

## Offseason Game Plan: Tampa Bay Lightning

Written by Tim Lucarelli

Monday, 20 August 2012 22:02 - Last Updated Wednesday, 22 August 2012 21:17

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### *Offseason Game Plan: Tampa Bay Lightning*

Over the next couple of months, I will be taking a closer look at each of the Eastern Conference teams to show what their current status is and where their offseason focus lies. Knowing a team's strategy should provide extra assistance in any offseason trading or keeper decisions. This week I'll take a look at the Tampa Bay Lightning.

As a reference, I'll add each of the teams I've covered here at the top in case you'd like to look at some of the other game plans.

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[Boston Bruins](#)  
[Buffalo Sabres](#)  
[Carolina Hurricanes](#)  
[Florida Panthers](#)  
[Montreal Canadiens](#)  
[New Jersey Devils](#)  
[New York Islanders](#)  
[New York Rangers](#)  
[Ottawa Senators](#)  
[Philadelphia Flyers](#)  
[Pittsburgh Penguins](#)

**UFA:** [Brett Clark](#) , [Mike Commodore](#) , [Dwayne Roloson](#)

**RFA:** [Jaroslav Janus](#)

**Rostered players signed for next season:** 23

**Available cap space:** \$6.95

The cap space above (taken from capgeek.com) consists of 13 forwards, eight defensemen, and two goaltenders. Of the forwards, [Vincent Lecavalier](#) , [Steven Stamkos](#) , Martin St. Louis, and [Ryan Malone](#)

carry no-trade clauses, while

[Brett Connolly](#)

and J.T. Wyman have two-way contracts. On defense,

[Matt Carle](#)

,

[Eric Brewer](#)

,

[Sami Salo](#)

, and

[Mattias Ohlund](#)

have no-trade clauses.

At forward, the top-six will feature Stamkos, St. Louis, Malone, Lecavalier, and [Teddy Purcell](#) , with the last spot being sought after by players like Connolly,

[Benoit Pouliot](#)

, and other prospects. Pouliot will certainly have his shot,

[based on the comments from Yzerman](#)

. That leaves the bottom-six to be filled out by B.J. Crombeen,

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### [Nate Thompson](#)

,  
[Adam Hall](#)

, Wyman,

[Dana Tyrell](#)

, and

[Tom Pyatt](#)

. Ultimately, the Lightning will be a two-line offense with two checking lines who chip in the occasional offense. Guys like Hall and Thompson can be fantasy relevant for short stints in leagues that value peripherals such as blocked shots, hits, and shorthanded points, but the Tampa Bay bottom-six does not carry much fantasy value.

The top line in Tampa to close out last year was Purcell-Stamkos-St. Louis and as long as that line is kept intact, Purcell should continue to be a strong fantasy asset who can be relied upon for close to the same output as last year – a career-high 65 points. However, Malone saw plenty of shifts on the top line as well, and neither he nor Purcell seemed to have productive stints when skating with Lecavalier, so whoever gets the short end of the stick on the line combinations should be looking at a slight hit in the fantasy department. Unfortunately for Lecavalier, he has had declining point seasons in five of his last six seasons, most recently coming in at a paltry 49 points, despite being only 32 years old. To put it bluntly, he's failed to develop chemistry with anyone other than St. Louis, and until he can do that, he will continue to be a shadow of his former self.

In terms of prospects ready to step up, the Lightning have some promising prospects in [Cory Conacher](#)

,  
[Tyler Johnson](#)

, and

[Kyle Wilson](#)

. Conacher went from being an undrafted college star to an absolute force in the AHL. In his rookie campaign, Conacher won the Les Cunningham Award (MVP of the AHL), while also leading Norfolk to a Calder Cup championship. Johnson, who came from the WHL, is another undrafted player who broke out in his rookie campaign, scoring 68 points in 75 games. Both he and Conacher are under 5-10, which could be an issue when trying to break into the NHL, but if their AHL success is any indication, they will be worthy of at least a couple cups of coffee. Wilson is a well-traveled AHL veteran who comes with NHL experience by way of Washington, Columbus, and Nashville. He will certainly be pushing for a full-time spot, but if he ends up in Syracuse he's a guy who could be one of the first call ups to fill in on a temporary basis for an injured top-six Tampa forward.

