

# **Tampa Bay Lightning Roster Strategy: Navigating Stamkos's Absence and Salary Cap Constraints**

*Date: October 29th, 2024*

## **Introduction**

As the General Manager of the Tampa Bay Lightning, faced with a critical juncture in the 2021-2022 season. Our leading scorer, Steven Stamkos, is scheduled for surgery and will be sidelined for 6-8 weeks. With the trade deadline on March 21st, we must make strategic moves to maintain our momentum and secure a strong position for the playoffs. This summary outlines our proposed roster adjustments, trade considerations, and the justification grounded in the NHL Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) and Standard Player Contract (SPC).

## **Assessment of Team Needs**

Stamkos's absence leaves a significant gap in our offensive lineup, particularly at the center position and on the power play unit. To mitigate this, we need a versatile forward who can contribute offensively and integrate quickly into our system. The ideal candidate should have a manageable cap hit and preferably possess playoff experience. This candidate will need to be helpful to the team in Stamkos's absence but also able to help when or if Stamkos comes back at the end of the season.

## **Salary Cap Considerations**

The NHL salary cap for the 2021-2022 season is \$81,500,000. Our current projected cap hit is close to the upper limit. However, per CBA Article 50.10(d), we can utilize the Long-Term Injured Reserve (LTIR) relief for Stamkos's \$8,500,000 cap hit during his absence. This provides temporary cap flexibility to acquire a replacement player.

## **Potential Trade Targets**

### **1. Rickard Rakell (Anaheim Ducks)**

- *Cap Hit:* \$3,789,444
- *Contract Status:* UFA at season's end
- *Attributes:* Skilled winger with a scoring touch; can play both wings

### **2. Calle Järnkrok (Seattle Kraken)**

- *Cap Hit:* \$2,000,000
- *Contract Status:* UFA at season's end

- *Attributes:* Versatile forward; reliable two-way play; can play center and wing
3. **Andrew Copp (Winnipeg Jets)**

- *Cap Hit:* \$3,640,000
- *Contract Status:* UFA at season's end
- *Attributes:* Strong defensive forward; can contribute offensively; plays center and wing

## **Proposed Trade**

*Trade with Seattle Kraken:*

- **Acquire:** Calle Järnkrok (F)
- **Send:** 2022 Third-Round Draft Pick

## **Justification:**

- **Cap Compliance:** Järnkrok's \$2,000,000 cap hit is manageable within our LTIR relief space.
- **Roster Fit:** His versatility addresses our immediate need at center and adds depth to our forward group.
- **Cost:** A third-round pick is a reasonable asset that doesn't deplete our roster or future significantly.

## **CBA and SPC Considerations**

- **LTIR Usage (CBA Article 50.10(d)):** Utilizing LTIR allows us to exceed the cap temporarily by the amount of Stamkos's cap hit, enabling us to absorb Järnkrok's salary.
- **Trade Regulations (CBA Article 13):** All trade conditions are met, including player consent, as Järnkrok does not have a no-trade clause per his SPC.
- **Contract Obligations:** Järnkrok is on an expiring contract, which aligns with our need for a temporary replacement without long-term cap implications.

## **Data Analysis Tools Utilized**

- **Spotrac.com:** For up-to-date salary cap calculations and contract details.
- **PuckPedia.com:** To analyze player statistics, contract statuses, and comparables.
- **Advanced Analytics (e.g., Corsi, Fenwick Scores):** Evaluated Järnkrok's on-ice impact and possession metrics to ensure he contributes positively to team performance.

## **Conclusion**

Acquiring Calle Järnkrok provides a strategic solution to our immediate need for a reliable replacement during Stamkos's absence. The move is cap-compliant, addresses our roster requirements, and aligns with CBA and SPC regulations. By leveraging our draft assets, we

avoid disrupting our current roster and maintain flexibility for future seasons. This proactive approach positions us to continue our strong performance into the playoffs while anticipating Stamkos's return. This allows us to maintain locker room chemistry by not trading away players and hopeful that Calle can fit into the forward depth if Stamkos does make a return. We don't need to make the team better than when Stamkos was playing but just need to get the team to play close to the same level without sacrificing future and current aspirations.