



**AMALIE Arena Media Clips
Sunday, December 10, 2023**

1. How Lightning's Andrei Vasilevskiy has started to find his old self – Eduardo Encina (Tampa Bay Times)
2. Nikita Kucherov scores in overtime to lift Lightning over Kraken – Cameron Van Til (Associated Press)
3. Tampa Bay Lightning dig deep, pull out rare – and needed – victory in Seattle – Erik Erlendsson (Lightning Insider)
4. The Backcheck: Bolts stay strong in OT win over Kraken – Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)
5. Crunch Downed By Comets, 3-1 – Syracuse Crunch

How Lightning's Andrei Vasilevskiy has started to find his old self **Eduardo Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

NASHVILLE — This certainly wasn't the start to the season that Andrei Vasilevskiy envisioned, with a back injury that forced him to miss the first two months and watch as the Lightning struggled in his absence.

But the goaltender has tried to find a silver lining: He's learned some valuable lessons out of this experience, and he hopes to be better for it.

On Thursday morning, a day after his second straight win — a pair of victories in which he stopped 49 of the 50 shots he faced and began to look like vintage Vasilevskiy — he was inside an empty Bridgestone Arena in Nashville working with goaltending coach Frantz Jean and taking shots from the team's three scratches on the ice.

He will be the first to tell you he's not yet where he needs to be. He's cautious in making too much out of his recent wins. But in a season that has tested Vasilevskiy's patience, he remains remarkably upbeat and committed to showing he's still the best goaltender in the world.

"I guess it depends on how you look at this situation," said Vasilevskiy Thursday, ahead of the team's five-game, 10-day road trip. "You can shape it in a bad way or you can shape it in a good way. So I'll just say I've shaped it in a good way.

"I was able to spend more time with family and take more rest and just focus on different things. And at the same time, I was able to kind of prepare myself for a season even more and hopefully, it'll help me along the way. ... I think once you get more mature you just see things differently. That helps a lot."

After offseason weightlifting led to a herniated disc in his lower back, he tried to push through it. Treatment kept him on the ice and the pain subdued. He went into training camp optimistic that the worst was over, but during drills in the team's first camp practice, he felt pain through his back and legs.

"I knew right away that something's not right," he said. "I really couldn't push hard and it was shooting pain."

Less than a week later, Vasilevskiy had a microdiscectomy to repair the disc in his back, and the Lightning's season started without him.

Vasilevskiy said he has quit the power squats and deadlifting that led to his injury. Work in the gym still remains a big part of his routine, but it's more focused on stretching and stamina, and he strengthens his core via medicine balls and other light equipment. Regardless, it's a sharp contrast to what Vasilevskiy used to do to prepare.

"I wouldn't call it easy, but just more controllable," he said. "It's less weights, just kind of basically working with my body weight. I weigh 220, so it's still pretty hard. Now I have to be smarter. I had both surgeries in my career now because of workouts. It's just stupid to just miss games because I wanted to squat more? It's silly, very silly."

No one promised Vasilevskiy would be back to his normal self immediately, and he received a tough draw in his first games back. He won his first outing, 8-2, in Carolina on the back of the run support he received. He battled the altitude in his second game in Colorado, and struggled tracking the puck in his first game at home against Pittsburgh, allowing four goals in each of those losses.

Despite a game that got out of hand early in Dallas last Saturday, Vasilevskiy felt he turned a corner. It was the first contest in which he felt like he had his legs back.

“There’s no layups in this league, but those three are some big-time teams to play against,” coach Jon Cooper said. “And I thought he fought through it awesome. I think there was some unluckiness to his game, but there’s a little bit of rust. But he would play three exhibition games or whatever in the preseason, so you can just tell by his timing and his command and the net, all those things have been just getting better and better.”

Cooper said the opening minutes of Vasilevskiy’s shutout home win over Dallas was a big moment. The Stars came out blazing with four shots on goal in the first 2:05 of play, but Vasilevskiy fought Dallas off long enough for the Lightning to take a 2-0 lead going into the first intermission.

“Dallas came right out and bang, bang, bang,” Cooper said. “They get these chances and he just looked calm, cool, collected, then we kind of took over from there. ... I think the team’s been pretty solid in front of him. But when we’ve broken down, he does what he does.”

