



AMALIE Arena Media Clips
Friday, December 22, 2023

1. How Lightning fought off NHL-leading Golden Knights for emotional win – Kristie Ackert (Tampa Bay Times)
2. Nick Paul scores with 1:13 left, Lightning top NHL-best Golden Knights – Associated Press
3. Tampa Bay Lightning pull out late winner in a thriller vs. Vegas – Erik Erlendsson (Lightning Insider)

How Lightning fought off NHL-leading Golden Knights for emotional win Kristie Ackert (Tampa Bay Times)

TAMPA — The Lightning finally fought back.

After being bullied early by the defending Stanley Cup champion Golden Knights Thursday night at Amalie Arena, Tampa Bay was sparked by Brandon Hagel's second-period fight, rallied and held on for a 5-4 victory.

It was the second straight win for the Lightning (16-13-5), who scored four goals in the second period, including two by Brayden Point, to take a two-goal lead. After the Golden Knights (tied for the NHL lead in points) tied the game in the third, Nick Paul put back a rebound from the corner with 1:13 to play for the win.

Alex Barre-Boulet and Nikita Kucherov also scored for the Lightning. Andrei Vasilevskiy made 30 saves.

"It's a good mark for us," Paul said. "Going in, it was a big game. It was going to be a fun one. It was physical, it was hard and entertaining for the crowd. But I think it was just a lot of resilience from us, because there's a lot of times that we could have just given up and kind of blamed and start pointing the fingers.

"We didn't do that. We took accountability and leveled up our game, won our battles. Just a great win all around from the goalie all the way through."

Here are three takeaways from the win.

The spark

Ivan Barbashev's check of Anthony Cirelli in the second period ticked off the Lightning. So much that Hagel went after him.

"I saw he hit Tony," Hagel said. "And, obviously, Tony is a key and important part to our team, and I thought (Barbashev) was my size. So I thought it was my job, and I asked him (to fight) and, yeah, it happened."

As Hagel skated off, he threw his arms into the air twice, trying to get the home crowd going. The fans reacted, and the Lightning shifted into a higher gear.

"I think it just brought the energy in the building," Point said. "The crowd came alive, and that fueled us. We got energy from it. It was a guy sticking up for a teammate, and then it was a spirited bout. I mean, they were both throwing some haymakers. That was awesome to see. And the crowd was just so loud. And I think that really helped us and, you know, we just had good energy after that, really."

Hagel was penalized an extra two minutes for unsportsmanlike conduct for initiating the fight, so the Lightning had to kill off the penalty while trailing 2-1.

It didn't matter. Tampa Bay was rolling off Hagel's emotion.

"They went from a Game (34) to a playoff-game atmosphere," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. "And you look at our team and you want to have your guys show emotion, and Hags most definitely brought the team into the fight (Thursday)."

The Point

Point scored twice on gritty goals 2:22 apart in the second period. With 3:32 left in the period, he followed up a rebound and chipped the puck in the net. With 1:10 to go, he again jumped on a rebound and shoved it in.

Point's 499th and 500th career points were part of his ninth multipoint game of the season.

"That's really cool," Point said. "Not quite as many as the milestones we've been seeing, but it's very cool. Obviously, the team's been great ever since I've been here. So, it's been really fun."

The mistake

Kucherov, who scored a power-play goal to tie the score at 2 at 15:55 of the second period, opened the door for the Knights to knot things up in the third. Annoyed that he didn't get a couple of calls, Kucherov was on the bench jawing when he was penalized for unsportsmanlike conduct.

Jonathan Marchessault scored on the ensuing power play, and Paul Cotter tied the score at 4 just over four minutes later.

Cooper said Kucherov's complaint was not out of line.

"I was standing right beside him when the ref called a penalty, and that's what I said was an uncharacteristic call for a referee," the coach said. "They 99.9% of the time wouldn't make that. It just struck a chord (Thursday) for some reason, and that was it.

