



AMALIE Arena Media Clips
Wednesday, December 20, 2023

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NHL points leader Kucherov has 2 goals as Lightning beat Blues 6-1

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — NHL points leader Nikita Kucherov had two goals, Andrei Vasilevskiy made 29 saves and the Tampa Bay Lightning beat the St. Louis Blues 6-1 on Tuesday night.

Michael Eyssimont, Tyler Motte, Haydn Fleury and Nicholas Paul also scored for the Lightning, who have won five of 12. Steven Stamkos had three assists to move past Theo Fleury (1,088) into 67th place on the career points list with 1,090.

Blues goalie Jordan Binnington was pulled in the second period after allowing five goals on 23 shots. He had a 5-0 shutout against Tampa Bay in the last meeting between the teams on Nov. 14.

St. Louis interim coach Drew Bannister lost in his first road game following a pair of home victories after taking over when Craig Berube was fired on Dec. 12.

The Blues got a power-play goal from Justin Faulk with 4:05 left. He ended a 34-game goal drought.

Kucherov scored twice 1:50 apart late in the first and early in the second to make it 4-0. The right wing has 54 points, including 22 goals.

Vasilevskiy stopped Kevin Hayes on a short-handed breakaway midway through the first. The Blues have eight short-handed goals.

St. Louis' NHL-worst power play went 1 for 3 and has converted three chances in 30 tries over the last 11 games. Two goals have come in the last two games.

Eyssimont stopped a 19-game goal drought 2:23 into the game after Binnington misplayed a dump-in behind the net.

Fleury got his first goal in 67 games during the second. He also had an assist and finished plus-four.

Tampa Bay defenseman Mikhail Sergachev took a shot by Colton Parayko off the back of his left foot in the first and did not return.

How Haydn Fleury came up big for the Lightning in win over Blues **Eduardo A. Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

TAMPA — Haydn Fleury played in only three of the Lightning's first 28 games this season, but he has started to see the lineup more often over the past week and a half. In Tuesday's home game against St. Louis, he suddenly was called upon to play big minutes for the Lightning in their 6-1 win.

When Mikhail Sergachev hobbled off the ice less than 13 minutes into the game after blocking a shot, unable to put weight on his left foot, it left the Lightning with only two left-shot defensemen, meaning Victor Hedman and Fleury would have to shoulder more of the load.

And in a game that at times was tighter than the lopsided score indicated, Fleury's steady play was critical. He logged a season-high 22:23 of ice time, and scored his first NHL goal in more than two years, a stretch of 66 games played. Fleury, who was a team-best plus-4 on the night, was one of only four available defensemen for the final 5:29 of the game after Erik Cernak took a fighting major penalty.

And he seemed to love every moment of it.

"When you play with five (defensemen), you don't really have time to dwell on a mistake or dwell on really anything or think about anything good," Fleury said. "You kind of just get back to the bench, have some water and you're right back out there, so you get a nice rhythm and it's always fun. Guys were supportive on the bench and we went down to four for the last five (minutes), so it got even better."

Fleury had entered the night having logged only 12:20 of ice time in six games this season.

"It's a tough job," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said of Fleury. "It's almost like the backup goalie who doesn't get it every single night. Flares hasn't been in every single night. But he's giving you a reason to keep him in."

The Lightning took a quick two-goal lead, and seconds after Blues forward Brayden Schenn hit the post, Nikita Kucherov's seeing-eye wrist shot from above the circles through screens set by Nick Paul and Brayden Point squeezed past goaltender Jordan Binnington with 13.3 seconds remaining in the period.

Another goal by Kucherov 96 seconds into the second — a period in which Tampa Bay was outscored 12-0 during its just-completed five-game road trip — might have been even more important for the Lightning to shake their middle-period woes.

"That's how close it was," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. "That goes in on Schenn's shot, now who knows how this game goes, but it worked out for us."

This is a critical stretch for the Lightning — Thursday's game was the beginning of a stretch of five home games in their next six to close out December — and they knew they needed to simplify their game. They drove to the net and were determined to create traffic in front to take away Binnington's line of sight, and their greasy game led to a 2-0 lead after goals by bottom-six forwards Mikey Eyssimont and Tyler Motte.

