



AMALIE Arena Media Clips
Thursday, November 2, 2023

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Lightning hit the road hoping for better results than the last trip **Eduardo Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

TAMPA — The Lightning are certainly a better team than they were two weeks ago after returning from their forgettable first road trip of the season.

A team with many new players and a new defensive structure have had more time to jell. And a five-game homestand in which the Lightning earned eight of a possible 10 points gave this group confidence.

But that won't necessarily carry over to the road, where the Lightning went 0-2-1 from Oct. 14-17 and struggled last season. The Lightning open a four-game road trip Thursday in Columbus before games at three division teams: Ottawa, Toronto and Montreal.

"We go on a road trip early in the year still trying to find ourselves, had some injury issues," coach Jon Cooper said. "But I can pick (through) every game; it was the 10% of the game we didn't play the way we should have and it cost us. There are times you can get away with that. Usually when you're on the road, you can't."

The Lightning allowed 11 goals in regulation losses at Detroit and Ottawa before a 3-2 overtime loss in Buffalo that began to turn things around. Tampa Bay allowed no more than three regulation goals in any of its past five home games, and posted back-to-back shutout wins over Carolina and San Jose.

That improvement is a result of the Lightning getting more comfortable with their new defensive structure, which centers on protecting the middle of the ice, especially in front of their own net, and directing shots to the perimeter as they collect more game experience together.

"I think it's hard to simulate in practice the in-game reads that you have to (make)," said forward Conor Sheary, one of the team's offseason additions. "They changed it and for me, it's a completely new system, but everyone's kind of trying to learn it at the same time. ... And I think with more games and however many games we've played, I think we've been better at it."

The Lightning should get forward Tyler Motte back on this trip. In his third practice back from an opening night right hand injury, Motte shed the red no-contact jersey and became a full participant Wednesday at Amalie Arena before the team flew to Columbus. He could return as soon as Saturday in Ottawa.

Creating space for Motte's return makes a difficult roster decision for the Lightning.

Rookie forward Waltteri Merela is the only waiver-exempt player on the roster, but he's clearly held his own at the NHL level and hasn't done anything to show he deserves a demotion to the AHL. Forward Alex Barre-Boulet, who was recalled to fill Motte's roster spot, is flourishing on the top scoring line and with the second power-play unit, having scored three goals in his last four games. The Lightning's 13th forward, Austin Watson, carries value as a heavy fourth-liner and enforcer.

If the Lightning determine that carrying eight defensemen is a luxury, right-shot defenseman Zach Bogosian could be optioned to Syracuse without having to clear waivers under a rule that says a player who has previously cleared waivers can be sent down again unless he's played 10 games or been on the NHL roster for 30 days. Bogosian has played in just two games since returning to the team Oct. 11.

“It will be a good one (to have),” Cooper said of the looming decision. “We don’t want to lose anybody, but you want to be able to put your best foot forward and so naturally, there’ll be some decisions to be made but we don’t have to make them right this second and usually that stuff plays itself out.”

Tampa Bay Lightning have an Alex Barre-Boulet problem **Erik Erlendsson (Lightning Insider)**

TAMPA – The Tampa Bay Lightning open the second month of the NHL season embarking on a four-game road trip that starts on Thursday in Columbus.

As they start off November, however, the Lightning have a problem. An Alex Barre-Boulet problem.

But the problem Barre-Boulet has created for Tampa Bay is not what one might think. Instead, it's the type of problem that coaches and management would much rather deal with than the alternative.

For the past handful of years, the team has been waiting for Barre-Boulet to seize an opportunity at the NHL level. Now, he might finally be fulfilling some of those expectations, but it does create a problem.

The story of Barre-Boulet has typically been one filled with expectations, labeled as the next Marty St. Louis or Tyler Johnson or Yanni Gourde, the undrafted and undersized forward the Lightning have made a habit of bringing into the organization and developing into NHL regulars. The Lightning kept waiting for Barre-Boulet to turn his prolific offensive game at the minor league level into NHL production.

Given another lease on his NHL career this season, he might finally be on the right path as he's found a spot alongside Brayden Point and Nikita Kucherov on the top line..

