



AMALIE Arena Media Clips
Tuesday, January 2, 2024

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How the Lightning overcame the strangest of goals to beat Montreal **Eduardo A. Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

TAMPA — The Lightning tend to play their best hockey when angry. Playing with a chip on their shoulder seems to bring out a different level of intensity.

They've spent most of this regular season sleepwalking through their schedule, finding themselves in an unusual position of desperately needing to pile up points as the calendar flips to a new year.

But in the second period of their New Year's Eve contest against Montreal on Sunday night, they received the strangest of wakeup calls, and it propelled them to an emotional and much-needed 4-3 comeback win over the Canadiens.

The buildup

After dropping two straight home games, coach Jon Cooper looked at Sunday's game as a must win. They needed to come out of this pivotal six-game stretch winning four, he said following Saturday's 5-1 home loss to the Rangers.

But the Lightning spent most of the first half chasing the puck. They had just seven shots on goal midway through the second period, and none in four minutes of power-play time.

They lost defenseman Erik Cernak on a questionable hit behind the goal by Montreal's Josh Anderson, a hit that prompted Lightning center Luke Glendening to go after Anderson. After reviewing the play, the official gave Glendening — not Anderson — a 10-minute misconduct.

With 8:11 remaining in the second period and the Lightning trailing by a goal, defenseman Darren Raddysh took a shot from the right point just inside the blue line that Montreal goaltender Samuel Montembeault swallowed into his pads.

Montembeault held the puck for several seconds, and everyone in the arena thought it was frozen. Fifth Harmony's "Baby, I'm Worth It" started blasting from the arena speakers, Lightning players retreated to the bench, and goaltender Jonas Johansson skated away from the net as he typically does after the whistle. Both linesmen even started skating in toward Montembeault as if the play was over.

But after Montembeault dropped the puck to the ice from his glove, referee Kelly Sutherland, who had a whistle in his mouth at the goal line, motioned that the play was still live, and Johnathan Kovacevic gathered the puck and shot across the ice into an empty net to make it a two-goal game.

"In every single game, you never know what you're going to see," Cooper said. "That is for sure at first."

After a review of the play, it was confirmed that the puck was still live. Boos reigned from the Amalie Arena seating bowl louder than they have all season, with the crowd incessantly chanting "refs, you suck" through the remainder of the period.

The result

The Lightning got angry. They finished off every check, they jumped into every puck battle and they had an extra jump in their step. The crowd was equally as amped, and the line of Tanner Jeannot, Tyler Motte and Austin Watson "went out there basically trying to annihilate everything in their way," as Cooper said, changing the tone of the game.

“I played in this building a bunch on the other side over the years and it is a home-ice advantage here for sure when the building’s rocking,” defenseman Calvin de Haan said. “I guess it took a weird goal for the crowd to get on their feet, but I think we felt the energy and kind of built off that from the fans. It was loud out there tonight.”

Brandon Hagel then sprung Nick Paul for a 2-on-1 breakaway through the neutral zone, and Paul found Brayden Point across the blue line in open ice through the middle to cut the lead to one. Victor Hedman then found Watson on a stretch pass to the right wing wall, and Watson flung a wobbler from above the right circle in front of Jeannot charging the net that got past Montembeault to tie the score at 2.

Johansson made two remarkable saves in one sequence to keep it tied, first stopping Mitchell Stephens on a rush and then blocking Anderson’s ensuing rebound in front.

de Haan’s first goal of the season — coming on a wrister from the left circle trailing on a pass from Nikita Kucherov — gave the Lightning the lead. And Kucherov circled around the back of the net to the left circle uncovered, where Hedman found him for an open look and a 4-2 lead.

The lasting effect

The win gives the Lightning 41 points, which puts them in the eighth and final playoff position in the East.

After the game, Cooper could joke, saying that his team could have used Sutherland, the referee who kept the play alive, in Game 3 of Tampa Bay’s first-round playoff series loss to Toronto last season; a Point goal that would have given the Lightning a two-goal lead was called off due to a premature whistle before Point poked a puck into the net.

The Lightning had to feel good about being able to take eight of a possible 12 points from “Christmas six” stretch, and their comeback win Sunday showed how quickly they can rally from a multi-goal deficit when they can create this kind of energy.

