

FROM THE TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING LOCKER ROOM

Thill a steady hand in Tampa Bay

Ray Thill, who is in his ninth season with the Lightning, says he loves living in Tampa. "It's a great place," says the 35-year-old Chicago native who now makes his home in Tampa year-round. We caught up with Thill to discuss the Lightning and the growth of hockey in Florida:

THN: The team is going through a tough rebuilding season, just four years after the Stanley Cup run of 2004. How are the fans responding?

RT: To me, there hasn't been a change in the fans. We have their full support.

THN: What's your favorite memory from the Lightning's Cup run in 2004?

RT: The whole thing was great, but if I had to choose one thing, it was probably Marty (St-Louis)'s double OT goal in Game 6 in Calgary.

THN: Tampa got three new players at the trade deadline: goalie Mike Smith and forwards Jussi Jokinen and Jeff Halpern. How do you handle things, equipment wise, when new guys come in mid-season?

RT: It's basically about asking questions and communications. Once we get everything set in terms of what they need, it becomes routine.

THN: Smith is still wearing his Dallas green-and-gold colored mask, gloves, and pads. How do you handle getting the colors right when a new goalie comes in?

RT: It's something I definitely try to get sorted out as soon as possible. I could spray-paint the



Ray Thill
Equipment
Manager



mask white, but that would permanently ruin the artwork. It's a custom-fit mask, so it's not like I can take a white one off the shelf to give him. I order new stuff right away, but it takes a bit of time to get in. Once it does, all his colors will match.

THN: Will you have any major projects during the off-season?

RT: The only thing I have is preparing for our trip next fall to the Czech Republic to play the first two regular season games of next season. I'm not sure what's involved yet in terms of what I'll have to bring and what will be provided for us, but I'm sure I'll be finding out soon.

THN: Has hockey become more popular in Tampa Bay since the time you first joined the team?

RT: The growth of the sport is absolutely crazy. There aren't enough rinks to fulfill the ice time that people are looking for. When I first came down here, it was slow, but things have really grown.

THN: Do you use the Blademaster Ultimate skate-sharpening machine?

RT: Yes, I do, I love it. I really like the fact it allows two guys to sharpen skates at once.

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