



**AMALIE Arena Media Clips  
Tuesday, January 16, 2024**

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## **How Lightning overcame first-period slumber to beat Ducks** **Eduardo A. Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

TAMPA — The Lightning were stuck in the mud one period into Saturday night's game against the Anaheim Ducks. And during the first intermission of a scoreless game, coach Jon Cooper let his team know.

"I honestly think that we were asleep in the first period," Cooper said. "Quite frankly, it was really disappointing, and I think the players knew my feelings."

Energized by a game-changing hit from rookie defenseman Emil Lilleberg and fueled by a power play that went 3-for-3, the Lightning took control in a convincing 5-1 victory at Amalie Arena, their third straight home win.

Steven Stamkos scored two power-play goals, tying him with Wayne Gretzky for 17th on the all-time list with 204. Nikita Kucherov assisted on all three power-play goals. Victor Hedman and Calvin de Haan also scored, giving Lightning defensemen eight goals over the past seven games.

"Sometimes the coach has to come in and let the guys know that we need better," Stamkos said. "They have a pretty good understanding of when to push the buttons and when to lay off, and we needed a little push and I think we got the response we wanted."

About a minute and a half after Hedman opened the scoring on a power-play goal from the center point, Anaheim forward Brett Leason was approaching the offensive blue line when Lilleberg unloaded a hit that knocked the 6-foot-5, 218-pound winger off his skates and into the air.

"It changed the game for us," Cooper said. "Hitting is still a part of the game, and you don't quite see them like that. But they've got a guy over there that's played here in (Radko) Gudas who I've watched him do that for 12 years. ... There is a physical aspect still in this game. And when you have it, you definitely feel better about yourself."

Lilleberg's hit put a charge into an otherwise listless team. The Lightning started to skate and began to finish their checks. Even though he's been with Tampa Bay for little more than a week, Lilleberg has made a huge impact with his physicality, providing an element the team has needed with big bodies Mikhail Sergachev and Erik Cernak out.

"He tried to do it in Game 1 in Boston," Stamkos said. "So he's not scared. He's stepped in and done a tremendous job. I thought he did that in training camp, as well, in some of the exhibition games. It may not be a goal or assist, but it's going to be something, and the physicality he brings is big for us."

Leason, who was wobbly skating back to the Anaheim bench, did not return.

The Lightning power play entered the game ranked fourth in the NHL (27.9%) but was 0-for-9 over the three games prior to Saturday.

After Hedman broke Tampa Bay out of its slump at 5:09 of the second, Kucherov was the catalyst on both of Stamkos' goals. On the first, Kucherov found Brayden Point in the slot. Anaheim goaltender Lukas Dostal stopped his shot, but the rebound popped out to Stamkos at the right circle.

After Frank Vatrano's goal cut the Lightning lead to one, Kucherov threaded a pass through the middle to Stamkos, whose shot deflected off the stick of defenseman Ilya Lyubushkin past Dostal.

"We were kind of overdue a little bit on the power play," Stamkos said. "And that was a spark for us, too, to get some momentum on special teams. It was nice to see the puck go in."

With his three assists, Kucherov became the fourth Lightning player to reach 800 career points, joining Stamkos, Martin St. Louis and Vincent Lecavalier. He also recorded his 298th career power-play point, passing Lecavalier for third-most in franchise history.

The Lightning lineup had three rookies — Lilleberg, forward Gage Goncalves and defenseman Max Crozier — each of whom made their debuts within the past eight days. Crozier, less than a year removed from his final college hockey season at Providence, made his first NHL appearance on Saturday.

All of the players coming up from AHL Syracuse have talked about how they've been able to play freely with the Crunch under first-year coach Joel Bouchard. They've added some of that to a veteran Lightning room that has played tight at times this season when things haven't gone their way.

"I think they've done a tremendous job of stepping in, especially the defensemen," Stamkos said. "It's tough to step in in this league as a young kid and play some minutes when we have injuries. So that's a spark in itself, to just have that excitement in the dressing room before the game."

The Lightning allowed just nine shots on goal after their first-period slog.

"I just think everyone's on the same page," de Haan said. "I think we're playing well with whatever five men get out on the ice. Even when the teams are hemming us in, it doesn't seem like they're getting too many Grade-A opportunities, and at the end of the day I think whoever limits those the most will generally come out on top."