“We’re used to seeing him bail us out,” Cooper added. “What I was more concerned with on our team was not playing the game where we needed the goalie to bail us out.”

The focus will remain on Vasilevskiy as he continues to find his form. He is the key to the Lightning’s season. Even with Nikita Kucherov and Brayden Point off to strong starts, Tampa Bay’s defensive struggles have them in a muddled pack in the Eastern Conference.

Vasilevskiy would like to think that his late start could help him be stronger down the stretch and into a potential playoff run.

“It’s a good thing that we’ve done (the surgery) and now I’m fixed,” he said. “My body’s still healing. Obviously, my legs still aren’t perfect. But just through the work and through all those games, I’ll be able to get back on my health and be at the highest level, I hope.”

Nikita Kucherov scores in overtime to lift Lightning over Kraken **Cameron Van Til (Associated Press)**

SEATTLE — Nikita Kucherov scored his second goal of the game 3:12 into overtime to give the Lightning a 4-3 win against the reeling Kraken on Saturday night.

Anthony Cirelli had a goal and an assist, and Nick Paul also scored for the Lightning, who have won three of four since a four-game skid. Andrei Vasilevskiy made 26 saves.

Oliver Bjorkstrand, Jamie Oleksiak and Jared McCann scored for Seattle, and Jordan Eberle had two assists. which lost its seventh straight. Philipp Grubauer stopped 12 of 14 shots he faced before leaving after two periods due to a lower body injury. Joey Daccord had five saves the rest of the way.

In overtime, Kucherov got a backhanded pass from Brandon Hagel and fired it past Daccord for his NHL-leading 19th of the season. He also had an assist to increase his scoring total to 47 points.

The Kraken's losing streak is tied for the second-longest in the franchise's three-year history, trailing only a nine-game skid December 2021 to January 2022.

Cirelli opened the scoring 9:28 into the first period, redirecting a shot from Nick Perbix for his seventh. Cirelli has four goals in his past four games after scoring three in his first 24.

Kucherov doubled Tampa Bay's lead with 44 seconds left in the opening period, tapping in a pass from Brayden Point.

Bjorkstrand put Seattle on the board midway through the second with his eighth. Oleksiak tied it just 2:31 later with his second of the season.

McCann scored his 13th on a slap shot 14 seconds into the third, giving Seattle a 3-2 lead. It was the Kraken's first lead since a 7-1 win over San Jose on Nov. 22.

Paul tied it at 3-3 when he buried a pass from Cirelli at the 7:09 mark. It was his ninth of the season.

The Kraken had a goal negated early in the second by a successful offsides challenge from the Lightning.

Seattle had to shuffle its lineup yet again after losing left wing Andre Burakovsky to another injury on Thursday night. Burakovsky made his return against New Jersey after missing six weeks, but lasted only two periods before suffering an upper-body injury that has him listed as week to week.

Kraken defenseman Justin Schultz exited the game with an upper-body injury. Tampa Bay was missing center Steven Stamkos, who was out with an illness.

Tampa Bay Lightning dig deep, pull out rare – and needed – victory in Seattle **Erik Erlendsson (Lightning Insider)**

SEATTLE – Wins in the National Hockey League are drawn from a script.

There are no textbooks to draw from.

And wins, never apologize for securing them, no matter how you got to that point.

The win the Tampa Bay Lightning secured on Saturday in Seattle, without their captain and missing one of their pillars for the third period, was as big as any this season, for a myriad of reasons.

Here's your talking points on how they got there.

DOMINANT START

The Lightning entered the game on a four-game losing streak on the road. The Kraken were winless in their past six, and had not held a lead in any of those six games.

Tampa Bay took advantage of that and just torpedoed the Kraken in the first period. If not for the play of Seattle goaltender Philip Grubauer, the Lightning would have runaway with the game in the opening 20 minutes.had

Tampa Bay had 66-percent of the shot attempts, outshot the Kraken 14-4, 65-percent of the scoring chances, 72-percent of the high danger chances and 86-percent of the expected goals. But as has been the case in recent road games, the Lightning did not get the expected reward.

