



**AMALIE Arena Media Clips
Wednesday, February 7, 2024**

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Lightning hope to pick up where they left off following All-Star break

Eduardo A. Encina (Tampa Bay Times)

BRANDON — The All-Star break offers a welcome respite from the grind of the NHL schedule. But for a Lightning team that was playing its best hockey in the weeks beforehand, the timing is somewhat unfortunate.

The Lightning won eight of their final nine games before the break and put themselves in the thick of the Eastern Conference playoff race after spending most of the season on the fringe following a sluggish start.

“It was tough for us, because we were on a bit of a roll,” head coach Jon Cooper said. “But for me, it doesn’t matter. When you get a break like that, and especially to see a lot of the injured guys on the ice and looking like they’re ready to go, it’s just kind of a rejuvenation.

“And to think, with 32 games left we’ve put ourselves in a position that we wanted to be all year long. And now the big message was making sure that we don’t find ourselves on the outside looking in.”

The Lightning entered Tuesday’s games third in the Atlantic Division with 59 points, leading the conference’s two wild-card teams — Toronto and Detroit — by a point and five ahead of the next team in the playoff chase, the Islanders. Three teams — Pittsburgh, New Jersey and Washington — sit eight points back, so Tampa Bay has separated itself from what had been an extremely close pack just a month ago.

“Our confidence is very high, but at the same time we can’t bank on that, too,” said defenseman Victor Hedman. “So we have to find a way to get back in the game action right away and take off where we left off and just make sure that we’re ready to go, because this doesn’t mean anything if we don’t go out there and execute in the future here. So, we’re super excited to get on the road right away, just get to work.”

The Lightning resume play with back-to-back games in New York, Wednesday against the Rangers and Thursday against the Islanders. Their four-game road trip continues Saturday in Columbus and Tuesday in Boston.

Tampa Bay has played better on the road of late, taking two of three on its most recent trip. But that was the first trip this season of two games or more on which the Lightning won more games than they lost. They are 10-13-2 away from Amalie Arena, their 22 road points ranking 24th in the league.

Last season, Tampa Bay exited the break with a 7-1 clunker at Florida and lost 10 of their first 15 games. Though they sit in the same place in the standings as this time last year, they have a smaller lead over the two wild-card teams and can’t afford a similarly slow restart.

The good news is the time off allowed injured players extra time to get healthy. Top defensemen Mikhail Sergachev and Erik Cernak are expected to be back against the Rangers Forward Tanner Jeannot could follow soon after, the team optimistic he could return from injury at some point during the trip.

Both the Rangers and Islanders will already have played games before the Lightning visit. Several Tampa Bay players skated on their own Sunday to get their legs back after not playing since Jan. 27. Monday’s first official full-group practice was high-paced and intense and included a mini-scrimmage to simulate game action.

“That’s what you try to get in these practices, replicate some scrimmages, some power plays, some situational work,” captain Steven Stamkos said. “You know there’s going to be a little rust, for sure, but you just try to minimize that. ... We’ll get (the Rangers’) second game. But it is what it is, and we’ve got to come out and play well. This is a big, big trip for us. We’ve been on a roll here. Let’s try to keep it going.”

Nuts & Bolts: Back from the break at MSG **Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)**

Everything you need to know ahead of Tampa Bay's matchup against the New York Rangers on Wednesday.

When: Wednesday, February 7 - 7:00 p.m. ET

Where: Madison Square Garden - New York, NY

TV coverage: TNT (check local listings)

Radio coverage: [102.5 MHz-FM](#), [Lightning Radio 24/7](#)

Where to stream it: [TNTdrama.com](#)

Lines from Tuesday's practice (subject to change)

Nick Paul - Brayden Point - Nikita Kucherov

Steven Stamkos - Anthony Cirelli - Brandon Hagel

Mikey Eyssimont - Tyler Motte - Conor Sheary

Alex Barre-Boulet - Luke Glendening - Mitchell Chaffee

Defensemen

Victor Hedman - Darren Raddysh

Mikhail Sergachev - Erik Cernak

Emil Lilleberg - Nick Perbix

Goaltenders

Andrei Vasilevskiy

Jonas Johansson

Wednesday's Matchup

The Lightning and Rangers are playing the second of three matchups this season and the only meeting at Madison Square Garden...Tampa Bay dropped the first meeting between the two teams this season in a 5-1 loss Dec. 30 at AMALIE Arena...Nikita Kucherov scored the Bolts lone goal Dec. 30 vs. NYR while Nick Paul and Steven Stamkos picked up the helpers...Kucherov is riding a four-game point streak vs. NYR (1-3—4) and has found the scoresheet in nine of the last 10 meetings (3-11—14)...Kucherov has picked up points in each of his last five games at NYR (1-6—7) and 10 of his 12 career contests at Madison Square Garden (3-10—13)...Stamkos (7-8—15) and Brayden Point (4-7—11) have both pointed in nine of their last 12 games vs. NYR...Victor Hedman has recorded 13 points over his last 13 contests vs. NYR (1-12—13) and has nine points over his last 10 contests at Madison Square Garden (1-8—9)...The Bolts are 4-6-0 in their last 10 road games at NYR and 3-6-1 in the last 10 meetings overall...The Lightning are 50-48-7 with five ties all-time vs. NYR, including a home record of 24-28-2 with two ties...Martin St. Louis (20-26—46) holds the Tampa Bay franchise records for career goals, assists and points vs. NYR.

Injuries

Erik Cernak – Upper-body, day-to-day

Haydn Fleury – Upper-body, day-to-day

Mikhail Sergachev – Lower-body, day-to-day

Tanner Jeannot – Lower-body, week-to-week

Austin Watson – Lower-body, week-to-week

The Road Ahead

Thursday, February 8 at New York Islanders

Saturday, February 10 at Columbus Blue Jackets

Tuesday, February 13 at Boston Bruins