 

**AMALIE Arena Media Clips
Thursday, September 21, 2023**

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**More rest doesn’t mean fewer games for Lightning’s Andrei Vasilevskiy
Kristie Ackert (Tampa Bay Times)**

TAMPA — Andrei Vasilevskiy left Amalie Arena disappointed and admittedly tired after the Lightning’s first-round playoff loss to the Maple Leafs. The All-Star goalie lamented that he needed to listen to his body more and respect its limits.

After an extra-long offseason, Vasilevskiy has returned refreshed but still focused on managing his body while not limiting himself. On Wednesday, as the Lightning began training camp by meeting the media, the 29-year-old said that he changed his offseason program and “bought a bunch of stuff” to help his body recover quickly so that he can keep up the same heavy workload he has maintained for years.

“I don’t think it will change the amount of games I’ll play this season, but I am pretty sure it’ll help me feel better during those games,” Vasilevskiy said.

General manager Julien BriseBois said workload management with Vasilevskiy had already been part of the team’s focus last season but agreed that may not be reflected in games played or time on ice.

“It’s an ongoing process with all of our players,” BriseBois said. “Sometimes it might be the number of games they play. Sometimes it might be how we use them in practice and what they do behind closed doors. It’s managing all of that because it all adds up over the course of the season.

“I think last year, we had already made some adjustments with ‘Vasy.’ He made some adjustments, and I think this year he has a plan to continue to make some adjustments.”

How Vasilevskiy feels on the ice is key to the Lightning getting back on track. He anchored them to three Stanley Cup finals in a row and was crucial to them winning two titles.

That is a lot of added wear and tear on the body.

Vasilevskiy started 71 playoff games as Tampa Bay won the Cup in 2020 and 2021. He was the playoff MVP in ‘21 and helped the Lightning get to the finals in ‘22, where they lost to the Avalanche. He went 34-22-4 in 60 regular-season games last season but lost 12 of his final 20.

In 242 games in the regular season and playoffs since August 2020, when the NHL resumed in a bubble because of the pandemic, Vasilevskiy has played 14,769 minutes.

So it’s no surprise after last season’s playoff exit that he was left wondering what toll that had taken on his body and game.

“My mistake was that I didn’t really pay attention to my recovery,” said Vasilevskiy, three days after Tampa Bay was eliminated by Toronto in the first round.

“The first 30, 35 games, I felt as usual, but then me and my body weren’t on the same page, I guess. All those small injuries came out at the same time. Good lessons, another experience. (The 2022-23) season really showed me that I have to be smart about it. So if I want to be a workhorse, I have to recover well.”

Maybe that wear and tear showed on the ice, too.

Vasilevskiy started 60 games, going 34-22-4, but his 2.65 goals-against average was the second worst of his career, as was his .915 save percentage. In six playoff games, Vasilevskiy posted a 3.56 goals-against average, far above his career playoff average of 2.37, and a .875 save percentage, well below his playoff career mark of .921.

So Vasilevskiy spent the summer months with family, friends and his cat to rejuvenate his mind. He returned with a plan to pay more attention to how he feels after workouts and practices. He will do that after games as well. The “stuff” he bought this offseason are devices that help the body recover better. He spends more time after being on the ice stretching and getting treatments.

“We’ll see. I never paid attention that much to my recovery the last few years,” Vasilevskiy said. “I feel it’s actually probably something new to me. So I’m not sure how my body will respond to it. I hope it will respond well.”

**Lightning’s Steven Stamkos will have to wait for new contract offer
Eduardo Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

TAMPA — Julien BriseBois’ main focus during his tenure as Lightning general manager has been to ensure that the team remains an annual Stanley Cup contender. He has had to navigate through severe salary-cap constraints and been forced to say goodbye to key pieces in order to do that.

And during Wednesday’s media day, on the eve of the Lightning’s first training camp practice, BriseBois made it clear that not even securing captain Steven Stamkos’ future with the organization will get in his way.