Anthony Cirelli did open the scoring to give Tampa Bay the lead at 9:28. But it wasn't until the final minute of the period that the Lightning were able to add to the lead when Nikita Kucherov scored with 44 seconds left in the first.

So yes, Tampa Bay built a 2-0 lead. It was a dominant display. But it could have – and should have – been more.

SECOND PERIOD SAG

Stop me if you've heard this before. The Lightning looked like Stanley Cup contenders in the opening period of the game. They had the puck a lot. They created a lot of chances. The opposing team had no chance.

But then the second period comes along and Tampa Bay looks like they are in line for a lottery pick.

It happened again.

The stats are somewhat deceptive because Tampa Bay's second-period, goal-differential was a plus-2 coming into Saturday. But we've seen too many times this season that a good first period is followed up by a porous second period. (at Toronto, home against Pittsburgh come to mind).

As good as Tampa Bay was in the first period, it was the opposite in the second. Seattle had 61-percent of the shot attempts and 60-percent of the scoring chances. Tampa Bay struggled getting pucks out of their own end (a familiar tune when things start to go downhill).

Seattle surged and the Lightning had few answers to stem the tide. The Kraken scored twice (in reality, they scored three times but the first goal was wiped off on an offside challenge). And after looking like they were on their way to a comfortable night, things quickly became uncomfortable.

A penalty on Luke Glendening – one of the team’s main penalty killers – with 1:13 left in the second turned up the discomfort level even more. And though they survived the second period in a tie game, Seattle scored 14 seconds into the third on a power play goal from Jarred McCann.

A game that Tampa Bay looked in complete control was no longer in their control trailing in the opening minute of the third period.

It felt like, should the game not go Tampa Bay’s way, that a tipping point on the season would have been reached.

“That’s something we’re working on all year, adversity,” forward Nick Paul said. “When adversity hits us, what do we do? Do we rise to the occasion or do we fold.”

RISING TO THE OCCASSION

Tampa Bay did rise to the occasion when they tied the game on a goal from Paul at 7:09.

It wasn’t a textbook comeback to tie the game, but it was effective.

“I don’t feel like we should have been in the position we were in to have to come from behind,” Lightning head coach Jon Cooper said. “But credit Seattle, they probably weren’t happy with their first. They came out, pushed in the second, we aided them in some of their pushing. But what’s done is done. We’re down 3-2 in the third. And in the end, we found a way. And that’s been hard for us at late.”

But it’s never easy.

KEY KILL

Tampa Bay was seconds away from securing at least a point in the game. Then, Cirelli tried to dive and make a play on a puck behind his own net, but wound up taking a tripping penalty with 16 seconds left in the third period.

So once again, one of the team’s top penalty killers takes a penalty at the end of a period.

But this time, no damage was done with a Seattle power play chance in overtime. With the 4-on-3 power play chance, Seattle had some looks. Andrei Vasilevskiy turned them aside to give his team a chance.

Then, on the only shot attempt of the overtime, the Lightning won the game.

Brandon Hagel took a bank pass from Kucherov in the Lightning zone and then turned on the jets. Hagel raced right past Matty Beniers wheeling up the right wing boards then went right past Jordan Eberle. As defenseman Vince Dunn then tried to come over and cut Hagel off, the Lightning forward put a backhand pass through Dunn’s legs right to Kucherov, who had a step on Beniers, to win the game.

“That was awesome,” Paul said. “We saw hags beat the first guy and then second guy came . . . I mean he hit the speed moves there, a little Need For Speed action. He beat him wide and then an unbelievable backhand pass to Kuch and Kuch isn’t gonna (miss) around there.”

Kucherov had an inkling of what was coming as he read off of Hagel.

“Hags has wheels,” Kucherov said. “He went through everybody and found me backdoor there. He’s got the skill on the backhand, so I’m confident in his abilities. It was good for him to make the play.”

THE MAN CAN’T BE STOPPED

Speaking of Kucherov, he finished the night with two goals and three points. He currently leads the league in goals, assists and points.

The three-point night for Kucherov was his 73rd career three-point game, tying Martin St. Louis for the second most in Lightning history, behind only Steven Stamkos (97). Kucherov’s seven multi-goal games this season leads all players.

Kucherov also has six games with three-or-more points this season. Kucherov has as many three-point games this season as games without a point.

