



AMALIE Arena Media Clips
Tuesday, November 14, 2023

1. Andrei Vasilevskiy practices with Lightning for first time since surgery – Kristie Ackert (Tampa Bay Times)
2. Andrei Vasilevskiy returns to practice with Tampa Bay Lightning, eyes his return – Erik Erlendsson (Lightning Insider)
3. Nuts & Bolts: Two-game Central Division trip begins in St. Louis – Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)
4. Game 12 preview: Syracuse Crunch at Bridgeport Islanders – Syracuse Crunch

Andrei Vasilevskiy practices with Lightning for first time since surgery **Kristie Ackert (Tampa Bay Times)**

TAMPA — Lightning goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy surprised his coach and some of his teammates Monday by joining them on the ice at Amalie Arena and participating in practice for the first time since having back surgery in late September.

Vasilevskiy, who faced shots and won a practice game, joked afterward that he had picked up his first victory of the season.

“Feels amazing,” Vasilevskiy said. “Obviously, it’s been a long time. So, obviously, it’s unfortunate, but it is what it is. I took the time to, you know, to recover well to prepare myself for the first practice, and so I feel good.”

Vasilevskiy, who has been out after having microdiscectomy surgery on Sept. 28 to address a lumbar disk herniation, said he is still at least two weeks away from returning from the injured reserve list. The initial prognosis had a recovery timeframe of eight to 10 weeks.

Vasilevskiy said feels he is on schedule but would not commit to a timeline.

“We’ll see how it is,” he said. “I think we’re about two weeks away from that eight weeks from that surgery (mark). And so once we hit that eight-week mark, we’ll go from there.”

Vasilevskiy said the injury was a result of “pushing too hard” in the gym.

“It’s just such a silly, silly injury and was avoidable,” he said. “Same as my first surgery ... six, seven years ago. It was after the hard workout in the gym, the squats and overhead presses and all this bodybuilding stuff. But as I say, very avoidable and I just wasn’t smart about pushing myself too hard.”

Vasilevskiy said his current injury will change how he works out away from the ice.

“I guess the first surgery wasn’t a good enough lesson,” Vasilevskiy said. “The injury was totally avoidable, not even hockey-related. It was gym-related. So I think now I will spend a lot more time on the ice.”

Vasilevskiy, 29, was diagnosed with a herniated disk before training camp. The 2019 Vezina Trophy winner as the NHL’s best goaltender is coming off his sixth straight season of at least 30 wins, going 34-22-4 in 2022-23.

That he is close to a return is a very hopeful sign for the Lightning.

“It’s great to have your best him out there, and seeing he’s well and getting back out there and stuff,” Lightning defenseman Victor Hedman said. “... Obviously, he’s not there yet, but, you know, it’s great to see him, get to see him working in practice and back in action.”

Vasilevskiy will continue to skate with his teammates and will make his first road trip of the season this week as Tampa Bay heads to St. Louis and Chicago.

But he likely will watch his backup, Jonas Johanson, who has held down the net in Vasilevskiy’s absence. Largely untested before this season, Johanson has gone 5-3-4 with a 3.42 goals-against

average and .899 save percentage. He has earned nothing but praise from his teammates, including Vasilevskiy.

“He’s been great. Obviously, it’s it’s not an easy job. Believe me, I know,” Vasilevskiy said with a smile. “But he’s been amazing. In some games we just didn’t play as well, but I thought he was really rock solid and we’re right there in those races. So, it’s big. He was a big part of that, for sure.”

Erik Cernak, who left Saturday’s game in the second period after taking a hard hit into the boards, was not on the ice Monday. The team described the defenseman’s status as day to day, and he is expected to participate in Tuesday’s morning skate in St. Louis.

“Obviously, he’s listed as day to day and didn’t practice (Monday), but I talked to him before and he said he’s feeling good,” assistant coach Rob Zettler said. “So, we’re hopeful.”

Right wing Nikita Kucherov, who missed Saturday’s game with an illness, was a full participant in practice.

