



**AMALIE Arena Media Clips
Saturday, December 30, 2023**

1. Will Lightning defenseman Mikhail Sergachev return this weekend? – Kristie Ackert (Tampa Bay Times)
2. Which Lightning milestone is next for Steven Stamkos? – Kristie Ackert (Tampa Bay Times)
3. Nuts & Bolts: Weekend back-to-back opens against the Rangers – Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)

Will Lightning defenseman Mikhail Sergachev return this weekend? Kristie Ackert (Tampa Bay Times)

TAMPA — The Lightning are hopeful that Mikhail Sergachev will return this weekend, they just aren't confident he will be available for both of the back-to-back games at Amalie Arena.

The defenseman was on the ice Thursday for practice, but Jon Cooper admitted Sergachev's lower-body injury is taking longer to heal.

"Hopefully one of the two (games)," the Lightning coach said of Sergachev's return. "I doubt both. Because it's a tough injury for him. So it takes a little time to heal, especially the stress with skating, so he's getting close, but I can't sit here and say for sure if he'll be in the lineup against the Rangers (on Saturday night)." The Lightning host Montreal on New Year's Eve.

Sergachev took a puck off the back of his left foot on Dec. 19. He missed the next three games, and Cooper said the defense corps has had to compensate.

"Sergy, he's a big part of our D-corps. And he's a big strong man back there that can defend," Cooper explained. "I think part of what we have to do when some of our top guys are out is simplify the game. Our D has done just that and (Haydn) Fleury has stepped in and just made all the simple plays you have to make and hasn't tried to be Sergachev ... and it's really worked out for us. So that's a big part of our game is just being able to defend, defend and get pucks out and Fleury has done that."

Goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy was not on the ice Thursday but Cooper said that it was a rest day. He expects Vasilevskiy to start one of the games this weekend. Tampa Bay will use backup Jonas Johansson on one of the days to help keep Vasilevskiy, who had back surgery before the season, healthy.

"We'll split them up," Cooper said, "but we just don't know which guy will have which one yet."

Which Lightning milestone is next for Steven Stamkos?

Kristie Ackert (Tampa Bay Times)

TAMPA — It was an unusual start. After a much-anticipated arrival as the first overall pick in the NHL draft and even an ad campaign designed to link Steven Stamkos with the rise of the Lightning franchise (Seen Stamkos?), he played his first NHL game as far away from Tampa — and the people who would watch him the next 15 years — as possible at that time.

“It was in Prague. I had nobody there. My parents and friends, their flights got canceled,” Stamkos said this week with a smile. “It was different because I don’t think any kid grows up dreaming their first NHL game will be in Prague. I played a few minutes and we lost, but it was a start.”

That 2-1 loss to the Rangers in October 2008 was the beginning of something very special. It was the start of the Lightning building the franchise into a perennial contender and the very start of Stamkos’ record-setting career.

Fast forward to this weekend, when Stamkos will mark yet another milestone. Last year he tallied his 1,000th point and 500th goal, and became Tampa Bay’s all-time leading scorer. Saturday night, ironically when the Lightning host the Rangers, Stamkos is expected to tie Vinny Lecavalier for the most career games played in Lightning history.

With Tampa Bay hosting the Canadiens the next night, he is expected to become the all-time leader with 1,038 games played in a Bolts uniform.

“I think it’s just kind of surreal in that moment that you’ve been with one organization to hit all those milestones. I think that’s what kind of hits home for me,” Stamkos said. “And for sure, you think about all the teammates that you’ve played with in the past ... the little impact or a big impact they had and you think of them and you’re thankful for that.

“But I think the thing I’m most proud of when you hit those types of milestones is that I was able to kind of see it through,” Stamkos continued. “I saw things through with just this organization, and obviously it was a little tougher at the beginning, but we’ve had some amazing memories the past couple years and I think those are the things that really stick with you.”

