



**AMALIE Arena Media Clips  
Wednesday, October 11, 2023**

1. Brandon Hagel on target in Lightning's win over Nashville Predators – Kristie Ackert (Tampa Bay Times)
2. Lightning's Nick Paul logs 2 power-play goals vs. Nashville Predators – Eduardo Encina (Tampa Bay Times)
3. Tampa Bay Lightning opening regular season Tuesday vs the Nashville Predators – Tim Kephart (ABC Action News)

## **Brandon Hagel on target in Lightning's win over Nashville Predators** **Kristie Ackert (Tampa Bay Times)**

TAMPA — Brandon Hagel changed his mind at the last minute. The Lightning left wing had a plan for his third-period penalty shot Tuesday night but abandoned it on the fly, and it paid off.

Hagel beat Nashville goaltender Juuse Saros over the blocker for a go-ahead goal, and Tampa Bay went on to beat the Predators 5-3 in its season opener at Amalie Arena.

It was just the 25th time in NHL history a penalty shot has been taken in a season-opening game. Hagel became only the seventh player to capitalize on it.

"That one felt good, obviously," Hagel said. "That one (Juuso Parssinen) goal (three minutes earlier) was a little bit my fault. I kind of lost my guy there. So to be able to get it back, taking the lead at that point was a nice feeling."

Hagel said he had a more intricate plan for his shot, but when Saros didn't move after Hagel crossed the blue line, he just snapped the puck over his blocker.

"I came down the left side and I was going to make a move," Hagel said, "but I saw that spot the whole way, so I took the shot."

It was Hagel's second career penalty shot attempt and first penalty-shot goal. He drew it by splitting Nashville defenders Luke Schenn and Jeremy Lauzon. Schenn pulled him down from behind, resulting in a holding call.

Hagel's only other penalty shot came in Game 4 of the opening-round playoff series against the Maple Leafs in April, which the Lightning lost in six games. Ilya Samsonov stopped him with a left-pad save.

The earlier-than-expected ending to Tampa Bay's season was still on Hagel's mind Tuesday.

"I think everyone's excited to get back, obviously," he said. "The ending of last season wasn't the way we wanted to do it. So everyone's excited. Big game, obviously."

"Now we go on on the road against three new teams (Detroit, Ottawa and Buffalo) that have been improving over the years and are supposed to be really good this year. So, it's big obviously to get the win (Tuesday) and kind of carry that momentum into those buildings in a few days."

Lightning goaltender Jonas Johansson makes a third-period save.

As if Jonas Johansson didn't already know how big the shoes he is trying to fill are, Lightning fans quickly reminded him. The biggest cheer of the pregame introductions came when the giant overhead screen zoomed in on injured goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy.

The Lightning don't expect Johansson to be Vasilevskiy, a former Vezina and Conn Smythe trophy winner. They just need him to give them a chance to win. Tuesday, he did exactly that.

Johansson, playing in just his 36th career NHL game, stopped 28 of the 31 shots he faced.

"His game was quiet," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. "He made himself big. He wasn't erratic. .... When the heat turned up, his heartbeat didn't go up. You kind of want to see that in a goaltender."

Johansson will have plenty more opportunities to show what he's got.

Vasilevskiy underwent surgery to repair a herniated disk in his back and is expected to miss the first two months of the season. According to the ESPN broadcast, Cooper expects the Lightning to be without Vasilevskiy for about 30 games.

The team declined to sign a veteran backup goalie this season in part to save some cap space and because they didn't think Vasilevskiy needed a mentor in his 10th NHL season.

Motte injured

Lightning forward Tyler Motte left the game after appearing to be hit in the hand by a puck near the end of the second period.

Motte, who signed a one-year deal in the offseason, did not play in the third period. The team had no information after the game other than to confirm that Motte had been hurt.

"We'll know (Wednesday)," Cooper said. "He wasn't able to come back from the injury."

The Lightning do not play again until Saturday, so Motte will have extra time to heal if the injury is not serious.

## **Lightning's Nick Paul logs 2 power-play goals vs. Nashville Predators** **Eduardo Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

TAMPA — It always takes a certain type of player to be able to play alongside stars. And going into this season, the Lightning's vaunted top power-play unit needed to replace the net front position that was left empty by Alex Killorn's departure.

During the preseason, the Lightning experimented with Anthony Cirelli there, then decided on third-line center Nick Paul to fill the void.

For a team opening the season with so many new faces and experimenting with different pieces, you can't expect easy fixes.

But positioning Paul on the power play surrounded by elite talent like Steven Stamkos, Nikita Kucherov, Brayden Point, Victor Hedman and Mikhail Sergachev, he seemed to fit in perfectly during the regular-season opener.

Paul scored two power-play goals — creating chaos in the crease with his 6-foot-2, 229-pound body — including the eventual game-winner in the Lightning's 5-3 victory over the Predators on Tuesday at Amalie Arena.

