



**AMALIE Arena Media Clips  
Sunday, December 24, 2023**

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## **Victor Hedman scores shootout winner as Lightning overcome Capitals** **Associated Press**

WASHINGTON — Victor Hedman scored the shootout winner and the Lightning beat the Washington Capitals 2-1 on Saturday night.

The Lightning have now won three straight games to gain traction in the Atlantic Division race.

“(Saturday) was a huge win for us, obviously,” Lightning center Anthony Cirelli said. “We haven’t been great on the road this year, so there was an emphasis to come out strong and play a full 60 minutes.”

Though Washington’s three-game winning streak came to an end, the Capitals secured a point for the fourth straight game.

“I like where we’re at. ... We’ve shown some things, some ingredients of winning teams,” Washington coach Spencer Carbery said.

Tampa Bay got off to a quick start following a miscue behind the Capitals net, as Luke Glendening deflected a point shot from Hedman past Charlie Lindgren to make it 1-0 at 7:29 of the first period.

With the assist, Hedman extended his point streak to four games before securing the victory with a shootout goal.

“I felt confident,” Hedman said. “I haven’t gone in a while, so it was time, and I’m happy to contribute.”

The Capitals tied the game in similar fashion to open the second period, as Nick Jensen’s shot from long range went off Anthony Mantha and made it past Andrei Vasilevskiy. It marked Mantha’s 10th goal of this season and his fifth in eight games. He also has points in seven of his last nine outings overall. It took Mantha 59 games to hit double digits in goals last season.

“I came in this year with a mentality to jump back on the train, and it was a hard year last year,” he said. “Was focused, was determined to step up this year, and that’s what’s going on right now.”

Washington appeared to get another goal minutes later courtesy of Jensen, but it was called back after a coach’s challenge for offside. Saturday marked the fourth straight game that Washington required extra time.

Vasilevskiy stopped 33 of 34 shots in regulation and went 2-for-3 (another shot missed the net) in the shootout to help Tampa escape with two points.

“He was really good again (Saturday). ... You’ve got to support your goalie, and when we did break down there, Vas, he stood tall for us,” Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. “We’re going to need him, obviously, for the rest of the year, but it’s nice to see him getting into a little of a rhythm right now.”

Lindgren had 19 saves in the loss.

## **How Lightning beat Capitals in shootout, pulled out 3rd straight win** **Eduardo A. Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

WASHINGTON — The Lightning found the back of the net just once in regulation Saturday night against the Capitals but managed to come away from their final game before the holiday break with two critical points against a team they are jostling against in the Eastern Conference standings.

Tampa Bay pinpointed its current six-game stretch to close out the calendar year as pivotal. Now, it has won the first three games, including the only road contest, 2-1 in a shootout at Capital One Arena in Washington.

“The last three games, I think we’ve been able to turn it on and focus more on simplifying the game and not making it hard on ourselves,” defenseman Victor Hedman said. “And when we do that, we’re a good team. Everyone understands their role and when to make plays and when not to. So when we do that, we’re a tough team to play against.”

It marked just the third time this season the Lightning have held their opponent to two goals or fewer on the road. Goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy kept the game tied with several key stops during a 33-save night.

After a scoreless five-minute, 3-on-3 overtime period, the teams were still even through three shootout rounds before Hedman scored the decisive goal to end the fourth. He roofed a shot past Charlie Lindgren to send Tampa Bay into the three-day break with continued momentum.

“We’ve had to gut some of these games out,” said coach Jon Cooper, whose team also beat St. Louis and Vegas during its win streak. “We’ve beat some good teams here in this little run we’re on. ... This is a push — five of six games at home — we’ve got to get some points on this.”

The Lightning now enter the break in the final playoff position in the Eastern Conference, tied with the Capitals with 39 points but trailing them in points percentage.

### **Getting defensive**

The Capitals are the lowest-scoring team in the league, but they’ve also allowed the second-fewest goals. The Lightning were content to play the careful, defensive-minded type of game Washington likes.

Tampa Bay took 26 shot attempts (11 on goal) in the first period, but there wasn’t much out there in the final 40 minutes of regulation, including a third period in which the Lightning had just two shots on goal.

It was reminiscent of the way recent Lightning teams had to win in the postseason, grinding out low-scoring affairs. Though this core has done it before, it’s important to see this year’s team win games this way.

“It’s only going to get harder down the stretch here as the season goes on as it tightens up on the D side of the puck, for sure,” center Anthony Cirelli said. “You want to win every game 10-0, but that’s not the reality. So it’s nice to be on top of a tight-knit game like that down the stretch. In that third period, time winds down and any mistake goes in the net at that time, it’s likely game over.”

### **Fighting through pain**

Luke Glendening entered the game clearly fighting off some kind of injury, but his first-period goal was the early spark the Lightning needed on the road, where they've found themselves behind early more than they'd like.

