



AMALIE Arena Media Clips
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Lightning GM Julien BriseBois: Steven Stamkos is not getting traded **Eduardo A. Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

TAMPA — So many things could happen to the Lightning's season in the eight weeks before the March 8 trade deadline. But no matter how things play out, general manager Julien BriseBois made clear Tuesday the one thing that won't:

The Lightning aren't trading Steven Stamkos.

During his midseason media availability, BriseBois got ahead of any rumors that the Lightning could deal their captain and longtime face of the franchise as he approaches unrestricted free agency this offseason.

"We're always on the lookout for opportunities to improve our chances of being successful, and this trade deadline is not different," BriseBois said. "The one thing I would say, just to get it out there, because I know as we get closer to the deadline a popular and interesting and frequent topic is who's going to get traded, who won't get traded.

"Steven Stamkos isn't getting traded. You can all write that. Steven Stamkos is not getting traded, so we can put that one to bed if anyone was speculating on that. That's not going to change between now and the deadline under any circumstances."

In September, Stamkos was frustrated the team didn't engage him in extension talks going into the final season of his eight-year, \$68 million contract. BriseBois said at the time the team wouldn't make Stamkos a new offer until the end of the season. Stamkos has a full no-move clause, so he'd have to agree to any trade.

The Lightning entered Tuesday in the eighth and final playoff position in the Eastern Conference, with four teams within three points of them. They've helped themselves over the past month by winning eight of their last 12 games, a span in which they've allowed fewer than three goals a game (2.92).

'Potential to accomplish great things'

BriseBois said that looking at his team's analytics — specifically expected goals for and goals against — the Lightning should have more points than they do. But he added that over the past month, the Lightning have started to show their capabilities.

"I don't think we've played up to our potential yet, certainly not on a consistent basis," BriseBois said. "We haven't been able to put all the pieces together at one time over a sustained period of time. But I believe in these players and I believe in this coaching staff, and I think this group has the potential to accomplish great things this season.

"Most of our games, we've had the upper hand for 40, 45, 50 minutes. It's the 10 to 20 minutes where we would fall flat that have been costing us, and I think in the last month we've done a better job of competing for 60 minutes. That's been the biggest difference. And when we do that, all of our skill, all of our talent, all of our different pieces, that should form a really strong, cohesive group that gets to come together and produce results."

The Lightning have played well despite losing key players to injury. Defenseman Mikhail Sergachev and Haydn Fleury are on long-term injured reserve and BriseBois said they aren't expected to return before the All-Star break (Feb. 1-4). Forward Tanner Jeannot is also week-to-week with an upper-body injury.

Their absence has meant opportunity for prospects playing in AHL Syracuse as the Lightning have debuted eight rookies this season, including six over the past two months.

“Because of injuries this year, we’ve had more opportunities to call up different players and they’ve all come up and they’ve helped us win games,” BriseBois said. “So all that is trending in the right direction and bodes well for the future of the franchise.”

‘Always about the collective’

BriseBois emphasized that he still sees Stamkos as part of the Lightning’s future beyond this season.

“After the season, we’re going to sit down and we’re going to evaluate where we are as a team and where Steven is,” he said, “and we’ll see how we can make all the parts work together.”

BriseBois has had to say goodbye to players he wanted to keep. Whether it was Blake Coleman or Barclay Goodrow or Ondrej Palat or Alex Killorn, he was hamstrung by cap constraints and watched those players walk.

“My job is to try to build the team that has the greatest odds of winning a Stanley Cup,” he said. “So it’s never (about) one thing, it’s always about the collective.”

But asked if keeping the face of the franchise (Stamkos) factors into the decision-making, BriseBois said flatly: “It obviously factors in.”

Asked about the long-term future of another cornerstone player, defenseman Victor Hedman (who becomes a free agent after the 2024-25 season), BriseBois said: “At the end of this season, we’ll take stock of where we are as a franchise, and in large part based on the results of this season.”

The Lightning can add an additional \$4 million in cap space as the cap grows to \$87.5 million, which BriseBois said is critical in trying to keep players like Hedman and Stamkos.

“It would make it very difficult if it wasn’t going up that much,” BriseBois said. “Obviously, we’ve been planning on going up. As we’ve been signing players to contracts the last few years we kind of knew what to expect. We knew what the projections were. So it’s really going to provide us with some flexibility. We have some big contracts that need to be addressed as well this coming year as well as the following year. So we’re going to be using every dollar of that cap space, I expect.”

“Our focus right now is on being successful this season and getting into the playoffs,” BriseBois added.