"So, I wasn't putting anything on Kuch at all. So it was like, literally, there were like four words said and none of them were profanity or anything, and it was something that probably gets said 1,000 times in games."

Nick Paul scores with 1:13 left, Lightning top NHL-best Golden Knights

Associated Press

TAMPA — Nick Paul scored the winning goal with 1:13 left and added two assists as the Lightning beat the injury-impacted and league-best Vegas Golden Knights 5-4 on Thursday night at Amalie Arena.

Paul put home a rebound for his second straight three-point game.

“It was big game,” Paul said. “I think it was just a lot of resilience from us.”

Tampa Bay right wing and NHL points leader Nikita Kucherov had a goal and two assists. Brayden Point had two goals and an assist, and Alex Barré-Boulet also scored for the Lightning. Andrei Vasilevskiy turned aside 30 of 34 shots.

Jiri Patera, playing in his third game this season and fifth overall, made 31 saves filling in for the injured Adin Hill (lower body) and Logan Thompson (upper body).

The defending Stanley Cup champions, coming off a 6-3 loss at Carolina on Tuesday, got two goals from Jonathan Marchessault. Ivan Barbashev and Paul Cotter had the other goals. Jack Eichel extended his franchise-record point streak to 12 games with two assists.

“It’s tough to swallow knowing that you did a lot of good things in the third to give yourself a chance to win,” Eichel said. “It’s tough to find positives when you don’t get any points here.”

Eichel had a great scoring chance stopped by Vasilevskiy with three seconds left. The puck got behind the goalie, who dove on it to keep out of the net.

Marchessault got Vegas within 4-3 with an early third-period power-play goal after Kucherov received an unsportsmanlike penalty. Kucherov thought a penalty should have been called on his breakaway and was sent off after yelling at a referee.

“I was standing right besides him when the ref called the penalty,” Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. “It was an uncharacteristic call for a referee. It struck a chord for some reason. I wasn’t putting anything on Kuch at all.”

Kucherov said “like, four words,” Cooper added. “None of them was profanity. It was something that probably gets said a thousand times in game.”

Cotter tied it four minutes later.

The Lightning went up 4-2 after scoring three times in a 2:55 stretch late in the second. Kucherov had a 5-on-3 goal and assisted on Point’s power-play goal 33 seconds later. Kucherov set up another Point goal to end the surge.

Kucherov now has 57 points.

Marchessault and Barbashev had first-period goals.

Lightning defenseman Victor Hedman had three assists.

Tampa Bay defenseman Mikhail Sergachev, who took a shot off the back of his left foot Tuesday, didn’t play. Cooper is hopeful that Sergachev will only miss a game or two.

Tampa Bay Lightning pull out late winner in a thriller vs. Vegas

Erik Erlendsson (Lightning Insider)

TAMPA – Nick Paul raised his arms up in the air, the blade of his stick seven feet straight up.

Paul was looking straight at his teammates that set up his winning goal with 73 seconds left in regulation. But he might as well have been asking the crowd inside Amalie Arena if they had been sufficiently entertained.

Paul's goal capped off a game that saw momentum swing back-and-forth like a ship caught in a storm in the middle of the ocean. The winning goal brought the ship to port in calmer waters.

There was a lot to unpack during the game that led up to that moment, so let's narrow it down to these talking points on the second-period turnaround, the momentum-turning fisticuffs, the milestone, the "uncharacteristic" penalty that nearly cost them and the quartet of three-pointers.

SECOND PERIOD, WIN?

The script didn't look good for Tampa Bay. Despite facing a Vegas team on their third-string goaltender, Jiri Patera, making his fifth career start and missing defenseman Shea Theodore, the Golden Knights jumped on Tampa Bay in the first period.

Perhaps it was the cheery Christmas music that put the crowd in a bit of a quiet mood because there was little energy in the building. Certainly they were intently in the game, but lacked that extra gear of enthusiasm.

