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Great Falls Americans Press Release

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Jackson's hat trick helps Great Falls down Butte in season opener at home

By Kevin Scott

Box Score	Game Sheet	League Scoreboard	Americans Team Statistics
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GREAT FALLS, Mont., October 2, 2020 — The 2020-21 North American 3 Hockey League (NA3HL) season is back after nearly seven months between seasons.

In March 2020, the NA3HL as well as the rest of the country was shut down due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) just as the regular season concluded and the playoffs were in session. The Americans finished the regular season in third place behind the Bozeman Ice Dogs (39-7-0-1) and the Sheridan (WY) Hawks (35-11-1-1), who were entering their first season in the league. Great Falls, who earned 36 victories in 50 games (36-9-4-1) including three postseason wins, swept the #6 Helena Bighorns (17-28-2-2) in two games in the Frontier Divisional Play-In Series before their encounter with the #2 Sheridan (WY) Hawks in the Frontier Divisional Semi-Finals began. Great Falls took Game 1 against the Hawks on March 11, 4-2 at home before play was suspended and later, cancelled due to the pandemic.

Now, with COVID-19 still hanging around, the North American 3 Hockey League is back for another season with a 43-game slate (usually there are 47 games) this season. Despite losing 9 players, third year mentor, Greg Sears returns 14 players from last year's squad ready to chase another trip to the playoffs. Colorado native Kirk Golden is the new associate coach replacing Ethan Hayes, who is now the Head Coach and General Manager of the NA3HL's Gillette (WY) Wild this season.

The Americans return eight forwards, four defensemen, and two goaltenders for the 2020-21 campaign. Netminders Trevor Mellen and Vincent Marroni along with forwards Jake Hayes, Nick Silance, Harley Nyhuis, Kellen Harris, Bryson Fletcher, Henry Fusco, Henry Chavez, and Blake Nerney are the players coming back. Defenseman Tommy Janes, Brody Savoie, Great Falls native Clay Walker and Cody Benjamin will also be back. Several newcomers are making their debuts for the Americans as well.

Great Falls' opponent tonight was the Butte Cobras. who finished last (eighth) in the Frontier Division during the 2019-20 season with a 6-40-1 record under head coach Chris Shadow. Butte, along with the

Missoula Junior Bruins, were the two teams that failed to qualify for postseason action in the Frontier Division last season. Butte is entering their third season in the NA3HL with a few team members coming back from last year's squad.

There was a change in venue's for tonight's game as Butte was supposed to host Great Falls, but the Americans opened the season at home against the Cobras instead as Butte had some rink issues. Butte took the 160-mile one-way trip to the Great Falls Ice Plex for Friday's NA3HL opener. Saturday's contest will also be played at the Great Falls Ice Plex as they try to fix the rink at the Butte Community Ice Center in Butte, Montana but will count as a home game for Butte.

Due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19), the Great Falls Ice Plex allows up to 250 fans to their home games this season.

Newcomers Alex Jackson and Nick Jensen shined in their debuts with the Great Falls Americans (1-0) as they utilized a four-goal second period to easily defeat the visiting Butte Cobras (0-1) 6-2 to open up the 2020-21 North American 3 Hockey League (NA3HL) on Friday night at the Great Falls Ice Plex. Goaltender Trever Mellen was the winning goaltender for Great Falls as he swatted away 23 shots.

Helena native Blake Nichols on a pass from Nick Bradshaw and Kyler Garsjo recorded the first and only goal of the first stanza for Butte. The power play score came with 5:22 remaining before the first intermission. The Americans had many opportunities to light up the lamp, but their 19 shots were denied. Butte finished the first twenty minutes with 11 shots.

After a slow opening period, both teams opened the scoring gates in the middle period. The Americans scored twice in a 26 second span near the middle of the second with the Cobras adding one. Forwards Jake Hayes and Alex Jackson each were successful in the scoring column for coach Greg Sears' squad. Kellen Harris, Henry Chavez, Cole Komarek, and Nick Jensen recorded the assists. Butte's Nick Bradshaw created the second goal for the visiting team. Kyler Garsjo received his second assist while Jonathan Schoof chipped in his first. The home team scored twice more before the period expired. Returning forward Harley Nyhuis got the puck through Butte netminder Danny Feilding with 6:51 remaining with secondary assists from Bryson Fletcher and Tommy Janes as the Americans held their first lead (3-2). Alex Jackson netted his second goal of the stanza with help from Minnesota natives Nick Jensen and Cole Komarek to conclude the scoring before the second intermission. The Americans maintained control of the puck by outshooting the Cobras, 32-10.

Alex Jackson's hat trick (third goal) came with 2:18 left in the contest to increase the lead for the Americans to 5-2. Nick Jensen collected his third assist on the empty net score. Butte pulled their goaltender to add another offensive threat, but Great Falls was able to capitalize on the Cobras attempt. Bryson Fletcher racked up his first score after dishing out one assist in the middle period with 81 seconds to go to ensure the home crowd went home happy. Alaska's Tommy Janes contributed his second assist while Tyler Lorrington garnered the assist on the second empty net score in a 57-second span to finish the contest.

Great Falls out-shot Butte in each of the periods to end the first game of the season with 73 while Butte had 21 of their 25 shots before the final stanza.

Both squads combined for nine penalties with 39 minutes spent in the penalty box. Blake Nichols first score of the game for Butte was the only scoring opportunity from either team that came via the power play. Great Falls went 0-for-2.

Trever Mellen picked up where he left off last season as the Minnesota goaltender stopped 23 of the 25 shots put up by the Cobras offense. He gave up one goal in each of the first two periods in the win. Meanwhile, Danny Feilding, who got the start for coach Chris Shadow's squad, recorded 47 saves in two periods before being replaced by teammate Mason Giordano who added 20 saves in 19:23 of action in the third period.

NEXT CONTEST: Great Falls will conclude their two-game series against the Cobras with the game set to start at 7:30PM from the Great Falls Ice Plex on Saturday, October 3, 2020. The Americans will also be at home again when the Helena Bighorns come to town for a 7:30PM showdown at the Great Falls Ice Plex on Friday, October 9th.

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