Lightning GM Julien BriseBois makes his annual mid-season check in Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)

Tampa Bay Lightning general manager Julien BriseBois hosted his annual, mid-season media availability Tuesday morning at AMALIE Arena and touched on a variety of topics surrounding the team.

Beginning with an opening statement, BriseBois said that while the team hasn't quite been able to play up to its potential for a sustained period of time this year, he has firm belief in the players and coaching staff to "accomplish great things this season."

"We're starting to see signs of it turning and some positive momentum building here," BriseBois added. "If we look at the last month in particular, kind of going back one month here, it started with the three games before the Christmas break. The team won all three games and in two of those games gave up only one goal. On the third game, big character win coming back from two goals down against Vegas.

"We got some positive momentum going into the break and then the break kind of halted our momentum a little bit, unfortunately. But since the calendars turned to 2024, all the pieces are starting to come together at once.

"We're scoring goals. Other than the Boston game, we've done a really good job keeping the puck out of our net. And both our special teams are producing really well thus far this month. So, when we look back now, we've won five of seven and, in the last month, we've won eight of 12. So, a lot of positive signs.

"Every year with new players and changes, it takes time for everything to start to come together and gel and I think we're building that cohesiveness now and we've got some positive momentum going into the second half of the season."

Since the start of the season, BriseBois has seen the team improve with its compete level throughout the full 60-minute games. As Lightning head coach Jon Cooper has mentioned on several occasions this year, the Bolts have played some great hockey over long stretches of games this season, but it has been the five- to 10-minute lapses that have cost them.

"I think, in the last month, we've done a better job of competing for 60 minutes," BriseBois said. "I think that's been the biggest difference. When we do that, all of our skill, all of our talent, all of our different pieces that should form a really strong, cohesive group get to come together and produce results.

"It's a question of putting it all together at the same time for 60 minutes. We've been doing a better job of that in the last month and it's showing in the results."

With the NHL Trade Deadline only 52 days away, BriseBois was asked how he will approach the deadline this year after bolstering the roster via trade on several occasions over his years as GM. This year will likely be the same.

BriseBois shared that looking for ways to improve the team is an ongoing endeavor throughout the entire calendar year, but with more players becoming available around the deadline, the Lightning will certainly be on the lookout for ways to strengthen the roster in hopes of securing a playoff spot and making a run at another Stanley Cup title.

While Tuesday's chat didn't reveal if Tampa Bay will make a trade at this year's deadline, it did reveal something else. Steven Stamkos will not be traded.

"The one thing I would say just to get it out there because I know as we get close to the deadline, it's a popular and interesting and frequent topic" BriseBois said. "'Who's going to get traded? Who won't get traded?'"

"Steven Stamkos isn't getting traded. You can all write that. Steven Stamkos is not getting traded, so we can put that one to bed. If anyone was speculating on that, that's not going to change between now and the deadline under any circumstances."

When asked if he envisions Stamkos remaining in Tampa after his contract expires following the 2023-24 campaign, BriseBois said he does, but maintained his stance that talks between the Lightning and the Stamkos camp will continue to be put on hold until the end of the season.

"Like I said all along, after the season, we're gonna sit down and we're gonna evaluate where we are as a team and where Steven is, and we'll see how we can make all the parts work together."

With multiple players on the shelf with week-to-week injuries, BriseBois provided a quick update on the status of Mikhail Sergachev and Haydn Fleury.

As the two defensemen continue to recover from lower-body injuries, BriseBois said he thinks it's going to be a stretch for either player to come back before the All-Star break in late January/early February.

When the Bolts return from the break, the first game will be a February 7 matchup against the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden. If both defensemen are unable to return before the break, look for them to be back with the team for that February matchup in Manhattan.

As for Erik Cernak, he remains day-to-day with an upper-body injury, while Tanner Jeannot remains week-to-week with a lower-body injury.

BriseBois shared some thoughts on the incredible year Nikita Kucherov is having with the winger set to eclipse his point total from 2018-19, when he set a new franchise record with 128 points. BriseBois said the rise of Kucherov's stardom has been consistent, with the All-Star forward getting better with each passing year.

"It's been an evolution and it's not just this year," BriseBois shared. "It's been every year, adding to his various ways that he can contribute to us winning. Over the last few years, he's really improved his play away from the puck. He is an underrated defensive forward. He is an excellent defensive forward."

"If you just look at what he's doing out there when he doesn't have the puck, he's doing a lot of good things to help us get the puck back. He's phenomenal at helping us break out the puck too. When we're hemmed into our zone for a while, if the puck ends up on his stick, usually we break out clean."

"The other area where he's really stepped up, gradually, but certainly taking a big step I think this year, was in the leadership department. He's one of the key leaders on our team now. That's why Coop put the A on his jersey and every day he is finding different ways to help pull our group forward."

