Connor McDavid (527 GP) and Sidney Crosby (554 GP).

- Victor Hedman recorded his seventh career four-point game with one goal and three assists, tying Roman Josi for the second-most four-point games among all active NHL defensemen. Erik Karlsson (10) is the only active D-man with more.

- Hedman's goal was the 151st of his career, moving him past Brad Richards and giving him sole possession of the eighth-most goals in Lightning franchise history. With the goal, he also passed Borje Salming to take sole possession of the third-most goals by a Swedish defenseman in NHL history.

- Hedman is up to 44 points on the season (8-36—44), the third-most points among all NHL defensemen this season. His 36 assists rank fourth among all NHL D-men.

- Brayden Point picked up his sixth three-point game of the season with one goal and two assists. He has now recorded 40 career three-point games, good for fourth all-time in Lightning franchise history behind Steven Stamkos (100), Nikita Kucherov (77), Martin St. Louis (73) and Vincent Lecavalier (53).

- Point is riding a three-game point streak (2-3—5) and has 17 points over his last 17 contests (9-8—17). With 47 points on the season (21-26—47), Point ranks second in goals and points among all Lightning skaters, while his 26 helpers are good for third.

- Steven Stamkos scored his 10th power-play goal and 19th goal of the season to push his season point total to 42 (19-23—42). Stamkos is up to 205 career power-play goals and is now tied with Joe Sakic for the fifth-most power-play goals with a single franchise in NHL history.

- Anthony Cirelli snapped a 14-game goalless drought with a three-point night, scoring two goals and adding one assist. The game marked the fifth three-point outing of Cirelli's career and first of the season. He's up to 20 points on the season (10-10—20).

- Playing his first game with the Lightning since mid-November, Waltteri Merelä logged his first career NHL goal and recorded his first career NHL point in the process. Prior to his call-up, Merelä played 23 games with the Syracuse Crunch and collected 16 points (6-10—16).

- Nick Perbix recorded one assist and extended his point streak to four games (1-5—6), matching the longest point streak of his career set last season.

- Darren Raddysh recorded one assist and extended his point streak to three games (1-2—3), tied for the longest point streak of his career. with one assist. He's up to 15 points this season (3-12—15).

### **Bolts Quotes**

- Jon Cooper: "I'd say the biggest thing, regardless of who's in the lineup, we're just not turning the puck over and we're playing a much more responsible game. When you do that, in the end, you're just limiting your chances to give freebies to the other team, which has been an issue for us, especially in the first half. We've limited that. When we manage the puck, we're actually doing okay."

- Waltteri Merelä on his first NHL goal: "A little bit of weight kind of off my shoulders. I don't really view it as pressure. Just come here and try to help the team win. There's a reason I've been here and played 15 games, so I just need to keep doing what I can do."

- Brayden Point: "I think we're just starting to play with a little more confidence. We've tightened up defensively. We're still giving up some chances, but a lot less than we were when we were kind of struggling. It's good to see us find some confidence and go on a little bit of a win streak here. Hopefully we can keep it going. We know we have to have a good second half to compete for a playoff spot. I really like the way it's gone so far."

### **Krenner's Three Stars**

1. Victor Hedman

2. Nikita Kucherov

3. Brayden Point

### **Lightning Look Ahead**

- Saturday, January 20 at Buffalo Sabres, 12:30 p.m. ET, KeyBank Center

- Sunday, January 21 at Detroit Red Wings, 7 p.m. ET, Little Caesars Arena

- Tuesday, January 23 at Philadelphia Flyers, 7 p.m. ET, Wells Fargo Center

## **Lightning scout saves choking man in press box with Heimlich maneuver** **Eduardo A. Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

Tony Hrkac is responsible for scouting 11 NHL teams for the Lightning, so he could have been in any one of a number of press boxes on the night of Jan. 4.

Hrkac, a professional scout for Tampa Bay since the 2015-16 season, just happened to be at Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles that night watching the Kings and Red Wings. It was between periods when Hrkac left his seat in the press box to stretch his legs and get a fresh cup of coffee. That's when he saw a man hurriedly rush to the trash can behind him.

"He didn't look real panicked walking towards me," Hrkac told the Tampa Bay Times by phone on Thursday. "I didn't really catch a great glimpse of him, but he walked by and I just kind of thought he's going to spit something out. And I turned and his eyes were big and he obviously looked like he was choking. So I just kind of turned around and started doing the Heimlich on him and did it until (a piece of pretzel) came out."