It didn't help when Jonathan Marchessault – a former Lightning forward – was open in the slot to pop in a rebound to open the scoring at 11:40. Then Ivan Barbashev made it 2-0 when Paul poked a puck away from Jack Eichel and Victor Hedman, but put on the stick of Mark Stone to set up a 2-on-1 down low that Barbashev finished to put the Lightning in a 2-0 hole.

That's not a good sign for a Lightning team that has had its issues in the second period against the Golden Knights, who outscored their opponents 40-24 in the second period entering the game.

But Alex Barre-Boulet put Tampa Bay on the board 8:25 into the middle period to pull Tampa Bay back into the game. Then the offense exploded, scoring three times in the span of 2:55. (And no, I looked, it doesn't even register as the three fastest goals scored in franchise history, the record is 32 seconds.)

Tampa Bay flipped the game around with a four-goal outburst. What was a 2-0 deficit turned to a 4-2 lead after 40 minutes.

"Our second periods haven't been great lately, I think we all know that," Brandon Hagel said. "So to be able to get it done in the second period going into the third to show how good of a hockey team we are."

DRAGGING THEM INTO THE FIGHT

Though Barre-Boulet cut the deficit to a goal, it didn't provide an immediate lift to the team, or the building. It was still just a 2-1 game.

Then Hagel created an energy burst that the Lightning rode like a wave cresting all the way into shore to close out the period.

Barbashev delivered a hard, clean check on Anthony Cirelli, who had the puck at the time of the hit, that sent Cirelli backwards toward the boards. Erik Cernak first came in to have a quick word with Barbashev before Hagel came over to take it a step further. Hagel grabbed Barbashev and tried, tried and tried to get the Vegas forward to drop his gloves before he finally relented.

While not many of the punches thrown landed, it was a spirited moment that got the attention of the crowd and the Lightning bench. As Hagel made his way to the penalty box, he gestured to the crowd to get up.

It was instant energy.

“That went from Game 33 to a playoff game atmosphere,” Lightning head coach Jon Cooper said. “And you look at our team and you want to have your guys show emotion. Hags most definitely brought the team into the fight tonight. No pun intended.”

While Hagel was handed an extra penalty for unsportsmanlike conduct, the Lightning killed it off until Mark Stone took a tripping call with 48 seconds left on the Vegas power play.

“Tony is a key and important part to our team and I thought (Barbashev) was my size so I thought it was my job and I asked him,” Hagel said. “That’s why you’re good at home, get the crowd into it, make an exciting atmosphere and kind of get the boys into it a little bit. Emotion never hurts and I think right after that, obviously, we all know story.”

The Lightning would go on to score a 5-on-3 power play, scored by Kucherov with two seconds left, to tie the game and Point scored 33 seconds later on the second half of the power play to gain the lead. Point scored again with 1:10 left to gain a two-goal lead, the crescendo of the moment Hagel sparked.

“It just brought the energy in the building,” Point said. “The crowd came alive and that fueled us. We got energy from it. It was it was a guy sticking up for a teammate and then it was a spirited boat. I mean, they were both throwing, that was awesome to see. And that crowd was just so loud and I think that really helped us. Wwe just had good energy after that”

GETTING TO THE BLUE PAINT

Vegas is among the top defensive teams in the league. Under Bruce Cassidy, the Golden Knights look a lot like the Boston teams he coached for years. They are patient, wait for their opponent to make a mistake and then defend the middle parts of the ice.

Tampa Bay had some trouble getting to those hard areas in the opening period. They had enough puck possession, but didn’t funnel enough pucks or bodies to the net.

In the second, three of the four goals were scored right at the blue paint. Barre-Boulet’s goal was scored from six-feet out, Point’s first goal was from eight-feet and his second goal was 14-feet out.

“They’re obviously such a good defensive team, that’s how they that’s how they won the Cup is by playing great defense,” Point said. “I think for us it was just more of a mentality of getting guys there and throwing pucks there and trying to win those battles. And tonight we did that.”

It’s a point of emphasis that was discussed after the first period.