Kucherov's two goals gave him 22 on the season and improved his NHL scoring lead to 54 points. Paul had a three-point night, and Steven Stamkos logged three assists for his 99th career three-point night.

The win wasn't perfect. The Lightning allowed 13 scoring chances in the second period, but Fleury's first goal since a two-goal night on Oct. 28, 2021, put an exclamation mark on the win.

The Lightning cycled the puck in the offensive zone and Stamkos kicked it out to Fleury up top, who corralled a rolling puck and rifled a wristed shot from inside the blue line that wobbled through traffic and past Binnington, chasing him from the game and giving the Lightning a 6-1 lead.

Fleury said when he was a young player coming up with Carolina, defenseman Dougie Hamilton told him, "Always shoot a rolling puck."

"He's got a lot of goals as a D-man, so you can listen to him," Fleury said of Hamilton, who has been one of the league's top goal-scoring defensemen over the past decade. "It was a knuckler.. When it hit my blade, it got wobbly. It worked out tonight."

Cooper didn't have an update on Sergachev after the game, but he was seen exiting Amalie Arena with his left foot in a boot and on a scooter.

"Who knows what's going to happen to Sergachev now," Cooper said. "But Fleury's asset is hit skating, and he really skated pucks tonight, especially breaking them out. So I thought that was big for us and his game."

Tampa Bay Lightning put road trip behind them to start homestretch on a positive note **Erik Erlendsson (Lightning Insider)**

TAMPA – The Tampa Bay Lightning were away from home for so long, the names on the back of their jerseys might have been substitutes for “Hello, My Name Is” stickers.

But it didn't take long for the team to reintroduce themselves to the home crowd with an outburst of offensive from their top stars along, goals from their depth players, a break-out game from a rarely used defenseman and another stellar showing in goal.

The Lightning entered Tuesday with six games left in the calendar year, five of which are at home. Head coach Jon Cooper called it an important stretch.

“I think this is a big time pre-post Christmas that . . . it's time for us to make a bit of a push here,” he said.

Tuesday was a step in that process as the Lightning put the disappointing five-game road trip behind them and pushed forward with a 6-1 victory against St. Louis to open this six-game stretch.

Five talking points from a comfortable – for the most part – victory on the return to home ice.

THE FRIENDLY FIRST

The Lightning have not had much of problem with their starts of late. The first period, as a whole, has been kind to Tampa Bay as they entered the game with a plus-six goal differential in the opening period.

They added to that on Tuesday, scoring three times, including Mikey Eyssimont's opening goal 2:23 into the game, his first goal since November 7 in Montreal. Tyler Motte scored his first on home ice with 2:10 left in the first during a goalmouth mosh pit. Nikita Kucherov capped off the period with 13.3 seconds left.

It was a quick start and the seventh time in the past eight games the Lightning have scored the opening goal.

“We have to simplify our game,” Cooper said. “And it sounds like a cliché but when you do those things you're hoping to put teams under duress, making the game a little bit more unpredictable in their defensive zone. Then be around the net and shooting it enough, good things usually happen for you. And it happened for us tonight, especially in the first period.”

Where Tampa Bay got in trouble on the road trip was when the opposing team had them hemmed in the defensive zone. Most of that issue was a bit self-inflicted. Any sort of forecheck pressure and the Lightning were able to set up breakout plays to either clear the zone or start a rush up ice.

That was a big area the Lightning cleaned up to start Tuesday's game. Breakouts were clean, crisp and done with speed to negate the forecheck pressure teams like to throw at the Lightning.

“We had some good reads, some good cut offs, which led to us going north quick,” Nick Paul said. “One thing we wanted to limit was our breakouts going D-to-D and kind of making soft plays. And I think we did a good job of that, not returning trucks over in our D zone which kind of kills the whole shift and you're kind of scrambling from there. So I thought our D zone was good, moving our feet, going north. Making simple plays definitely helped.”

SECOND PERIOD DEMONS NOT EXACTLY SLAYED

With the three-goal lead after the first period, Tampa Bay entered the first intermission knowing their greatest enemy was still in front of them – the second period.

