



**AMALIE Arena Media Clips
Friday, February 9, 2024**

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How the Lightning fell flat in New York for the second straight night **Eduardo A. Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

ELMONT, N.Y. — The Lightning knew drawing the Rangers and Islanders on the road on back-to-back nights coming out of the All-Star break was going to be a tough task.

The emotional roller coaster they rode over a 24-hour stretch made it even more difficult.

The Lightning watched defenseman Mikhail Sergachev leave the ice on a stretcher Wednesday at Madison Square Garden and then heard of his surgery to repair fractures to the tibia and fibula in his left leg before Thursday night's game in Long Island, potentially ending his season.

Both New York teams had games under their belts before facing the Lightning. Tampa Bay's attempt to recapture the momentum it built before the break — when it won eight of nine — crashed hard with consecutive losses, capped by a 6-2 defeat to the Islanders at UBS Arena.

"I'm disappointed in how we've come out of this break," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. "I thought we'd have a little bit more in us to make sure we were ready. But we've looked slow. We looked out of shape. We looked like we took 10 days off. And all the hard work we did to get ourselves in the spot we're in, now we're going to have to work our way back in by playing games, and that's just not the way you can do it."

The Lightning looked a lot like the team that at times seemed lost defensively early in the season, leaving opponents uncovered in front of the net and committing costly turnovers that gift-wrapped Grade-A scoring chances. For the first time in 11 games, Tampa Bay allowed more than three goals.

Backup goaltender Jonas Johansson, making just his second start in nearly six weeks, allowed the most goals he's permitted in a regulation start this season.

An emotional carryover

The Lightning clearly were still rattled by losing Sergachev one night earlier.

They were unable to rally the way they did when Sergachev first got hurt in December and they played their best hockey of the season, particularly in the defensive end. Thursday, they spent too much time in their own zone early and couldn't muster enough offense to build momentum.

"It's tough," said forward Brandon Hagel, who scored in both New York games. "We could have turned a negative into a positive and maybe did it for (Sergachev Wednesday) or did it for him (Thursday), and we weren't able to do that."

Breaking down, not through

The Lightning played one of their worst first periods of the season, allowing three even-strength goals while managing just three shots on goal in the opening 20 minutes.

Still, they were inches away from tying the game at 3 when Anthony Cirelli hit the post just over five minutes into the second period. But 14 seconds later, Steven Stamkos took a hooking penalty to put New York on the power play.

The Lightning nearly killed the penalty, but Ryan Pullock's shot from inside the blue line with seven seconds left on the power play slithered through traffic and into the back of the net. The goal, the first of three straight for the Islanders to end the period, extended their lead to 4-2.

“It kind of went downhill after that,” Cooper said. “Just not defending hard enough. ... We had given up six after two periods. You’re not going to win that way.”

Not enough on net

The Lightning had just 20 shots on goal against the Islanders and only 18 in their loss to the Rangers. The majority of their attempts either missed the net or were blocked . That included a number of looks in close that were shot wide.

“We get pucks to our defensemen, and they’ve got to get pucks through,” Cooper said. “And then when we’ve got opportunities in tight, we’ve missed some glorious opportunities. Some of our best chances were missing the net. So, that’s going to be a point of emphasis for us.”

Lightning's Mikhail Sergachev has surgery to fix broken tibia, fibula **Eduardo A. Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

ELMONT, N.Y. — Lightning defenseman Mikhail Sergachev could be lost for the season after having surgery Thursday in New York to stabilize fractures to the tibia and fibula bones in his lower left leg sustained during Wednesday's loss to the Rangers.

Sergachev will return to Tampa in the coming days to begin rehabilitation immediately. The team has not yet established a timetable for his return to the ice.

With only 30 games remaining, it appears unlikely Sergachev would be able to return this season barring a deep playoff run by the Lightning. Even then, it would seem difficult.

Head coach Jon Cooper did not sound optimistic when asked before Thursday's game against the Islanders if there is a scenario in which Sergachev could return this season.

"He's going to miss significant time, and significant meaning the regular season," Cooper said. "I'm not a doctor, and maybe even saying that much is going out of my comfort zone. But it's going to be significant time, so we're going to have to find a way to get by without him."