## **Who's that playing for the Lightning? New faces dot the lineup** **Eduardo A. Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

TAMPA — Through the Lightning's three straight runs to the Stanley Cup final, it was difficult for the organization's prospects to crack the veteran-laden lineup. But in recent seasons the salary cap has forced a steady overhaul of the roster, which has impacted the team's depth.

Combine that with a rash of longer-term injuries that the Lightning haven't often seen, and not only has the door of opportunity opened for the organization's top-tier prospects, but the team needs them as it faces a second-half chase for a playoff spot.

Over the past two weeks, five Lightning prospects — defensemen Declan Carlile, Emil Lilleberg, Jack Thompson and Max Crozier, along with forward Gage Goncalves — made their NHL debuts. In all, eight rookies have debuted for Tampa Bay this season.

Some, like Carlile, Thompson and forward Mitchell Chaffee, stayed for just one game — in part because the salary cap forces the Lightning to retool their roster daily — but others, like Lilleberg and Goncalves, are getting longer looks.

"We're in a situation that's not ideal, and when we have room to call guys (up) it's because other players are injured," coach Jon Cooper said. "And so we can't overlook that ... the need to have those guys back. But now (it) gives us an opportunity to look at some players we otherwise wouldn't have been able to. And there's a lot of good stuff happening with the players in Syracuse."

### Need for the next man up

When the Lightning made a string of massive training camp cuts to send players to AHL Syracuse, Cooper predicted that he'd need some of them this season — that good teams aren't just 25 players deep — but he probably didn't think he'd have to dip this deep into the prospect pool.

Just before the holiday, defenseman Mikhail Sergachev injured his left foot. His replacement, Haydn Fleury, also was injured. Both players are on long-term injured reserve, and it doesn't appear Sergachev is returning any time soon.

Defenseman Erik Cernak missed the first three games of 2024, returned Tuesday against Los Angeles, then was knocked out of Thursday's game and Friday was considered day-to-day with an upper-body injury.

Forward Tanner Jeannot left the Jan. 6 game at Boston and landed on injured reserve to make space for Crozier, who was recalled from Syracuse on Friday and made his NHL debut on Saturday against Anaheim.

Lilleberg — a Norwegian playing in his first North American season after two seasons in the top pro league in Sweden — brings a physical game that the Lightning need, injuries or not.

"I know my style," Lilleberg said. "Play simple and play physical."

The Lightning know Goncalves, their second-round pick in 2020, well. He has made major strides to his two-way game at Syracuse, and it's resulted in his best offensive AHL start. Again, whether they were injury-depleted or not, the Lightning need a forward who can provide defensive help, so if his Crunch success translates, Goncalves could stick.

### Adjusting quickly

All of the new players made an impression in training camp, but it's a totally different challenge coming into an NHL room for the first time in the middle of the season.

The Lightning's veteran core has done a good job of making rookies feel comfortable. Back in 2020-21, forward Ross Colton jumped into the lineup and famously scored the game-winning goal in the Cup final. Last season, defensemen Nick Perbix and Darren Raddysh displayed a calm presence after their in-season callups.

"We've got a very open room," defenseman Victor Hedman said. "(Goncalves has) been with us for a long time playing in the minors. He knows most of the guys from camp so that makes it a lot easier. But we just try to take the pressure off and just tell them to go play to the best of their abilities and play to their strengths and if anything comes up we're here to help them."

Getting thrown into a NHL lineup for the first time is stressful. But Cooper said players have come up ready to make the jump knowing that the systems in Syracuse and Tampa are mostly the same. They just need to adjust to the speed and pace of the NHL game.

"Game 1 for any player playing his first NHL game is a blur," Cooper said. "They don't remember a ton of it. I'm sure they're trying to get family in and there's just so many distractions to it. But in saying that, pretty much 90% of everything that goes down in the minors happens up here. We just had our meeting with Gage and he goes, 'It's basically all the same.' So you know that's a good thing, it eases things for the players when they come up."

#### A new attitude in Syracuse

Goncalves, the Lightning's second-round pick in 2020, rooms with Thompson and Carlile in Syracuse, so he was able to see both of his roommates experience NHL debuts before he got his call.

"It's really nice to see guys get called up," he said. "We all always tune in and watch the game. So to see those guys up there, it's pretty cool and they come back and tell us stories about how they did and what it was like and the pace and everything. ... You get to ask them about it and it just gives you a little bit more of a chance that it's not as far away as you might think."

