THE WEEKLY POWER PLAY:

NIKITA KUCHEROV OUT IN TAMPA?



Posed fitness stock photo of Nikita Kucherov of the Tampa Bay Lightning. Kucherov managed to win two Stanley Cups during his time with the Tampa Bay Lightning.
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For the entirety of his career, Nikita Kucherov has spent his time with the Tampa Bay Lightning, winning two Stanley Cups, two Hart Memorial Trophies and three Art Ross Trophies. Most recently, the right-winger became the franchise' all-time leading scorer, passing former teammate Steven Stamkos. But last Friday, news broke that the alternate captain would not re-sign with the organization and was seeking a trade.

However, the most surprising part of the whole thing was that his reasoning had nothing to do with the money.

"It was never about the money for me," Kucherov told reporters, according to an interview with NHL.com. "It was more about the poor communication and respect."

Losing Kucherov for the Lightning is not ideal. But more importantly the reason why he wants out raises more questions surrounding the team and how they treat their players that have made them one of the most successful teams in the league in recent years.

Kucherov is entering the final season of his eight-year, $76 million contract he signed back in 2018. He was eligible to discuss an extension since July 1 and can become an unrestricted free agent next summer.

In his interview with NHL.com, Kucherov added that he and general manager of the Lightning, Julien Brise-Bois had only spoken twice over the past four months and added that he was told he was "free to leave" when his contract expired July 1.

For Kucherov, who has been with the Lightning since the start, this message was probably not ideal to hear.

Kucherov was drafted by Tampa Bay in the second round of the 2011 NHL Draft and has developed into a strong offensive player across the league. He has recorded 1,142 points in 892 regular-season games, led the league in hat tricks and helped the Lightning win consecutive Stanley Cups in 2020 and 2021.

Last season alone, he recorded 130 points and earned his second career Hart Trophy. He has already carried this momentum into the Lightning's season so far as a leading goal scorer.

A question that remains unclear is why contract negotiations have gotten to a point where a key player for the Lightning wants out.

However, this is not the first time the organization has found themselves in this position.

In 2024, Stamkos left Tampa Bay for the Nashville Predators after spending 16 seasons with the organization. The former captain was a crucial part of the organization for years, leading the Lightning to two Stanley Cup championships and becoming their all-time leading scorer before Kucherov surpassed him.

While Stamkos' departure was a significant loss for the organization both on and off the ice, the team is facing the same situation with another high-profile exit. Ultimately, both players helped establish Tampa Bay as a championship team, and both situations have raised questions about the organization's ability to keep their biggest stars.

So where could he end up?

If Tampa Bay does eventually agree to trade Kucherov, the next question is where the right-winger could end up. Any deal would require a significant return, and his modified no-trade clause would give him a say in where his next destination will be.

Fellow Atlantic Division team, the Montreal Canadiens, could be a fit for the veteran player. Montreal has established a young team led by Nick Suzuki and Cole Caulfield, and the addition of a strong offensive player could add to their push to the Stanley Cup.

Another potential destination could be the Dallas Stars as they have a trend of consistently competing for the Stanley Cup in recent seasons. Kucherov's strong offensive production could help them reach this goal more than ever. A potential deal that involves left-winger Jason Robertson, who has been in trade talks recently, could be a strong move for both teams.

The Toronto Maple Leafs could also be an option. Toronto has spent past years searching for success in the postseason and could benefit from adding the two-time champion. Pairing him with Auston Matthews would add to the Maple Leafs offense but acquiring him would likely require the organization to part ways with some of their current roster.

Ultimately, Tampa Bay's willingness to trade Kucherov will determine whether any of these destinations will become realistic. For now, Kucherov remains in Tampa Bay and if the relationship between the two is unable to be repaired, the team he has spent his entire career with could have to watch him chase his third championship somewhere else.

THE FANTASY FORECAST:

CHASING DAYLIGHT IN WEEK 9



Players of the Buffalo Bills celebrating together on the field. The Buffalo Bills played against the Seattle Seahawks during Week 8 of the 2024 NFL season.

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With Halloween officially behind us and Thanksgiving on the horizon, several changes are about to descend upon Storrs.

For starters, colder weather is at our doorstep. Puffer jackets are no longer fashion accessories; they're clothing necessities. Perhaps the most obvious change, however, is the shortening of daylight. As the sun sets earlier each day, night seems to arrive before you've even had a chance to enjoy the afternoon.

For fantasy football managers, a similar phenomenon is unfolding. With the NFL season approaching its halfway point, the time to turn a struggling fantasy team around is shrinking. Each passing week makes the playoff picture clearer and leaves less daylight for managers hoping to make a late-season push.