“In years past, maybe thinking about making the playoffs, it was an afterthought by Game 60,” Cooper said. “But this year is not. Our playoffs are starting now. So we’re going to buckle down and understand that, ‘Hey, this was a great night for us, the way it ended up,’ but tomorrow’s a new day.”

Now, they face a tough road trip to Winnipeg, Minnesota and Boston, and their blue line is banged up. Cooper indicated that defenseman Haydn Fleury, who exited the game in the second period, could miss some time. Cernak’s status is uncertain, and Mikhail Sergachev is still working his way back from a foot injury.

Tampa Bay Lightning unpack a lot to pull out important two points **Erik Erlendsson (Lightning Insider)**

TAMPA – The Tampa Bay Lightning sure know how to throw a New Year's Eve party.

There was a lot that went on against Montreal on Sunday that if someone tried to explain it, one might accuse them of partaking in a few too many libations. The game was that erratic, things were all over the place and things even went somewhere very few – or perhaps nobody – has ever seen before.

And what would have been a monumentally embarrassing moment had the game went against Tampa Bay turned into the fuel that turned their engines on.

What we're talking about on this New Year's Day after what was a whacky New Year's Eve.

ENTER SANDMAN

After dropping [Saturday's game to New York](#), the postgame comments centered around the importance of winning Sunday's game. After starting a six-game stretch to close out the calendar with three consecutive wins, Tampa Bay dropped the next two games. Sunday was a must win.

The Lightning started the game with all the urgency of a teenager asked to mow the grass in July after an all-night gaming session.

Tampa Bay didn't have the energy. And what might suggest right about now to point out that the Lightning were playing on back-to-back nights. Ah, but so did Montreal. In a different city.

There truly was no excuse for how the Lightning started this game. Tampa Bay was below 35-percent in just about every advanced stat, including below 25-percent in high danger chances and expected goals. And this was, for all intents and purposes, a must-win game.

Tampa Bay had four shots on goal through 20 minutes. Midway through the second period, it ballooned to nine.

And it was a cardinal sin committed by Steven Stamkos that led to Montreal's opening goal in the second period. Stamkos collected a puck in the neutral zone and carried back into his own end. While he had the chance to backhand a pass off the boards to Haydn Fleury, Stamkos continued toward the middle of his own end while being hounded by Nick Suzuki. Stamkos tried to force a pass up that hit the skate of Cole Caufield, who collected the gift and put it through the five-hole of Jonas Johansson at 3:58.

Falling behind on that type of turnover did not spark the Lightning.

But what happened seven minutes later, did.

GOING OFF THE RAILS ON THIS CRAZY TRAIN

Many times one thinks there is nothing new to see in the game. Through more than 100 years of the National Hockey League, certainly everything that can happen in a game has happened at some point.

Then, something comes along that nobody can remember seeing happen before.

Darren Raddysh sent a shot on goal and Montreal goaltender Sam Montembeault dropped to his knees and smothered and held on to the puck. Referee Kelly Sutherland, in the corner, raised his

whistle to his mouth with the intent to blow the play dead. Only, he didn't. He stared at Montembeault, who had no Lightning players pressuring the play, before the Montreal netminder dropped the puck from his glove to keep the play alive.

Only problem was that everybody in the building – and I mean everybody – thought the play was dead. The Lightning players started to head toward the bench to make a change before the faceoff as the music in the building began to play, which happens during stoppages. Even the linesmen started to make their way down the ice to prepare for the faceoff.

“It was kind of weird,” defenseman Calvin de Haan said. “Music came on and everything. I was talking to the ref on the far side of the boards, like asking why there wasn't a penalty or something earlier in the game and I don't know. It was weird.”

As all that was happened, Montembeault gave the puck to defenseman Johnathan Kovacevic. Montembeault, realizing the play hadn't been stopped, urged Kovacevic to shoot the puck, from 150-feet away.

Johansson, meanwhile, had done what just about every goaltender who has ever played the game does during a stoppage of play – he went to the side boards for a quick skate. That meant the net was vacated, and Kovacevic didn't miss. It gave the Canadiens a 2-0 lead and left everyone in shock at what they just witnessed.

“I thought the whistle had blown, music was playing and all,” Johansson said. “That's a first, I think, for everyone.”

Cooper had a thought on the play, as well, with a reference to what happened in Game 3 of the playoff series against Toronto last season when a quick whistle negated a Brayden Point goal that would have give Tampa Bay a 4-2 lead at the time.