Players also rave about new Syracuse head coach Joel Bouchard, who was hired in the offseason to take over for Ben Groulx, saying Bouchard and his staff have allowed them to play freely.

"They let us make mistakes. They hold us accountable for it, but it's not to a level where you're scared to try things," said Syracuse defenseman Sean Day, who has been recalled four times in the past month, but hasn't gotten into an NHL game yet.

Goncalves, who was named to his first AHL All-Star Game with the Crunch, said Bouchard has helped him gain more consistency.

"You know what you're going to get out of him every single day," Goncalves said. "He brings so much passion and just so much love for all the guys and just for our systems and everything. So to have him in my corner, it's huge. ..."

"I think years prior, I've kind of went up a couple of games, went down a couple games, but I think this year, I've kind of hit my stride and kind of kept that bar pretty high."

## **Inside ex-Lightning forward Alex Killorn's emotional return to Tampa** **Eduardo A. Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

TAMPA — Alex Killorn admits part of him wasn't looking forward to his return to Amalie Arena for the first time as a visiting player. He's typically good at containing his emotions, but this was uncharted territory.

On Friday, Killorn entered Amalie for the first time as an opposing player to practice with his new team, the Anaheim Ducks. His walk through the hall was a familiar one, but instead of making the left turn into the Lightning locker room he continued down the path to the visitor's locker room.

"You just keep walking and you're like, for so many years you walked through that door," Killorn said.

Killorn, who played his first 11 seasons in a Lightning uniform before signing a four-year, \$25 million deal with the Ducks this past offseason, never wanted to leave. Tampa Bay was all he knew as an NHL player. He grew with the franchise. His first season, the Lightning had the third-fewest points in the league. But he saw them become one of the NHL's model franchises and twice lifted the Stanley Cup.

Killorn developed a kinship with Lightning fans, connecting with them during the pandemic through his "Dock Talk with Killer" show. He made Tampa his adopted home and immersed himself in the community. The image of him celebrating the Cup wins on his jet ski were highlights of both boat parades.

Killorn saw many of his longtime teammates leave before him, from Tyler Johnson to Yanni Gourde to Ondrej Palat. He watched their tribute videos and heard the standing ovations they received when they returned to Tampa for the first time.

Saturday, it was Killorn's turn. During an early first-period break in the Lightning's 5-1 win, the team played a video full of his top highlights, followed by a reception that might have been louder than all of the tributes that came before his.

"I don't know if it's just the older age or just seeing some of these guys come and go that have been here forever," Lightning captain Steven Stamkos said, "but you get a little emotional, for sure."

Killorn took a skate around the ice, an impromptu move to calm his emotions. With the arena spotlight following him, he lifted his stick to acknowledge the crowd and clapped his gloves, applauding back to the fans.

"I was trying to push back all the emotions, and I'm pretty good at doing that," Killorn said. "But once I saw that video, it was really tough to hold it in. ... I think, honestly, if I was just sitting there, it would have been different. But to kind of get moving (helped). I was kind of breathing a little heavy, and just to go for a skate was nice. Honestly, a moment in my career I'll never forget."

Killorn said returning to Tampa midway through the season helped. Mentally, he had started preparing for life after the Lightning at the beginning of last season, knowing it would be hard to stay given the team's salary-cap constraints. After choosing to sign with a rebuilding Ducks squad, he said the whole summer was tough.

"I wasn't really looking forward to (returning), because I thought there's going to be too many emotions," Killorn said. "Even through the first period, you're back and your heart's racing and you've got so much family. It seems like every year there's another guy that leaves, and we've had so many great players here, and then you never think it's going to be your time and then it happens."

The night before Saturday's game, Killorn went to dinner with many of his old teammates. He was able to catch up with head coach Jon Cooper at the arena after the Ducks practiced.

"He's one of the most important players this organization has seen in the last decade," Cooper said. "So, he deserved that reception he got and the video he received."

Deadpanned Cooper, "It was really long, so I was wondering if Killer contributed to the video and sent his old clips in."

In Tampa, Killorn was part of a core group that grew up together. His role in Anaheim is different. At 34, he's the oldest player on a roster that includes eight players age 24 or younger.

