



**AMALIE Arena Media Clips
Tuesday, December 12, 2023**

1. Victor Hedman a game-time decision for Lightning vs. Canucks – Eduardo Encina (Tampa Bay Times)
2. Nuts & Bolts: Headed north of the border to Vancouver – Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)
3. Sampling the New York restaurant where Russian NHL stars find a taste of home – Joe Smith (The Athletic)

Victor Hedman a game-time decision for Lightning vs. Canucks **Eduardo Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

As the Lightning prepared Monday afternoon for the Western Canada swing of their season-long five-game road trip, their top defenseman was absent from practice, making his status for Tuesday's game in Vancouver uncertain.

Victor Hedman missed the third period and overtime of Saturday's win in Seattle. He saw just 13:40 of ice time against the Kraken, his final shift ending with the Lightning on the power play with 3:07 remaining in regulation. There was no obvious sign of injury on that shift or the previous one in 5-on-5.

The Lightning offered no details other than coach Jon Cooper saying Hedman will try to test the injury during Tuesday's morning skate before Tampa Bay plays the Canucks that night.

"We will give him a go in the morning and see where he's at. I would say he's game time," Cooper told reporters in Vancouver.

Hedman, who last week became the first Lightning defenseman to play 1,000 games, has five goals and 22 assists playing in all 29 games. His 27 points were fourth most among all NHL defensemen entering Monday.

He has scored five of the Lightning's seven goals by defensemen this season, and his 23:39 average ice time leads the team. Hedman has two goals and seven assists on the power play, playing mostly on the Lightning's vaunted first unit, and he also has been a mainstay on the team's penalty kill.

On Saturday, the Lightning were already without captain Steven Stamkos (illness) and fielded an 11-forward, seven-defenseman lineup. Hedman's departure left the Lightning a defenseman short for the remainder of the game and down to 17 available skaters.

The Lightning went down a goal 14 seconds into the third, but evened the score on Nick Paul's tally 7:09 into the period. Tampa Bay opened overtime by killing off a penalty for the first 1:43 of the extra session before Nikita Kucherov won it with 1:48 remaining. It was the Lightning's second victory in seven overtime games this season.

Cooper said the Lightning had a "massive flu bug" hit the team that affected Stamkos and kept backup goaltender Jonas Johansson off the ice for Monday's practice.

Nuts & Bolts: Headed north of the border to Vancouver

Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)

Everything you need to know ahead of Tampa Bay's matchup against the Vancouver Canucks on Tuesday.

When: Tuesday, December 12 - 10 p.m. ET

Where: Rogers Arena - Vancouver, BC

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 Wednesday's game (subject to change)

