



**AMALIE Arena Media Clips
Monday, January 8, 2024**

1. Nikita Kucherov's 3 points not enough as Lightning upended by Bruins – Associated Press
2. The Backcheck: Lightning close out road trip with 7-3 loss to Bruins – Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)
3. Tampa Bay Lightning tripped up at the halfway mark on Saturday in Boston – Erik Erlendsson (Lightning Insider)

Nikita Kucherov's 3 points not enough as Lightning upended by Bruins

Associated Press

BOSTON — Trent Frederic scored two goals, David Pastrnak added his team-leading 24th and the Boston Bruins beat the Lightning 7-3 on Saturday night.

Charlie McAvoy, Morgan Geekie, Charlie Coyle and Jake DeBrusk also scored for Boston, which has won five of its last six games. Hampus Lindholm and Matt Poitras each had two assists, and Linus Ullmark made 23 saves.

The loss delayed Tampa Bay coach Jon Cooper's chance to become the 29th coach to reach 500 NHL wins for at least one game.

Brayden Point scored two goals and Nikita Kucherov had a goal and two assists for the Lightning, who have dropped four of six. Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 20 of the 26 shots he faced.

After the Bruins gave up Point's goal 21 seconds into the game, Frederic tied it with his power-play score at 4:42. The Bruins forward got a pass in the slot, quickly shifted from his backhand to forehand and shoveled it over Vasilevskiy's right pad.

"I think his confidence has increased his poise with the puck, and he's got tremendous hands," Bruins coach Jim Montgomery said of Frederic. "In practice he's scores more than anyone except for (Pastrnak)."

Seconds after Frederic's hard check sent Emil Lilleberg into the side boards and brought a loud roar from the TD Garden crowd, McAvoy's goal pushed Boston ahead 2-1 with 5:04 left in the first when his wrist from the right point deflected off Point's stick and sailed over Vasilevskiy.

Frederic added his second early into the second period, scoring off his own rebound when it caromed in off the back of Vasilevskiy's right pad to make it 3-1.

"A lot of that is confidence," Frederic said of his 12 goals this season. "I don't think it's something that I haven't had, it's just having that confidence to look up to have the puck on certain parts of your stick."

Tampa Bay sliced it to 3-2 on Kucherov's hustle goal before Pavel Zacha sent Pastrnak in on a semi-breakaway. The Bruins' star forward fired a wrist shot past Vasilevskiy's glove to restore the two-goal lead, then pumped his left fist as he was gliding on one knee celebrating along the boards.

Point's second cut the Lightning's deficit to one again late in the second when he scored off a cross-ice feed from Kucherov, but Geekie made it 5-3 at 1:35 of the third.

"Penalties hurt us early, took a little wind out of our sails and we kind of got ourselves back," Cooper said. "Weird game. A lot of weird pucks going in the net. ... The bottom line is a 4-3 game going into the third and they took advantage of their (four) shots."

DeBrusk's empty-net short-handed score sealed it with 3:26 to play, and Coyle scored his 14th just 40 seconds later.

Cooper was whistled for a misconduct when he was screaming at the referees after Frederic's second goal.

"Boston's a heck of a team, but for us, we felt that could have been a winnable game," Cooper said. "And we look up at the scoreboard and it's 7-3. A little bit of a head-shaker for me. But in the end, a good team found a way to win it and we couldn't come back."

Lightning forward Tanner Jeannot left the game at 12:08 of the second period after being hit from behind by Frederic. He did not return.

The Backcheck: Lightning close out road trip with 7-3 loss to Bruins

Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)

The Tampa Bay Lightning closed out their three-game road trip with a 7-3 loss to the Boston Bruins Saturday night at TD Garden. The Bolts finished the trip with a 1-2-0 record with the lone win coming Thursday night at Minnesota.

Tampa Bay had a near perfect start to the game when Brayden Point opened the scoring just 21 seconds into the contest with Nikita Kucherov picking up the assist.

Getting in on the forecheck immediately, Brandon Hagel helped force a turnover below the Bruins goal line before Kucherov found Point all alone in front, allowing his linemate to fire a shot past Linus Ullmark for his 18th goal of the season.