“He’s playing . . . even the year he was the MVP, he’s better this year,” Cooper said. “It’s the attentiveness at both ends of the ice. He’s just a hell of a player.”

ABSENT TWO PILLARS

Tampa Bay played the game without captain Steven Stamkos, who sat out the game due to an illness. It’s the third game this season that Stamkos has missed.

Then the Lightning lost defenseman Victor Hedman, who did not play in the third period. Hedman’s last shift came with 3:07 left in the second period, just past the halfway mark of a Tampa Bay power play.

The team did not provide an update on his absence and Cooper was not asked in the postgame about Hedman’s absence.

Tampa Bay did dress seven defensemen in the game.

NOTES

RW Austin Watson was scratched. . . . D Hayden Fleury made just his fourth appearance of the season. . . . The Lightning have now scored 35 goals in first periods this season – the second most behind only the Oilers (37). . . . The Lightning earned their 55th overtime win since 2015-16 (when the 3-on-3 format was introduced). The only teams with more victories over that span are the Blackhawks (60), Penguins (57), Kings (57) and Blue Jackets (56). . . . Tampa Bay won its second overtime game on the season in seven tries, improving to 2-5.

MY THREE STARS

1. Lightning RW Nikita Kucherov – Two goals, assist, plus-1, 10 shot attempts
2. Lightning LW Brandon Hagel – Two assists, five shot attempts, two takeaways
3. Lightning C Anthony Cirelli – Goal, assist, plus-2, four shots, two takeaways, four blocked shots

The Backcheck: Bolts stay strong in OT win over Kraken

Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)

After dropping the first contest of a five-game road trip in Nashville Thursday night, the Tampa Bay Lightning got back in the win column with a 4-3 overtime win over the Seattle Kraken Saturday night at Climate Pledge Arena.

Tampa Bay came out of the gate with plenty of pace and played one of their best periods of the season in the opening 20 minutes.

Anthony Cirelli continued his hot streak and gave the Bolts a 1-0 lead at the 9:28 mark of the first period. Skating below the Seattle goal line with the puck, Tanner Jeannot sent a pass to the point for Nick Perbix, who hammered a shot towards the Kraken goal where Cirelli was waiting to redirect his seventh goal of the season past Philip Grubauer.

Almost exactly 10 minutes later, Nikita Kucherov's incredible year continued when he scored his 18th goal of the campaign to put the Lightning up 2-0 with just 43.8 seconds left in the opening frame.

The play started with Kucherov forcing a turnover in the Seattle zone, allowing Brandon Hagel to gain possession in the high slot. Hagel sent a pass to the right circle for Brayden Point, who made a beautiful pass to the back door for Kucherov to light the lamp and send Tampa Bay to the locker room with a 2-0 lead and a 14-4 shot advantage.

The Bolts expected a push back in the second period from Seattle and they got one with the Kraken holding a 15-9 shot advantage and netting the only two goals of the middle frame.

Oliver Bjorkstrand got his team back within one when he scored at the 9:52 mark before Jamie Oleksiak quickly tied the game just 2:31 later.

Going into a critical third period, the Lightning fell behind almost instantly when Jared McCann scored a power-play goal just 14 seconds into the frame to give Seattle a 3-2 lead.

But the Bolts continued to push and got the game-tying goal with 12:51 remaining off the stick of Nick Paul. With Kucherov skating the puck through the neutral zone, the Lightning pushed forward into the Kraken zone before Cirelli took a pass near the top of the left circle. Keeping his head up the whole way, Cirelli found Paul at the top of the crease, where he was waiting to redirect the puck over the glove of Joey Daccord for his ninth goal of the year.

With the game tied 3-3 at the end of the third period, perhaps the biggest moment of the game came at the start of overtime with the Bolts down a man and forced to kill off 1:45 of a 4-on-3 power play for the Kraken.

Tampa Bay successfully got the penalty killed off and got the game-winning goal from their most valuable player in Kucherov. And while Kucherov was the one who ended the game, a lot of the credit has to go to Hagel, who used his speed and tenacity to generate a Grade-A scoring chance for the NHL's leading goal scorer.