Andrei Vasilevskiy returns to practice with Tampa Bay Lightning, eyes his return **Erik Erlendsson (Lightning Insider)**

TAMPA – Following a two-game homestand that yielded zero points, the Tampa Bay Lightning returned to practice on Monday to some good news – Andrei Vasilevskiy was on the ice.

And on the ice is where Vasilevskiy expects to spend more time moving forward after an off-ice injury put him on the sidelines since the second week of training camp. Vasilevskiy underwent microdiscectomy surgery on his back on September 28 that was expected to keep him out 8-10 weeks.

That eight-week mark comes on Thanksgiving. Monday's return to practice was a major milestone toward his return to the Lightning net.

"It feels amazing, obviously it's been a long time," Vasilevskiy said. "It's unfortunate, but it is what it is. So I took the time to recover well and to prepare myself for the first practice. I feel good."

Vasilevskiy is a perennial Vezina Trophy candidate and a five-time finalist while winning the award in 2019. He was also the 2021 Conn Smythe winner as the playoff MVP. The 29-year-old is widely regarded as the best goaltender in the game and a lock for the Hall of Fame when his career is finished.

But he is far from finished as the notorious gym rat works as hard as anyone when it comes to honing his craft on and off the ice. After what occurred over the summer, however, you can expect him to spend less time in the gym and more time on the ice.

Vasilevskiy said on Monday that the injury to his back did not stem from anything that happened during a game or in practice and is unrelated to what he experienced last season that kept him from being at his best.

It happened while working out in the gym.

"It's just such a silly, silly injury and way avoidable," Vasilevskiy said. "It was after a hard workout in the gym, the squats and overhead presses and all this bodybuilding stuff. But as I said, very avoidable and I just wasn't smart about pushing myself too hard."

Vasilevskiy has been through something similar in the past when he underwent surgery to relieve a blood clot in his shoulder area prior to the start of the 2015 season. That injury also came from work done in the gym.

"The first surgery wasn't a good lesson, I guess," he said. "It's all, just as I said, just silly and a way avoidable injury and nothing hockey related. More like a gym related and obviously, after that I'll spend more time on the ice now."

Vasilevskiy has been skating on his own for the past few weeks, primarily away from the team. While he has been seeing some shots, they have primarily been while working with goaltending coach Frantz Jean in a limited capacity.

During practice on Monday, Vasilevskiy was primarily a spectator during the first half of practice, which included power play work. But for the second half, he moved into the crease, taking live shots during drills and then was in a net during a short-sided game before the end of practice, with the losing team skating extra laps. Vasilevskiy did not have to skate the extra laps.

“It’s really exciting, it just means his progress is kind of on track,” assistant coach Rob Zettler said. “And he’s doing really well. He’s healthy enough to get in there and face some real shots and some real traffic. So it’s great. And he’s excited. We played a little game at the end and he said he got his first win of the season. So that’s good. It’s just a confidence builder for him and for everybody. It’s great.”

Just the sight of Vasilevskiy making progress and rejoining the team on the ice is welcome to the rest of the team. It’s a morale boost, particularly coming off consecutive home losses.

“Vasy is such a huge part of this team,” center Anthony Cirelli said. “To see me out there kind of smiling and back at practice is really good to see.”

There is no timetable for Vasilevskiy to be back in the lineup. The team will certainly monitor his progress over the next two weeks leading up to the first benchmark at eight weeks on November 23. While original estimates suggested it might be closer to Christmas before Vasilevskiy might be ready, it looks like it might be on the early part of the possible window, barring any setbacks.

“We’ll see,” he said. “It’s still about two weeks away from eight weeks from that surgery, so once we hit that eight-week mark, we’ll go from there.”

To this point in Vasilevskiy’s absence the Lightning have been able to keep their head above water. Tampa Bay enters Tuesday’s game at St. Louis with 16 points through 15 games. The Lightning sit in sixth place in the division but are just two points out of second place.