Still, the Lightning have not entirely ruled out a return this season. They will know more in the coming days as Sergachev recovers from the operation and is reevaluated by the team's specialists.

The typical recovery time from a broken fibula and tibia is three to six months. It took Lightning captain Steven Stamkos about four months to recover from a tibia fracture in 2013, though Sergachev's rehab is expected to be less complicated because the breaks were clean.

Sergachev had just returned to the lineup after missing 17 games with a left foot injury. He was hit by a puck during a game against the Blues Dec. 19 at Amalie Arena.

Seven minutes into the second period Wednesday at Madison Square Garden, Sergachev exchanged hits with Rangers forward Alexis Lafreniere as they battled for the puck near the corner boards. Sergachev went down awkwardly, his left leg bending at an unnatural angle underneath him.

"It was hard to see; I was on the ice with him," defenseman Erik Cernak said. "I know how excited he was to be back in the lineup and be around the team, be in games. It's a really hard bounce for him, but I know how strong Sergy is. He's going to come back stronger than ever. I'm going to give him all the support or whatever he needs. He's our brother."

It was immediately clear Sergachev had suffered a serious injury, and he was taken off the ice sitting up on a stretcher as both benches cleared to show their support. He received an ovation from the crowd and raised his left hand to acknowledge the fans before disappearing down the Zamboni tunnel.

"Injuries happened in this game," Cooper said. "The problem was the significance of the injury, and the optics of it makes it more tough. These guys understand that players are going to miss time, and I don't know what team has ever gone injury-free the entire year. The magnitude of what happened is what was troubling. But that's professional hockey, and Sergy is always going to be with us, just not on the ice right now."

Hours after sustaining the injury, Sergachev expressed his frustration in an emotional Instagram post. Getting hurt so soon after working hard to get back into the lineup "feels fair, feels terrible," he wrote.

He acknowledged things are tough right now but vowed to come back stronger and play better than before. “We all fight our own battles, and this is mine,” he wrote. I’ll win, always do.”

With Sergachev out, Calvin de Haan returned to the lineup as the Lightning’s third left-shot defenseman, behind Victor Hedman and rookie Emil Lilleberg. The team has a fourth left-shot defenseman on the roster in Haydn Fleury.

The Lightning have overcome major injuries to their top players in the past.

They won the Stanley Cup in 2020 mostly without Stamkos and played the entire 56-game 2021 season without Nikita Kucherov before winning their second straight Cup. This season, they stayed afloat despite opening the season without goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy for nearly two months, then played their best hockey — winning eight of nine before the All-Star break — without defensemen Sergachev and Erik Cernak, and forward Tanner Jeannot.

“This group has been together for a long time,” Cooper said. “Injuries and adversity is going to happen. It seems like it’s happening in a large way with us at times, and especially right now. But the guys don’t hang their head. It’s just of next man up, and I know that’s a cliché, but they’ve kind of taken that upon themselves.

“(We’ve lost) monumental players on our team, and the guys have found a way, and I’m sure they will during this one as well.”

Sergachev is the Lightning’s highest-paid defenseman with an annual average value of \$8.5 million, so placing him on long-term injured reserve will create significant cap space as the March 8 trade deadline approaches and allow general manager Julien BriseBois to cast a wider net for trade deadline targets.

Still, it won’t necessarily change the way BriseBois approaches the deadline. The Lightning still have cap restraints next season despite an anticipated \$4 million increase to the cap ceiling. Given the desire to re-sign Stamkos in the offseason, any target likely would have to be a player on an expiring contract.

Lightning's Mikhail Sergachev: Injury 'feels unfair, feels terrible' **Eduardo A. Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

NEW YORK — Hours after suffering a devastating injury to his left leg Wednesday night against the Rangers, Lightning defenseman Mikhail Sergachev shared a glimpse into the raw emotion he was feeling.

Posting to his Instagram account shortly after midnight, Sergachev wrote, "Oh man, why me? Why now? After all the games missed, coming back and getting injured again, feels unfair, feels terrible. Trying to stay calm and positive, but it's impossible. After doing everything right, I get this."