Forwards

Brandon Hagel - Brayden Point - Nikita Kucherov

Nick Paul - Anthony Cirelli - Alex Barre-Boulet

Tanner Jeannot - Luke Glendening - Mikey Eyssimont

Tyler Motte - Cole Koepke

Defensemen

Victor Hedman - Darren Raddysh

Mikhail Sergachev - Erik Cernak

Calvin de Haan - Nick Perbix

Haydn Fleury

Goaltenders

Andrei Vasilevskiy

Jonas Johansson

Tuesday's Matchup

The Lightning and Canucks are playing the second of two matchups this season and the only meeting Rogers Arena...Tampa Bay skated to a 4-3 victory over VAN in the first matchup of the season Oct. 19 at AMALIE Arena... Nikita Kucherov (2-0—2) leads the Bolts in goals vs. VAN this season and is tied with Nick Paul (1-1—2) for the team lead in points...Kucherov has posted three consecutive multi-point efforts vs. VAN with goals in each of those three contests (4-2—6)...Kucherov has recorded two points in nine of his last 12 games vs. VAN (8-10—18), including six of the last seven meetings (6-6—12)... Steven Stamkos has picked up points in three consecutive games vs. VAN (4-2—6) and has found the scoresheet in 15 of his 19 career contests vs. VAN (16-12—28) with goals in five of the last seven meetings (7-4—11)...Brayden Point is riding a three-game point streak vs. VAN (1-4—5) and has 12 points over the last eight meetings (4-8—12)...Brandon Hagel has pointed in each of his three career contests vs. VAN (1-3—4)...Andrei Vasilevskiy has won five straight games vs. VAN with a .933 save percentage and 2.20 goals against average over that five-game span...Tampa Bay is 8-2-0 in their last 10 road games at VAN and 9-1-0 in the last 10 meetings overall...The Bolts have won seven straight contests vs. VAN, winning the seven games by a combined score of 34-16...Tampa Bay has scored four or more goals in eight of the last 10 meetings vs. VAN (total: 44 goals)...The Bolts are 20-17-3 with two ties all-time vs. VAN, including a road record of 8-9-1 with two ties...Stamkos (16-12—28) holds the Lightning franchise records for career goals and points vs. VAN and is tied with Martin St. Louis (4-12—16) for the franchise lead in assists.

Injuries

Conor Sheary - Upper-body, out

The Road Ahead

Thursday, December 14 at Edmonton Oilers

Saturday, December 16 at Calgary Flames

Tuesday, December 19 vs. St. Louis Blues

Sampling the New York restaurant where Russian NHL stars find a taste of home

Joe Smith (The Athletic)

NEW YORK — Wild defenseman Jake Middleton was at the rink one day in November and Russian superstar Kirill Kaprizov surprised him with a question.

“You ever have Russian food?” Kaprizov asked.

“No,” Middleton replied.

“You want to go in New York?” Kaprizov said.

“Absolutely,” Middleton said.

Middleton, 27, is from small-town Alberta and had no idea what to expect. He thought maybe it'd be something extravagant, perhaps even some raw fish dishes. What Middleton was introduced to on a mid-November night was a treasure trove for Russian-born NHLers looking for an authentic taste of home.

Kaprizov brought Middleton and captain Jared Spurgeon to Mari Vanna.

The restaurant is nestled in a quiet part of 20th Street in Manhattan. From the outside, it looks like an apartment. You could easily walk past the green-bordered windows and entrance with “Mari Vanna” written on a faded white curtain above it. But walk inside and you're transported thousands of miles away and decades back in time. The menu, from the borscht to the cured herring, is cooked and served by Russian staff. It's as authentic as NHL players have found in the States. So is the decor. There are old Russian books, lamps, dolls, gold-framed photos, tea cups and chessboards. The white tablecloths and floral china look like they're from the 1970s under the dim light. Russian cartoons play from a flatscreen TV.

“It's like your grandmother's house,” says Lightning defenseman Mikhail Sergachev. “Like being back in Moscow.”

“You can dive back into your childhood,” Jets center Vladislav Namestnikov says.

“It's having your home cuisine,” Panthers goalie Sergei Bobrovsky says.

Mari Vanna also has a location in Washington, D.C., and two in Russia. It's owned by the Ginza Project, which owns 70 restaurants in St. Petersburg and Moscow. This New York location, which opened around 15 years ago, has the personal touches of a hole-in-the-wall, family-owned spot. Namestnikov said “regulars,” at least before COVID-19, were given a key, with a Matryoshka doll attached, so they could get in on “off” nights or for private parties.

The head chef will come out and greet NHLers like Sergachev, Nikita Kucherov and Andrei Vasilevskiy, giving them a hug. There are signed plates hanging on the wall of celebrities (like Sarah Jessica Parker), as well as their most high-profile hockey stars, from Kucherov to Capitals captain Alex Ovechkin. On the November night Kaprizov brought Spurgeon and Middleton, there was a table full of Detroit Red Wings.

“You've got to check it out,” Sergachev said.

So on a recent trip to New York, I did just that.

Nikita Kucherov's signed plate adorns the wall of similarly signed plates at Mari Vanna in New York.

Sergachev was a rookie with the Lightning back in the 2018-19 when he had his first Mari Vanna experience.