"He's playing with some pretty darn good players and he has a skill set to do that," Lightning head coach Jon Cooper said. "The issue with him is, can keep up and can he win those puck battles. He's doing that and now he's starting to get rewarded with some points. And I think BB is now getting more comfortable in the NHL, I think which helps."

Barre-Boulet enters Thursday's game at Columbus with points in four consecutive games and three goals in seven games. The three goals already match his career high and the five points is one shy of tying his career best.

But Barre-Boulet is not trying to let his game – or his mind – get too far ahead of itself, despite the quick start to his season.

"My memory right now is just day-to-day," Barre-Boulet said. "Whatever happens is going happen, so just play your best, do your plays and whatever happens going to happen. I'm just trying not to think too much ahead of time. I just go day-by-day and whatever happens, happens. But obviously I'm going to work as hard as I can to stay here."

Barre-Boulet knows all too well about not thinking too far ahead because he's been here too many times already.

Tampa Bay has been waiting and waiting and waiting for Barre-Boulet to come to this point. But for the last few seasons Barre-Boulet has spent as much time on the waiver wire as he as a regular in a Lightning uniform. Each of the past three seasons, Barre-Boulet (a three-time, 20-goal scorer at the AHL level who had a career high 84 points last season) has been among the final cuts at the end of training camp, which meant nervous hours awaiting the results of the waiver process.

Two years ago, Barre-Boulet was in a three-man competition along with Taylor Raddysh and Boris Katchouk competing for two roster spots. Barre-Boulet was the odd-man out at the end of camp, was

placed on waivers by Tampa Bay and quickly claimed by the expansion Seattle Kraken. After two games with Seattle, he was put back on waivers and claimed by the Lightning and appeared in a total of 14 games with Tampa Bay.

Training camp last season, Barre-Boulet was again among the final cuts as Cole Koepke and Gabriel Fortier earned the roster spots. Despite a MVP-caliber season with the Crunch, Barre-Boulet saw one game up with Tampa Bay last season.

Then this season, a familiar pattern emerged as despite a strong preseason, Barre-Boulet was again one of the last-men out for the start of the season when he was placed on waivers again and cleared.

“It sucked, I’m not going to lie, it wasn’t fun,” Barre-Boulet said. “I was a bit down on myself for like a day but then went home and waited for things to happen.”

What happened was an injury on opening night to Tyler Motte that would keep him out for the first month of the season opened a roster spot. So Barre-Boulet was brought back to the team. Since being inserted into the lineup on October 15, Barre-Boulet has the fifth-best expected goals rate on the team while on the ice. Certainly there is a boost there playing with Point and Kucherov, who are second and third on the team. But individually, he also has the fifth best expected goals rate and his nine individual high-danger chances are tied for second since he was put in the lineup. All numbers are at 5-on-5 strength.

“I think he’s an extremely smart player, and he’s skilled,” Point said. “He does see the ice very, very well. I think his confidence is growing and he’s feeling more comfortable that he can make plays at this level.”

Now it’s about maintaining perspective and keeping an even keel. As Barre-Boulet knows all too well, tomorrow is not promised to anyone at this level and things can change overnight, even while confidence might be riding high.

“I don’t want it to be too high and I don’t want it to be too low,” Barre-Boulet said. “If I have a good game, I leave that at the door when I leave the rink. But if I have a bad game, I try to do the same.”

That is not the problem with Barre-Boulet.

What the problem is surrounds the pending return of Motte. who practiced with the team on Wednesday and is cleared for contact. Cooper said Motte will return at some point on this road trip.

Here’s the problem – in order for Tampa Bay to activate Motte off injured reserve, a roster move is required as the Lightning are carrying the maximum of 23 plays on the roster. The only player waiver exempt is rookie Waltteri Merela, who has appeared in all nine games on the season.

The other part of that to consider is that Zach Bogosian and Barre-Boulet already cleared waivers last month. The waiver rule stipulates that a player that passes through waivers has 30 days or 10 games before they must clear waivers again. Bogosian cleared waivers on October 9 and Barre-Boulet on October 11, which means both can still be reassigned without the waiver process.