"It's definitely a different feel," Killorn said "It's a different process than it was in Tampa, and that's kind of why I was brought in, I guess, to help out with that. ... We practice a lot more here than we did in Tampa, so for veteran guys, it can be a little tiring. But it's just part of the process with a younger team.

"But to have these younger guys, it's exciting, because you can see all the talent in this organization and how special it's going to be in the future."

Killorn's long-term future remains in Tampa. He still owns his home in the area and is building another one he eventually will make his retirement home. His fiancée, Tiffany, is from Tampa. After Saturday's game, he joked that he will steal former teammate Braydon Coburn's broadcasting and podcasting gig with the Lightning.

"I'm going to be in the area when I'm done playing, that's for sure," Killorn said. "I love it here. I'm definitely going to retire in Tampa. ... These fans and this city mean so much to me.

"Being here (11) years, seeing how we've developed, going and getting swept (by Columbus in the opening round in 2019) and them staying behind us and then winning the two Cups, going to another Cup (Final). Even, like, just being around Tampa, people are so good to me and I really missed that. And it's been great being back here."

## **The Backcheck: Bolts down Ducks for third-consecutive win** **Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)**

The Tampa Bay Lightning entered the current four-game homestand with a big opportunity to gain some ground in the playoff race and stash points in a building that the team has had resounding success in over the past decade.

After winning the first two games against the Los Angeles Kings and New Jersey Devils, the Bolts skated to a 5-1 victory over the Anaheim Ducks Saturday night at AMALIE Arena for a third-straight win.

Three-game win streaks haven't been easy to come by this season for the Bolts. In fact, this streak ties the longest win streak they've had all year. They had done it just twice before Saturday night.

Now, the team will enjoy four days off and have a chance to record the longest win streak of the season when they battle the Minnesota Wild Thursday night in Tampa.

But before we get there, let's take a look back at how the Lightning earned that third-straight win Saturday night against Anaheim.

In the opening 20 minutes, neither team was able to find the back of the net with Tampa Bay looking a little less engaged than head coach Jon Cooper would have liked. Speaking to Cooper and a few players after the game, it was clear that a message was sent in the locker room during the first intermission.

Following that message, the Bolts responded in the middle frame, outscoring the Ducks 3-1 with three power-play goals to take a two-goal lead into the third period.

Victor Hedman got things started at the 5:09 mark of the second when he took a pass from Steven Stamkos and hammered a one-timer from the point that went right through the five hole of Lukas Dostal to make it a 1-0 game.

After Hedman gave the Lightning the lead, it was another big, left-handed defenseman that made an impact play for Tampa Bay, and it may not be one that you would have thought of before the game started.

Playing in just his fourth career NHL game, Emil Lilleberg saw Brett Leason streaking up the boards and stepped up in the neutral zone before hammering the 6-foot-5, 218-pound forward with a huge, open-ice hit that got everyone on their feet.

The Bolts used that momentum, earned a power play and made it a 2-0 game a little over three minutes after the big hit.

Snapping the puck around with the man advantage, the Lightning set up in the offensive zone before Brayden Point fired a shot on goal that was stopped, but Stamkos was right on the doorstep to jump on the rebound and sneak one through the five hole of Dostal to make it 2-0 with 9:04 left in the period.

Frank Vatrano got Anaheim back within one with a power-play goal of his own at the 13:20 mark, but with Tampa Bay right back on the power play just 48 seconds later, Stamkos found the back of the net a second time to restore the two-goal lead.



Taking a pass from Nikita Kucherov, Stamkos looked to dish the puck to Brayden Point in the slot, but it deflected off the heel of Ilya Lyubushkin's stick and ended up behind Dostal to give Stamkos his 204<sup>th</sup> career power-play goal.

Entering the third up by two, the Lightning pushed the lead to 4-1 when Calvin de Haan netted his second goal of the season, throwing a shot towards the net from the point that snuck through traffic and got behind Dostal with 10:54 left in regulation.

With the game essentially put away, the Bolts got one last goal from Brandon Hagel, who wrapped up the 5-1 win with his 13<sup>th</sup> goal of the season with 1:55 to go. Sending a pass down low for Nick Paul, Hagel went to the net and jumped on a loose puck before hammering it past Dostal to finish off the third-straight win for the Lightning.

Andrei Vasilevskiy got the start in goal and made 19 saves on 20 shots against to move to 12-9-0 on the season.

Going into the four-day break, Tampa Bay holds a 22-17-5 record, including a mark of 14-5-3 on home ice.