Sergachev was playing his first game since a left foot injury forced him to miss the previous 17. He first was injured while blocking a shot in a Dec. 19 game against the Blues at Amalie Arena.

Seven minutes into the second period Wednesday at Madison Square Garden, Sergachev exchanged hits with Rangers forward Alexis Lafreniere as they battled for the puck near the corner boards. Sergachev went down awkwardly, his left leg bending at an unnatural angle underneath him.

It was immediately clear Sergachev had suffered a serious injury, and he was taken off the ice sitting up on a stretcher as both benches cleared to show their support. He received an ovation from the crowd and raised his left hand to acknowledge the fans before disappearing down the Zamboni tunnel.

"I know I'll come back stronger and I know I'll play better than before, but it's tough right now, and it's going to be tough tomorrow," Sergachev wrote on Instagram. "We all fight our own battles and this is mine. I'll win, always do."

Sergachev indicated in the post that medication was helping him with the pain. He said he appreciated the well-wishes he received and thanked the medical staff that treated him.

After Sergachev's devastating injury, resilient Lightning don't want a 'pity party' **Arthur Staple (The Athletic)**

ELMONT, N.Y. — You don't need to be a medical professional to know that breaking the two leg bones in the same leg means you're going to be off the ice for a while. Months, not weeks. So Mikhail Sergachev's broken tibia and fibula, suffered on a freak play at Madison Square Garden on Wednesday night, required surgery barely 12 hours later and clearly will cost the Tampa Bay Lightning defenseman at least the rest of the regular season.

A season in which Tampa Bay was without its star goaltender for 25 games, without Sergachev for 17 games prior to Wednesday and without Tanner Jeannot and Erik Cernak for double-digit game stretches, is still a test of one of the more resilient teams of the last decade. Coach Jon Cooper was asked whether another deep playoff run from his two-time Stanley Cup-winning core would mean a chance of seeing Sergachev again.

"We'd really have to go," he said with a bit of a grimace.

That was Thursday, before the Lightning got pasted by Patrick Roy's New York Islanders. The 6-2 final was a just result. Tampa Bay was slower to pucks, committed a couple of ghastly turnovers and generally looked like a team that suffered a traumatic moment 24 hours earlier.

"Injuries happen in this game. The problem was, the significance of the injury and the optics of it makes it a little more ... it's tough," Cooper said. He was asked whether his team could start to wonder what's next after watching Sergachev, near tears with a towel over his head, get wheeled off the Garden ice as players from both teams gave him taps and acknowledgments the way NFL players do after a particularly gruesome injury.

"I think when you start using that as an excuse, it's going to be trouble for you," Cooper said. "And the group in here has never done that. Maybe there's a pity party that happens for a night or so. But it's just not been in our DNA."

Tampa's 8-1-0 run heading into the 10-day All-Star break set the Lightning up pretty well, holding down third place in the Atlantic Division for a decent stretch. The Eastern Conference, outside of the Boston Bruins, has been a season-long display of "who wants it?" — teams have had good stretches but none have cleared the pack and declared themselves a solid Stanley Cup contender.

The two recent significant trades have come from Western Conference teams bolstering their lineups. Tampa Bay now has Sergachev's \$8.5 million cap hit to potentially use in long-term injured reserve — the Lightning had just taken Sergachev off LTIR on Wednesday and put Jeannot on in order to create enough adjusted cap space for Sergachev's return — so that puts GM Julien BriseBois' creative approach to trade deadlines very much in play.

But with a roster that's already been chipped away over the years since the back-to-back championships of 2020 and 2021 by cap constraints and the raises earned by some of the key supporting players — Barclay Goodrow, Yanni Gourde and Ryan McDonagh two years ago, Alex Killorn last summer — it's fair to wonder if a trade or two can restore Tampa Bay's elite status.

Outside of Victor Hedman and Cernak, the other four defensemen in uniform Thursday night have barely 250 games in a Lightning uniform among them. And everyone was still playing a bit stunned from the scene they witnessed Wednesday.