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At defense, the top-four will include Carle, Salo, Hedman, and Brewer, and the big story is Carle. He will be the top blueliner without a doubt, but he plays more of a complimentary game. Don't be surprised if he is the setup man on the top power-play, feeding Salo's cannon from the point. While it's possible he will have a career year, his value may be inflated for the time being. When you're drafting your defensemen, just remember that Carle has not broken the 40-point plateau since 2006-07. Salo on the other hand, hasn't had more than 30 points since 2006-07 either, and with his injury risk, the door is wide open for Hedman or Brewer to solidify their role as a top-pairing defender. Rounding out the top-six are [Brian Lee](#) , [Brendan Mikkelson](#) , and possibly the injured Marc-Andre Bergeron or [Mattias Ohlund](#) , although there is speculation Ohlund will never play again.

In terms of prospects ready to make the leap to the NHL level, Tampa Bay has a very promising crop on defense as well, including [Mark Barberio](#) , [Keith Aulie](#) , and [Matt Taormina](#) . Barberio just wrapped up his second season as a professional, and his development was huge. His 61 points in 74 games was most among defensemen, landing him the Eddie Shore Award or AHL's Best Defenseman, and at 6-1, 201 lbs., he certainly has the size to play in the NHL. Combined with his skill, he is expected to make a strong showing in training camp and be one of the first called up if he is unable to land a permanent roster spot. Aulie is the player who Yzerman acquired for one of their top forward prospects,

[Carter Ashton](#) , and with most of his time being spent in the NHL last year, he will be another candidate for a full-time gig as well. Aulie is a whopping 6-6, 215 lbs. who has shown some offensive promise at times. If he makes the Lightning, he will likely be used in a defensive role though. Taormina is a once-promising Devils prospect who has struggled to stick in the NHL after a freak practice mishap led to torn ligaments in his ankle, cutting his rookie season short. If he can find his game once again, he could play a big role in helping this group challenge for another Calder Cup. Unfortunately for him, he is low man on the totem pole with plenty of bodies in his way.

In goal, Yzerman is rolling the dice on the relatively inexperienced [Anders Lindback](#) . Lindback comes to Tampa with only 38 games of NHL experience, but in that short time he has shown promise to be a reliable goaltender who can maintain a .910 save percentage or higher. If he falters, the Lightning will have

[Mathieu Garon](#) to step in, and while Garon has also been a strong goaltender at times, he has proven time and time again that he is unreliable if used for lengthy stretches of time. This could ultimately lead to the emergence of one of Tampa's AHL goaltenders.

The two goaltenders primed for AHL duty – [Dustin Tokarski](#) and [Riku Helenius](#) – are both strong goaltenders who may be ready to step into NHL action right away. While Tokarski has

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spent the last three years in the AHL (dressing for 7 NHL games in the process), Helenius spent the last two seasons in Europe, first in the Elitserien and most recently in the SM-liiga in Finland, where he had an outstanding season. In 33 games, Helenius posted a 1.64 goals against average and a .936 save percentage. Realistically, Helenius and Tokarski will duke it out for the starting role in Syracuse, and if Lindback falters, the winner may step into the starting role in Tampa Bay come spring.

**Biggest holes to fill:** Offensive depth.

**Priorities:** The top priority in Tampa Bay is to solidify the offensive depth. After the top-six, most of the forwards are not capable of becoming a future reliable top-six threat. When looking at the farm squad, there are some promising names, but they are undersized. Yzerman traded the closest top forward prospect with size (Ashton) to bring in a defensive prospect, but with the additions of Carle, Salo, and Taormina, they might have been better off keeping Ashton. If Yzerman has proven anything though, it's that he is a smart GM who will take his time to make the right move. It should only be a matter of time before Tampa Bay has a crop of young, upcoming forwards with upside rounding out their bottom-six.

Overall the Lightning are a better team with the bolstered defense, but they are a team in limbo. Their offense relies almost entirely on the shoulders of Stamkos and St. Louis, as Lecavalier has struggled to provide enough secondary scoring for this team to be a playoff contender. Behind Lecavalier, the succession planning could use improvement. The defense is strong, but overstocked. As veterans like Ohlund and Salo are out of the picture permanently, guys like Barberio and Hedman should definitely begin to blossom though. In goal, it is unclear whether Lindback will be the next franchise goaltender or if he is simply keeping the seat warm for Helenius or Tokarski. It looks as though Yzerman really wants to see what each of his AHL goaltenders have to offer before committing to a huge name goaltender though (i.e. Luongo), which suggests that the Tampa GM views his team as one still in a state of transition. For now, only the top players are fantasy relevant, but there are some promising prospects led by a savvy GM, which should mean that Tampa Bay will be a team to invest in over the next few years.

Got anything to add? Feel free to add your opinion below.