As he prepares for his 16th season, Stamkos is in the final year of an eight-year, $68 million contract he signed in 2016. He has made it clear he wants to wear only one NHL sweater.

Though refreshed from a lengthy offseason that allowed him to rest and get prepared, Stamkos thought it would be more eventful in terms of discussing a contract extension. Talks could have begun July 1.

“To be honest, I’ve been disappointed in the lack of talking,” Stamkos said Wednesday. “It was something that I expressed at the end of last year that I wanted to get something done before training camp started. There haven’t been any discussions.”

BriseBois’ response: Stamkos will have to wait.

The Lightning are up against this year’s $83.5 million cap, and though that cap is expected to jump considerably — projections are for a $4 million increase for 2024-25 and a $4.5 million jump the following season, according to salary website CapFriendly — BriseBois said he needs to see how this season plays out before trying to figure out how Stamkos fits with his Lightning plans.

“Steven and I share the common goal of bringing a Cup back to Tampa,” BriseBois said. “That’s our objective. In order for us to do that in future years, we’re going to need to spend our cap dollars as wisely as possible. In order for me to do that, I feel like I need to gather more information. I need to see how this season plays out. I need to see how the pieces of the puzzle fit this year. I need to see who steps up and is able to handle a bigger role. I need to see how the team performs.”

BriseBois said he’ll be better able to make that assessment after the season.

“I’ll have gathered that information,” he said, “and then I’ll be in a better position to have a clearer picture of what our puzzle looks like going forward, what roster needs we might have and then how to allocate our cap space in order to build the best roster possible not only for Steven to remain with the Lightning but for us to stay Stanley Cup contenders year in, year out for the remainder of his tenure with us and hopefully bring the Cup back to Tampa.”

Stamkos didn’t anticipate an impasse as he headed into the offseason in April after a first-round playoff loss to the Maple Leafs.

“I guess it was something I didn’t see coming, but it is what it is,” he said. “I stated at the end of last year that I would love to extend and play here and finish out my career here, but that’s out of my hands. I can’t write a contract for myself.”

The Lightning did have a busy offseason, despite major cap constraints. They brought in forwards Conor Sheary, Luke Glendening and Tyler Motte, and defenseman Calvin de Haan; re-signed forwards Tanner Jeannot and Mikey Eyssimont; and signed forward Brandon Hagel to an eight-year extension that will kick in after this season.

Eight-year extensions for forward Anthony Cirelli and defensemen Mikhail Sergachev and Erik Cernak kick in this season. And for 2024-25, nearly $45 million of cap space is tied up in five players: goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy, forwards Nikita Kucherov and Brayden Point, and defensemen Victor Hedman and Sergachev.

Stamkos’ impact on and off the ice can’t be overstated. He has captained two Stanley Cup winners, is a future Hall of Famer, owns the career franchise record in nearly every offensive category and will one day have his No. 91 hanging from the rafters at Amalie Arena.

Having overcome a litany of injuries in his career, he is coming off two of his best seasons. He followed up his first 100-point season two years ago with a 34-goal, 84-point campaign in 2022-23. He has missed just two regular-season games the past two seasons — one for the birth of his second son, Chase — so he has been durable as he approaches his mid-30s.

“He’s coming off arguably his best two-years stretch of hockey,” BriseBois said. “He’s in great shape, and he keeps himself in great shape. Next summer when his contract ends, he’s going to be 34 years old, not 44 years old.

“So, I fully expect him to continue to be a highly productive player, not just for this coming year, but for years to come. … I know that for him, it would have been a lot easier for him to have a contract in place. But for me, in the grand scheme of things, I think this is the right course of action at this point.”

**Lightning’s Steven Stamkos ‘disappointed’ by lack of extension talks: Why deal may be complicated
Shayna Goldman, Joe Smith and Dom Luszczyszyn (The Athletic)**

Tampa Bay Lightning center Steven Stamkos said he’s been “disappointed in the lack of talking” regarding a contract extension with the team. Here’s what you need to know:

“It was something that I expressed at the end of last year that I wanted to get something done before training camp started,” Stamkos said Wednesday. “There haven’t been any conversations.”