Boston was able to answer right back 4:21 later with Trent Frederic scoring a power-play goal right in front of the net to even the score at 1-1.

There was plenty of pace in a first period that saw Tampa Bay record 13 shots on goal, but they would go to the locker room in a 2-1 hole after a shot from the point from Charlie McAvoy snuck its way through traffic and was redirected on the way to the net before beating Andrei Vasilevskiy with 5:04 remaining in the period.

Not long after the middle frame began, the Bolts found themselves trailing 3-1 when Frederic scored his second goal, throwing a puck towards the goal that went off a skate in front and snuck into the back of the net just 1:49 into the second.

But the Lightning kept fighting and made it a one-goal game when their MVP of the season scored his 28th of the year with 12:07 remaining in the period.

Following a battle along the boards inside the Boston zone, the puck made its way toward the net before Kucherov lifted the stick of Brandon Carlo to steal the puck and fire a shot past Ullmark to make it 3-2.

Unfortunately for Tampa Bay, the Bruins weren't done fighting either as David Pastrnak gave Boston an immediate answer and restored the two-goal lead just 30 seconds after the Kucherov goal.

Through the adversity of the game, Kucherov continued to dazzle with some incredible plays, none greater than his assist on Point's second goal of the night that got the Bolts back within one.

Taking a pass from Hagel as they crossed into the offensive zone, Kucherov made a beautiful move through his legs to get around Hampus Lindholm and put a backhand pass right on the tape of Point, who made no mistake and fired home his 19th goal of the year to make it 4-3 with 4:07 left in the second period.

Entering the third period trailing by one, Tampa Bay surrendered another goal early when Morgan Geekie scored his eighth of the season just 1:35 into the third to make it 5-3. The Bolts still had plenty of time left in the game, but failed to score another goal with Jake DeBrusk adding an empty-net goal before Charlie Coyle scored on a breakaway to wrap up the 7-3 loss for the Lightning.

The Bolts fell to 19-17-5 on the year with a road record of 8-12-2. The team will return home for a critical, four-game homestand against Los Angeles, New Jersey, Anaheim and Minnesota.

Bolts by the Numbers

- Brayden Point scored his team-leading fourth game-opening goal of the season and added a second goal near the end of the second period.
- Point has scored a goal within the first 60 seconds of a game four times in his career, tied with John Tucker for the second-most in Lightning franchise history. Only Vincent Lecavalier and Steven Stamkos (5 each) have more.
- Nikita Kucherov scored a goal and added two assists for his ninth three-point game of the season, tied with Jack Hughes and David Pastrnak for the most in the NHL.
- Kucherov is back on top of the NHL leaderboard for scoring with 67 points on the season (28-39—67).
- Kucherov recorded his 492nd career assist and passed Vincent Lecavalier to take sole possession of the fourth-most assists in Lightning franchise history.

Bolts Quotes

- Jon Cooper: “The penalties hurt us early, kind of took a little wind out of our sails. We got ourselves back. I don’t know, it was a weird game. A lot of weird pucks going into the net. That second one goes off Pointer’s stick. You saw some of these goals. I thought we only gave up three shots in the third. One is an empty-net breakaway. One is a snapped-stick breakaway. The bottom line is it was a 4-3 game going into the third and they found a way to take advantage of their three shots and we couldn’t do the same.”
- Brandon Hagel: “We tried to come back and we just kept giving up goals. We’ve got to be able to respond a little bit better than that and carry the momentum over instead of making mistakes and making it harder on us.”
- Calvin de Haan: “It seems like the chances they got, they just went in the net. At the end of the day, sometimes they do, sometimes they don’t. We can’t blame our goalie on those. It’s a team effort out there. There will be some video and some stuff we can build on.”

Krenner’s Three Stars

1. Trent Frederic
2. Nikita Kucherov
3. David Pastrnak

Lightning Look Ahead

- Tuesday, January 9 vs. Los Angeles Kings, 7 p.m. ET, AMALIE Arena
- Thursday, January 11 vs. New Jersey Devils, 7 p.m. ET, AMALIE Arena
- Saturday, January 13 vs. Anaheim Ducks, 7 p.m. ET, AMALIE Arena

Tampa Bay Lightning tripped up at the halfway mark on Saturday in Boston **Erik Erlendsson (Lightning Insider)**

BOSTON – Up. Down. Down. Down. Up. Up. Down. Down.