### **Bolts by the Numbers**

- Victor Hedman scored his seventh goal of the season and is up to 40 points on the campaign (7-33—40). Hedman has now scored 31 career power-play goals, tied with Dan Boyle for the second most among all defensemen in Lightning franchise history, trailing only Pavel Kubina (33).
- Hedman's goal was the 150<sup>th</sup> of his career, tying him with Brad Richards for the eighth-most goals among all skaters in Lightning franchise history and tying him with Borje Salming for the third-most goals among all Swedish defensemen in NHL history.
- Steven Stamkos scored two power-play goals and added one assist, all in the second period, to boost his season point total to 41 (18-23—41). Stamkos has now scored 204 career power-play goals and is tied with Wayne Gretzky for the 17<sup>th</sup>-most power-play goals in NHL history.
- With his three points, Stamkos became the first player in Lightning franchise history to record 100 career three-point games.
- Nikita Kucherov recorded three assists, all in the second period, and boosted his NHL-leading point total to 72 (28-44—72). Kucherov has now recorded more three-point games (10) than zero-point games (9) this season.
- With his second assist, Kucherov became the fourth player in Lightning franchise history to record 800 career points with the club.
- All three of Kucherov's assists came on the power play, pushing his career power-play point total to 298. With the third assist, he moved passed Vincent Lecavalier and took sole possession of the third-most power-play points in Lightning franchise history.
- Brayden Point recorded one assist and pushed his season point total to 44 (20-24—44). The assist was the 269<sup>th</sup> of Point's career, moving him past Alex Killorn and giving him sole possession of the eighth-most assists in Lightning franchise history.
- Max Crozier made his NHL debut and logged 13:00 time on ice, recording one takeaway and one blocked shot.

- The Lightning have got a goal from a defenseman in each of the three games this homestand.

## **Bolts Quotes**

- Steven Stamkos on Emil Lilleberg's big hit in the second period: "He tried to do it in game one in Boston. He's not scared. Great for him. That's an element that sometimes we miss when we don't have a Cerny or a Sergy or a big body back there like we've had in the lineup regularly. He stepped in and he's done a tremendous job."
- Stamkos on the first intermission: "Sometimes the coach has to come in and let you guys know that we need better. They have a pretty good understanding of when to push the buttons and when to lay off. We needed a little push and I think we got the response we wanted."
- Jon Cooper on Lilleberg's hit: "It's a physical game and he kind of brought us into the fight in a game where we felt we were not as engaged as we should've been, especially with our situation. That was a big part of the game and, like I said, I hope the guy's alright."
- Cooper on the four-day break: "I think we've been the leader in games the entire season, so we are going to at some point have some of these breaks because teams have to catch up. It's a good time for us, especially with the amount of guys we have on the shelf."
- Stamkos on the 3-0 start to the homestand: "This is a tough building to play in. I think the atmosphere has been great. The past four or five games, the crowd has been great and we kind of feed off that a little bit, so it's been great to see."

## **Krenner's Three Stars**

1. Steven Stamkos
2. Nikita Kucherov
3. Emil Lilleberg

## **Lightning Look Ahead**

- Thursday, January 18 vs. Minnesota Wild, 7 p.m. ET, AMALIE Arena
- Saturday, January 20 at Buffalo Sabres, 12:30 p.m. ET, KeyBank Center
- Sunday, January 21 at Detroit Red Wings, 5 p.m. ET, Little Caesars Arena

## **Tampa Bay Lightning power way to a third consecutive win, spoil Killorn's return**

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

**TAMPA** – The Tampa Bay Lightning need to start piling up points.

The Tampa Bay Lightning put themselves behind the playoff picture with a mediocre first half of the season. Questions surfaced surrounding whether they've aged out of being a contending team, if the contract situation regarding captain Steven Stamkos has served as any sort of distraction, or if the salary cap finally caught up with the roster.

Three games in to the second half of their schedule, and the Tampa Bay Lightning are perfect in their three games, piling up points they need.

And thanks to a sizzling power play and a thunderous hit from a rookie defenseman, the Tampa Bay Lightning won their third consecutive game heading into a mini-break,

What we're talking about after a 5-1 victory against Alex Killorn and the Anaheim Ducks.