Tampa Bay could also look at the trade route to open up a spot, and to be fair, Barre-Boulet’s stock may never be higher. The Lightning also have Austin Watson, signed at the start of the season, who has appeared in only one game to date.

Trying to figure out who stays based on a high quality of play is a better situation than the opposite for coaches.

“It’s a good (decision to have to make),” Cooper said. “Not in the sense that we want to lose anybody but you want to be able to put your best foot forward. So naturally there will be some decisions to be made. But we don’t have to make them right this second and usually that stuff plays itself out.”

Nuts & Bolts: Roadtrip opens with a Blue Jackets matchup **Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)**

Everything you need to know ahead of Tampa Bay's matchup against the Columbus Blue Jackets on Thursday.

When: Thursday, November 2 - 7 p.m. ET

Where: Nationwide Arena - Columbus, OH

TV coverage: Bally Sports (check local listings)

Radio coverage: [102.5 MHz-FM](#), [Lightning Radio 24/7](#)

Where to stream it: [BallySports.com](#)

Projected Lineup (subject to change)

Forwards

Alex Barre-Boulet - Braydent Point - Nikita Kucherov

Steven Stamkos - Nick Paul - Conor Sheary

Tanner Jeannot - Anthony Cirelli - Brandon Hagel

Mikey Eyssimont - Luke Glendening - Waltteri Merela

Defensemen

Victor Hedman - Erik Cernak

Mikhail Sergachev - Nick Perbix

Calvin de Haan - Darren Raddysh

Goaltenders

Jonas Johansson

Matt Tomkins

Thursday's Matchup

The Lightning and Blue Jackets are playing the first of three matchups this season and the first of two meetings at Nationwide Arena...The Bolts posted a 3-0-0 record vs. CBJ last season, winning the three contests by a combined score of 15-6...Nikita Kucherov (2-5—7) led Tampa Bay in points vs. CBJ last season and was tied for the team lead in both goals and assists...Kucherov has posted a multi-point effort and scored a goal in nine of his last 11 contests vs. CBJ (12-15—27)...Kucherov has found the scoresheet in 11 of his last 12 games vs. CBJ (12- 16—28)...Kucherov has points in five of his last six contests at CBJ (6-5—11) with goals in four of those six games... Steven Stamkos has pointed in six of his last seven contests vs. CBJ (5-7—12) and is riding a four-game point streak at CBJ (3-3—6)...Stamkos has found the scoresheet in 11 of his 15 career games at CBJ (8-9—17)...Victor Hedman has picked up points in seven straight contests vs. CBJ (1-10—11) with at least one assist in each of those seven games...Hedman has points in 15 of his last 20 games vs. CBJ (3-19—22) and eight of his last 10 at CBJ (1-10—11)...Brayden Point has scored a goal in two consecutive contests vs. CBJ (2-0—2) and has eight points over his last seven games vs. CBJ (3-5—8)...Point has collected 12 points over his last 10 games at CBJ (4-8—12)... Brandon Hagel has recorded four points over his last two contests vs. CBJ (2-2—4)...Tanner Jeannot has found the scoresheet in four of his last five games vs. CBJ (2-3—5)...The Lightning have scored three or more goals in eight of their last 10 contests vs. CBJ (total: 43 goals)...The Bolts are 7-3-0 in their last 10 games at CBJ and 8-2-0 in the last 10 meetings overall...Tampa Bay is 31-14-0 with one tie all-time vs. CBJ, including a road record

of 13-9-0 with one tie...Kucherov (13-22—35) holds the Lightning franchise record for career points vs. CBJ, while Stamkos (15- 18—33) leads the way in goals.

Injuries

Tyler Motte - Upper-body, Day-to-Day

Andrei Vasilevskiy - Back, out

Tampa Bay Sports Item of the Game

Tommy Launch

The Tampa Bay Lightning by Tommy Hilfiger collab is hitting stores now. Available in store at Amalie Arena and online at TampaBaySports.com, while supplies last.

The Road Ahead

Saturday, November 4 at Ottawa Senators

Monday, November 6 at Toronto Maple Leafs

Tuesday, November 7 at Montreal Canadiens