 

**AMALIE Arena Media Clips  
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**Opening day of Lightning training camp is the start in name only   
Eduardo Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

BRANDON — Though Thursday was the Lightning’s first official practice of training camp, for most players, preparation for this season began several weeks ago.

Following last season’s first-round playoff exit, the Lightning had something they hadn’t had in years: lots of time off. It allowed players time to recover physically and mentally, and to jump earlier into training for this season.

For the past month, they have spent their mornings at TGH Ice Plex for informal team skates. Following Thursday’s practice, coach Jon Cooper said it was noticeable that players had been working on their own on the ice for weeks.

“There’s no question,” Cooper said. “This is camp No. 11 for me (as Lightning coach), and I’ve never seen this many players back this early for camp. So maybe (it’s) because we had a longer layoff than we’ve had in the past four years or whatever, but guys were eager to get back.

“To be honest, they could probably play a game right now. That’s how they were flying out there (Thursday).”

The practice was faster-paced than a typical opening workout. It was an indication of the group’s hunger after seeing its postseason end early with the loss to the Maple Leafs.

“We’ve had a lot of, basically, our full squad for about a month, I’d say now,” center Nick Paul said. “So, we’re feeling good. Those practices out there weren’t new to us. We’ve been doing it for a while. The team is ready to work, and it’s kind of that atmosphere where everyone wants to get better. Everyone’s pushing each other, and we’re striving for greatness.

“After every practice, we run through, like, five, six drills, and then we do a scrimmage, and then we do a bag skate. So, we’ve been doing 15-minute periods, so the boys are ready. We’re hungry.”

The skates included many of the team’s newcomers, giving them additional time to adjust to new teammates. Some of the recently departed players, including forwards Alex Killorn and Pat Maroon, also dropped in to skate a few times.

“I think at some point they’re fired up to have a little more direction in practice, because they’ve been running all their drills,” Cooper said. “So I think that was probably getting a little long in the tooth for them. But as you’d expect in a first day, everybody’s excited.”

The precamp skates delivered a message to the newcomers that the work starts early.

“It bodes well for our team this year, but I think it also sends a great message to those young players,” general manager Julien BriseBois said. “If you want to become as great of a hockey player as Steven Stamkos or Nikita Kucherov or Andrei Vasilevskiy or Victor (Hedman) — name a player — you have to put in the work.

“Those guys weren’t born that way. They put in a lot of work to become the great players they are today, and they continue to work at it, and that’s why they continued to perform at such a high level.”

Prospects, who shared the facility with the veterans during last week’s rookie showcase practice, took notice.

“It’s one of the things Cooper talked about in the (first camp) meeting (Wednesday), that those guys are the ones who really set the standard here,” forward prospect Lucas Edmonds said. “So, as a younger player coming in, you always looked up to those kinds of players. And to be alongside them, that is a really, really cool experience.

“I think it’s really motivating to see the kind of work those guys who have played in the league for so long and won two Cups already, to see them still that motivated for another season, it really, really helps you kind of push through every day.”

**Lightning prospect Lucas Edmonds easing into training camp with injury   
Eduardo Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

BRANDON — Lightning forward Lucas Edmonds, one of the organization’s most intriguing prospects, is recovering from a lower-body injury suffered in the Southeast Rookie Showcase last week in Estero.

The injury is preventing him from being a full participant at the beginning of training camp.

Edmonds, Tampa Bay’s third-round pick in the 2022 draft, is coming off a 15-goal, 27-point campaign in his first full season at AHL Syracuse.

He wore a red no-contact jersey when the Lightning practiced for the first time Thursday at TGH Ice Plex.

“Just kind of getting back to 100% right now,” Edmonds said. “I just want to be smart about things, you know, like this time of year, (you) don’t want it to kind of drag on longer than it has to.”

Edmonds said he pulled a muscle when a skate got caught on the ice but he didn’t expect to be held back for long.

“Coming into camp, everyone wants to put their best foot forward. So it’s definitely a little bit of a setback,” he said. “It’s obviously not what you want. But I think I should be probably back in the next few days. So, hopefully once I’m back … I’m able to showcase myself then.”

Edmonds is one of the players the Lightning would like to give a longer look during the seven preseason games to see if he can work his way onto the list of potential AHL callups.

Forward Daniel Walker (ACL) also wore a red no-contact jersey. Forward Jack Finley (shoulder) and defenseman Dyllan Gill (shoulder) wore red socks as they work their way back from injuries.

**Bolts feel fresh and confident in first on-ice practice   
Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)**

After knocking out medicals, testing and media day on Wednesday, the Tampa Bay Lightning took to the ice Thursday for the first official practices of training camp. While it was only day one and things can (and likely will) change, fans got a glimpse of the first line combinations and defense pairings of the year.