Between now and Thanksgiving there are five more games on Tampa Bay’s schedule – at St. Louis and Chicago followed by home games against Edmonton, Boston and Winnipeg. Before Vasilevskiy returns, the Lightning still have some work to clean up.

Jonas Johansson and Matt Tomkins have filled in fine in net during Vasilevskiy’s absence, giving the Lightning the chance to win on a consistent basis through the first 15 games of the season. But the team in front of whoever plays in goal needs to be better as Tampa Bay has allowed the fifth most goals against at 3.6 per game.

“If you look at our game, especially over the last couple there’s areas we need to fix no matter who we’re playing in front of,” Zettler said. “We’ve just given up a little bit too much lately. When you look at what’s going on in front of the goalies, there’s some areas we can clean up. Our execution needs to be better. We need to come out of our end a little bit cleaner. So those are the areas that we’re focused on.”

With the thought of Vasilevskiy’s return coming, it’s time for the team to take a deep breath, calm the situation and figure out the solution. What they can’t do is think everything will be solved with Vasilevskiy’s return and take an exhale.

“That can’t be the case,” Cirelli said. “Just because we have a guy like Vasy coming back that shouldn’t be our mindset of all that let’s take a breath now that Vasy is back. You can’t be like that. It’s got to be we have to continue to be getting better. We have to play even harder. Being even better in our D zone, limiting turnovers, everything that has kind of been our downfall. Goaltending hasn’t been an issue, so it’s more on the players. on us, just being better all over the ice.”

PRACTICE UPDATES

After missing Saturday’s game due to illness, right wing Nikita Kucherov returned to practice. ... The team received positive news on defenseman Erik Cernak, who left Saturday’s game due to an upper-

body injury. Cernak is considered day-to-day and is expected to be on the ice for the morning skate on Tuesday in St. Louis. "I talked to him before (practice) and he said he's feeling good. So we're hopeful," Zettler said. ... Zettler said the plan is for Haydn Fleury to play in one more game with Syracuse before he finishes his conditioning assignment and rejoins the team. ... RW Connor Sheary is considered week-to-week with an upper-body injury, similar to the situation with Tyler Motte.

The lines and pairings at practice on Monday looked like this:

Brandon Hagel-Brayden Point-Nikita Kucherov

Steven Stamkos-Nick Paul-Alex Barre-Boulet

Mikey Esyssimont-Anthony Cirelli-Tanner Jeannot

Tyler Motte-Luke Glendening-Waltteri Merela

Austin Watson

The defensive pairings were:

Victor Hedman-Nick Perbix

Mikhail Sergachev-Darren Raddysh

Calvin de Haan-Phil Myers

Nuts & Bolts: Two-game Central Division trip begins in St. Louis **Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)**

Everything you need to know ahead of Tampa Bay's matchup against the St. Louis Blues on Tuesday.

When: Tuesday, November 14 - 8 p.m. ET

Where: Enterprise Center - St. Louis, MO

TV coverage: Bally Sports (check local listings)

Radio coverage: 102.5 MHz-FM, Lightning Radio 24/7

Where to stream it: BallySports.com

Lineup from Tuesday's game (subject to change)