“The first thing I thought was, we could have used Kelly in Game Three in the playoffs last year,” he said. “But aside from that, that's one of the strangest plays . . . I guess that's why you're in the game. You love the competitive fire and everything that goes on but you go in to every single game and you never know what you're going to see. And that one is for sure.”

GIMME FUEL, GIMME FIRE, GIMME THAT WHICH I DESIRE

That sort of a goal against can send a team into a spiral. But instead, it woke the Lightning out of whatever slumber they were in up to that point.

First, the crowd erupted in protest to the call. The boos that rained down from the stands were as loud, or louder, than any cheers heard around these parts in some time. It acted like hitting the turbo button for the Lightning.

“You can Monday morning quarterback it, our game did change,” Cooper said. “The crowd was unbelievable, and how the crowd made us grow a foot on the bench. So I can't thank them enough for how they supported our team.”

Suddenly, the Lightning found some life. The line of Tyler Motte, Austin Watson and Tanner Jeannot were sent over for the next shift and they came out with some jam, hitting anything they came close to on the ice. Anthony Cirelli laid a big hit on Jesse Ylonen along the boards. Nikita Kucherov was throwing his weight around.

It was a spark.

“I think we responded the right way after that crazy goal,” Watson said. “As a group we kind of, one line after another, went and focused all our frustration, all our energy toward getting back in the hockey game and kind of changing the fate of the game.”

Even Johansson felt the energy shift.

“I felt like it gave us some energy,” he said. “The arena was buzzing and they gave us some energy.”

ANGRY AGAIN

With the nitro boost the Lightning received, it's fair to say there was some anger in the way they were playing.

It launched the offense, and perhaps provided a little karma.

First, the Lightning broke out quickly after Darren Raddysh disrupted a play in his own end and moments later Brandon Hagel fed Nick Paul up ice. Meanwhile, Brayden Point hit the boost button as he raced past every Montreal player as Paul slipped a perfect pass to spring Point on a breakaway from the blue line in. And Point shot the puck with some anger as he ripped a wrist shot past Montembeault 2:02 after Montreal's second goal.

Then karma intervened when Victor Hedman fed a perfect stretch pass on to the tap of Watson at the far blue line. Watson, appearing in his 500th career game, attempted to put a pass into the path of Jeannot driving the net. But the puck was wobbling and caught Montembeault off guard as the puck slipped under his pad and inside the far post to tie the game 3:35 after Point's goal.

“The Watson goal for me, if anybody has heard of karma? That's what that goal was,” Cooper said. “And whether there's hockey gods or not, tonight, I think they played a part in making sure this one was going to be evened out.”

THREE LOCK BOX

With the game even after two periods, thanks to some cosmic intervention, Tampa Bay had the momentum in their corner. And they used it to their advantage.

The third period was the Lightning's best of the game. They looked more like the team they should have been at the start of the game. But they were awake, now.

“I think the team felt the energy and we just channeled it the right way,” de Haan said. “I think we just stayed positive and tried to control what we can control.”

That was playing the right way. They receive the pay off on another play off the rush on a breakout play. Anthony Cirelli carried up ice, fed Stamkos at the side boards for the entry. Stamkos fed it back to Kucherov in the middle who found de Haan alone off to his left. de Haan took the time to line up his shot and put a wrist shot off the inside of the far post for his first goal of the season and first since January 27 against San Jose while with Carolina, a span of 46 games.

“It's been a while,” de Haan said. “I feel like I could have a bunch more points this year, and I know that's not my job necessarily. But it's also nice to contribute on the score sheet. I just tried to be the fourth man on the play. Stammer and Kuch made a good entry to get the puck over to me. I was fortunate enough to put it in. So it was nice. Nice to score once in a while.”

Kucherov gave the Lightning an insurance goal as Hedman patiently waited at the right circle for Kucherov to emerge from behind the net. Hedman fed another perfect pass for Kucherov to score his

26th goal of the season and notch his 61st point to become the first player to hit the mark this season and set a franchise record as the fastest to score 60 points, doing so in his 37th game.

Kucherov (121 points) also became the seventh active player to record at least 120 points in a calendar year, joining Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl, Matthew Tkachuk, Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and Nathan MacKinnon.

WE'RE ALL TO BLAME

It's easy to laugh off the events that led to the second Montreal goal because of how the game finished for Tampa Bay. But when the moment happened, and the Lightning were down 2-0, the one question many want answered is who is to blame for the play.

