

RAMO, C'MON DOWN

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Exasperated by other contestants, the Lightning calls Karri Ramo back to start in goal tonight.

Lightning coach John Tortorella likes to talk about Karri Ramo's first game last season, and how the rookie goaltender was "yappin' it up with the boys" between periods, "trying to cheer them on."

General manager Jay Feaster said Ramo, when called up for last season's playoffs, was disappointed he was on the bench.

"He wanted to play," Feaster said. "He didn't understand why he wasn't."

There will be no misunderstandings tonight when Ramo, called up Wednesday from AHL Norfolk, starts against Toronto at the St. Pete Times Forum.

It was a move the reeling Lightning had to make.

The team has lost three straight, five of six and is 14th in the East. Johan Holmqvist was pulled in three of his past four games. He and Marc Denis have allowed 28 goals in their past six and have a league-worst .879 save percentage.

And though Feaster said, "This isn't about blaming the goaltenders ... it's about trying to solve the situation we're in," a large part of the solution is consistency in net, the lack of which clearly helped accelerate a downturn in the team's confidence.

That doesn't dismiss problems on a young blue line, little secondary scoring and a growing injury list. But as Tortorella said of goaltending: "It's the brain of your team, really. It determines how you play. Are you in a tentative mode or do you feel comfortable?"

Ramo, 21, (his name is pronounced KAHR-ee RAY-moh) said he is ready for the NHL, "I have been practicing hard all these years to be ready."

The Finn played 70 minutes over two games last season for Tampa Bay. He played six games this season with Norfolk and was 2-4 with a 3.33 goals-against average and an .898 save percentage. He missed almost two months with a high ankle sprain he said is completely healed.

The Lightning has been touting the 6-foot-2, 201-pounder as NHL-ready since last season.

"I've matured a lot," Ramo said. "My concentration is better, and I can see plays better when they happen."

"I like his swagger," Tortorella said. "I don't think a whole lot bothers him, good or bad. I don't think he gets too high or too low."

Despite the hype, Feaster said no one is anointing Ramo No. 1, and the team will keep three goalies until he plays himself in or out of the lineup.

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"By no means should anyone look at this guy like he's a savior," Feaster said. "This is an opportunity right now to evaluate how ready he is."

"He's getting thrown right into the fire," Tortorella said. "But we're that high on him, we feel he can give us a chance. That's what we're looking for in our goaltending. We're not looking to be spectacular. Ramo is going to get a chance at this. We need to see what he's about."

Here is an idea:

"I just take it one game at a time," Ramo said. "I don't take it that (tonight's) game is going to decide if I am going to play. I just go on the ice and have fun."

TRANSACTIONS: With defenseman Brad Lukowich questionable with a left shoulder injury, Tampa Bay called up Jay Leach from Norfolk on an emergency basis. ... Defenseman Andy Rogers, the Lightning's first-round pick in 2004, was promoted to Norfolk from ECHL Mississippi.

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Credit: Times Staff Writer

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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