“It’s something you should be trying to harp on as a team,” Cooper said. “We don’t get enough shots from our defenseman. That was a big point of emphasis is to shoot the pucks and really get bodies there. I think the last couple games we’re getting rewarded for it. So hopefully we continue.”

OPENING THE DOOR BACK UP

Vegas is a championship team. Like most teams of that caliber, they are capable of making a push when trailing. The Golden Knights have a winning record when allowing the first goal and trailing after the first period while securing six points in eight games when trailing after the third.

While Tampa Bay was aware of the push that Vegas would make, they opened the door for them on a rarity – a call assessed to a player on the bench.

Kucherov carried the puck up the ice and was hooked and held at various points as he entered the Vegas zone. After he lost possession of the puck, he looked in the direction of the referee with his hands out asking why a call was not made.

After he finished his shift, Kucherov wasn't done explaining to the officials how they missed a call. Then 21 seconds after his shift ended, while on the bench, Kucherov was whistled for an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty.

Sixteen seconds into the power play, Marchessault scored his second of the night to cut the lead to 4-3. Then four minutes, 13 seconds later, the game was tied when Paul Cotter put a puck through traffic.

Cooper felt the call to Kucherov was unwarranted.

"I was standing right beside (Kucherov) when the ref called a penalty," Cooper said. "It was an uncharacteristic call for a referee, 99.9% of the time they wouldn't make that, it just struck a chord tonight for some reason. So I wasn't putting anything on Kuch at all. Literally it was like four words said and none of them were profanities or anything. It was something that probably gets said a thousand times in the game. It unfortunately went against us. But we got through it."

MILESTONE MOMENT

The Lightning have seen plenty of individual milestones hit over the past year. Steven Stamkos just recorded his 200th career power play goal and 400th career power play point. Victor Hedman just appeared in his 1,000th game. Last season Stamkos scored his 500th goal, reached 1,000 points and played in his 1,000th game.

On Thursday, it was Point who reached an individual milestone when he recorded his 500th career point, which he reached with his second goal of the night.

"That's really cool," Point said. "Not quite as many as the milestones we've been seeing. But very cool. Obviously I've played on . . . I mean, the team's been great ever since I've been here. So it's been really fun and it's pretty cool."

The Lightning center is one of just eight active players drafted in the third round or later to score 500 career points. The others are Joe Pavelski, Brad Marchand, Jaime Benn, Kris Letang, Johnny Gaudreau and Mark Stone.

Point reached the mark in his 533rd career game. He is the sixth player in franchise history to register 500 points with the Lightning, joining Marty St. Louis, Vinny Lecavalier, Victor Hedman, Steven Stamkos and Kucherov, who needs one more goal for 300 and 13 more assists for 500.

FOUR FOR THREE

Tampa Bay had a quartet of players record a three-point night.

Kucherov picked up a goal and two assists, all in the second period, his 19th career three-point period. He is one of six active players with as many following Sidney Crosby (24), Connor McDavid (24), Alex Ovechkin (22), Patrick Kane (21) and Evgeni Malkin (19)

Point registered his third point of the night with the secondary assist on the winning goal, as did Hedman who picked up his third assist of the game. Paul's goal also capped off a three-point night.

NOTES

Mikhail Sergachev missed the game with a lower body injury and is considered day-to-day. ... Tampa Bay called up D Sean Day from the Syracuse Crunch. ... The Lightning scratched RW Austin Watson, Sergachev and Day. ... The Lightning have scored eight go-ahead goals within the final two minutes of regulation in the past five years – the second most among all teams behind the Blue Jackets (10). ... Nikita Kucherov recorded his 19th career three-point period (1-2—3). ... Victor Hedman collected two assists in the second frame for his 62nd career multi-point period. The only other active defensemen with as many are Erik Karlsson (83) and Brent Burns (71).

MY THREE STARS

1. Lightning LW Nick Paul – GWG, two assists, plus-1
2. Lightning C Brayden Point – Two goals, assist, plus-1, six shot attempts
3. Golden Knights RW Jonathan Marchessault – Two goals, plus-1, six shots on goal