**Forwards:**  
Hagel-Point-Kucherov  
Stamkos-Cirelli-Sheary  
ABB-Paul-Jeannot  
Motte-Glendening-Eyssimont

**Defense:**  
Hedman-Perbix  
Sergachev-Raddysh  
de Haan-Cernak  
Fleury-Bogosian

*\*ABB = Alex Barre-Boulet*

Lightning head coach Jon Cooper met with the media for the first time Thursday and, like many of the players who spoke on Wednesday, was pleased with the number of guys that rolled into town weeks before camp to get back to work early.

“This is camp 11 for me and I've never seen this many players back this early for camp,” Cooper said. “Maybe because we had a little longer layoff than we've had the past four years or whatever, but guys were eager to get back and I think at some point too, they're fired up to have a little more direction in practice, because they've been running all their drills at captain skate by themselves, so I think that was probably getting a little long in the tooth for them.

“But, as you'd expect in a first day, everybody's excited and I thought, to be honest, they could probably play a game right now. That's how they were flying out there today.

“You can just tell the shape the guys are in. Guys are bigger, stronger, and there's just life in them. I remember the two previous years, it was tough at training camp. It was tough to get the guys going because when you have such a short offseason, especially coming off a year where we got to the Final and didn't win, it really sucks some of the life out of you.

“I've been proud of these guys, man. They just keep coming back year after year, so hopefully a little extra rest here will help us get out of gate.”

Nick Paul echoed the sentiments of Cooper, elaborating on the value of everyone getting back into town earlier than past years. With a lot of chemistry already built up, the players were ready to go for the first day of on-ice activities.

“There’s a sense of confidence too,” Paul shared. “We got some new guys sliding in here, but the chemistry has been (going) well, especially them coming in early as well and connecting with the group. It’s not like we're just coming in here first day and shaking hands. We know exactly what we're doing and we're looking good.

“We’re skating a lot with the new guys. They're blending perfect. They're making great plays. We're joking with them. We're going for dinner. That's huge.

“When your team buys in and gets here early, it makes it so much easier for bonding. You don't need to wait for the road. You don't need to wait for dinner. You don't need to wait for team events. It's nice and easy.

“Football Sunday last Sunday, someone had the guys over. They go for a game and it’s just nice to see everyone. You're meeting families. The wives and girlfriends are coming in, meeting the girls. When you have the commitment of guys buying in and coming in early, it makes it a lot easier come training camp.”

With players reporting to camp in excellent shape, the Bolts were able to jump right into working on systems and strategy Thursday. A lot of the time on the ice was spent working on defensive zone coverage, breakouts, and other elements that some of the new players on the roster will have to adjust to. There will also be some minor tweaks to the systems that players from last year will have to learn as well.

“Their shape and their conditioning is not in question,” said Cooper. “Like I said, I’m pretty sure these guys all could play a game right now, so now it gets into a little bit of structure and that's what we have to get down in our game.

“We’ve got to get back to our habits and especially without the puck. These guys know what they're doing with the puck, but it's without. And we've got some new guys. Let's be honest, there's a lot of new faces out there.

“So, (there are) guys coming from different systems, different teams. Glendening played a different system than de Haan did, who played different than Motte did. So, they're all trying to learn what we're trying to do and get our guys up to speed. It’s what training camp is for, so we've got to jump on this probably a little earlier than we may have in the past.”

One player hoping to earn a spot on the Opening Night roster is Alex Barre-Boulet, who had a terrific year with the Syracuse Crunch last season, ranking second among all AHL skaters in both points and assists with 84 points (24G, 60A) in 69 games. His plus-24 rating also ranked third among all AHL forwards.

“He has proven all he can prove in the American League and that's what you want to do,” said Cooper. “There are spots on this team open, more than there probably have been in the last five years. You’ve got to play to your strengths. The kid can put the puck in the net, so put the puck in the net.

“In this league, every year it seems to get faster. It's not just for BB. It's for everybody. You’ve got to be able to keep up, and like I said, if today was any indication, everybody, including BB, was flying out there.

“So, play to your strengths. Do what you do well. Don't go outside your comfort zone until maybe we tell you to, but you don't have to do that now. And if you do those things, you’ll be totally fine.”

The Lightning will be back on the ice tomorrow at 8:15 a.m. at TGH Ice Plex. All practices are free and open to the public.

**LeBrun: Why some NHLers bucking trend of fleeing high-pressure, high-tax Canadian markets   
Pierre LeBrun (The Athletic)**

TORONTO — [Steven Stamkos](https://theathletic.com/nhl/player/steven-stamkos-LAne1Qw4slgxuwn2/) certainly made a splash this past week when he shared his frustrations about not having been approached this summer about a contract extension from the [Tampa Bay Lightning](https://theathletic.com/nhl/team/lightning/).