### **FLEXING THEIR POWER**

Heading into Saturday's game, the Tampa Bay Lightning power play had been in a bit of rut. They were on an 0-for-9 stretch and had gone without a power play goal in six of the previous nine games. They were 4-for-26 (15.3-percent).

Power plays are cyclical in nature. They tend to go through ups and downs throughout the course of the season. The Lightning's has been somewhat consistent for most of the season.

But after they went through a little bit of a low, Saturday was a high. Times three.

Tampa Bay struck on each of its first three attempts.

First, it was Victor Hedman, who blasted a 99-mph slap shot from the center point at 5:09 of the second period, 63 seconds into the man advantage.

Then it was Steven Stamkos, who found a rebound off a Brayden Point shot and slid the puck under the pads of Lukas Dostal at 10:56 of the second period, 45 seconds into the second power play chance.

After Anaheim kept the power play parade moving with a Frank Vatrano goal to cut the lead to 2-1, Stamkos regained the two goal lead at 14:47, 12 seconds before the power play expired. Stamkos was looking to center a pass toward the crease where Nick Paul had his stick on the ice looking to guide the puck into the net. But the puck hit the stick of Anaheim defenseman Ilya Lyubushkin and deflected past Dostal.

"We were kind of overdue a little bit on the power play," Stamkos said. "It was a spark for us to get some momentum on the special teams and nice to see the puck go in."

### **DYNAMIC DUO**

Steven Stamkos and Nikita Kucherov have been a dangerous duo for the better part of the past decade.

The pair continues to just pile up the points and accolades.

Kucherov recorded three assists, all in the second period on the three Lightning power play goals. Kucherov recorded three points in a period for the 20th time in his career which is the fifth most among active skaters, behind Sidney Crosby (24), Connor McDavid (24), Alex Ovechkin (22) and Patrick Kane (22). Kucherov recorded his 296th, 297th and 298th career power-play point, surpassing Vinny Lecavalier (297) for the third most in franchise history behind Steven Stamkos (407) and Martin St. Louis (300).

With his second assist of the period, he notched his 800th career point, the 183rd player in league history to reach the milestone. And with 801 career points, he ranks 182nd on the all-time list. He also became the first player in the league this year to reach 70 points.

Kucherov recorded his 10th game this season with at least three points, which is one more than the number of games he's been held without a point.

Stamkos, meanwhile, recorded his 203rd and 204th career power play goals to tie Wayne Gretzky for 17th most in league history. He also passed Steve Yzerman for sixth most power play goals with one franchise.

But being tied with Gretzky?

"That's kind of weird," Stamkos said. "It just goes to show he did a lot of damage, not on the power play, too."

Stamkos also recorded his 100th career three-point game to become the first player in franchise history to reach that mark. The only other active players with as many are Sidney Crosby (173), Alex Ovechkin (131), Connor McDavid (111), Evgeni Malkin (111) and Patrick Kane (106).

## **THE THUNDEROUS HIT**

Where were you when Emil-Martinsen Lilleberg announced his arrival to the league?

Lilleberg, playing in just his fourth NHL game delivered the type of hit that conjured up images of those delivered in a bygone era by the likes of Scott Stevens and Darius Kasparaitis.

As 6-foot-5, 218-pound Brett Leason carried the puck up ice through the neutral zone, Lilleberg lined up a hit. Just before the blue line, Lilleberg came in from the side to deliver a hip check that sent Leason helicoptering into the air. Leason landed awkwardly, tried to get back on his skates, stumbled back to the ice, got back up again and headed to the bench where he was unable to put his leg over the boards to get back to the bench.

Leason did not return to the game.

But the hit will no doubt resonate around the league when teams face the Lightning.

"He tried to do it in game one in Boston, so he's not scared," Stamkos said. "And great for him. That's an element that sometimes we miss when we don't have (Erik Cernak) or (Mikhail Sergachev), a big body back there, like we've not had and in the lineup regularly, and he's stepped in and done a tremendous job. I thought he did that in camp as well, in some of the exhibition games. It may not be a goal or an assist but it's going to be something in the physicality that he brings his is big for us,"

Tampa Bay was up 1-0 at the time of the play at 6:57 of the second period. But it provided a spark to the Lightning's game.

“It brought a little life to the building,” Calvin de Haan said. “And I don’t like to comment on the but I hope the guy is okay. Obviously a little bit of Bambi legs going on, but that happens sometimes. But I think it was a good hit. And I think it brought a little energy to bench and especially inside the building so have turned the tides for us.”

