



**AMALIE Arena Media Clips
Thursday, September 28, 2023**

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Lightning's Alex Barre-Boulet embraces 'make-or-break' opportunity **Eduardo Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

BRANDON — For Lightning wing Alex Barre-Boulet, the time is now.

He is in his sixth training camp with Tampa Bay, entering each having built a more impressive AHL resume. But he has yet to stick on the Lightning roster, accumulating just 32 NHL games over the past three seasons.

"It's no secret," Barre-Boulet said. "I'm 26 years old now, so it's almost make it or break.

"Just play my game. You know, I'm not trying to do too much, just keep it simple and work hard and try to show the staff that I can play here."

Barre-Boulet entered this season with perhaps his best chance yet. He has spent most of camp slotted on the third line alongside wing Tanner Jeannot and center Nick Paul. There's also an opportunity for Barre-Boulet to show his value on the team's second power-play unit.

Entering the final year of his current three-year deal, Barre-Boulet is coming off a career-best 84-point season at AHL Syracuse, which included 60 assists, second-most in the league. Now, he has to show he can score in the NHL, too, to stick.

"Listen, he has proven all he can prove in the American League, and that's what you want to do," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. "There are spots on this team open, more than probably have been in the last five years.

"So you've got to play to your strengths. The kid can put the puck in the net, so put the puck in the net. In this league every year, it seems to get faster. And it's not just for BB, it's for everybody. You've got to be able to keep up. ... Everybody's got opportunity, especially him."

Forward Alex Barre-Boulet, 26, hopes to finally stick with the Lightning in his sixth training camp with the team.

Forward Alex Barre-Boulet, 26, hopes to finally stick with the Lightning in his sixth training camp with the team. [DIRK SHADD | Times]

Barre-Boulet made a strong first impression in Tuesday's preseason opener in Carolina, opening the scoring with a power-play goal. He took the puck above the right circle and drove into open space in the high slot before launching a wrist shot that beat Hurricanes goaltender Frederik Andersen.

"I think it's about just doing the same thing I was doing at Syracuse, but maybe with a little bit more confidence, believe in myself that I can make plays," Barre-Boulet said. "Playing in this league, I think if you don't believe in yourself, it's not going to work. So I think everybody that plays in this league is confident enough, so it's up to me to just get my confidence up, make some plays and prove to the staff that I can play here."

This offseason, Barre-Boulet concentrated on improving his speed. He went to Toronto for a week to work with Lightning skating coach Barb Underhill and got more work with her when he arrived in Tampa early.

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"I could always be faster, and I was working hard on it in the offseason," Barre-Boulet said. "But again, it's really the confidence. Once you get on the ice, it's believing in yourself, that you can keep up with the pace and believe you can make plays. That's what's going to get you a job."

Last season in Syracuse, Barre-Boulet reemerged as a power-play threat, scoring seven of his 24 goals with the man advantage. It was reminiscent of his first two AHL seasons, when he scored 17 power-play goals in 2018-19 and nine in 2019-20.

Barre-Boulet's strong one-timer from the right circle also can help him win a job, because of the loss of Ross Colton, who previously provided that element on the power play. Colton was traded to Colorado in the offseason as a salary-cap casualty.

"The power play's always been a big part of my game since I've been playing junior," Barre-Boulet said. "I was always a slower guy, so I was trying to take advantage of the power play to have more space. If I have a shot there, then I'll try to fit in, but right now I'm just focusing here on playing my 5-on-5 as best as I can."

Bolts take down Preds in OT

Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)

After dropping the first game of the preseason Tuesday night in North Carolina, the Tampa Bay Lightning traveled to Tennessee and took down the Nashville Predators with a 2-1 overtime win at Bridgestone Arena on Wednesday.

Collectively, the Predators roster brought a combined 6,857 games of NHL experience to the ice, 4,324 more than the Bolts lineup that had 2,533 NHL games under its belt. But despite the disparity in games played, Tampa Bay's roster brought plenty of enthusiasm and effort to the game and finished the night with 35 blocked shots, six more than the team recorded during any regular season contest last season.