The 33-year-old has twice won the Maurice “Rocket,” Richard Trophy as the NHL’s scorer: in 2010 when he scored 51 goals and in 2012 when he scored 60. He has scored 40 or more goals in six of his seasons and is a seven-time All-Star.

Perhaps most importantly for Stamkos, he inherited the captain’s “C” from friend and mentor Marty St. Louis, and he is a two-time Stanley Cup champion.

“He’s been an exemplary figurehead of this organization for a decade, both on and off the ice,” Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. “And we’ve just watched him grow from a young kid to a man and to a father and to Stanley Cup champion. It’s kind of cool, to have been a part of that ride with him.

“He’s got a long way to go, but years from now, when it’s all said and done, he’s going to be one of — if not the greatest Bolt — there’s ever been.”

Sitting in his stall after practice this week, Stamkos laughed when he thought back to that 18-year-old kid making his NHL debut in Prague. In a business where not many players stay in one spot for 16 seasons, Stamkos said this ride has been beyond his wildest dreams.

“You don’t know what to expect. You’re just a kid at 18, living your dream for the first time and you have no clue what’s in store,” he said. “To be sitting where I am today, with a wife and two kids and two Stanley Cups, and four Stanley Cup (finals) appearances, with the individual milestones ... it’s beyond what I dreamed up as a kid.”

Injury update

Defenseman Mikhail Sergachev skated through about half of practice Friday but is not expected to play Saturday night. Sergachev has already missed three games with a lower-body injury. He took a puck to the back of his left foot in the Lightning’s win over the Blues on Dec. 19.

Nuts & Bolts: Weekend back-to-back opens against the Rangers **Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)**

Everything you need to know ahead of Tampa Bay's matchup against the New York Rangers on Saturday.

When: Saturday, December 30 - 7 p.m. ET

Where: AMALIE Arena - Tampa, FL

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

Nick Paul - Brayden Point - Nikita Kucherov

Brandon Hagel - Anthony Cirelli - Steven Stamkos

Tanner Jeannot - Luke Glendening - Mikey Eyssimont

Austin Watson - Tyler Motte - Conor Sheary

Defensemen

Victor Hedman - Nick Perbix

Haydn Fleury - Erik Cernak

Calvin de Haan - Darren Raddysh

Goaltenders

Andrei Vasilevskiy

Jonas Johansson

Saturday's Matchup

The Lightning and Rangers are playing the first of three matchups this season and the first of two meetings at AMALIE Arena... Tampa Bay posted a 1-2-0 record vs. NYR last season, winning one game at home and dropping both contests on the road... Nikita Kucherov (0-3—3) led the Bolts in points and assists vs. NYR last season...Kucherov is riding a three-game point streak vs. NYR (0-3—3) and has found the scoresheet in eight of the last nine meetings (2-11—13)...Steven Stamkos has recorded 14 points over his last 11 contests vs. NYR (7-7—14) and has nine points over the last five meetings at AMALIE Arena (5-4—9)...Brayden Point has found the scoresheet in 11 of his last 14 games vs. NYR (6-8—14) with points in each of the last five meetings at AMALIE Arena (2-4—6)...Victor Hedman has recorded 13 points over his last 12 contests vs. NYR (1-12—13) and has found the scoresheet in four of the last five meetings at AMALIE Arena (0-7—7)...In six career home starts vs. NYR, Andrei Vasilevskiy is 3-1-2 with a .938 save percentage and 1.96 goals against average...The Bolts are 5-2-3 in their last 10 home games vs. NYR and 4-5-1 in the last 10 meetings overall...The Lightning are 50-47-7 with five ties all-time vs. NYR, including a home record of 26-19-5 with three ties...Martin St. Louis (20-26—46) holds the Tampa Bay franchise records for career goals, assists and points vs. NYR.

Injuries

Mikhail Sergachev - Lower-body - Day-to-day

The Road Ahead

Sunday, December 31 vs. Montreal Canadiens

Tuesday, January 2 at Winnipeg Jets

Thursday, January 4 at Minnesota Wild