Stamkos added he’s “ready whenever” to engage in the discussions: “I guess that was something that I didn’t see coming but it is what it is.”

The 33-year-old is entering his 16th season with Tampa Bay and has one year left on his eight-year, $68 million deal that has a cap hit of $8.5 million.

The Athletic’s instant analysis:

Lightning have tricky cap situation

Navigating any situation in Tampa Bay right now is tricky given their cap situation. Stamkos is one of six pending unrestricted free agents, and none of the others in that group compare to him in on-ice value or importance to the team. And his next deal has to be balanced with increasing costs on the books already like Brandon Hagel’s cap hit going up by $5 million ahead of next season.

With Stamkos’ $8.5 million coming off the books when his deal expires, Tampa Bay is projected to have a $75 million collective cap hit. That leaves the Lightning with about $12.4 million to spend, and they obviously have to be careful in how they do it. — Goldman

What could happen for Stamkos?

Stamkos’ next contract will start at age 34, so the Lightning are lucky to not have to deal with any 35-plus clauses on his next deal. Management should be a little more willing to include terms then but don’t benefit from the same performance bonus rules that would give the team a little more breathing room.

Per Dom Luszczyszyn’s model, Stamkos’ market value is projected to be $8.5 million, on average, in the four years after his current deal expires. That number is the ceiling of what his next contract should be worth. Evolving-Hockey’s contract projections, to compare, have a three-year deal with a $7.6 million cap hit as the most likely outcome.

Someone like Anze Kopitar, who just signed a year ahead, could be comparable; he signed a two-year deal worth $7 million a year on average with the Kings for when his eight-year deal expires next summer. Stamkos getting a little more cap, plus a longer term, could make sense for the center who is a few years younger. — Goldman

What’s next?

Lightning general manager Julien BriseBois indicated after the season they could try to work ahead on extensions for Hagel and Stamkos after navigating their current cap crunch. Hagel got his eight-year deal. So it’s understandable that Stamkos would be “disappointed” there have been no talks with him so far, even if he’s not an unrestricted free agent until next summer.

Stamkos has been the long-time face of the franchise, one of this generation’s top goal-scorers. He’d like to retire in Tampa Bay, and the legacy of spending his entire career with one team (like Steve Yzerman) is special. The Lightning would have interest in a new deal but they have to be careful with their cap going forward. Perhaps they’re waiting to see how the season goes, specifically with their young defensemen, so they know how much they’ll have to spend in other areas too. It’s hard to imagine the Lightning without Stamkos, the best player in franchise history. — Smith

Stamkos still worth every penny

Steven Stamkos currently makes $8.5 million and the unfortunate problem for the Lightning is he’s still absolutely worth that amount. Stamkos turns 34 in February, but he still carries an elite impact after scoring 84 points last season.

That kind of performance is worth over $9 million and while age effects will bring him down in his mid-30s, it’s not enough to warrant the kind of discount that Tampa Bay can likely fit within its cap structure. — Luszczyszyn

What they’re saying

“Steven and I share the common goal of bringing the Cup back to Tampa,” BriseBois said about Stamkos’ contract. “In order for me to do that, I need to gather more information … I need to see how this season plays out before I can make those decisions.”

BriseBois added: “It’s not just about Steven playing out his career in Tampa. It’s about Steven staying in Tampa and the Lightning remaining a legitimate Stanley Cup contender year in and year out for the remainder of his tenure as a player on the club.”

Backstory

Stamkos scored 34 goals and added 50 assists for the Lightning last season. He tacked on two goals and two assists through six games in the postseason with the Lightning.

The seven-time NHL All-Star has led the NHL in scoring twice (2010 and 2012). He’s recorded 515 career goals since joining Tampa Bay in 2008.