Despite the sun setting earlier, this week's Fantasy Forecast is here to shed some light on Week 9. Whether your fantasy team is basking in the late autumn glory or hiding from the encroaching winter night, read below so that you're prepared for what's ahead.

Green Bay Packers vs. New England Patriots

When the New England Patriots began the season 1-2, everyone pointed to quarterback Drake Maye's timid performance for answers. Six interceptions and only one passing touchdown were not what anyone expected from the reigning AFC champion.

However, it would appear that the Patriots have completely turned the tide, winning four of their last five for an overall record of 5-3. Steering the ship, Maye has recorded only two interceptions since Week 3, alongside 14 passing touchdowns, silencing the original doubters.

Anchored in their path to back-to-back victories are the Green Bay Packers, the only other NFL team to have the exact same start as the Pats. Leading the league in passing yards, quarterback Jordan Love will need all the wins he can get to climb the competitive NFC North standings.

For fantasy managers, the Foxborough matchup should prove to be a competitive. With both teams maintaining middle-to-upper-tier defenses, offensive potential could be limited. Plus, with Patriots running back TreVeyon Henderson, wide receiver A.J. Brown and tight end Hunter Henry all listed as questionable for Sunday afternoon, fantasy managers must constantly check in. This will ensure their lineups don't suffer from any last-minute absences.

With both teams eyeing the top of their respective divisions and possessing legitimate chances of reaching it, this midseason brawl will have plenty of eyes on it. Kickoff is slated for 4:25 p.m.

Cincinnati Bengals vs. Atlanta Falcons

For the second time in NFL history, a regular-season game will be held in Madrid, Spain. As part of the league's efforts to expand its influence around the globe, the Cincinnati Bengals will take on the Atlanta Falcons, with kickoff set for 9:30 a.m. EST.

Even with a meager average of 2.3 points in the first quarter over the last three weeks, Cincy has scored above 30 in each contest, with a notable 40-point bomb in last week's overtime thriller against the Tennessee Titans.

At a whopping 20 passing touchdowns, quarterback Joe Burrow leads the league, with wide receiver Tee Higgins sitting second in receiving yards. In addition to Higgins, wide receiver Ja'Marr Chase also sits among the league's best with six touchdowns, placing him two off the premier spot.

As for Atlanta, much of its offensive prowl lies in the hands of running back Bijan Robinson. Although the seasoned veteran has accrued 780 rushing yards (the league's best) and five total trips to the end zone, the Falcons still perch at 3-5. With three of their losses separated by just one score, Atlanta may pose a bigger threat to Cincy than statistics may show.

With the Bengals' air attack getting stronger every week and the Falcons yet again relying on their ground game, fantasy managers should expect strong performances in those domains and almost nothing else. Both opposing defenses struggle in those respective categories, making the potential for fantasy heydays exciting.

Buffalo Bills vs. Minnesota Vikings

When the Minnesota Vikings lost to the Detroit Lions last week, their aspirations of a perfect season quickly dissipated. While the 1972 Miami Dolphins breathed a sigh of relief knowing their historic achievement would remain untouched for another year, those in Minnesota began to doubt their 6-0 run.

Looking closely at their schedule so far, one might notice the potential grounds for a fraudulent ranking. Aside from Week 1, the Vikings have averaged around 16 points per game, with their defense holding opponents to an average of 11. To stoke the deceit, over their last four games, Minnesota's opponents have recorded only three wins combined.

In other words, the Vikings have played easier teams and don't have the offense to prove outright dominance. The case for fraud becomes clearer when you realize their first loss was also to the first team they played with a winning record.

Clearly, Minnesota is in trouble this week as they welcome the Buffalo Bills for a Monday night matchup. The Bills, who average 33 points per game, are chasing their fourth straight win. Under the direction of quarterback Josh Allen, the Bills are poised for another playoff appearance.

For fantasy managers, the 8:15 p.m. bout will certainly answer a lot of questions. Is the Vikings' defense truly a threat, or has its strong start been smoke and mirrors? Perhaps Buffalo's fierce offense may have the answer.

To sum it up: With the Packers and Patriots both trying to secure their sixth win of the season, fantasy managers should be confident in a tight contest. Meanwhile, as the Bengals travel to Madrid to face off against the Falcons, Cincinnati users can expect a repeat of last week's passing success. Finally, although the Bills and Vikings both boast a 6-1 record, the potential for a fraudulent latter means the former could easily capitalize. Best of luck, Huskies.