“It’s hard to see something like that happen to one of your brothers,” Cernak said. “You don’t wish that kind of thing on anyone, especially for him, because he just came back from his old injury. I know how excited he was to be back.”

Tampa Bay still has some of the game’s elite old hands. Nikita Kucherov scored his 33rd goal of the season Thursday, maintaining his NHL scoring lead over Nathan MacKinnon. Brayden Point, Steven Stamkos and Hedman still have plenty in the tank. Andrei Vasilevskiy, six months removed from back surgery, has gotten back to winning games the last month, even if his rather pedestrian .899 save percentage still sticks out.

And the Lightning still sit in a playoff spot, though not comfortably. They have played more games than every team chasing them. Even if Tampa Bay were to make the playoffs, whether the Lightning have enough depth or experience to carry through multiple playoff rounds is highly questionable.

“We could have turned a negative into a positive and maybe did it for (Sergachev) tonight, or did it for him last night,” Brandon Hagel said. “We weren’t able to do that. ... I think the playoffs kind of start now for us.”

You can’t count out the Lightning. But maybe there are too many injuries, too many unlucky moments piling up on a group that has been the most dominant team in the NHL over the last five years.

“We’re just going to somehow find a way,” Cooper said. “We’ve done it a little in the past. Now there’s a little more certainty. So we’re really going to have to do it now.”

Mikhail Sergachev has surgery on leg, out indefinitely: What it means for the Lightning **Chris Johnston (The Athletic)**

Tampa Bay Lightning defenseman Mikhail Sergachev underwent surgery to stabilize the tibia and fibula in his left leg Thursday and will return home in the coming days to immediately begin rehabilitation, the team has announced.

No timeline for his return was provided.

Sergachev was stretchered off the ice at Madison Square Garden during Wednesday's 3-1 loss to the Rangers after taking a reverse hit from Alexis Lafrenière and having his left leg bend awkwardly under his body as he fell to the ice.

That came on the night Sergachev made his return to Tampa's lineup after missing seven weeks due to another undisclosed lower-body injury. The 25-year-old shared an emotional message on his personal Instagram page after the game and accompanied it with a photo of him burying his face in a towel while being taken off the ice.

"Oh man, why me? Why now?" he wrote. "After all the games missed, coming back and getting injured again, feels unfair, feels terrible. Trying to stay calm and positive, but it's impossible. After doing everything right I get this. The universe is unpredictable I guess, and has its own plans, but f— the universe man, I know I'll come back stronger and I know I'll play better than before, but it's tough right now, and it's gonna be tough tomorrow."

While Sergachev's season has been limited to just 34 games played — he registered two goals and 19 points — he's been a critical part of the Lightning's lineup. Only Victor Hedman (24:35) has played more minutes per game for the team this year than his 22:33.

What's next for the Lightning?

In the short term, they'll proceed as they were throughout January, with Darren Raddysh assuming a larger role alongside Hedman on the top pairing. The Lightning have managed to patch things together this season with a rotating cast of depth defensemen, including Emil Martinsen-Lilleberg — a Norwegian-born, SHL-groomed free agent signed last summer who has made a noticeable impact of late.

However, with an eye toward the March 8 trade deadline, watch for Lightning general manager Julien BriseBois to strike in his typical fashion.

He had already been checking in on the available defensemen around the league before the Sergachev injury. Now he'll potentially gain an additional \$8.5 million in long-term-injured-reserve space to play with while looking for upgrades, depending on how quickly Sergachev can get himself back into playing shape.

If it's determined Sergachev won't return before the start of the Stanley Cup playoffs — and the Lightning expect to have clarity on his rehab status in advance of March 8 — that would leave Tampa free to use all of the LTIR room created with Sergachev's salary being shifted over.

BriseBois has developed a reputation as a shrewd deadline operator after giving up two first-round picks to acquire Blake Coleman and Barclay Goodrow and then watching them form two-thirds of a highly-effective third line that helped propel Tampa to Stanley Cup wins in 2020 and 2021.

He also gave up multiple first-rounders to acquire Brandon Hagel while also bringing in Nick Paul at the 2022 deadline and surrendered five draft picks to acquire Tanner Jeannot last year.