On the just-completed road trip, the Lightning entered the first intermission either tied or in the lead. In the second period of those five games, Tampa Bay was outscored 12-0.

“The seconds not not been our favorite period, that’s for sure,” Paul said. “But that’s something we’re trying to work on. We’re having a good first, you have to build on it.”

In some ways, that’s what happened, particularly when Kucherov scored his 96 seconds into the period to build a 4-0 lead. But it was downhill after that and some of the issues that put the Lightning in peril on the road crept back into their game.

On Tampa Bay’s power play chance at the 3:33 mark, the Lightning again got soft with the puck and their decision making. St. Louis had a 2-on-0 break and a 3-on-1 chance in less than the span of a minute. That was sort of the theme of the middle period, again.

“The problem was, we got that lead and then we just started doing things that we’ve done in 2-2 games and 3-2 games that have cost us,” Cooper said. “Then all of a sudden we’re doing them in a game we didn’t need to, we didn’t need to bring any risk into the game. I thought we just gave St. Louis way too many chances to get back into this game. We had some mental fatigue there in the second period, which didn’t really like but we got through it”

In the second period, the Blues out-chanced the Lightning 13-5. Some of the same issues were there, only this time Tampa Bay didn’t give up a goal to open the door for their opponent.

“It was definitely mentioned before the (second) period,” Haydn Fleury said of their second period issues. “I don’t think we played great in the second but Vasy stood on his head and I think we got out of there 2-0.”

LOSING SERGY

Midway through the first period Mikhail Sergachev took a puck off his left foot, courtesy of a Colton Parayko slap shot at the 11:40 mark. The thud could be heard all the way up in the press box and Sergachev immediately dropped to the ice. He was able to get back on to his skates but was in noticeable discomfort.

After the puck cleared the zone, Sergachev was able to make his way back to the bench – though not in a timely manner as Tampa Bay was called for a too many men on the ice penalty at 12:03. Sergachev stayed on the bench for a few minutes trying to shake off the pain. But he eventually got to his feet and limped down the hallway back to the locker room area.

Sergachev did not return to the game and was diagnosed with a lower body injury.

Cooper did not have an update on Sergachev’s status after the game, but later added in a different question, “who knows what’s going to happen with Sergachev.”

That’s a rather ominous comment from Cooper on the injury. It’s likely that Sergachev had X-rays performed at the rink and may need further testing to determine the extent of the injury. Sources said that Sergachev was seen wearing a walking boot and was on a knee scooter.

Tampa Bay is already thin on defense as it is and if Sergachev were to miss any significant amount of time, they don’t have players who can take on Sergachev’s role and minutes individually. Sean Day

was called up at the end of the road trip and the Lightning have been carrying an extra left defenseman on the roster most of the season.

FLEURY STEPS UP

In Sergachev's absence after the first period, Hayden Fleury took on a chunk of that load.

In just his seventh game this season – he's been on the active roster all season and did have a two-week conditioning assignment – Fleury logged 22:32 of ice time. Fleury last logged at least 20 minutes on November 26, 2021 as a member of the Seattle Kraken in a game against Tampa Bay.

Fleury earned those minutes with what is easily his best game in a Tampa Bay sweater.

"He played pretty well a couple nights ago when he played," Cooper said. "It's a tough job. It's almost like the backup goalie who doesn't get in every single night? Fleury hasn't been in every single night but he's giving you a reason that to keep him in. Fleury's asset is his skating. He really skated pucks tonight, especially breaking them out, so I thought that was big for us."

Fleury would go on to score Tampa Bay's fifth goal of the game, firing a rolling puck past Jordan Binnington for his first goal as a member of the Lightning and the only goal from a Tampa Bay defenseman not named Victor Hedman or Sergachev.

"It was an knuckler," Fleur said. "One of the older guys when I was younger said always shoot a rolling puck, so it worked out tonight.

The goal was the first for Fleury since October 25, 2021, when he scored twice for Seattle against Minnesota.

"It's always nice to contribute and help the team win," Fleury said. "When you play with five D, you don't really have time to dwell on a mistake or dwell on really anything or, think about anything good. You kind of just get back to the bench get your water and you're right back out there. So you get a nice rhythm and it's always fun. Guys are supportive on the bench."

