



## Lightning Focusing On Ice, Not On Sale

By ERIK ERLENDSSON The Tampa Tribune

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CHICAGO - The walls surrounding the Lightning locker room, no matter where it happens to be, are four barriers of concrete used to house the players, coaches and staff. It's a sanctuary to escape all things not directly related to what takes place on the ice.

Tuesday, as the team wrapped up practice and departed for one of its three games this season outside the Eastern time zone, those walls were used as a symbol for keeping the turmoil surrounding the sale of the team outside the thoughts of everybody inside them.

"It's our job to keep it out," Lightning coach John Tortorella said. "We are players and we are coaches, we're not businessmen.

"That's just not our part of the business, and we shouldn't even be thinking about that."

Word came out Monday that one of the team's prospective owners, Jeff Sherrin, filed a lawsuit against Oren Koules, a fellow member of the Absolute Hockey Enterprises ownership group, for trying to circumvent the sale process and negotiate a deal on his own to purchase the team.

Companies owned by Sherrin are seeking damages of \$50 million from Koules, a movie and television producer based in Hollywood, after the current Lightning ownership terminated the deal that was announced Aug. 5 at a news conference featuring the three principal owners - Sherrin, Koules and ex-NHL executive Doug MacLean.

Lightning center Chris Gratton, who was with Tampa Bay during the sale of the team from Art Williams to Bill Davidson in 1999, said there is no concern in the locker room about the concentration level as the Lightning try to win for the first time in five games tonight.

"Our job as players is to focus on hockey," he said. "We have enough character and guys who have been around a while ... so I think this dressing room can handle that."

Center Vinny Lecavalier, who also went through the sale process in 1999, said this time around there are no worries stemming from talk that the franchise could be moved if it is sold. That was the case eight years ago, after Lecavalier's rookie season when cities such as Portland, Ore., and Detroit were mentioned as possible destinations for the franchise.

"Definitely not," Lecavalier said. "Obviously if there was talk about moving the team, guys would be concerned a little bit. That's not the case, so we'll keep our focus."

Besides, the team has enough to worry about on the ice to try to find some consistency after the past month, when the team went through a six-game stretch without a win followed by a five-game winning streak leading into the recent four-game stretch.

"I think we've [been focused] since the beginning of the season," Lecavalier said. "Nobody is really talking about [the sale] - obviously we've been talking about it a little bit [Tuesday] - but besides that, I think we've kept a pretty good focus on what we have to do. If it happens, it happens. We'll just keep focusing on us and keep working."

**Reporter Erik Erlendsson can be reached at (813) 259-7835 or [eerlendsson@tampatrib.com](mailto:eerlendsson@tampatrib.com).**

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