But it also elicited an interesting response from a Western Conference front-office person when we texted about it. His point was that Stamkos’ comments sent way more tongues wagging north of the border than they probably did in his actual market.

No doubt about it. Hockey is king in Canada, and that Stamkos quote was a juicy headline up here.

I very much doubt anyone is going to bother Stamkos about it that much in Tampa for the rest of the season. Here and there, sure, but it won’t be a constant narrative like it would be up here.

Which is among the many reasons he re-signed for eight years and $68 million with Tampa in the summer of 2016 after briefly using the unrestricted free-agency speaking period to meet with the [Buffalo Sabres](https://theathletic.com/nhl/team/sabres/), [San Jose Sharks](https://theathletic.com/nhl/team/sharks/), [Montreal Canadiens](https://theathletic.com/nhl/team/canadiens/) and, of course, his hometown [Toronto Maple Leafs](https://theathletic.com/nhl/team/leafs/).

At which point, before a scheduled meeting with the [Detroit Red Wings](https://theathletic.com/nhl/team/redwings/) the next day, he slapped himself in the face and realized he didn’t want to leave Tampa, where life was great, the organization was built for long-term success and people left him alone. The meeting with Detroit never happened. He had already re-signed with the Lightning.

So you get why he wants to sign another extension in Tampa and play his whole career there.

The markets that can combine a solid hockey program with warm weather and low to no income taxes are increasingly becoming destinations for [NHL](https://theathletic.com/nhl/) players. Last June’s Stanley Cup Final featured two of those teams — the [Florida Panthers](https://theathletic.com/nhl/team/fla-panthers/) and [Vegas Golden Knights](https://theathletic.com/nhl/team/golden-knights/) — and the players on each team didn’t hide why [they love where they are](https://theathletic.com/4576630/2023/06/03/panthers-golden-knights-taxes-front-offices/).

My favorite comment at the time came from [Radko Gudas](https://theathletic.com/nhl/player/radko-gudas-Xh5pFZhMHyGBwclK/) when asked about the warm-weather markets having an edge.

“I would say 100 percent it’s definitely a big plus to have,” he said. “You know you’re putting your flip-flops on and you don’t have to worry about a cold car. And I would say you don’t think as much about hockey as you would (in) a colder market. You’re able to free your mind more. I would say it’s a big plus.

“Team-wise, winning-wise, tax-wise: Honestly, there’s so many aspects to it that makes it more lucrative for players to play there and for families to live there.”

Cap-strapped Florida couldn’t keep Gudas this summer, but the veteran found a warm landing spot with the [Anaheim Ducks](https://theathletic.com/nhl/team/ducks/), albeit in a state not as friendly when it comes to its income tax.

But it’s not just those things. For some players, it’s also about reducing the white noise as much as possible.

Something [Matthew Tkachuk](https://theathletic.com/nhl/player/matthew-tkachuk-57jhzMCrx1OfKHkg/) said to me — I just love the guy’s honesty — after his Panthers eliminated the Maple Leafs last May indicated as much. I asked him if he could appreciate what his Maple Leafs pals [Auston Matthews](https://theathletic.com/nhl/player/auston-matthews-9SjwQzInyEKRwajO/) and [Mitch Marner](https://theathletic.com/nhl/player/mitch-marner-4ruZuzgBxxa43HbV/) were going through, as far as scrutiny in yet another playoff defeat.

“I appreciate the fact that it’s tough,” the former [Calgary Flames](https://theathletic.com/nhl/team/flames/) star said. “Playing in Canada is very different with the spotlight and the history. What I’ve noticed in the difference between playing in Canada and Florida is the highs and the lows. So I think for them, maybe, and they’re unbelievable talents, but unless they win the Stanley Cup, they’re basically getting crucified.

“And it’s not their fault; it’s kind of just the way it is. I know that they’re mentally tough enough, and I know them well, and they’ve been able to handle it and have kept getting better and better in their careers in each year.

“But I know, seeing it from afar, nothing against here, but I know I wouldn’t want to deal with it on any given day.”

Bingo.

Tkachuk is a rock star with the Panthers. But he gets to the rink in flip-flops all season without a soul bothering him.

This matters to a lot of players. But not all.

One of the things I wanted to do at the recent NHL player media tour event in Las Vegas was ask stars about this topic and why some of them bucked the trend.

Case in point: [Josh Morrissey](https://theathletic.com/nhl/player/josh-morrissey-2WvHDiFUj7Cp7xBr/), who in September 2019 signed an eight-year, $50 million extension to stay with the [Winnipeg Jets](https://theathletic.com/nhl/team/win-jets/), an organization that just saw [Pierre-Luc Dubois](https://theathletic.com/nhl/player/pierre-luc-dubois-nDjkQo3GxE1GcW8s/) force a trade (to sunny Los Angeles), has uncertain futures with [Connor Hellebuyck](https://theathletic.com/nhl/player/connor-hellebuyck-mWRNu28WFawDEMil/) and [Mark Scheifele](https://theathletic.com/nhl/player/mark-scheifele-SeBCkfBlEaJjcbzm/) and — well, in general — sometimes struggles to lure free agents despite running a solid program.