**Bolts enter training camp energized, motivated to make another deep run in 2023-24
Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)**

When the puck drops for the Tampa Bay Lightning’s first game of the season vs. the Nashville Predators October 10 at AMALIE Arena, the Bolts will be playing their first hockey game in 164 days.

At the start of the 2022-23 campaign, the Lightning were coming off a third-straight appearance in the Stanley Cup Final and had 107 days of offseason to rest and recover. The year before that, Tampa Bay had just 97 days to heal up. And the year before that, another offseason of just 107 days.

This summer was the longest for the Bolts since the team fell to the Columbus Blue Jackets in four games during the First Round of the 2019 Stanley Cup Playoffs.

With the long offseason, players on the roster had a lot of time on their hands. Time to relax. Time to recover. Time to train. And, maybe most importantly, time to think. After bowing out to the Toronto Maple Leafs in the First Round last season, the Lightning enter training camp motivated, excited and ready to prove that they are still a legitimate Stanley Cup contender.

“We're going to battle, even though people are not going to pick us to win or even make the playoffs,” said Victor Hedman at the Lightning’s media day Wednesday. “We still believe in our group. We believe in what we have. We’ve got all the pieces and we’ve just got to put everything together.

“The bottom line is that you don't want to have these long summers. You want to be doing rehab and stuff because you’ve obviously gone far, but at the same time, three long years and two Cups. I wouldn't change that for the world.

“For us to be back now and have a little bit of a different shape to our team, we’ve just got to get to work right away and try to get these new guys into our systems and just get ready. Training camp isn’t that long and we're going to get underway very quickly, so you just need to be focused and sharp from the start.”

Most years, players typically begin to trickle back into town a couple weeks before the beginning of camp to participate in some informal skates with teammates and start getting back into game shape. But this year, a multitude of players on Tampa Bay’s roster were back much earlier than usual in preparation for the upcoming season.

“They’re excited,” said Bolts captain Steven Stamkos. “Obviously, we didn't like how last season ended. I thought our play was pretty good. We didn't see the results. That's the frustrating part.

“We've had a long time to kind of just digest everything that has happened and, like I said, it sucked losing the First Round, but it gave us a chance to regroup physically and mentally, and guys seem to be in a really good spot.

“This is probably the first time in a while that the core group of this team has had this long to digest what happened last year, but also kind of just have a great summer of resting and getting ready, getting the body and the mind ready for the season.

“I don't know how many of you guys have out to the skates in Brandon, but it feels like this is the most guys we've ever had here for the last three, four weeks that I've seen since being part of this organization. That just goes to show how excited and hungry this group is this year.”

With the salary cap increasing by just $2 million over the past five seasons, players on the Lightning roster have become all too familiar with the process of losing valuable pieces every offseason. This summer, the Bolts said goodbye to Pierre-Edouard Bellemare, Ian Cole, Ross Colton, Brian Elliott, Alex Killorn, Pat Maroon and Corey Perry.

In response, the team will turn to some new faces in Logan Brown, Calvin de Haan, Luke Glendening, Jonas Johansson, Tyler Motte and Conor Sheary to fill the void.

“That’s the way it is,” Stamkos said. “It's the business side of the sport and when you’ve had as much success as we've had and the cap has kind of stayed flat, it's tough. You lose some really good players and not only really good players, but really good people and guys who meant a lot to this organization on the ice and in the room too.

“But the guys that we brought in are really good players as well and they're going to come in and have a big role on this team and we're excited about the opportunity that they're getting.

“That's just been something that management always has been able to do. When we lose really good players, they go out and find some guys and it’s usually worked out.

“It’s a motivated group. It's a group that has some younger guys that are going to come in and play a bigger role obviously.

“Look at some of the players we lost. We lost a lot of veteran guys and leadership, so guys are going to have to step up in that regard and maybe get into some areas that they aren't quite comfortable with. But that's how you progress as a player and as a team, when those younger guys start to really gain that valuable experience in different areas.

