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Great Falls Americans Press Release

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Helena takes Game 1 of the Frontier Division Semi-Finals in overtime thriller

By Kevin Scott

Box Score	Game Sheet	League Scoreboard	Americans Team Statistics (Playoffs)
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GREAT FALLS, Mont., March 16, 2018 — Six days ago, the 2017-18 North American 3 Hockey League (NA3HL) season ended with four of the six Frontier Division squad who finished with the best records qualified for the 2018 playoff semi-final round.

Just like last season, the Yellowstone Quake (Cody, WY) finished in the top spot followed by the Great Falls Americans at No. 2. The Helena Bighorns and the Gillette (WY) Wild rounded out the top four with the Missoula Jr. Bruins and the Bozeman Ice Dogs failing to make postseason play. The two winning teams in the semi-finals will move on to next week's Frontier Division Finals with the winner of that best-of-three series being one of the eight teams in the NA3HL Fraser Cup Championship Tournament (formerly the Silver Cup Tournament) in Romeoville, Illinois (March 27-31).

The #2 Great Falls Americans (34-11-3-0) hosted the #3 Helena Bighorns (31-13-4-0) with Great Falls picking up victories in five of their eight regular season meetings.

The Americans fared better on the road (18-5-1) than they did in front of the home fans at the Great Falls Ice Plex (16-6-1) during their 47-game 2017-18 regular season.

Gavin Cline accumulated two goals and dished out one assist to lead the #3 Helena Bighorns to a 4-3 overtime victory over the second-ranked Great Falls Americans during Friday's Frontier Divisional Semi-Finals opening contest at the Great Falls Ice Plex. Payton McSharry, Kyler Mack and Matt Janke scored the three goals for Great Falls.

Each team scored twice during the first twenty minutes. Great Falls' Payton McSharry converted the first goal unassisted 1:50 into the period followed by Kyler Mack, who put the Americans in front 2-0 thanks to assists by Noel Parker and Michael Fary on the power play. Helena would not go away empty-handed in the first stanza. Kaden Lindberg and Jarett Scheibel evened up the contest near the end of the period. Gavin Cline assisted on Lindberg's scoring drive while Great Falls was in the penalty box. Ben Kottmeier

and Richard Groskops helped set up the game-tying goal by Scheibel. Bighorns out-shot the Americans 12-10.

Gavin Cline got the puck by Great Falls goalie Drew Scites to give Helena their first lead of the night (3-2) eight minutes into the middle period. Kaden Lindberg and Luc Cross received the assists. The home team waited until the final 74 second to tie the game at 3-3. Dustin Truex and Brandon Peterson collected their first assists in the playoffs with their pass to Matt Janke, who put the puck between the pipes. Great Falls managed 12 second period shots but still trailed Helena 28-22 before the second intermission.

Despite no scoring in the third period to break the tie, both teams combined for 20 shots. An overtime was necessary to declare a winner in the first game. Unlike regular season overtime games that see a five-minute extra period, playoff games are sudden death and consist of a 20-minute overtime with the first team to score wins.

Kaden Lindberg and Dane Rieger set up the game-winning scoring opportunity in overtime with Gavin Cline slapshot that went through the net and lit up the lamp to send Helena home with a 1-0 series lead in the best-of-three series with a chance to clinch the series back in Helena on Saturday evening.

The two-hour-and-38-minute overtime contest saw five penalties and 10 minutes of time in the penalty box. The Bighorns amassed 41 shots while Great Falls took 36.

Nick Battaglia had a superb game as netminder for the Bighorns. He stopped 33 of the 36 shots that Great Falls sent his way in the win. Drew Scites suffered the overtime loss, but not before recording 37 saves.

NEXT CONTEST: The Great Falls Americans play a must-win game at the Helena Ice Arena on Saturday, March 17th. The second game of the series starts at 7:05PM (MST).

If Helena wins, they will advance to the Frontier Division Finals starting next week. If Great Falls bounces back to win on Saturday, a decisive third game will be needed to determine who gets the opportunity to play in the Finals. To view the 2018 Playoff format and the schedule for the 2018 Fraser Cup Championship tournament, please [click here](#).

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