



**AMALIE Arena Media Clips  
Monday, December 4, 2023**

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## **Lightning get back to work after ugly loss in Dallas** **Eduardo Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

TAMPA — Sunday had been a scheduled off day for the Lightning. They were returning from the road, and later this week, they're going back out for one of their longest trips of the season, a five-game, 10-day trek that takes them through Western Canada.

But following the Lightning's lopsided 8-1 loss to the Stars in Dallas, they were back on the ice at Amalie Arena trying to right a ship that could sink quickly.

Lightning captain Steven Stamkos said Saturday's outcome didn't play a factor in the team practicing Sunday.

"Our schedule has been so terrible that we haven't had any time to practice," he said. "I just think we needed to get on the ice and work on some things. Look at the schedule. It's either (Sunday) or Tuesday, and we're going on a huge trip, so it was nice to just get out and work on some things."

The Lightning go into Monday's home rematch against the Stars having lost a season-high four straight games. Just nine days ago, they rallied from an early one-goal deficit to score eight goals on 13 shots in an 8-2 road rout of Carolina. Since then, they've scored just five goals on 144 shots.

With 25 points, the Lightning (10-10-5) are two points out of the Eastern Conference's eighth and final playoff spot, but since they've played more games than most of their opposition, their .500 points percentage actually rank 12th out of the conference's 16 teams.

"It's not going our way right now, that's for sure," Stamkos said. "And there's that snowball effect sometimes, but that's where you have to be a professional and find a way to get through it."

In Dallas, the Lightning fell behind 61 seconds into the game and were down 3-0 at the 7:39 mark in the first. Coach Jon Cooper kept goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy, who was playing his fourth game since returning from back surgery, in because he wanted to stay in. Vasilevskiy allowed three more goals in the second before being pulled for backup Jonas Johansson.

"We have a goalie who (Saturday) night was put in a tough situation and he didn't want to come out of the game," Cooper said. "You can't expect anybody to take 207 days off and then come in and it's going to be all-world. We as a team have got to be better in front of him. But the fact that he wants to play and he wants to be the guy to help pull us out of this, is that enough? That's all I need."

The Lightning were haunted last week by bad turnovers that ended up in the back of their net. That prevented them from holding leads and made early deficits snowball.

"The shots, the scoring chances (against Dallas), it wasn't like they dominated us," Stamkos said. "We had a glimpse of that against Carolina, where we are on the other side of that, and that's just sports. That's the way it goes. But when it goes like that after some games where we thought we played well and didn't get any points, that can lead to some frustration and we just can't let that happen."

In Sunday's practice, the Lightning seemed to get back to basics, concentrating on making better decisions. One drill involved flipping the puck in deep and creating offense by rimming the puck around in their own zone.

"Sometimes a D is pinching and if you make the play, it's a 2-on-1 and those opportunities that we obviously want to take advantage of," Lightning center Nick Paul said. "Just reading those, it's, 'OK,

what are the odds of this happening?' If it's 40/60, then the puck's going in. But if it's 60/40 and there's a chance for us to get a Grade-A chance out of it, those are the decisions, but things happen (quickly).

"It's hard to get those when you're not practicing. You don't see those reps as much. It might happen once in the game, and you've got to make that right call. The practice is nice. Get some touches, get some feel, work on the rim a little bit."

## **December is a crucial month to separate from the pack for Lightning** **Eduardo Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

TAMPA — December has typically been moving time for the Lightning, a part of the calendar when they start solidifying their playoff positioning.

They really need that kind of momentum swing this season.

November was not kind. Even though Nikita Kucherov led the league in scoring with 28 points and Brayden Point was sixth with 20, the Lightning were 6-7-2 in a month that included two three-game losing streaks.

The November frustration peaked Thursday night against Pittsburgh, when the Lightning blew a two-goal lead after a pair of offensive-zone turnovers by Kucherov turned into breakaways the other way and ended up in the back of the net in a 4-2 loss.

And their December slate didn't start in a promising way. The Lightning lost to the Stars 8-1 on Saturday afternoon in Dallas. At 10-10-5 and with 25 points, they lost their hold on the final playoff position in the Eastern Conference.

Improved game, but no points to show

The case can be made that the Lightning have made tremendous strides since the beginning of the season. Twelve of the 23 players on the opening night roster weren't on the team when last season opened. They struggled early on to grasp a new defensive system, and they were without star goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy (back surgery) for the first two months.

"I think we've come a long way since the beginning of the season, but just not getting the results and the mistakes end up in our own net," defenseman Victor Hedman said. "We've just got to improve on that and keep playing the way we are in most areas of the game."