Even more impressive was the performance the Lightning put on during the third period, a frame that saw Tampa Bay take six minor penalties and kill off each of the final five infractions to force overtime. Playing a major role in killing those penalties was goaltender Matt Tomkins, who signed a two-year, two-way contract with the Bolts this offseason after spending the previous two seasons playing in Sweden.

"My experience was great over there," said Tomkins after Wednesday's game. "I enjoyed my time over there. I certainly wanted an opportunity to come back to North America and the opportunity came up with the Lightning.

"It was a no-brainer for me to come back and try to play in the NHL. It's always been a dream of mine. I'm just trying to seize every day here and take advantage of the opportunities when they come."

Tomkins was excellent in his first game with the Lightning, making 30 saves on 31 shots and earning First Star of the Game honors, making some game-saving stops along the way.

"I didn't know a ton about him," said Tampa Bay head coach Jon Cooper. "I knew he was coming over from Europe, but he stood in there. He was calm. He was poised.

"He didn't look like anything was rattling him at all, especially when everything was buzzing around him in the third period. It was great to see that performance."

With all the penalties taken in the third period, Tomkins had his work cut out for him in his first game action of the season with the majority of the play taking place inside the Tampa Bay zone.

"We were getting a little bit of a chuckle as the game went on with how many penalties we were taking," added Tomkins. "But the kill was great. We did a good job and obviously to come out with a win was huge. It was awesome."

Prior to Nashville's tying goal early in the third period, the Lightning opened the scoring with a power-play goal of their own off the stick of Max Groshev, a third-round pick by Tampa Bay in the 2020 NHL Draft.

Taking a pass from Felix Robert, Groshev accelerated past Spencer Stastney and Ryan O'Reilly before firing a shot through the five hole of Juuse Saros to give the Bolts a 1-0 lead with 7:17 left in the second period.

Groshev, who spent last season playing in his home country of Russia, has shown a lot of promise over the past several weeks. During the Southeast Rookie Showcase in Estero, he had as many

scoring chances as any player on the roster and put his skating, strength and relentless effort on display. He'll be a prospect to watch for Lightning fans moving forward.

After getting through the final five penalties assessed in the third period, Tampa Bay earned a power play of its own at the 1:47 mark of overtime when Cody Glass was whistled for tripping. With a 4-on-3 advantage, the Lightning got the game-winning goal from newcomer Tyler Motte, who showcased his hand-eye coordination when he batted a rebound out of midair off a shot from Mikey Eyssimont that got past Yaroslav Askarov for the game-winning goal.

"Me and Mikey were cycling the puck trying to get it to a couple of righties on the one-timer," said Motte. "He created some space for himself in the corner that gave him a bit of a lane.

"I just tried to get to the net. He made a good shot through the screen and it went off his shoulder. I tried to just swing at it out of the air and it happened to go in.

"I would've liked it to come on some of the other chances I had out there, but it's going to come. Sometimes the puck doesn't feel great on your stick when you're traveling day of and it's just not as smooth as you'd like it to be sometimes.

"But it's always great to have chances. You never really complain when the chances are there. I'm just going to continue to work hard to make the most of the opportunities."

With the first win of the preseason out of the way, the Bolts will head back to Tampa before getting right back at it Friday night with another battle against the Carolina Hurricanes.

"The energy with the group was outstanding," said Cooper on the win. "You detail something out in between periods, and they went out there and tried to execute it.

"It was a lot of fun in the game. Nashville's a great atmosphere to play in, so I think the guys had a ton of fun. Any time you can sneak through here, especially with some of the guys they had in the lineup, and get a win, it was great."

Tampa Bay's battle with Carolina will begin at 7 p.m. ET Friday night in the first home game of the preseason at AMALIE Arena. Tickets are available at [TampaBayLightning.com/Tickets](https://www.tampabaylightning.com/tickets).