It’s just the way Lilleberg plays the game.

“It might have change the game for us,” Lightning head coach Jon Cooper said. “I honestly thought we were asleep in the first period, I was really disappointed. And I think the players knew my feelings after the first and really stepped up. Lille made that play and, I hope the kids okay, It’s pretty clean, but a physical game and he kind of brought us into the fight in a game where we felt we were not as engaged as we should have been, especially with our situation. So that was a big part of the game”

## **ANOTHER ROOKIE DEBUTS**

The ninth different player made their NHL debut for the Lightning this season when D Max Crozier was brought up to the Lightning. The 6-foot-2, 185-pound defenseman was a fourth-round pick in the 2019 draft. He signed his first pro contract after finishing a four-year career at Providence College.

Crozier, 23, is in his first season as a pro and has a goal and seven points in 23 games with the Crunch.

In his NHL debut, Crozier logged 12:13 of ice time with one shot attempt, two giveaways, one takeaway and one blocked shot.

Crozier is the eight player this season to make their NHL debut with the Lightning – Waltteri Merela, Matt Tomkins, Mitchell Chaffee, Declan Carlile, Jack Thompson, Lilleberg, Gage Goncalves,

## **KILLORN THANKFUL IN HIS RETURN**

Alex Killorn never wanted to leave the only franchise he’s ever played for, he never wanted to leave the area he still calls home.

But in the business of sports, it’s rare a player can play out their entire career with one franchise. The age of the salary cap has made many personnel decisions in hockey as much about the business – or in some cases moreso – than about the player.

Killorn came to a part of that reality last season,, which turned out to be his final season in a Lightning sweater.

“I knew the summer before really, which is, tough to play that last season,” Killorn said. “There’s always a hope that you’re going to come back and you never know what could happen. (Nikita Kucherov) got hurt in training camp that one year. You hope and pray but just the way with the cap system and me being the age I was at, I kind of figured it was just the way it was going to be. And we tried to make it work, it just didn’t make any sense. So that’s just the way it is. It was a tough summer (of 2023) honestly, for me, dealing with all those emotions.”

The emotions came pouring back in his return to Amalie Arena to face his former team for the first time. It hit him as he walked down the hallway and past the entrance to the Lightning locker room when the Ducks practiced on Friday. Then came game day and having to face Stamkos, Kucherov, Hedman, Brayden Point Anthony Cirelli and Andrei Vasilevskiy for the first time as an opponent.

Then, of course, there was the [tribute video](#) that he knew was coming, because he’s seen them for the likes of Ondrej Palat, Tyler Johnson, Ryan McDonagh among others when they returned for the

first time to the ice they lifted the Stanley Cup in 2021, the second consecutive championship won by Tampa Bay.

The video had all the feels one would expect.

“I was pushing kind of like all the emotions and I’m pretty good at doing that,” Killorn said. “But once I saw the video, it was really tough to hold it in. So many great memories. I feel so fortunate. Everything that we did, and so many great teammates, and the fans that gave me that ovation, it really meant a lot to me, so I want to thank them for that. It was awesome.

“Honestly I wasn’t really looking forward to the moment because I thought there’s going to be too many emotions. But I was happy it happened halfway through the season instead of, if it happened at the beginning it would have been really tough.”

Once Killorn’s playing days are done, he will return home.

“I’m building a house right now, so that’s the plan,” Killorn said. “My fiancé’s from here. I love it here. I’m definitely gonna retire here.”

And yes, you might even spot in on his Jet Ski riding the waves in Tampa Bay.

## **NOTES**

Tampa Bay scratched RW Alex Barre-Boulet, D Phil Myers and D Erik Cernak. ... Victor Hedman scored his 31st career power-play goal and tied Dan Boyle for the second most in franchise history among defensemen, behind only Pavel Kubina (33). ... Victor Hedman scored his 31st career power-play goal and tied Dan Boyle for the second most in franchise history among defensemen, behind only Pavel Kubina (33). ...

## **MY THREE STARS**

1. Lightning RW Nikita Kucherov – Three assists, five shots on goal, two takeaways
2. Lightning C Steven Stamkos – Two goals, assist, six shots on goal, 7-for-12 on faceoffs
3. Lightning D Emil-Martinsen Lilleberg – Five hits, two blocked shots, 15:48 of ice time