The answer is, more than one person.

The first part lies in the team in control of the in-house video. Though no whistle was ever blown to trigger a stoppage in play, the music and lights almost immediately came to life. That is what nearly everyone in the building reacted to thinking play was halted. Three of the four officials thought the play was over and so did every Montreal player, even Josh Anderson was slowly skating toward the near boards near the linesman.

An itchy-trigger finger is the first sin.

"we are most definitely going to have that talk," Cooper said. "Because to be honest, I turned away because many times you can't even hear the whistle blow with the crowd and everything."

But Johansson is not absolved here. Sure, the music is a trigger and probably 99.9-percent of goalies so what Johansson did when he skated to the corner. And it's unlikely he would have heard a whistle even if it was blown.

He has to be sure, however, that the play is actually dead. Stay near the crease until it's confirmed the play is over. If he's near the crease, the goal doesn't happen.

Sutherland, though, deserves some blame in all this, as well. Not because he failed to blow the whistle – which is probably the right call in the end with no Lightning players near the Montreal net to trigger the whistle – but because he looked like he did or was about to. Sutherland leaves the whistle up to his lips for roughly three seconds before dropping it and signaling with a subtle hand movement (hidden from up the ice) that the Canadiens could move the puck up ice.

That leads to this question. If intent to blow the whistle can prevent a goal from being scored, why can't intent to blow end this type of play, as well?

KING OF PAIN

The Lightning played the final period-plus with four defensemen.

Erik Cernak was leveled by Josh Robinson behind the net early in the second period that dropped Cernak to the ice. The play was originally called a major but was reviewed and deemed a minor for charging at 4:07 of the second.

Then Hayden Fleury had a puck go off his left hand. Though it hit the knuckle area, which usually has good padding, he was immediately trying to shake it off. Fleury left after the 10:28 mark of the second and didn't return.

Cooper said they didn't have an official update on Cernak, who was walking around the locker room after the game and appeared to be fine. But Cooper said the expectation is Fleury "might be a little longer".

Tampa Bay is already without Mikhail Sergachev, who missed his fifth game but appears close to a return, along with Conor Sheary, who also appeared to suffer a hand injury on Saturday against the Rangers.

"It was a tough night," Cooper said. "It was a tough way to end the year on the injury front."

NOTES

Steven Stamkos skated in his 1,038th career contest and surpassed Vincent Lecavalier for sole possession of the most games played in Lightning history. Only six other active players lead a franchise in games played (among franchises that were established prior to 2017-18): Boone Jenner (686 GP w/ CBJ), Aleksander Barkov (697 w/ FLA), Anze Kopitar (1,325 GP w/ LAK), Sidney Crosby (1,225 w/ PIT), Alex Ovechkin (1,381 GP w/ WSH) and Blake Wheeler (897 w/ WPG). ... Victor Hedman became just the 18th different defenseman in NHL history to record 30+ assists in nine straight seasons and just the second active blueliner to do so after Tyson Barrie (9 from 2014-15 – 2022-23). ... Hedman recorded his 10th career assist on New Year's Eve and tied John Tavares for the most among all active skater Tampa Bay scratched D Mikhail Sergachev, D Sean Day and RW Conor Sheary, who left Saturday's game with an apparent upper-body injury. ... Saturday marked the 102nd regular-season day in 2023 to feature at least one team overcoming a multi-goal deficit to win – tied for the third-most in a calendar year (also 102 in 2013). The only years with more are 2022 (111) and 2018 (103).

MY THREE STARS

1. Lightning D Calvin de Haan – Third period go-ahead goal, four shot attempts, hit, blocked shot, 18:57 of ice time
2. Lightning RW Nikita Kucherov – Goal, assist, eight shot attempts, two takeaways, 25:05 of ice time
3. Lightning G Jonas Johansson – Stopped 27 shots, including 7-of-8 high danger chances

The Backcheck: The Lightning ring in the new year with a win over the Canadiens **Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)**

After falling into a 2-0 hole to start the contest, the Tampa Bay Lightning rallied together and wrapped up 2023 with a 4-3 win over the Montreal Canadiens Sunday night at AMALIE Arena.

Following Cole Caufield's game-opening tally at the 3:58 mark of the second period, the Bolts found themselves down 2-0 when Montreal scored a goal at the 11:59 mark that got the crowd into the game and ignited the players as well.