Hrkac's quick reaction saved the man, identified only as a league employee by TMZ, which first reported the story Thursday morning.

"I didn't hesitate," Hrkac said. "I didn't look around to see who else was there. I knew he's in trouble, so I just grabbed him."

Before joining the Lightning, Hrkac coached college hockey at Concordia University in Wisconsin, and to do so, he needed to take regular first aid courses to stay certified. He hadn't taken one since he left that job more than 11 years ago.

"I've never seen anybody choke before," he said. "I guess I paid attention in class."

Hrkac played in the NHL for parts of 12 seasons with St. Louis, Quebec, Dallas, Anaheim, Atlanta, Chicago, San Jose, Edmonton and the New York Islanders. He won a Stanley Cup in 1999 with the Stars.

After coaching at Concordia, he pursued a career in professional scouting and was given a shot by former Lightning assistant general manager Pat Verbeek, who played with Hrkac in Dallas, and former Lightning general manager Steve Yzerman. Hrkac, who is based near Chicago, scouts the Central Division, as well as the Kings, Ducks and Coyotes, for Tampa Bay.

"We all have certain teams we have to watch, and LA is one of my teams," Hrkac said. "So I watch them every two or three weeks. So I just happened to be right there at the right time."

Scouts often do yeoman's work, and prefer to do it under the radar, especially at this time of the season with the trade deadline approaching in March.

But after the news of Hrkac's act broke Thursday morning, he couldn't avoid the attention. His cell phone buzzed all day with messages from friends and fellow scouts around the league.

"It's always nice to get recognized," Hrkac said. "Most of the scouts have been texting me and telling me I'm giving scouts a good name."



## **Lightning Pro Scout's Life-Saving Play** **Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)**

Tony Hrkac has been to a lot of hockey games in his life. After 758 career NHL games as a player, Hrkac did some coaching at the NCAA and USHL level before eventually joining the Tampa Bay Lightning organization as a Pro Scout in 2015.

As a scout, Hrkac does most of his work in the Midwest, traveling to various arenas and sitting in the press box watching both AHL and NHL games. And despite watching games from the press box for the past nine years, Hrkac said he can't recall anything too crazy or out of the ordinary ever happening at a game he was working.

That all changed earlier this month. In the later months of 2023, Hrkac's territory expanded to southern California, which brought him to Crypto.com Arena on January 4 to catch a game between the Detroit Red Wings and Los Angeles Kings.

At the beginning, it was like any other game. The horn sounded at the end of a period, allowing media members, scouts, broadcast talent and others to grab a couple snacks or take a quick bathroom break during the intermission.

Most intermissions are the same for Hrkac. He'll stretch his legs, chat with some scouts from around the league and maybe grab a hot cup of coffee.

But this intermission was unlike any other.

Standing in a corner of the press box, Hrkac noticed a man rapidly walking around the corner and approaching the garbage can directly behind him.

"I was just standing there, kind of minding my own business," Hrkac said. "I just thought he was spitting something out at first. I was the only guy that saw him do that because the garbage can was kind of in the corner."

But the abnormally fast walk to the trash can wasn't just to casually spit something out. It was far more serious than that. The man was choking on a pretzel. And it wasn't getting better.

"I turned and I just saw him struggling," Hrkac shared. "His eyes were real wide and he was choking. I just turned around and grabbed him and started doing the Heimlich on him."

"Then, I just kept doing it until it popped out. It happened so quick. The whole thing was probably 20 or 30 seconds. I'm just glad I was in the right spot at the right time."

Hrkac said he learned the Heimlich Maneuver over 15 years ago when he was coaching at Concordia University Wisconsin. The coaches took first aid courses every two years and had some refresher courses along the way as well.

"I'm just glad I could help," said Hrkac. "Obviously, it was a great feeling just to be in the right place at the right time."

"I think he was choking for a little bit, even before I saw him. He was obviously scared but was very thankful after. There's always a bunch of people sitting up in the press box, so people came up and shook my hand and stuff like that. That was pretty neat."

Hrkac said he's received plenty of messages from friends across the league since that night in Los Angeles. The handshakes and recognition are all well-deserved for Hrkac. If not for him, who knows what would have happened? Thankfully, we'll never know.