"When you're with good players, you just try and get them the puck," Paul said. "And then my job is just stay in there, take the goalie away and then the trash in front, put it in. Just got to keep it going and build confidence."

Big Boi of OutKast performs for fans before the first game of the season at Amalie Arena.

The Lightning's early puck drop — they were the first game of a nationally-televised triple-header — officially kicked off the 2023-24 NHL season. Hours before, players entered the arena on a blue carpet lined by fans and Big Boi, one half of the Atlanta hip-hop duo Outkast, played a bass-thumping pregame concert in Thunder Alley.

"Wow, when I pulled up there, I was actually doing an interview before and kind of caught myself staring at that blue carpet," said forward Brandon Hagel, who gave the Lightning a 3-2 lead when he converted a penalty shot 3:07 into the third period. "I think I was a little bit more nervous than other people out there."

After a dominating first period in which the Lightning outshot the Predators 12-2 and allowed just seven shot attempts, the game shifted momentum in the second period. And 11 seconds into the third, the Lightning found themselves down 2-1 after Nashville forward Juuso Parssinen slipped past the defense and scored a go-ahead goal.

That's when Paul stood steady in front of the net and pounced on a rebound of Stamkos' shot from the left circle as goalie Juuse Saros slid out of the crease, tying the score 2:25 into the period.

"There is a skill-set you have to have but the skill-set is also part mental," coach Jon Cooper said of playing with the star power on the Lightning's power-play unit. "The fact that Paulie has been with us for a while and he's watched the dynamics of how everything goes through, I think it's really helped him ... Those guys know what they're doing together and so Paulie's stepped in there and done a heck of a job."

Hagel's penalty shot gave the Lightning a one-goal lead at the 3:07 mark, but Nashville's Tommy Novak beat Lightning goaltender Jonas Johansson shortside above his blocker to tie it at 3-all on the power play.

Paul then found the puck at his feet skating in front of the crease when Saros stopped Sergachev's shot from the high slot with a pad save. Off balance, Paul swiped the puck past Saros in traffic for the winner midway through the third for a 4-3 lead.

"Just a big body," Point said of Paul on the power play. "I thought all through training camp and the exhibitions, he was great in that spot and then tonight, no different, using his body, getting those rebounds and putting them in, it's awesome. Big for us."

"That's what you call money-makers," Hagel said of Paul's goals.

Paul actually wasn't pleased with his play on the power play early, struggling to mesh with the unit entering the offensive zone.

Scoring twice certainly helped his confidence. Four of his 17 goals came on the power play in 80 games last season while with the second unit, but he went the final 40 regular-season games without a power-play goal and scored just two total over that stretch. This year, he had big skates to fill in the departed Killorn, who had scored 22 man-advantage goals over the past four seasons, most of them from the net-front position.

"I've just got to make better plays, because you don't want the puck going all the way down the ice, but that's just growing pains," Paul said.

Johansson, playing his first game as the starter with goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy (back) out for the first two months, made 28 saves, including four in the final 2:22 when Nashville pulled Saros to bring on an extra attacker. Kucherov filled an empty net with 1.8 seconds remaining on a feed from Paul to close out scoring.

## **Tampa Bay Lightning opening regular season Tuesday vs the Nashville Predators Tim Kephart (ABC Action News)**

TAMPA, Fla. — After not making it to the Stanley Cup Final for the first time in three years, the Tampa Bay Lightning are rested and ready to drop the puck on the regular season. But they'll be short-handed when they do.

Perhaps the most important member of the Lightning, goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy, will miss at least the first two months of the season as he recovers from back surgery at the beginning of training camp.

Vasilevskiy has been the backbone, no pun intended, of the Lightning's amazing run to three straight Stanley Cup Final appearances and two Stanley Cups. He's also won the Conn Smythe Trophy, a Vezina Trophy and has been named to five All-Star teams.

The Lightning will turn to Jonas Johansson and Matt Tomkins to fill the enormous void left by Vasilevskiy. The team grew more confident with both as the preseason ended, but they have a combined 35 regular season games between them and they will need plenty of support.

Luckily for both, the Lightning returns much of their roster that has helped power the team over the last several seasons, including centers Anthony Cirelli, Brayden Point, and team captain Steven Stamkos.

The team also brings back wings Nicholas Paul, Brandon Hagel, and star Nikita Kucherov. Finally, the defensemen in front of the goal will include Victor Hedman and Mikhail Sergachev.

Last season, the Lightning coasted into the playoffs with a 46-30-6 record while giving up 3.1 goals per game while before getting eliminated in the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

The last time the Lightning were eliminated in the first round was the 2018-19 season. The next two seasons, the Lightning hoisted the Stanley Cup.

Lightning fans are definitely hoping for a repeat of that and it all starts Tuesday night at Amalie Arena against the Nashville Predators.