“Like I said, there's no excuse. We had a lot of rest. Guys are coming in, feeling really good, and we're excited about that.”

With the departure of Colton and Killorn, the Lightning are losing a combined total of 43 goals from last year’s regular season. One addition that will play a big role in generating some of that offense will be the 31-year-old Sheary, who has shown a propensity to play with highly talented offensive players like Sidney Crosby and Alex Ovechkin throughout his career.

“I think I'm starting to become a little bit of an older guy as well, which is weird to say, but you kind of get used to playing with really good players,” Sheary said. “I was thrown into it my rookie year, right into playing with some star power. Nerve wracking at times, but looking back, it was definitely a benefit for my career.

“Every team in this league has star players, but each stop I've been at, it seems I have been able to play along some really good star players. I've just been really fortunate with where I've ended up.”

Sheary, who signed a three-year deal worth an average annual value of $2 million this offseason, said the consistent success Tampa Bay has sustained over the years was the biggest draw for him in signing with the Bolts this summer.

“It just seems that they're always a playoff team, no matter what the year is,” said Sheary. “I think, like I said, that's built on the culture that a lot of guys that have been around here a long time have built.

“On the ice, coming into this building was always a hard task. They always played a fast game and it was overwhelming at times. To be on this side of it is a lot better I think, to be that home team.

“It's hard to sustain success for that long and that speaks to the culture of the organization, the players in the locker room and the staff and all that. They've done a really good job.”

Two of the biggest contributors to building the culture in Tampa Bay are Stamkos and Hedman, a pair of franchise pillars who are prepared to guide a group that they believe has everything it needs to lift the Stanley Cup at the end of the year.

“We have to lead the way and that's the bottom line,” said Hedman. “We've been here for a very long time, but I’m turning 33 in December. I’m not in the beginning of my career, so you’ve got to take advantage of these opportunities when you get to play for this organization and play for this team.

“It’s going to be a different shape, but I’ve got to go out there and be as good as I can, and the same goes for the rest of the guys. We've got to lead the way from the start and get ready to go here when the fun starts October 10.”

“I don't think our window is closed,” Stamkos added. “We have the goaltender. We have the defense. We have some elite forwards.

“You try to build your team around that and, to me, it's still open. Some other teams have had to make adjustments too with the salary cap, so we’re looking forward to being a competitive team and if you get in the playoffs, you never know.”

Speaking of the goaltender, there may not be a player on Tampa Bay’s roster that will benefit from the rest more than Andrei Vasilevskiy, who has spent more time on the ice than any other goalie across the NHL over the past four seasons.

“I didn’t do much,” said Vasilevskiy when asked about his offseason. “Just tried to stay away from hockey obviously. I would say that was the biggest part of my offseason. Spend as much time as I can with the family as possible. Just forget about everything and now I’m well rested and ready to go.

“We didn't have that much time off for a while the last few seasons. I hope we have that fire in our eyes again. No excuses about the rest now.”

After saying he wants to spend more time focusing on recovery at the end of last season, Vasilevskiy shared Wednesday that he tweaked his offseason training program and is paying “a lot” more attention to his recovery. With that being said, Vasilevskiy shared that he doesn’t envision himself playing fewer games in 2023-24.

“I don't think it'll change the amount of games I’ll play this season, but I’m pretty sure it will help me feel better during those games,” said Vasilevskiy. “I’m just paying attention to my recovery after games and practices.

“I got a bunch of recovery devices at home. I just bought a bunch of stuff and I’m just spending more time at the arena after practice now stretching and stuff. I’d been doing that before, but now I’m just kind of doing it more often.”

With medicals, testing and media day out of the way, the Bolts are set to take the ice for the first practice of training camp tomorrow morning at TGH Ice Plex in Brandon. The first group will be on the ice at 8:30 a.m. and all sessions are open to the public.