Forwards

Brandon Hagel - Brayden Point - Alex Barre-Boulet

Steven Stamkos - Nick Paul - Tyler Motte

Tanner Jeannot - Anthony Cirelli - Mikey Eyssimont

Austin Watson - Luke Glendening - Waltteri Merela

Defensemen

Victor Hedman - Erik Cernak

Mikhail Sergachev - Darren Raddysh

Calvin de Haan - Nick Perbix

Goaltenders

Jonas Johansson

Matt Tomkins

Tuesday's Matchup

The Lightning and Blues are playing the first of two matchups this season and the only meeting at Enterprise Center...The two teams will meet next month to conclude the season series with a Dec. 19 matchup at AMALIE Arena...The Bolts posted a 2-0-0 record vs. STL last season, winning both games in regulation by a combined score of 9-4...Brayden Point (4-2—6) led the Lightning in goals and points vs. STL last season, while Nikita Kucherov (0-4—4) paced the team in assists...Kucherov is riding a three-game point streak vs. STL (1-6—7)...Point is also riding a three-game point streak vs. STL and has posted at least one goal and one assist in each of the three contests (5-3—8)...Steven Stamkos has notched an assist in three straight games vs. STL (0-4—4)...Since being acquired by Tampa Bay in 2022, Brandon Hagel has recorded three points in two contests vs. STL (1-2—3)... Anthony Cirelli has found the scoresheet in five of his seven career games vs. STL (4-2—6) with goals in four of the last five meetings... Mikhail Sergachev has recorded an assist in back-to-back contests vs. STL (0-2—2)... Nick Perbix posted a multi-point effort in his one career game vs. STL (1-1—2)...The Bolts have scored three or more goals in nine of their last 12 contests vs. STL (total: 37 goals)...The Lightning have held STL to two goals or fewer in nine of the last 14 meetings (total: 33 goals)...Tampa Bay has scored a power-play goal in five consecutive games vs. STL...The Bolts are 2-6-2 in their last 10 road games at STL and 5-3-2 in the last 10 meetings overall...The Lightning are 14-24-5 with three ties all-time vs. STL, including a road record of 5-15-3...Martin St. Louis holds the Tampa Bay franchise records for career assists and points vs. STL, while Stamkos (7-9—16) and Point (7-5—12) are tied for the lead in goals.

Injuries

Conor Sheary - Upper-body, out

Andrei Vasilevskiy - Back, out

Tampa Bay Sports Item of the Game

Starter Launch

You've been waiting for it, and it's finally here - check out the newest collaboration with your favorite brand Starter, and the Tampa Bay Lightning. Available in store at Amalie Arena and online at TampaBaySports.com, while supplies last.

The Road Ahead

Thursday, November 16 at Chicago Blackhawks

Saturday, November 18 vs. Edmonton Oilers

Monday, November 20 vs. Boston Bruins

Game 12 preview: Syracuse Crunch at Bridgeport Islanders

Syracuse Crunch

CRUNCH GO BACK TO SCHOOL IN BRIDGEPORT

The Crunch hit the classroom for a field trip clash against the Bridgeport Islanders at Total Mortgage Arena this morning.

It's the final matchup of the two-game season series between the clubs. The Crunch defeated the Islanders, 4-2, exactly one month ago in Syracuse's 30th home opener at Upstate Medical University Arena. The Crunch have not swept Bridgeport in a season series since 2017-18.

LAST TIME OUT

Mitchell Chaffee and *Max Groshev* both scored twice and the Crunch raced past the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins, 6-3, Saturday at Mohegan Sun Arena at Casey Plaza.

Joe Carroll start the scoring for the Crunch at 7:31 of the first period. He banged home a rebound with assists from *Sean Day* and *Devante Stephens* for his second goal of the season. Chaffee extended the lead in the first period by ripping a power-play goal from the left circle off a cross-ice pass from *Max Crozier*.

The Crunch built the advantage in the second period when Groshev burst out for a breakaway goal at 8:48. *Gage Goncalves* made it 4-0 at 11:03. After a Penguins power-play goal cut the score to 4-1, Chaffee potted his second of the night for a 5-1 lead.

A Groshev empty-net goal off-set two Jack Rathbone tallies for the Penguins to make it a 6-3 final.

SCOUTING THE CRUNCH

The Crunch snapped a three-game winless (0-1-0-2) spell with their 6-3 win over the Penguins Saturday night. The win moved the Crunch to 2-1-0-2 in November and 6-3-0-2 overall this season. They are in fourth place in the North Division with 14 points, but a win today would move them into a tie for first.

Gage Goncalves posted his sixth career game (regular season and playoffs) with at least three points in Saturday's 6-3 win over the Penguins. The third-year-pro had assists on both *Mitchell Chaffee* goals, and added what was the game-winning goal in the second period.