While the Lightning are running short on available draft capital — BriseBois is without his first-, second- and fourth-round picks this year, plus his 2025 first-rounder — they hold down a wild-card position in the Eastern Conference and will want to stay aggressive with a strong core and captain Steven Stamkos playing out the final year of his contract.

“As a general manager, you’re looking for opportunities to take advantage of and threats to mitigate. That’s a 365-day-a-year endeavor,” BriseBois told reporters last month. “The difference being that around the trade deadline, there are more opportunities out there because you end up with more teams that are making players available. But we’re always on the lookout for opportunities to improve our chances of being successful and this trade deadline is not different.”

The Backcheck: Bolts drop back-to-back games **Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)**

After dropping the first game back from the All-Star break in a 3-1 loss to the New York Rangers Wednesday night, the Tampa Bay Lightning lost a second-straight contest on Thursday, falling to the New York Islanders by a score of 6-2 at UBS Arena.

The Islanders got on the board early when Noah Dobson netted his seventh goal of the season 4:07 into the first period. After Dobson attempted to send a pass to the back door for Oliver Wahlstrom, the puck took a deflection off the skate of Erik Cernak in front of the net and made its way past Jonas Johansson to give New York the 1-0 lead.

Despite the early adversity, the Bolts had an answer just 2:35 later when Nikita Kucherov lit the lamp for the 33rd time this season and pushed his NHL-best point total to 87. Taking a pass from Darren Raddysch, Kucherov hammered a one-timer that ricocheted off an Islanders defender and got behind Ilya Sorokin to even the score at 1-1 with 13:18 remaining in the opening frame.

With 5:53 remaining in the first period, Mat Barzal put the Islanders back up by one with his 15th goal of the season when Bo Horvat won a faceoff in the offensive zone before sending a pass to Barzal, who roofed a backhand past the outstretched blocker of Johansson to make it a 2-1 game.

As it looked like the Lightning were going to head to the locker room trailing by one after 20 minutes, Kyle Palmieri found a soft spot in the offensive zone and fired a quick one-timer past Johansson to put New York up 3-1 with 1:25 remaining in the first period and send the Bolts to the first intermission in a two-goal hole.

Tampa Bay came out with some jump in the second period and got back within one goal just 1:14 into the middle frame with Scott Mayfield in the box for tripping. With the second power-play unit on the ice, Victor Hedman sent a stretch pass up the ice to Anthony Cirelli, who drove the net and fired a low shot on net before Brandon Hagel jumped on the rebound and beat Sorokin for his 18th goal of the season to make it a 3-2 game.

With the Lightning on the penalty kill shortly later, Ryan Pullock sent a shot through traffic that beat Johansson and extended the Islanders lead to 4-2 with 12:50 remaining in the second period.

Only 1:08 later, Horvat took a pass from Barzal and fired a one-timer from just above the top of the circles that found the back of the net and made it a 5-2 game with his 21st goal of the campaign.

Casey Cizikas scored the final goal of the contest with 4:38 remaining in the second to wrap up the 6-2 win for New York.

Bolts by the Numbers

- Nikita Kucherov scored his 33rd goal of the season and pushed his season point total to 87. The All-Star winger has found the scoresheet in six consecutive contests (5-7—12).
- Brandon Hagel scored his 18th goal of the season and is up to 45 points on the season (18-27—45). With the goal, Hagel extended his point streak to five games (5-2—7), one game shy of tying his career long.
- Victor Hedman picked up his 42nd assist and 51st point of the season with the secondary helper on Hagel's goal. He's pointed in seven of his last nine contests (3-9—12).

- Darren Raddysh collected the lone assist on Kucherov's goal and is up to 19 points on the year (4-15—19).

- Anthony Cirelli recorded the primary helper on Hagel's goal and pushed his season point total to 26 (10-16—26).