Glendening didn't practice Wednesday, a body-maintenance day, and skated 14:02 in Thursday's win over Vegas. But he didn't participate in Saturday's morning skate and walked out of the arena afterward with a noticeable limp.

Still, Glendening didn't show any signs of being held back come game time and opened the scoring by deflecting Hedman's shot on net after first gloving a puck out of the air to keep it in the Capitals zone.

Glendening, who has made a career of doing the little things right, isn't known for scoring. But he already has five goals in 35 games this season after scoring just three in 70 games last season.

### **Refusing to lose**

Even on nights when they've grinded, the Lightning have struggled to close out games on the road. But they didn't make any of the glaring puck possession miscues that have led to losses, and Vasilevskiy was brilliant in net. It didn't hurt that the Capitals struggled to finish on several second-chance scoring opportunities.

Regardless, the Lightning found a way through overtime — a session in which they had lost five of seven entering the night — and emerged victorious in their first shootout of the season.

Brayden Point bobbled the puck before scoring in the shootout, which was tied 1-1 after three rounds. Vasilevskiy made big saves on Dylan Strome and Alexander Ovechkin, and Connor McMichael shot wide to open the fourth round. Hedman then lost the puck off his stick while crossing the blue line but gathered it and pulled it back before snapping a shot above Lindgren's glove for the winner.

"Pointer lost it, so I figured I better lose it, too, and go score" Hedman said. "But, jokes aside, I felt confident. I haven't gone in in a while, so it was time and I'm happy to contribute."

## **Tampa Bay Lightning get defensive heading into Christmas break**

### **Erik Erlendsson (Lightning Insider)**

**Washington, D.C.** -Road games for the Tampa Bay Lightning this season have been more coal in the stocking than candy cane.

But as the Lightning headed home from the final road game of the calendar year, their stockings were filled with two big points.

For just the third time this season, Tampa Bay held a road opponent to under three goals. And for the first time this season, a game involving the the Lightning was decided via the shootout.

It all added up to a third consecutive win for Tampa Bay heading into the three-day Christmas break.

“I’m really happy with the way we’re going into the break,” Lightning head coach Jon Cooper said.

Tampa Bay tied a season best with three straight wins. They matched that season best with what is an unconventional victory for the Lightning this season.

Here’s how they found a way to pull off the rare type of win.

### **MATCH THE OPPONENT**

The Washington Capitals are not the high-octane version of their former selves. The Caps have just two players with double-digits in goals 31 games into the season and neither of them are Alex Ovechkin, who snapped a 14-game scoring drought on Thursday. In fact, the Capitals rank 31st in scoring at just 2.39 goals per game.

Yet, Washington sat in a playoff spot entering Saturday primarily because they allow just 2.68 goals per game, eighth best in the league.

The are not your Bruce Boudreau Capitals.

“Washington hasn’t scored a ton of goals this year and they have a really good record,” Cooper said. “That’s because they play defense. They’re hard to get through.”

Tampa Bay had a good early push, testing an opponent they faced for the first time, getting a feel for the game. It was a good push and it resulted in the first goal. Victor Hedman stepped in to a loose puck as he came late on a line change. Luke Glendening deflected the shot past Charlie Lindgren for his fifth goal of the season at 7:29.

Getting the first goal is always, well, the goal. But against Washington this season, it’s imperative. The Capitals are undefeated in regulation this season when scoring first (9-0-2), 9-0 when leading after the first period and 12-0-3 when leading after two periods.

“It was good for us to get that one early,” Cooper said. “It was two teams that played it tight.”

For one of the few times this season through 35 games, Tampa Bay matched a team’s defensive approach with their own defensive approach.

“We did a good job playing defensively,” Anthony Cirelli said. “Obviously Vasy was there to make huge saves when we needed them. But overall this is a good, tight game that we came out on top.”

### **BORING GAME**

Of all the ways a low-scoring game can be exciting, this was not one of them.

With the game described as tight, it's easy to demise there as not much space to work with on the ice. Not a lot of chances off the rush – NaturalStatTrick tracked one rush shot on goal for each team. The teams had to work for their ice.

In a lot of ways, particularly after the first period, it could be classified as a boring game that saw just 16 combined shots on goal in the final 40 minutes.

"We'll take that . . . perfect road game," Hedman said.

## **KEEPING IT LOW**

For just the eighth time this season Tampa Bay held an opponent to fewer than three goals in a game. But it's the second time in the past three games.

As Tampa Bay turned from a high-scoring team that could out-score their mistakes, they became a championship team when they learned to become a patient team that could keep the goals against down and wait for their opportunities.

The Lightning entered Saturday allowing 3.50 goals per game, 27th most in the league. That's now how teams win titles.

But Saturday looked a lot like how Tampa Bay used to play in those previous seasons.