The Mission, British Columbia native ranks second on the Crunch with 11 points, and his nine assists are tops on the team. Goncalves enters the week with 98 points in 154 career games and is on the verge of becoming the 39th player in franchise history to log 100 points with the Crunch.

TAKING CLASS ON THE ROAD

The Crunch are off to a strong start on the road this season, earning at least a point in five of their first six road games (4-1-0-1).

They have been particularly potent offensively on the road, totaling 26 goals in six games for an average of 4.33 goals per game. They have scored at least four goals in their four road wins. Their

plus-11 goal differential on the road is tied with Calgary for the second best in the AHL (Texas, plus-12).

SCOUTING THE ISLANDERS

Goals have been hard to come by for the Islanders, who enter today in last place in the Atlantic Division with nine points (4-6-1-0). Despite winning two of its last three games – both versus Springfield – Bridgeport has scored only 20 goals in 11 games, for a league-low 1.82 goals per game. The last AHL team to finish a season averaging fewer than two goals per game was San Antonio in 2005-06 (1.91).

Ruslan Iskhakov has accounted for 10 points and four of his team's 20 goals this season. He collected two assists against the Crunch in the first match up as part of a five-points (2g, 3a) opening weekend. He had been held in check since, until he scored twice, including in overtime, in the Islanders 2-1 win over Springfield on Saturday.

Three of the four Islanders wins this season have required overtime and Iskhakov has two of their three overtime goals.

TAKING ON THE ATLANTIC

Today is the third of five straight Crunch games against Atlantic Division foes. Syracuse is 2-1-0-0 so far against the Atlantic Division in 2023-24. The Crunch scored a win in their home opener versus Bridgeport on Oct. 14 and split a home-and-home with Wilkes-Barre/Scranton over the weekend.

The streak concludes with a home-and-home slate against Hartford starting Friday in Syracuse.

In 17 total games between Atlantic and North Division clubs, the Atlantic Division has nine wins and the North has eight.

SPEED=DISTANCE/TIME

Speedy rookie *Max Groshev* logged a pair of multi-point performances in Week 5 to lead the team in scoring with four points (2g, 2a) in three games. He opened the week with the first goal of the game Wednesday in Belleville before adding an assist on a game-tying, shorthanded goal in the third period.

The 21-year-old netted his first two-goal game in the AHL Saturday against the Penguins. He scored on a partial breakaway in the second period, and then iced the game with an empty-net goal in the third.

A third-round pick by Tampa Bay in the 2020 NHL Draft, Groshev has nine points (4g, 5a) in 11 games this season, his first spent in North America.

A+ REPORT CARD

Today marks the Crunch's lone morning game day of the season.

Syracuse has won four straight games as a visitor during an opponents' school field trip game; that streak began Feb. 28, 2018 with a 4-3 overtime win against the Marlies.

Last season in Springfield, the Crunch came back from a 4-1 deficit to win in a shootout and extend

their morning win streak.

They won in Bridgeport, 3-2, Feb 5, 2020 by rallying with two third period goals. *Devante Stephens* and *Daniel Walcott* are the only players on the current roster who appeared in that game for the Crunch.

Their other field trip win in this span is at Hartford on Nov. 20, 2019 (W, 3-1).

100 FOR CHAFFEE

Exactly one year removed from tearing his ACL while with the Iowa Wild, forward *Mitchell Chaffee* had his finest night in his brief Crunch career Saturday at Wilkes-Barre/Scranton. The 25-year-old scored twice for his sixth career multi-goal game. He scored a power-play goal in the second period and an even strength goal in the second, giving him three goals this season.

The Rockford, Michigan native signed a one-year contract as a free agent with the Lightning this summer. He began his career as an undrafted free agent with the Wild organization, playing two games for Minnesota and 87 with Iowa, where he collected 63 points (30g, 33a) in 87 games from 2020 to 2023. He has nine points (3g, 6a) in 10 games for the Crunch this season. Today marks his 100th pro game.