Gradually, the Lightning have grown more comfortable protecting their own end, though there still are some defensive lapses that leave soft areas uncovered. But their stars started carrying the offensive load. And recently, they've mostly carried the play throughout the game with puck possession and offensive zone time, but have been hurt by their own miscues. In many of those situations, the Lightning have tried to get too cute with the puck rather than play a simpler game of getting the puck deep and establishing zone time.

"You don't want to be gripping your stick all night and be afraid to make a play," captain Steven Stamkos said. "We're not pinning it on anybody. It's a collective thing here. We've all done it. We've all gotten away with it at times, but that's the thing that keeps coming up over and over again is when we're playing well and we're losing. It's just little lapses in the game and that's a tough pill to swallow."

Decembers mean defense

The past two seasons, the Lightning showed their strengths when the calendar flipped to December, and that's when good teams begin to hit their stride because they have worked out their early-season bugs.

Last season, the Lightning were 13-8-1 entering December, their 27 points good for the third playoff position in the Atlantic. They went 10-3-0 in December, solidifying their spot and keeping pace with the two division rivals — Boston and Toronto — ahead of them. More importantly they opened the gap between themselves and the fourth-place team in the division from two points to eight.

The key? They shored up their defense. In their first 22 games last season, the Lightning allowed 3.18 goals a game, and in December they improved to 2.4 per game.

Two seasons ago, the Lightning also entered December in third place in the division with a 12-5-4 record (28 points), then rolled to a 9-2-1 mark that put them in first place in the Atlantic on New Year's Day, three points up on second-place Florida.

The Lightning won nine of their first 10 games that month, and defense again carried the way, as they allowed two or fewer goals in six of the first eight games.

Tougher task to gain distance

As was expected going into the season, the conference — as well as the division — is more competitive. After Saturday, three teams — including the Lightning — were within six points of Detroit's third-place spot in the Atlantic.

The good thing for the Lightning is they have improved their all-around game and Vasilevskiy is back. If they can stop hurting themselves, they could make another strong December run.

"We said it a few times this year already where we've had repetitive meetings about those plays that end up in the back of (our) net," Stamkos said. "The guy makes a good play, you tip your cap and you line up at center. When we're the ones making the mistakes throughout the year — all of us, myself included — they're ending up in the back of our net. And that's killing us in games where for the most part we played well, and then we have nothing to show for it.

"So it's a collective effort. It's not one guy, it's all of us. We just have to simplify sometimes."

## **Nuts & Bolts: A rematch vs. the Stars** **Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)**

Everything you need to know ahead of Tampa Bay's matchup against the Dallas Stars on Monday.

**When:** Monday, December 4 - 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 Thursday's game (subject to change)**

#### *Forwards*

Steven Stamkos - Brayden Point - Nikita Kucherov  
Brandon Hagel - Anthony Cirelli - Alex Barre-Boulet  
Tanner Jeannot - Nick Paul - Mikey Eyssimont  
Cole Koepke - Luke Glendening - Tyler Motte

#### *Defensemen*

Victor Hedman - Erik Cernak  
Mikhail Sergachev - Darren Raddysh  
Calvin de Haan - Nick Perbix

#### *Goaltenders*

Andrei Vasilevskiy  
Jonas Johansson

### **Monday's Matchup**

The Lightning and Stars are playing the second of two matchups this season and the only meeting at AMALIE Arena...The two teams met Dec. 2 at DAL with Tampa Bay dropping the contest 8-1...The Bolts posted a 2-0-0 record vs. DAL last season, winning the two contests by a combined score of 8-5...Alex Killorn (1-4—5) led Tampa Bay in points and assists vs. DAL last season, while Anthony Cirelli (2-1—3) paced the team in goals...Nikita Kucherov has recorded 15 points over his last 11 games vs. DAL (2-13—15)...Steven Stamkos has picked up 27 points over his last 21 contests vs. DAL (17-10—27), including 10 points over the last 11 meetings (6-4—10)...Brandon Hagel has six points in his last eight games vs. DAL (2-4—6)...Victor Hedman has 15 points over his last 21 contests vs. DAL (3-12—15)...Andrei Vasilevskiy is 7-3-0 over his last 10 starts vs. DAL, recording two shutouts with a .926 save percentage and 1.96 goals against average during that span...The Bolts are 8-1-1 in their last 10 home games vs. DAL and 6-4-0 in the last 10 meetings overall... Stamkos (20-12—32) holds the Lightning franchise records for career goals and points vs. DAL, while Hedman (5-20—25) leads the way in assists.

### **Injuries**

Conor Sheary - Upper-body, out

### **The Road Ahead**

Wednesday, December 6 vs. Pittsburgh Penguins - [Buy Tickets](#)

Thursday, December 7 at Nashville Predators

Saturday, December 9 at Seattle Kraken