“For me, being drafted in Winnipeg and being a Canadian guy from western Canada, I’ve always felt a sense of pride in playing in Canada, and specifically in western Canada with Winnipeg,” said Morrissey, a Calgary native. “I think the No. 1 caveat for me, let’s say, when I was looking at all the things you look at as a player, was on-ice opportunity — the opportunity on a team that has a chance to win and also with a team that I can see myself develop the most as a player, have a role I feel I can grow into and eventually become the player that I feel I can be in the league.

“Also, I feel we’re treated really well by the team, the organization and the city, so those were the big reasons for me. Every guy has their own lists and reasons and priorities, and some land higher than others. It’s just how it is. But I think the important part of us is taking pride in playing in Winnipeg and having guys who want to be there and feel that same way. I’m excited right now because I feel we have a group of guys who want to be there.”

The reality, too, is that some players feed off playing in a market that thinks hockey 24/7.

“I like that it matters,” Morrissey said. “I like that you go to Starbucks and people are giving you advice, whether you want to hear it or not. Maybe I’ll retract that statement after a tough loss this year. But it is cool that it matters, and as I said, growing up in Canada and seeing that, I’ve always tried to embrace it. Yeah, it’s important to me.”

Young American star [Cole Caufield](https://theathletic.com/nhl/player/cole-caufield-dOIaaezXSp4Lko87/) signed an eight-year extension with the Habs. It’s not like he could go anywhere as a restricted free agent after his entry-level deal, but he certainly didn’t have to sign for the maximum eight years, either.

But he wanted to. Why?

“One, the culture. Obviously, what we’re building there is kind of special,” Caufield said during the media tour in Vegas. “If you don’t want to be there, just get out. That’s kind of the mindset we have. If you play in the NHL, life could be a lot worse. To me, I love Montreal. I love the city. I love the fans. They’re so passionate. Every night it’s sold out. It’s a fun place to play. It’s probably the sickest jersey I’ve ever worn. For me, it was a no-doubter.”

Fellow young American star [Brady Tkachuk](https://theathletic.com/nhl/player/brady-tkachuk-L6j8PNJXBI1JiXTb/) did the same coming out of his entry-level deal, going the full eight years with the [Ottawa Senators](https://theathletic.com/nhl/team/senators/) in October 2021 after a long, drawn-out contract battle.

“To be honest with you, I love it there,” the Senators captain said. “And I think it shows with everybody signing long-term there, is that we love playing there, we love each other and we love the group we have. And it shows the belief we have in the capabilities we have as far as individual players but also collectively as a team and what we want to accomplish, and it makes it so much more exciting going into this year because all our goals are aligned and we’re excited for what’s to come.”

In a perfect world, [Nazem Kadri](https://theathletic.com/nhl/player/nazem-kadri-RwZ8XzcIvjkqKAVq/) doesn’t leave the Cup champion [Colorado Avalanche](https://theathletic.com/nhl/team/avalanche/) in the summer of 2022. But cap constraints forced him into the UFA market. The former Maple Leaf had offers from U.S. teams but chose Calgary. He says he feeds off that Canadian market energy.

“Of course, I’m Canadian, so I appreciate the country of Canada, and it’s where I was born and raised,” he said. “I’ve always thought Alberta was beautiful and always loved the city of Calgary. Once I became a local there, I’ve been to the Stampede, got my first Cowboy hat, my first boots. Once you get the hang of it and figure out your life situation and get your family settled, you really start to enjoy being out there and just the passion that they have, the fan base, the ‘C of Red.’”

At the end of the day, markets like Florida, Tampa, Vegas, Nashville, Dallas and Carolina will continue to have a leg up on luring players. That’s reality. And those markets have used their leverage wisely at times over the past few years, led by the Lightning and reigning Cup champion Golden Knights especially.

It’s never going to be a fair fight when Winnipeg and Tampa are fighting over a UFA. Let’s be real.

The key is to build programs that keep players engaged. The [Edmonton Oilers](https://theathletic.com/nhl/team/oilers/) are knocking at the Cup door with [Connor McDavid](https://theathletic.com/nhl/player/connor-mcdavid-YjAiBpZTVfUGkPFn/) and [Leon Draisaitl](https://theathletic.com/nhl/player/leon-draisaitl-XwZ93jCIukNyeI24/). Matthews extended in Toronto, believing the perennial contending Leafs will finally figure it out. The Senators have a nucleus of young core players who have committed to something they believe has the chance to be special.

Is it a level playing field? No. But good programs foster a culture that narrows that gap.