"That goes back a few years to when we were really good at it," Hedman said. "So it feels good to only get one (goal) and still get two points. That's a good sign."

It's something that has been emphasized, and it was a good opponent to test themselves against.

"It's playing the right way and winning the right way.," Cooper said. "And in the end you can't give up goals. You give up just one have got a good chance at getting points out of the game. Hence like the same way Washington's done it. They're a pretty disciplined team in their own end and when they get their goals they make them stand up. So it's something that we're trying to model as well and hopefully tonight to start for us."

## **SHOOTOUT SUCCESS**

Tampa Bay is among the most success teams in league history when it comes to winning shootouts. The Lightning entered Saturday with a winning percentage of .525 in games decided by a shootout, tied for eighth best since the shootout was implemented in 2004-05.

So it really shouldn't be a big surprise when they earn the extra point in the skills competition, since they've had a lot of skilled players, particularly in the past decade.

Of goaltenders to have faced at least 50 shootout attempts, Vasilevskiy has the second highest save percentage of all time at .782, behind only Linus Ullmark (.836). While Vasilevskiy's percentage actually dropped on Saturday he stopped three-of-four attempts, including the final three.

That allowed Brayden Point to convert his chance in the second round of the shootout and Hedman to win it with his conversion in the fourth round to earn Tampa Bay the additional point.

"I felt confident," Hedman said of his winning attempt. "I haven't gone in a while so it was time and I'm happy to contribute."

And for Vasilevskiy, he keeps looking more and more like he's completely put behind the back surgery that kept him out for eight weeks.

"It's crazy because we thought he was really good the other night and he let in four," Cooper said. "He's really good again tonight and let's in one. It's just funny how the league works. But you have to support your goalie and when we did break down Vasy was tall for us. We're going to need him, obviously, for the rest of this year. So it's nice to see him getting in a little rhythm right now."

Vasilevskiy has now won seven of his past nine starts.

## **HALFWAY THERE**

When the Lightning limped home from a 2-3 road trip, it didn't sit well with the coaches.

So when Tampa Bay returned home with six games before the end of the calendar year, it was emphasized the importance of this six-game stretch, with five of them at home. Saturday was the midway point of that six-game stretch, and the only road game.

Tampa Bay is a perfect six-for-six in points with victories over St. Louis, Vegas and Washington.

"We knew we had three here before the break, two at home and this one on the road," Anthony Cirelli said. "So we took care of business at home and today was a huge win for us. We haven't been great on the road this year. So it was an emphasis to come out strong and play a full 60 minutes."

But that work is only halfway done on this stretch, with the first game back from the Christmas break coming on Wednesday at home against Florida, followed by back-to-back home games against the New York Rangers and Montreal next weekend.

"We made a point of emphasis when we came back from the West Coast that we weren't happy with the way that ended," Cooper said. "And this is a push with five of six at home, we have to get some points out of this, we've kind of circled the six games. It's great that we're 3-0, and we get this little break. But we have three more left against some top flight teams in the East, so I guess we'll see we're out after that. But I'm really happy with the way we're going into the break."

## **NOTES**

Tampa Bay placed D Mikhail Sergachev was placed in injured reserve, retroactive to December 19, which means he's eligible to return when the Lightning return to the ice on Wednesday against Florida. ... The Lightning scratched D Sean Day and RW Austin Watson. ... D Victor Hedman recorded his fifth career game-deciding goal in a shootout, tied with Marty St. Louis for fourth most in franchise history since shootouts were implemented in 2005-06. Hedman improved to 10-for-33 (30.3 percent) all-time in shootout attempts. He is the sixth player in franchise history to record 10 career shootout goals, joining Steven Stamkos (21), Brayden Point (16), Brad Richards (13), Nikita Kucherov (12) and Vinny Lecavalier (12).

## **MY THREE STARS**

1. Lightning G Andrei Vasilevskiy – Stopped 33 shots, 3-of-4 in the shootout, 20th career shootout victory
2. Lightning D Victor Hedman – Game-deciding goal in shootout, assist, 27:32 of ice time, 8 shot attempts, two takeaways, three blocked shots
3. Capitals G Charlie Lindgren – Stopped 19 shots, 5-for-5 in high danger chances against

## Here's what the latest Bally Sports news means for Lightning fans

Eduardo A. Encina (Tampa Bay Times)

TAMPA — Lightning games will continue to be broadcast on Bally Sports Sun for the remainder of the season, but where fans will be able to watch the team on local television beyond 2023-24 is very much uncertain.

Diamond Sports Group, Bally Sports' parent company, has been going through Chapter 11 bankruptcy proceedings since March. This week, Diamond reached an agreement with the NHL that will allow Bally to continue broadcasting games through the end of the season for the Lightning and 10 other teams currently on the regional sports network before the rights return to the league.

So, what does it all mean? We'll try to break it down.