Fleury also finished with an assist on the opening goal from Eyssimont and was a plus-4 on the night.

VASY, VASY AND VASY

Once again, when things got a little hairy for Tampa Bay, particularly in the second period when the Lightning had their breakdowns, Vasilevskiy was there to erase the mistakes. He has that ability, you know.

While he didn't have to be as spectacular as he was in Edmonton last week, Vasilevskiy was on his game.

Tuesday was another good sign that Vasilevskiy, who missed the first month-plus of the season following back surgery, is back to being his normal self. He has won five of his past seven starts and allowed one or fewer goals in three of those games.

While the shutout bid was spoiled by a power play goal from Justin Faulk with 4:03 to play, Vasilevskiy did finish with 28 saves.

NOTES

Tampa Bay scratched D Calvin de Haan and RW Austin Watson. ... RW Nikita Kucherov has 15 goals and 30 points at even strength this season, second most in the league. ... Kucherov extended his home scoring streak to eight games. ... Steven Stamkos registered three assists to record the 99th three-point game of his career to pass Denis Potvin (98) and tie Darryl Sittler on the League's all-time list. ... Stamkos also registered his 295th career multi-point game to pass Theo Fleury (294) for sole possession of 57th place on the League's all-time list. ... Kucherov's 54 points through 32 games played is the 10th most points by a natural winger since 1984.

MY THREE STARS

1. Lightning G Andrei Vasilevskiy – The shutout bid was spoiled late, but he was brilliant in stopping 28 shots, including all 13 in the second
2. Lightning RW Nikita Kucherov – Two goals, plus-2, seven shot attempts, three takeaways
3. Lightning D Haydn Fleury – Goal, assist, plus-4, two blocked shots in 22:32 of ice time

The Backcheck: Bolts return home with strong win over the Blues

Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)

Returning home from the longest road trip of the season that saw the Tampa Bay Lightning post a 2-3-0 record over a five-game stretch, the Bolts were hungry for a big win on Tuesday night and got one with a 6-1 victory over the St. Louis Blues.

Right from the drop of the puck, it was clear there was an emphasis on simplifying the game for Tampa Bay by getting shots and bodies to the front of the St. Louis net and putting pucks behind the Blues defensemen and getting in on the forecheck.

That mindset paid dividends right away when Mikey Eyssimont opened the scoring just 2:23 into the first period for his fifth goal of the season.

After Haydn Fleury hammered the puck along the boards and into the St. Louis zone, Jordan Binnington made his way behind the goal to try to slow things up, but the puck deflected off his stick and went right to the front of the net. Tanner Jeannot anticipated the play and quickly jumped on the loose puck before throwing it to the front of the net, where it deflected off Eyssimont and past Binnington to put Tampa Bay up 1-0.

Throughout the first 33 games of the season, the Lightning have performed well in the first period and Tuesday night was no different. The Bolts outshot the Blues 14-5 in the opening 20 minutes and would go to the locker room with a 3-0 lead following two more goals from Tyler Motte and Nikita Kucherov.

Motte made it a 2-0 game with 2:50 remaining in the first on another play that showcased the mentality of getting pucks and bodies to the net. After Conor Sheary threw a backhand shot on goal, Steven Stamkos and Motte were right there at the edge of the blue paint, battling for the puck before Motte was able to force it over the goal line for his second goal of the season to make it 2-0.

Just 2:36 later, Kucherov made it a three-goal game with one of those last-minute tallies that can really deflate a team heading to the locker room. Shortly after Brayden Schenn nearly made it 2-1 with a shot that hit the post, Kucherov instead pushed the lead to 3-0 with his 21st goal of the season.

Taking a pass from Brayden Point as he crossed over the St. Louis blue line, Kucherov quickly slammed on the brakes and made a shifty move around Brandon Saad and into the high slot, where he wired a shot through a ton of traffic that beat Binnington and made it a 3-0 game after 20 minutes.

Picking up where he left off, Kucherov quickly extended the Lightning lead to 4-0 only 1:36 into the second period.

Skating in his 100th career NHL game, Nick Perbix jumped up into the play and skated the puck into the offensive zone before coming to a hard stop in the corner and sending a backhand pass up to the point for Kucherov.

