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Great Falls Americans Press Release

Contact: Kevin Scott, GF Americans Public Relations Coordinator

Phone: (406) 403-8146

Frontier Finals: Helena steals Game 1 of Frontier Finals from Great Falls

By Kevin Scott

Box Score	Game Sheet	League Scoreboard	Americans Team Statistics (Playoffs)
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HELENA, Mont., March 21, 2019 — Tonight was Game 1 of the best-of-three NA3HL Frontier Division Finals with the #1 Helena Bighorns hosting the #2 Great Falls Americans in Helena, Montana. The winner of the three-game series gets an automatic spot in next week's (March 27-31) NA3HL Fraser Cup Tournament in Illinois.

In the NA3HL Frontier Division semi-finals, both Great Falls and Helena needed to play all three games against their respective opponents, the Bozeman Ice Dogs and Missoula Junior Bruins. Great Falls needed an overtime in the first game to win 4-3, then Bozeman bounced back and took a 5-3 win over Great Falls at Haynes Pavilion in Bozeman and then Great Falls came back to win on home ice, 6-2.

Meanwhile, the Helena Bighorns easily won the first game of the Frontier Division Semi-Finals, 7-2 before falling at Missoula the following night, 2-1 before slipping past the Bruins, 6-5 to move on to the Frontier Division Finals.

Darren Donovan scored two of the Helena Bighorns goals and Justin Sullivan dished out two assists in the middle period as the #1 Helena Bighorns stole Game 1 of the Frontier Division Finals from the #2 Great Falls Americans 5-3 on Thursday night at the Helena Ice Arena in Helena, Montana.

The first half of the opening period went scoreless before Ian Zaleski and Elliot Plourde each found a way to get the puck through Great Falls starting goaltender Drew Scites. Zaleski's score came with nine-minutes remaining before the first intermission. Darren Donovan and Valary Dietz were each credited with the assists to give the Bighorns a 2-0 edge. Both squads created 14 shots at the break.

Helena's Darren Donovan put the home team on top, 3-0 after three minutes ticked off the clock during the second stanza. Justin Sullivan and Elliot Plourde took advantage of the Americans penalty to set up the score on the power play. Great Falls was scoreless for the first 27 minutes of the contest and that is when Jack Olson and Justin Ohnstad found an open George Nuutinen to cut their deficit to 3-1. Each team would end the period by trading goals. Darren Donovan scored the fourth goal for Helena thanks to

help from Valary Dietz, who each received their second assists of the night. A successful pass from Jack Olson to Luke Richesin pulled Great Falls to within one goal (4-3) before both teams went into the locker room for the second intermission. A total of 35 shots kept both goaltenders busy with 31 of those being denied.

The Americans, led by first year coach Greg Sears, trimmed the Bighorns lead to 4-3 with assistance from Great Falls' all-time assist leader, Jens Juliussen and Cody Dearing dishing the puck off to Payton McSharry for the power play score midway through the third frame. Viktor Wennberg relieved Great Falls starting netminder Drew Scites for the final 19 minutes of action being pulled out of the game for the last 91 seconds to add an Americans player to the ice for an offensive threat. Both teams played hard throughout the final period before Helena put the game away with Nicholas Noel's empty net score with 69 seconds remaining to put Helena one victory away from going to the Fraser Cup national tournament next week.

The visiting Americans tallied three goals with 46 shots taken including a 15-11 advantage in the third. Helena managed five goals on 43 attempts.

Only seven penalties were called in the first game between these two rivals in the contest. Great Falls committed three infractions, all in the second period, with six minutes spent in the penalty box. Helena, who racked up four penalties for 29 minutes, had two minor penalties before the last period began and then had a checking-from-behind with both a major (five minute) and a 20-minute game misconduct penalty called against the home team during the first few minutes of the third period. Each team converted one of their power play chances.

Netminder Carver Thompson of the Helena Bighorns swatted away 29 of the 32 shot attempts that the Great Falls offense sent his way and picked up the win. Starting goaltender Drew Scites saw action in the first two periods and recorded all 28 saves for Great Falls in the loss. Backup Viktor Wennberg appeared in the final period and was pulled before Helena scored their fifth goal.

NEXT CONTEST: The Great Falls Americans will return to play at the Great Falls Ice Plex one more this season when they host the Helena Bighorns for Game 2 of the best-of-three Frontier Division Finals on Friday, March 22nd with the must-win game set to begin at 7:30PM. If Great Falls wins, a third game will take place on Saturday night at 7:05PM from the Helena Ice Arena in Helena, Montana.

The six-division winning squads (Central, Coastal, Frontier, South, Northeast and West Divisions) will then head to the [2019 Fraser Cup National Tournament](#) held in Woodridge, Illinois on March 27-31. The national tournament includes two round-robin games for each team followed by two semifinals contests and the championship.

To view the 2019 Playoff format and the schedule for the 2019 Fraser Cup Championship tournament, please [click here](#).

CONTACT:

Greg Sears
Great Falls Americans Head Coach/General Manager

Cell Phone: 715-566-2811

Email: gsears@greatfallsamericans.com

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