The Tampa Bay Lightning hit the midway point of the season on Saturday, and that opening graph above sums up how the first half of the schedule went. Tampa Bay has not won more than three consecutive games at any point this season. The longest losing streak has been four games.

Up. Down. Down. Down. Up. Up. Down. Down.

That's how the 41 games to date have been. About the only thing consistent about the Lightning's season has been their inconsistencies. And though Saturday's 7-3 loss to the Bruins wasn't rock bottom – that happened here – it definitely ended the first half of the season on a low note.

THE FIRST HALF

Tampa Bay ends the first half of its schedule with a record of 19-17-5 and 43 points. They have the ninth most points in the Eastern Conference, currently outside the playoff picture. By points percentage, the Lightning are 12th in the East.

As far as trying to make the playoffs, it's that points percentage that is the more meaningful line to look at. That's because the Lightning have played more games than every other team in the East outside of Columbus. With every other team in the conference holding games in hand, Tampa Bay will sit idly by at points in the second half of the season as teams could potentially race by them as they sit in pit row.

Tampa Bay is on pace to finish the season with 86 points. Last season Florida, which was 18-19-4 through 41 games last season, earned the second wild card spot with 92 points, which marks the lowest total to clinch a playoff spot in the East since the league moved to the two-division alignment in 2013-14.

Right now the second wild card spot is on pace to finish with 95 points. At that pace, the Lightning need at least 52 points out of the final 41 games to reach 95 points, which equates to winning 26 of the final 41.

That's the predicament the Lightning find themselves in at the midway point as they look to string together a winning streak or an extended points streak to get on that pace.

A look at some of the first-half numbers.

3.49 – Average goals allowed per game, 27th overall.

55 – Number of third period goals allowed, third most in the league

98 – Number of 5-on-5 goals allowed by the Lightning, third most in the league

3.24 – Goals scored per game, 14th in the league

11 – Comeback wins, tied for fifth most in the league

67 – Points in 40 games for Nikita Kucherov, two more than Nathan MacKinnon

135 – Points Kucherov is on pace to finish with

NIKITA KUCHEROV

Looking to close out a three-game road trip on a high note, the Lightning jumped out of the gate quick. On the opening shift of the game, Victor Hedman dumped a puck in the Boston zone. As the puck came around to the near boards, Brandon Hagel checked Brandon Carlo to disrupt the puck. Kucherov picked it up behind the net and fed Brayden Point along in front.

The goal came 21 seconds into the game to give Tampa Bay the lead.

Kucherov then scored his 28th goal of the season in the second period to cut Tampa Bay's deficit to 3-2. Then, the wizard went to work late in the period to again cut the Lightning's deficit to a goal. As Hagel sped up the left wing boards and cut to the middle to find Kucherov at the top of the zone. Kucherov then pulled the puck through his legs and race around Hampus Lindholm.

But that wasn't the final act. As Kucherov cut to the middle, he spotted Point across the ice trailing the play and delivered a pin-point backhand pass.

"He's the best player in the league and hopefully one day I'll get some credit for that," Hagel said.

Kucherov collected his ninth three-point game of the season, one more than the number of games he's failed to register a point this season. He also registered his 491st and 492nd career assists to leapfrog franchise icon Vinny Lecavalier (491) for fourth place on the club's all-time list.

WHAT'S UP WITH THE GOALTENDING

Andrei Vasilevskiy is one of the best goaltenders in the game. He has a Vezina Trophy and a Conn Smythe award to his name.

But he's coming off a season that was well below his standards. After the season he admitted to that he just wasn't himself during the season. Then came training camp, when working out in the gym led to a back injury that required surgery in September that kept him out all of training camp and the first six weeks of the season.

In his 18 starts since returning, he's had glimpses of his old self. But mostly, he's been like the team – inconsistent.

His numbers are pedestrian, at best, with a 9-9 record, .895 save percentage and 3.01 goals against average. Those are not the numbers of a goaltender at the top of his game.

It's not all his fault, the defensive system has flaws and the high quality chances the Lightning give up can be downright alarming. But, he's not blameless.