Bolts Quotes

- Jon Cooper: "Let's be honest. I think our break was 10 days. We come back [with] a couple practices. We play a back-to-back. I'm disappointed in how we've come out of this break. I thought we had a little bit more in us to make sure we were ready, but we've looked slow. We've looked out of shape. We look like we took 10 days off. All the hard work we did to get ourselves in the spot we're in, now we're going to have to work our way back in by playing games. That's just not the way you can do it. I'm in complete agreement with the break. I'm just not sure we handled it great."

- Brandon Hagel: "We've got to be better on the road. I think that's a big thing that we haven't been able to figure out this year. Obviously, at home, everyone knows how good we are there and what we can do at home. But if you want to make the playoffs and you want to get to the end of the playoffs, you need to win on the road. I think we talked about it. I think the playoffs kind of starts now and that's definitely not the way we wanted to start."

- Cooper: "To be honest, we didn't have the ideal first period, which obviously was disappointing. But, in the end, it's a 3-2 game. We hit the post. We're all over them. It could be 3-3. We take the penalty, can't get out of it, it's 4-2 and then it kind of went downhill after that. Just not defending hard enough. You have to do that in this league and giving up six after two periods, you're not going to win that way. We defended hard when we were penalty killing, but tonight, we didn't defend hard 5-on-5. They're a team that's hungry here. They come off their break, had a big win on the road, probably a couple of good practices, and they took it to us."

Krenner's Three Stars

1. Mat Barzal
2. Bo Horvat
3. Ryan Pullock

Lightning Look Ahead

- Saturday, February 10 at Columbus Blue Jackets, 7 p.m. ET, Nationwide Arena
- Tuesday, February 13 at Boston Bruins, 7 p.m. ET, TD Garden
- Thursday, February 15 vs. Colorado Avalanche, 7 p.m. ET, AMALIE Arena

Mikhail Sergachev undergoes surgery **Erik Erlendsson (Lightning Insider)**

ELMONT, N.Y. – Tampa Bay Lightning defenseman Mikhail Sergachev underwent surgery in New York on Thursday to repair two fractured bones in his left leg suffered Wednesday against the Rangers.

Sergachev fell to the ice as he went in to deliver a hit on New York forward Alexis Lafreniere, but Lafreniere braced for the contact and delivered a reverse hit that knocked Segachev off balance. As Sergachev fell to the ice, his left leg went backwards as the ankle got caught in the ice. Sergachev's left ankle bent under him, which caused fractures to both the tibia and fibula bones.

The 25-year-old defense needed medical attention to help stabilize the leg and needed a stretcher to be taken off the ice. Sergachev had just returned to the lineup after missing 17 games due to an injury to his left foot.

The surgery was performed in New York on Thursday to stabilize the fractures. The team announced that Sergachev will remain in New York for a few days before returning to Tampa to begin the rehabilitation process. No timetable has been established at this point for how long it will take for Sergachev to return.

According to the Cleveland Clinic, most people require a "few months" to recover from this type of an injury, without knowing the specific type of fracture. A few months timeline would be the beginning of May, suggesting that Sergachev will miss the remainder of the regular season and wouldn't be ready, at the earliest, until at least the second round of the playoffs.

Lightning head coach Jon Cooper said all but confirmed that.

"He's going to miss significant time, and significant meaning the regular season," Cooper said. "I'm not a doctor, maybe saying that much is going out of my comfort zone, but it's going to be significant time."

Sergachev has not been ruled out for the remainder of the playoffs, in part because the team is still waiting to see how the next few days go post-surgery. He won't return to Tampa until Sunday at the earliest, where he will be evaluated by Lightning team doctors and begin the rehab process.

Does that mean if the Lightning go far in the playoffs, Sergachev could return?

"We'd have to go really far," Cooper said.

The injury is believed to be different than the type of fracture suffered by Lightning captain Steven Stamkos in 2013. While Stamkos suffered a clean break and required a more extensive procedure, Sergachev has what is more traditional fracture, which means the rehabilitation process should not be as difficult to recover.

In the short term, the Lightning will have to make due in trying to fill in for Sergachev's absence. They were able to survive his 17-game absence with Calvin de Haan, Hadyn Fleury and, most recently, Emil Lilleberg manning the left side behind Victor Hedman.

Enduring a month-long absence is a bit different than a three-month absence.