### What we know

There's been very little certainty regarding Bally's Sports' short-term future as Diamond wrangles with its debtors. Ultimately, this week's news provides something the RSN, the league, its teams and fans have been waiting and hoping for — the certainty that games will continue to be broadcast through the end of this season. Bally has the broadcasts for 71 of the Lightning's 82 regular-season games. The other 11 are network exclusives.

As crazy as it might sound, there were no guarantees that would happen.

Now, Lightning fans won't have to worry that they'll abruptly be left in the dark in the middle of the season. The team knows it will receive rights fee payments, though under the agreement Diamond will pay a discounted fee to some of the teams under contract — the Lightning are believed to be one — before the rights return to the league. The other teams on Bally are the Ducks, Hurricanes, Blue Jackets, Stars, Red Wings, Panthers, Kings, Wild, Predators, and Blues.

The Lightning renewed their rights deal with Bally early this year, just weeks before Diamond filed for Chapter 11. The length and terms were not disclosed, but the Panthers in 2022 re-signed with Bally for a multiyear deal that paid the team between \$14 million-16 million a year, according to Sports Business Journal.

With the rights returning to the league after this season, the Lightning will have the ability to negotiate their next rightsholder deal for 2024-25 and beyond.

### How we got here

The partnership between the Lightning and Bally Sports Sun dates back to the start of the franchise. Sunshine Network showed the team's first games in 1992, bringing televised hockey to a regional audience while providing the fledgling RSN with valuable on-air programming.

Over the years, it went through various ownership and name changes — from Sun Sports to Fox Sports Sun — but remained the TV home of the Lightning. The network's ownership has been in trouble since Sinclair Broadcasting purchased the 21 Fox Sports RSNs from Disney for nearly \$10 billion in 2019. Disney acquired them in its takeover of 21st Century Fox but was forced to sell them by antitrust regulators due to Disney's ownership of ESPN. The networks were rebranded as Bally Sports the following year.

Just three years later, Bally has become a source of frustration for area sports fans. Carriage fee disputes that took the network off cable providers and streaming services forced viewers to scramble



to watch games, and the direct-to-consumer Bally Sports app has been marred with streaming issues this season that have left fans in the dark on several game nights and with little faith in the network.

According to court filings from March, Diamond is \$8.67 billion in debt. Its attempts to get out from under it while producing a product worthy of the teams it broadcasts has been a challenge, to say the least.

### What's next

Where Lightning games will be broadcast beyond this season is unknown, but possibilities continue to arise and the situation remains fluid.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said this week he hoped Bally would be able to resolve its financial issues and remain a long-standing partner of the league. He reiterated that the NHL's main concern is ensuring fans continue to have access to games. In an interview with the Dallas Morning News, Bettman said the league is ready to take the lead to help deliver local broadcasts.

"We're preparing alternatives for clubs," Bettman said. "We're going to make sure we're in a position where games are available and we're going to seek to evolve with the times, because the model has obviously been under some stress. We have contingency plans. It's more in the short-term of making sure we can deliver games. That's something from the first time I was worried that we had prepared for. ... The longer-term business strategy is something that's going to have to evolve."

The NHL has had the benefit of seeing how Bally's issues have played out with other sports leagues. Diamond holds the regional rights to more than 40 teams across the NHL, Major League Baseball (including the Rays) and NBA. In November, Diamond and the NBA reached a deal that allows Bally broadcasts to continue through the end of the season and rights fees to be paid — some at a discount — before rights return to the league. This week, Sports Business Journal reported, Diamond agreed to make payments to nine of its 12 teams (including the Rays) for the 2024 season. It promised to make offers to the other three (Guardians, Rangers and Twins). If they decline the offers, their rights would return to MLB.

When Diamond defaulted on payment to the Padres in May, breaching its contract with the team, MLB stepped in to produce and distribute games locally through its apps and websites and on the MLB.TV out-of-market service by lifting local restrictions. From Bettman's comments, the NHL seems prepared to do the same, potentially framing local coverage into the ESPN+ service that provides out-of-market games. But this week's agreement gives the league time before that might have to happen.

It is uncertain what will become of Bally Sports, but this week's Wall Street Journal report that Amazon is in talks to invest in Diamond on a multiyear streaming partnership could potentially bail out and resuscitate the networks while making Amazon's Prime Video subscriber platform the streaming home for all of the teams. The plan has received support from a select group of Diamond's creditors, according to the Journal, but would still need bankruptcy court approval and could fall through.

No matter where Lightning games are shown next year, fans shouldn't expect the product to change much, if at all. Even though the team's broadcast crew, which consists of play-by-play man Dave Randorf, color analyst Brian Engblom and rinkside reporter Gabby Shirley, represent Bally on air, they technically are employees of the Lightning, so any TV broadcast on another local medium will include them.