As we've seen throughout the season, Kucherov showed no hesitation to shoot and ripped another quick wrister past Binnington for his 22nd goal and 54th point of the campaign.

After picking up the secondary assist on the first goal of the contest, Fleury scored his first goal and recorded his first multi-point game as a member of the Bolts when he made it 5-0 with 7:47 remaining in the second.

Taking a pass from Stamkos at the left point, Fleury walked the blue line and quickly fired a slap shot through a ton of traffic that ended Binnington's night between the pipes.

Nick Paul added more cushion for Tampa Bay with 12:07 left in the third period when he scored his 10th goal of the season on the power play.

Making his way to the front of the net and presenting his stick for Stamkos, Paul calmly redirected a heavy slap pass from Stamkos past Joel Hofer and pushed the Bolts lead to 6-0.

Justin Faulk added a power-play goal of his own and spoiled the shutout for Andrei Vasilevskiy with 4:03 remaining in regulation to wrap up the 6-1 final.

Vasilevskiy was strong in goal for the Lightning yet again, stopping 28 of the 29 shots he faced, including some big saves on shorthanded chances for the Blues throughout the contest.

Despite the 6-1 win, it wasn't all good for Tampa Bay Tuesday night. Mikhail Sergachev took a heavy shot from Colton Parayko off his left foot and hobbled to the bench before eventually making his way to the locker room and missing the remainder of the game.

After the contest, Lightning head coach Jon Cooper was unable to provide an update, telling reporters the team should know more ahead of Wednesday's practice at AMALIE Arena.

The Bolts will be back in action with the final home game before Christmas Thursday night against the Vegas Golden Knights.

Bolts by the Numbers

- Nikita Kucherov scored his 21st and 22nd goals of the season for his eighth multi-goal game of the season.
- Kucherov has picked up points in eight consecutive home games (7-7—14).
- Kucherov remains the only player in the NHL with more than 50 points on the season (22-32—54).
- Steven Stamkos recorded three assists for the 295th multi-point game of his NHL career, passing Theo Fleury (294) and taking sole possession of 57th place on the NHL's all-time list.
- Stamkos recorded three shots on goal and passed Vincent Lecavalier for sole possession of the most shots on goal in Lightning franchise history.
- Mikey Eyssimont opened the scoring with his fifth goal and 11th point of the campaign (5-6—11).
- Tyler Motte scored his second goal of the season and second in the past three contests.
- Haydn Fleury scored his first goal in a Lightning sweater and added an assist for his first multi-point game with the Bolts.
- Nick Paul posted a three-point effort for the second time this season with one goal and two assists. Paul has recorded four multi-point games this year.
- Nick Perbix skated in his 100th career NHL game and recorded one assist.

Bolts Quotes

- Jon Cooper: "We have to simplify our game. It sounds like a cliché, but when you do those things, you're hoping to put teams under duress, making the game a little bit more unpredictable in their defensive zone. Then, if you're around it and shooting it enough, good things usually happen for you and it happened for us tonight, especially in the first period and a little bit of the second."

- Jon Cooper on the performance of Haydn Fleury: "Fleury hasn't been in every single night, but he's giving you a reason to keep him in...Fleury's asset is his skating and he really skated pucks tonight, especially breaking them out, so I thought that was big for us and his game. Then, for him to get what I found out was his first goal as a Bolt, that was pretty cool."

- Haydn Fleury: "When you play with five (defensemen), you don't really have time to dwell on a mistake or dwell on really anything or think about anything good. You kind of just get back to the bench, have some water and you're right back out there, so you get a nice rhythm. It's always fun. Guys were supportive on the bench, and we went down to four for the last five (minutes), so it got even better."

Krenner's Three Stars

1. Nikita Kucherov
2. Andrei Vasilevskiy
3. Haydn Fleury

Lightning Look Ahead

- Thursday, December 21 vs. Vegas Golden Knights, 7 p.m. ET, AMALIE Arena
- Saturday, December 23 at Washington Capitals, 7 p.m. ET, Capital One Arena
- Wednesday, December 27 vs. Florida Panthers, 7 p.m. ET, AMALIE Arena