"Maybe there's a little consolation in that, but it's not what you want," Cooper said of other stepping up previously. "We're going to have to find a way to get by without him."

With Sergachev out for the remainder of the regular season, it does allow the team to place him LTI where they would be able to use the available cap space to bring in help if general manager Julien BriseBois chooses to try to find help outside the organization.

Sergachev is in the second year of a eight-year deal that carries an \$8.5 million cap hit, which is significant amount of available cap space to work with. But whether the Lightning choose to take advantage of it or not, no doubt they would rather have a player how helped them win a pair of Stanley Cup titles on the ice the remainder of the season.

“We’re a better team when he’s in the lineup,” Cooper said. “We’re just going to have to find a way and we’ve been trying, we’ve done it a little in the past. ... This group has been together for a long time and injuries and adversity is going to happen. It seems like it’s happening in a large way with us at times, and especially right now. But the guys don’t hang their head. It’s just kind of a next man up. And I know that’s a cliché, but they’ve kind of taken that upon themselves. The guys have found a way and I’m sure they will during this one as well.”

Tampa Bay Lightning looked like early-season Tampa Bay Lightning **Erik Erlendsson (Lightning Insider)**

ELMONT, N.Y. – The Tampa Bay Lightning looked like a team dealing with a bit of hangover on Thursday.

Normally, hangovers wear off in the morning before you're ready to roll at night. But the kind the Tampa Bay Lightning were dealing with against the New York Islanders was different from most. This was the kind that couldn't be shaken off, the type that still gives you the go-slows, even 24 hours later.

The Tampa Bay Lightning watched Mikhail Sergachev get taken off the ice on stretcher Wednesday at Madison Square Garden. On Thursday, they learned the news that Sergachev underwent surgery in New York to stabilize a fractured fibia and tibula and would miss the remainder of the season.

It felt like that fog was still hanging over them when they stepped on the ice to face the Islanders. In what should have been a rallying point after the events of Wednesday, the Tampa Bay Lightning looked more like they were caught in between.

And that's a bad place to be.

"It's tough," Brandon Hagel said. "That's a key player to our team and something that we can't control and we obviously hope he has a speedy recovery. But at the same time we could have turned a negative into a positive and maybe did it for him tonight or did it for him last night. We weren't able to do that."

TOUGH SLEDDING TO START

The Lightning should have been energized to start the game. They should have come out with jump. They should have dictated the play.

Instead, on the opening shift on what was a 3-on-2 for Tampa Bay, it was Hagel that ended up getting a hooking call in the offensive zone. It set the tone.

"We didn't have the ideal first period which obviously was disappointing," Lightning head coach Jon Cooper said.

The Lightning were outshot 14-3 in the first period. They were outchanced 14-8. They allowed an expected goals rate against of 1.24. They were fortunate to only be down two goals as the Islanders forecheck was all over them in the defensive zone. New York was attacking the puck carrier coming in the offensive zone.

In many ways, this game on February 8 looked more like one of the games they played on November 8.

Three months ago, the Lightning defensive zone approach was, to but it kindly, a mess. In the first period on Thursday, it was a mess.

Time and time again, the Islander players were alone around the crease, or they were checked with enthusiasm. On the third New York goal, they play on the puck carrier coming down the wall was late by Nick Perbix recognizing the situation a hair too late. Then Anthony Cirelli was slow to react the Kyle Palmieri setting up shop just above the paint, where he took the pass from Mike Reilly and gave New York a 3-1 lead with 1:25 left in the period.

“Just not defending hard enough, you have to do that in this league,” Cooper said. “We defend hard when we’re on the PK, but tonight we didn’t defend hard five-on-five.”

MORE EARLY SEASON COMPARISONS

When the Lightning entered the All Star break, they were coming off a game against New Jersey where they built a two-goal lead, only to see the Devils make it a one-goal game on three occasions. All three times, the Lightning had an answer and won the game 6-3.

Early in the season, when something would go against the Lightning, they would sag nearly to the point of cratering. They looked to have turned that around. But not on Thursday.