There were many eyes on Vasilevskiy to see how he would perform after undergoing the surgery. His timing is still not there on a consistent basis. At times he appears to be too low in his crouch, which opens space upstairs.

On Saturday, he was the unfortunate recipient of a couple of bad bounces. The first came on Boston's second goal, a shot from Charlie McAvoy that hit the shaft of Point's stick and changed direction. On the third Bruins' goal, a shot attempt by Matt Grzelcyk was blocked by Darren Raddysh as he put his stick on the ice. Trent Frederic picked up the puck and tried to center a pass that hit the skate of Calvin de Haan right back to Frederic, who then banked the puck off the pad of Vasilevskiy.

But Vasilevskiy couldn't come up with a big save when the Lightning, which is usually a trademark of his game. David Pastrnak converted a breakaway chance, lifting a puck over Vasilevskiy's glove as soon as he dropped to the butterfly. This goal came 30 seconds after Kucherov cut it to 3-2.

In the opening 95 seconds of the third, after Tampa Bay had two good looks in the offensive zone, Vasilevskiy got beat on a shot he shouldn't get beat on as Morgan Geekie had an open look from inside the right circle and put a shot to the far post.

His angle was off, the sign of a goaltender who is off his game. Even Charlie Coyle converted a breakaway by waiting for Vasilevskiy to drop before flipping a puck over the goaltender's glove.

As much as the Lightning have to work on, Vasilevskiy does, as well.

MORE NHL DEBUTS

Tampa Bay made a swap of defensemen before the game, sending down Sean Day and Declan Carlile to Syracuse – Carlile made his NHL debut on Thursday in Minnesota – calling up Jack Thompson and Emil Lilleberg.

Both Thompson and Lilleberg were in the lineup against the Bruins to make their NHL debut, the third and fourth players this season to make their NHL debuts, joining forward Mitchell Chaffee who made his debut in Vancouver last month.

Tampa Bay dressed seven defensemen and 11 forwards in the game.

So it makes sense that the two had nearly identical ice time, even though Thompson is a righty and Lilleberg a lefty.

Thompson, a third round pick in 2020, logged 11:39 of ice time with one shot on goal and two hits. The 21-year-old showed his strengths with his first-pass out of the zone, ability to carry the puck through traffic and his offensive instincts.

Lilleberg, originally a fourth-round pick of Arizona in 2021, is a big, physical presence. He logged 11:48 of ice time with one hit, one blocked shot and finished a minus-2.

While it remains to be seen how the defensive corps is going to look when Tampa Bay returns home to face Los Angeles on Tuesday as they await the return of Erik Cernak, but both Thompson and Lilleberg at least put their name in the conversation.

"I thought they were both solid," de Haan said. "I've been there a long time ago and it's a nerve-racking experience, obviously, but it's something you work towards your whole life. I think they handled themselves well, and I thought they played pretty good, both of them. They should have a bright future ahead of them."

Putting a pair of rookie defensemen in the lineup on the road against a top team can be a recipe for disaster. The loss had nothing to do with either Thompson or Lilleberg.

"They were great," head coach Jon Cooper said. "For young kids playing their first NHL game, you want to make sure that they're confident in the game and they were, they made confident plays. Good for them, because those are kids that eventually you want to see in our lineup on a regular basis and they've got to get their feet wet at some point."

NOTES

Tampa Bay scratched RW Alex Barre-Boulet, LW Austin Watson and D Erik Cernak. ... C Brayden Point scored a goal within the opening minute of a game for the fourth time in his career, tied with John Tucker for the second most in Lightning history. Vincent Lecavalier and Steven Stamkos (both w/ 5) share the most for the franchise. ... Tampa Bay has lost four consecutive games in Boston. ... The Lightning fell to 11-38-10 all-time in Boston. ... Tampa Bay's 12 regulation road losses are third most in the league. ... Only Chicago has allowed more goals on the road this season than Tampa Bay's 88

MY THREE STARS

1. Bruins RW David Pastrnak – Goal, assist, plus-1, seven shot attempts
2. Lightning RW Nikita Kucherov – Goal, two assists, 11 shot attempts
3. Bruins D Charlie McAvoy – Goal, plus-4, four hits, four blocked shots