Lastly, a brief prospect update.

After Tampa Bay's 2022 first-round pick Isaac Howard won a gold medal with Team USA at the IIHF World Junior Championship earlier this month, BriseBois will get a chance to see the prospect up close this coming weekend. With Howard and Michigan State University set to battle University of Michigan and Dylan Duke, the Lightning's fourth-round pick in 2021, BriseBois will be heading to Yost Arena to watch the two face off with a back-to-back set scheduled for Friday and Saturday.

Stamkos won't be traded from Lightning prior to Deadline, GM says **Corey Long (NHL.com)**

TAMPA -- Steven Stamkos will not be traded prior to the NHL Trade Deadline, Tampa Bay Lightning general manager Julien BriseBois said Tuesday.

The forward and Lightning captain is in the final year of an eight-year, \$68 million contract (\$8.5 million average annual value). Stamkos has 41 points (18 goals, 23 assists) in 41 games this season and is the Lightning all-time leader in games played (1,044), goals (533) and points (1097). He is second in assists (564).

"It's a popular and interesting ... and a frequent topic is who's going to get traded, who won't get traded," BriseBois said. "Steven Stamkos isn't getting traded. You can all write that -- Steven Stamkos is not getting traded, so we can put that one to bed. That's not going to change between now and the deadline (March 8) under any circumstances."

BriseBois said that Stamkos' contract situation would be revisited after the season.

"We're going to sit down and we're going to evaluate where we are as a team and where Steven is," BriseBois said. "We will see how we can make all of the parts work together."

Will Stamkos be playing for a new team next season?

BriseBois said the same consideration will be made for defenseman Victor Hedman, who has one year remaining after this season on his eight-year, \$63 million contract (\$7.85 AAV).

The Lightning have five players other than Hedman that will be making at least \$5 million next season; forwards Nikita Kucherov (\$9.5 million AAV, three seasons remaining); Brayden Point (\$9.5 million AAV, six seasons remaining); Anthony Cirelli (\$6.25 million AAV, seven seasons remaining); defenseman Erik Cernak (\$5.2 million AAV; seven seasons remaining); and goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy (\$9.5 million AAV, four seasons remaining).

"At the end of the season, we'll take stock of where we are as a franchise," BriseBois said. "And we'll address future contracts for all of our players whose contracts are going to be up in due time."

The Lightning (22-17-5) are tied for fourth in the Atlantic Division and the first wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Eastern Conference with the Detroit Red Wings. They have made the postseason nine of the past 10 seasons, including at least the third round in six of those seasons.

"The trade deadline, every year, every day, you're looking to improve your odds of being successful," BriseBois said. "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."

Tampa Bay still has a solid core, led by forwards Nikita Kucherov and Brayden Point. But injuries have tested its depth, with eight rookie skaters playing at least one game this season.

The Lightning also have key injuries with defenseman Mikhail Sergachev and forward Tanner Jeannot out. It's uncertain if either player will be back before the All-Star break. Tampa Bay plays its final game prior to the break on Jan. 27 before not returning for a game until Feb. 7.

BriseBois, however, is confident that Tampa Bay will be in the playoff race down the stretch.

"I think it's going to be an exciting second half of the season," BriseBois said. "Every game is going to be very meaningful. It's going to be challenging, but it presents a great opportunity for our group to prove itself up to the challenge."

Lightning GM Julien BriseBois: 'Steven Stamkos is not getting traded' **Joe Smith (The Athletic)**

Tampa Bay Lightning general manager Julien BriseBois is usually active and creative at the trade deadline.

But BriseBois wanted to make one thing clear Tuesday: His captain, Steven Stamkos, isn't going anywhere.

"Steven Stamkos is not getting traded," he said. "So we can put that one to bed. That is not going to change between now and the deadline under any circumstances."

Stamkos, the longtime face of the franchise, is in the final year of his deal. His status for next season has been up in the air, with Stamkos saying earlier in the year that he was disappointed more contracts weren't done over the summer.

Asked if he envisioned Stamkos being on the Lightning beyond this season, BriseBois said "yes." Talks won't continue until the summer.

"After the season, we're going to sit down and evaluate where we are as a team, and where Steven is, and see how we can make all those parts come together," BriseBois said.

BriseBois indicated the decision on Stamkos is less about the captain and more to do with evaluating his entire roster to see what can truly keep them a contender. The Lightning are fighting for a playoff spot, now in the second wild card. BriseBois did acknowledge Stamkos being who he is — the face of the franchise — "obviously factors in."

"My job is to try to build a team that has the greatest odds of winning a Stanley Cup," BriseBois said. "It's never one thing. It's always about the collective."