Hagel scored a power play goal 1:14 into the second period to cut the deficit to 3-2. After a first period in which they deserved their deficit, they had the chance to turn those fortunes in their favor.

Because during one sequence, Cirelli had the tying goal on his stick on a rebound chance, but hit the post. The Islanders then rushed up ice on a partial odd-man rush where Steven Stamkos was called for hooking. The with seven seconds left on the power play, off a lost faceoff by Nick Paul to Pierre Engval, Ryan Pullock blasted a bomb past Jonas Johansson at 7:10 to regain the two-goal lead.

The Lightning sagged after that, allowing two more goals before the end of the period to trail 6-2.

“It’s the same thing that put us in that spot we’re in, early in season, that was the same thing,” Hagel said. “Get right back into it and we can’t find a way, we can’t get that next shift to give us that momentum in the game and after that it just kind of snowballed.”

That did not please Cooper in the least.

“Really disappointing . . . it’s another adjective beyond that,” he said.

SHOOT THE *(&(* PUCK

For the second consecutive game, Tampa Bay had 20-or-fewer shots on goal. Not only that, but they’ve had 40-plus shot attempts blocked. And they are over 30-plus shots missed. In the two games coming out of the break, they have had more shots blocked or miss the net than shots that have made their way to the opposing goaltender.

“We have to start getting the puck there and getting guys to the net,” Hagel said. “I think we have to get them through. We have to hit the net. Obviously, we can attempt as much as we want but usually when a shot gets blocked, it’s usually a turnover and we’re coming back the other way.”

Earlier in the season, Cooper and the coaching staff emphasized getting shots from the point through traffic. When that was happening, the goal production from the defense started to go up. But, just like earlier in the season, it’s hampering the team’s play.

“Guys have to look at themselves here,” Cooper said. “We get pucks to our defenseman and they have to get pucks through. Then when we’ve got opportunities in tight we’ve missed some glorious opportunities, some of our best chances, we’re missing. So that’s got to be a point of emphasis for us. That’s bearing down, it’s bearing down in defensive zone, it’s bearing down in the offensive zone.”

TOO MUCH TIME ON THEIR HANDS

Breaks in the NHL are rare. It’s an 82-season grind. So when time off comes, take advantage of it.

The Lightning rode into the 10-day break they just had with eight wins in nine games. Now, they've started the post-break with two losses.

Cooper intimated the time off was too long.

"I'm disappointed in how we've come out of this break," Cooper said. "I thought we had a little bit more interest to make sure we were ready. But we've looked slow. We looked out of shape. We look like we took 10 days off."

All that work done over a months span wiped out in two games.

"All the hard work we did to get ourselves in the spot we're in, now we're going to have to work our way back in by playing games," Cooper said. "That's just not the way you can do it. I'm in complete agreement with the break, I just thought we didn't handle it very well."

HEADING TO A MUST WIN

With an 0-2 start to the road trip, it puts an extra emphasis on the next game, which comes on Saturday in Columbus. Getting as many points as games on a trip is the measure the Lightning live by. The only way to have a chance at that now is to win at Columbus and then look toward the final game in Boston on Tuesday.

But a win against the Blue Jackets is imperative.

"It's going to be huge," defenseman Erik Cernak said. "We lost the first two games of the road trip. We weren't planning on it, but just just have to come back stronger against Columbus and Boston. Kind of look at those games game-by-game. Focus on Columbus now and then focus on Boston. We need a much better effort for 60 minutes and hopefully we're going to get some points."

NOTES

LW Austin Watson was activated off injured reserve prior to the game and was in the lineup on Thursday. ... D Haydn Fleury and RW Alex Barre-Boulet were scratched. ... Kucherov scored and boosted his League-leading total to 33-54—87. Eight of Kucherov's 33 goals this season have come by means of a slap shot, tied with Evan Bouchard for the second most among all players and trailing only Drew Doughty (9).

MY THREE STARS

1. Islanders C Matt Barzal – Goal, assist, plus-2
2. Islanders C Bo Horvat – Goal, assist, plus-2, four shots on goal
3. islanders D Noah Dobson – Goal, five shot attempts, two blocked shots