

# Home-ice advantage seems to be a real thing so far in the NHL playoffs

BY TIM REYNOLDS  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Home-ice advantage hasn't really existed over the past couple of years in the Stanley Cup playoffs. In 2023 and 2024, visiting teams won more games than the home teams did.

That's not the case so far in 2025.

Entering Wednesday, home teams were 10-3 in this postseason. And the teams at home on Thursday in the NHL — Tampa Bay, Ottawa, St. Louis and Minnesota — are surely hoping that trend continues. The Senators are down 2-0 to Toronto, the Blues are down 2-0 to Winnipeg, the Lightning are down 1-0 to Florida and the Wild can take a 2-1 lead in their series over Vegas if they successfully protect home ice on Thursday.

It's not must-win time for any of them, but there's certainly some urgency.

"I know it's been a long time coming for Sens fans," Ottawa forward Brady Tkachuk said, looking ahead to what will be the first home playoff game for the Sen-

ators since May 23, 2017. "We're going to really need them and I'm looking forward to getting out there in Game 3 in front of our fans."

St. Louis had chances; it led Game 1 in the third period and went into the third period of Game 2 tied. The Blues hope being at home provides the little extra boost that wasn't there for Games 1 and 2 in Winnipeg.

"We're going to have the last line change now," Blues coach Jim Montgomery said. "We're going to go home. We're going to be in front of our frenzied crowd. And we're going to have an opportunity to hold serve at home."

The Lightning are trying to avoid dropping Games 1 and 2 of a series at home for the first time since Round 1 in 2019, when they were the top overall seed but wound up getting swept by Columbus — and goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky, who now stars for Florida.

"The bottom line is we lost," Tampa Bay coach Jon Cooper said after Game 1. "Whether you

lose 6-2 or you lose 1-0 in overtime, we lost the game. Turn the page and move on."

Minnesota can take a 2-1 series lead, after a 5-2 win in Game 2 at Vegas. The NHL said when a best-of-seven playoff series has been tied 1-1, 66% of the Game 3 winners have eventually won the series.

## FLORIDA PANTHERS AT TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING

**When/Where to Watch:** Game 2, 6:30 p.m. EDT (TBS, truTV, Max)

**Series:** Panthers, 1-0.

Florida got Matthew Tkachuk (two goals, one assist) back for Game 1, a 6-2 road win on Tuesday that gave the Panthers the early upper hand in the series.

Don't tell Panthers coach Paul Maurice that it'll mean much going into Game 2.

"Don't mean to be a downer here, but not a huge believer in momen-

tum," Really not. Puck drops. That's your opportunity to change momentum and it's going to happen at the opening face-off. Both teams will look at the game and find things they can do better."

Tampa Bay did a lot of things right in Game 1, particularly hold Florida to 16 shots. Problem was, only 10 of them got stopped.

## TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS AT OTTAWA SENATORS

**When/Where to Watch:** Game 3, 7 p.m. EDT (ESPN2)

**Series:** Maple Leafs, 2-0.

Toronto is in total control of the Battle of Ontario.

This is the 11th time —

first since 2002 — that the Maple Leafs grabbed a 2-0 series lead by winning Games 1 and 2 on home ice. In the previous 10 instances, Toronto went on to win the series.

And there's this: Ottawa has never won a series when trailing 2-0. It has happened nine previous times, the Senators lost all nine of those matchups.

To their credit, the Senators are not panicking. "We've got to play a little better next game," coach Travis Green said.

## VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS AT MINNESOTA WILD

**When/Where to Watch:** Game 3, 9 p.m. EDT (TBS, truTV, Max)

**Series:** Tied, 1-1.

If the Wild's top line has been dominant

through the first two games of this series, the opposite is true for the Golden Knights. The line of Jack Eichel, Ivan Barbashev and Mark Stone has not registered a point.

Eichel didn't even have a shot on goal in Tuesday night's 5-2 loss to the Wild. He had just two in the opener, a 4-2 Vegas victory.

"They're elite, world-class players and they've got to get going," Golden Knights coach Bruce Cassidy said. "We've got to help them. We're trying to help them."

Cassidy believes they could still make a strong impact. So does Minnesota.

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