Sam Montembeault made an initial save for the Canadiens and held onto the puck for a few seconds before music began playing in the arena and nearly everyone thought the play was over. But Kelly Sutherland's whistle was never blown as Montembeault dropped the puck onto the stick of Johnathan Kovacevic, who fired the puck the length of the ice and into a wide-open net with Jonas Johansson skating off to the corner in his usual post-whistle routine.

The play was reviewed and the goal was upheld, sparking the crowd and setting up a response shift from Tyler Motte, Tanner Jeannot and Austin Watson. The trio produced arguably the most physical shift of the game, throwing multiple heavy hits and seemingly flipping the momentum.

Moments later, Brayden Point took a pass from Nick Paul and flew into the Canadiens zone before beating Montembeault glove side to make it a 2-1 game with 5:59 remaining in the middle frame.

As Tampa Bay continued to push forward, Watson provided the game-tying goal just 3:35 later when an attempted pass for Jeannot snuck through the five hole of Montembeault to make it 2-2.

Going into the third period with the score knotted at two apiece, Calvin de Haan gave the Lightning a 3-2 lead with his first goal as a member of the Bolts. With 12:11 remaining in the final frame, de Haan took a pass from Nikita Kucherov in the slot and patiently picked his spot before ripping a shot past Montembeault.

Just over seven minutes later, Kucherov pushed the lead to 4-2 when he dropped a pass to Victor Hedman and went around the net to the back door, where Hedman sent a perfect pass, allowing Kucherov to fire his 26th goal of the season into the open net.

Nick Suzuki was able to get Montreal back within one at the 17:55 mark of the third, but Jonas Johansson shut the door over the final two minutes to secure the 4-3 win for Tampa Bay.

The Lightning moved to 18-15-5 on the season with a home record of 11-5-3.

Bolts by the Numbers

- Stamkos skated in his 1,038th career game and passed Vincent Lecavalier (1,037 GP) to become the Lightning's all-time franchise leader in games played.
- Stamkos joined Aleksander Barkov (697 w/ FLA), Sidney Crosby (1,225 w/ PIT), Boone Jenner (686 GP w/ CBJ), Anze Kopitar (1,325 GP w/ LAK), Alex Ovechkin (1,381 GP w/ WSH) and Blake Wheeler (897 w/ WPG) as the only active players to lead a pre-2017 franchise in games played.
- Watson skated in his 500th career game and scored his second goal of the season to tie the game in the second period.
- Hedman recorded the primary assist on the goals by Watson and Kucherov and became just the 18th defenseman in NHL history to tally 30+ assists in nine consecutive seasons (5-31—36).

- Calvin de Haan scored his first goal as a member of the Lightning and collected his fourth point of the season (1-3—4).
- Kucherov picked up the primary assist on de Haan's goal and scored the game-winning goal, moving him to 61 points on the year (26-35—61).
- Kucherov set a new Lightning franchise record for fewest games to reach the 60-point mark in a season, passing his previous mark of 38 games (2018-19).

Bolts Quotes

- Jon Cooper: "The crowd was unbelievable. The crowd made us grow a foot on the bench. I can't thank them enough for how they supported our team."
- Cooper: "What kind of helped after that was when Motte, Watson and Jeannot went out there and basically were trying to annihilate everything in their way. I think that doubled down the energy the crowd gave us. After that, I thought we were a completely different team."
- Calvin de Haan: "I played in this building a bunch on the other side over the years, and it is a home-ice advantage here for sure when the building's rocking. I guess it took a weird goal for the crowd to get on their feet, but I think we felt the energy and kind of built off that from the fans. It was loud out there tonight. It's a great building to play in when it's rocking in here and it's intimidating on the other side."
- Cooper on Nikita Kucherov: "He's just got gifted talent. There are a lot of players that have that, but the guys that do it the right way...I've just watched this kid grow into one of the best players in the world. Whether he's MVP of the league or not, he's for sure been ours."

Krenner's Three Stars

1. Nikita Kucherov
2. Calvin de Haan
3. Jonas Johansson

Lightning Look Ahead

- Tuesday, January 2 at Winnipeg Jets, 8 p.m. ET, Canada Life Centre
- Thursday, January 4 at Minnesota Wild, 8 p.m. ET, Xcel Energy Center
- Saturday, January 6 at Boston Bruins, 7 p.m. ET, TD Garden