Taking the puck in his own end at the left circle in front of Andrei Vasilevskiy, Hagel turned on the jets and skated towards the right wall. Accelerating past Matty Beniers in the neutral zone, Hagel continued to fly forward and fought through a stick check of Jordan Eberle near the Kraken blue line.

Flying into the Seattle zone, Hagel sent a perfect backhand pass right through the skates of Vince Dunn and onto the tape of Kucherov, who beat Daccord with his 19th tally of the year to earn the crucial second point for the Lightning.

Andrei Vasilevskiy was back between the pipes for Tampa Bay and earned his fourth win of the season with 26 saves on 29 shots against.

Victor Hedman did not return to the bench to start the third period and missed the remainder of the contest.

Bolts by the Numbers

- Anthony Cirelli scored his third game-opening goal of the season, tying Nikita Kucherov (3) for the Lightning team lead.

- Cirelli extended his point streak to a season-long four games (4-2—6) and has scored five goals over his last eight contests.

- Nikita Kucherov scored his 18th and 19th goals of the season to pass Brock Boeser and Auston Matthews (18 each) to take over the NHL lead in goals.

- With his 28th helper of the season, Kucherov passed Cale Makar and Quinn Hughes to take over the NHL lead in assists.

- Kucherov continues to pace all NHL skaters in points and is up to 47 (19-28—47) through just 28 games.

Bolts Quotes

- Jon Cooper: "In the end, it came down to a massive penalty kill for us in overtime and then, as I said, the big boys made some plays. I just loved the character in the guys and how we pulled this one out."

- Nikita Kucherov: "We just have to play our game. We can't give up the lead that we had. As I've said before, we've got to play better and consistent. We didn't do it today. We have to build from a win, but definitely have to play a lot better."

- Jon Cooper on Nikita Kucherov: "Even the year he was the MVP, he's been better this year. His attentiveness at both ends of the ice. I don't know, he's just a hell of a player."

- Nick Paul: "When adversity hits us, what do we do? Do we rise to the occasion or do we fold? That's huge for our team when adversity hits to come up big like that. Everyone's laying it on the line and stepping up to the plate and wanting to be the guy. Everything we do is for the team and it showed there at the end."

- Nick Paul on Brandon Hagel's assist on the OT GWG: "He hit the speed boost there. A little Need for Speed action, hit the NOS. Beat him wide and then unbelievable backhand pass to Kuch and Kuch isn't going to make no mistake around there."

Krenner's Three Stars

1. Nikita Kucherov

2. Anthony Cirelli

3. Brandon Hagel

Lightning Look Ahead

- Tuesday, December 12 at Vancouver Canucks, 10 p.m. ET, Rogers Arena
- Thursday, December 14 at Edmonton Oilers, 9 p.m. ET, Rogers Place
- Saturday, December 16 at Calgary Flames, 10 p.m. ET, Scotiabank Saddledome

Crunch Downed By Comets, 3-1 **Syracuse Crunch**

SYRACUSE, N.Y. – The Syracuse Crunch were downed by the Utica Comets, 3-1, tonight at the Upstate Medical University Arena.

The loss snaps a five-game winning streak and moves the team to 13-6-0-2 on the season. The Crunch are 2-3-0-0 in the 14-game season series against the Comets.

Crunch goaltender *Hugo Alnefelt* turned aside 15-of-17 shots. Isaac Poulter earned the win stopping 28-of-29 shots between the pipes for the Comets. The Syracuse power play was held scoreless on three opportunities, while the penalty kill went a perfect 3-for-3.

Felix Robert opened scoring and ignited the Stanley Steamer Tired Teddy Toss 10 minutes into the game. He got the puck in the right circle, faked a shot and then beat Poulter with a wrister. Two minutes later, Utica tied it up when Filip Engaras scored on a shorthanded breakaway.

The Comets took over the lead at the 7:42 mark of the second period. Graeme Clarke made a move to get around a defender and fired in a shot from the right face off dot.

Xavier Parent added an empty-netter in the final minute to secure the Comets win.

Syracuse closes out the three-in-three weekend in Utica tomorrow.

Crunchables: The Syracuse Crunch collected 5,985 stuffed animals in the 13th Annual Stanley Steamer Tired Teddy Toss.