Teammates Kucherov, Vasilevskiy and Namestnikov had been there before, and wanted to introduce him to it. They met the owner, the head chef, whom Sergachev said looked, and acted, like their grandmother. She gave them an embrace, brought them some off-menu options. He couldn't help but notice the antique furniture, the magazines, the raggedy, white wallpaper, which had signatures from previous guests.

"Every year I go back to Russia and my grandmother's house, and it's kind of similar," Sergachev said. "There's a big Russian community in New York, and it feels like back home. Everyone speaks Russian. You don't get homesick because you can just go to that place. It reminds you of how beautiful our country is."

Sergachev said his go-to dishes usually begin with borscht, a soup typically made with meat stock, vegetables and seasoning. The dumplings are a must, as are their salads, with Sergachev preferring the "Herring Under a Fur Coat" one. When it's not the night before a game, the Lightning group typically goes with a flight of infused vodka shots, as you can pick from an array of flavors, from cranberry to horseradish to cucumber and dill.

"Kirill said the proper way to do a Russian dinner is to have those shots," Middleton said, laughing. "We didn't do it that night."

Kaprizov told his teammates that mid-November trip was his first time in Mari Vanna, though he's been to the Russian Tea Room in the city before. Kaprizov likes to make his own Russian food, usually dumplings. "My mom made me a lot, we just froze," he said. "And you just cook them whenever you want. You can have them for breakfast, lunch, whatever."

Middleton said at Mari Vanna, he and Spurgeon just surrendered the menu and let Kaprizov show them the way, from the borscht to dumplings to after-dinner drinks. The best part? Kaprizov picked up the bill, too.

"I had no idea what Russian food was like before," Middleton said. "But it's a lot like farmer's food. Heavy and dense, soup and potatoes. It was such a fun experience. I went and put on a couple pounds of potatoes. When we were leaving, it started to get rowdy and a band started setting up. It would have been cool if we had a day off the next day to hang the whole night. They said Sundays and Mondays are the Russian-heavy night where Russians go there to party and hang out.

"I'm sure it won't be the last time I do something like that."

The same mid-November night that Kaprizov hosted his teammates at Mari Vanna, I gave it a try myself.

Armed with tips from several Russian players, I wanted to experience it all. I invited a friend, Kieran, a Londoner who is now living on Long Island, to join. The bar was packed as we waited for our table. Typically there's Russian music quietly playing in the background, but on this night there was a three-piece jazz band. They were tucked in a corner by the bathroom, with Russian cartoons playing on a TV behind them, old framed photos hanging on the wall. Sydney Fay played the acoustic guitar, with her sound giving off Norah Jones vibes.

Never thought I'd hear "Only You" while eating borscht, so cross that off my bucket list.

We were seated at a table by the front, where you could see the hanging string lights outside the French doors. The lace curtains and tablecloths had a vintage feel, as did the polka dot white dresses the waitresses wore. We started with a chicken liver plate, with the spread going over toasted bread. The borscht, beet mixed with beef, was as advertised. This is the kind of place where players say they treat it like a tapas spot, splitting a bunch of appetizers and entrees. The dumplings were served in a brown mini bowl that looked like a coffee cup. I could have eaten 15 of them.

Since Kieran and I weren't playing in a game the next day, we did partake in the infused vodka shots (a flight of five for \$50). It was an eclectic mix of cranberry flavors to apricot to horseradish.

"They're not that strong," Sergachev told me. "So don't worry."

The Russian players typically bring teammates along to introduce them to their culture. Sergachev, Kucherov and Vasilevskiy brought Pat Maroon and Alex Killorn to the Mari Vanna in Washington, D.C. "Everything was awesome there," Maroon said. "Never been to a place like it."

Other teammates don't always have the same reaction. "I was in New York and Kevin Hayes came with me," Namestnikov recalled. "I don't think he liked it too much — he was giving a weird face. Some guys like it, some guys don't."

Sometimes players are asked to sign plates, which are put up on the wall. Kucherov signed one, "Tampa 2020" with his name written in Russian. We weren't asked for our autograph, but after paying the tab (which was presented in a blue, Russian designed, hand purse), the hostess came over to ask one more question.

"Would you like some shots, guys?"