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Great Falls Americans Press Release

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Gillette bests Great Falls 2-1 for third overtime win of the season

By Kevin Scott

Box Score	Game Sheet	League Scoreboard	Americans Team Statistics
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GILLETTE, Wyo., December 10, 2021 — The fifth edition of the #4 Great Falls Americans (13-9-3-1) and the #2 Gillette (WY) Wild (21-2-0-0) took place on Friday, December 10th.

When the Americans last played the Wild three weeks ago, Gillette was one of two teams in the NA3HL's Frontier Division without a loss (the other team being the Helena Bighorns, 23-0-0-0).

The weekend of November 19th-20th, Great Falls was held to just two goals each night and fell 4-2 and 7-2 with the Wyoming junior hockey team making the necessary plays and scored during their weekend series at the Spirit Hall Ice Arena in Wyoming. Declan Young of the Wild combined for four goals and three assists while Great Falls' Tyler Sunagel scored two total goals on the weekend for coach Greg Sears' squad.

During the first encounter between these two foes, the Americans faced off with the Wild in their fourth and fifth contests of the season and were denied wins. Gillette, one of three Frontier Division teams hailing from the Cowboy State, needed an extra frame to decide a victory both nights as the Wild utilized their home crowd for a 6-5 win on September 24th and an 4-3 decision on September 25th.

The Wild are coached by former Great Falls Americans Associate Coach Ethan Hayes, who was on the bench for the 2019-20 season under current Americans Head Coach Greg Sears.

Since November 20th, the Americans had won four of their five contests with a loss against the South Dakota-based Badlands Sabres. The Wild are 2-2-0-0 with a pair of road victories against the #3 Bozeman Ice Dogs (14-8-2-0) since the Americans came to town. The first weekend of December saw the #1 Helena Bighorns and the #2 Gillette Wild face off against each for the first time this season in Helena, Montana with the weekend concluding with at least one of the teams no longer undefeated. Helena won both nights to remain perfect after 23 games by scores of 4-2 and 2-1.

Could Great Falls pull off the first upset and send the host team to their third consecutive loss after winning the first twenty games of the 2021-22 campaign or would the Wild bounce back and begin a new win streak?

Gillette Wild forward and second year player Tristan Baker helped the #2 Gillette (WY) Wild escape with a 2-1 overtime victory when his successful shot lit up the lamp in the extra five-minute frame on Friday night against the #4 Great Falls Americans in their fifth head-to-head meeting of the 2021-22 NA3HL season. The Americans failed to deny the Wild their third straight loss after Gillette fell to Helena twice last weekend to stop their twenty-game win streak.

Great Falls and Gillette sailed through the first twenty minutes with no scoring by either side. Great Falls could not convert any of their eight shots-on-goal. The Americans defense allowed 18 offensive shots by the Wild. The Americans were whistled for two of the three minor penalties.

The lone goal of the middle period was scored by Gillette's Tucker Lien. The 1-0 lead held up for the final twelve minutes of the stanza. Saizha Norwegian, a forward from Fort Frances, Ontario, Canada, acquired his 21st assist which makes him one of four Gillette players with 21 assists on the season (Tristan Baker, Isaac Young and Brock Trboyevich are the others). North Dakota native Sky Solig picked up his second in his first season with the team. Both teams went 0-for-4 on the power play and combined for 34 second period shots.

In the third period, Great Falls' Jay Alford committed the Americans seventh penalty for hooking on a breakaway play that resulted in the Wild getting a penalty shot. Caleb Sanborn had a chance to get a second goal for the Wild, but the penalty shot against Great Falls netminder Zac Hattan came up short midway through the period. The Americans waited until the final 2:16 before they secured their first scoring opportunity which resulted in a tie game after sixty minutes of competition. AJ Benit and Garrett Weisenburger set up an open Daniel Crutcher, who put the puck in the net over Gillette's Jake Turek, for the short-handed score to give the visiting Montana team hope and a chance to extend the suspense filled junior hockey contest. There was plenty of offense being made in the third with Great Falls creating 27 shots while limiting the host team to 12.

The five-minute extra period took 2:24 off the clock before Gillette's Tristan Baker scored the game-winning goal over Zac Hattan for his twelfth goal in 23 games for the Clovis, California native. This was the third time in five games that saw both teams playing against each other need extra time to declare a winner. On the weekend of September 24-25, Gillette escaped with a 6-5 win ([game story](#)) and a 4-3 win ([game story](#)). Seven combined shots were taken between both squads in overtime.

Almost half of Great Falls shots (27 of 55) were taken in the middle period as the Americans lost for the first time after four consecutive wins. The Wild opened the first period with 18 shots to finish four behind the Americans with 51.

Power plays chances could have made for a different outcome as both NA3HL squads combined for eleven unanswered power plays. Great Falls accrued seven of their eight penalties as minors that resulted in 24 minutes of off-ice time for the Americans. The host team tallied five minor penalties.

Three different players (Gillette's Tucker Lien and Tristan Baker and Great Falls' Daniel Crutcher) scored the goals along with six different assist-makers. Gillette's Saizha Norwegian, Sky Solig, Vance Kleinschmidt and Will Blake set up their two scores while Great Falls' Garrett Weisenburger and AJ Benit compiled the assists for the Americans.

Jake Turek won for the tenth time in twelve games by allowing one goal in 55 attempts. The first-year goalie from North Branch, Minnesota has made 360 saves and has a save percentage of 0.938. Zac Hattan saw his record fall to 4-2-2-0 in nine games after picking up one win last season for Great Falls. Hattan's 49 saves on the night gives him a season total of 360.

NOTES: In other NA3HL Frontier Division action, the #1 Helena Bighorns continued their winning ways by besting the #5 Butte Cobras, 8-4 in Butte, Montana. The rest of the Frontier Division saw the #6 Badlands Sabres downing the #8 Sheridan Hawks, 5-2 in Wyoming and host #3 Bozeman (Ice Dogs) adding another victory by getting past the #7 Yellowstone (WY) Quake, 5-2.

NEXT CONTEST: The Great Falls Americans and Gillette Wild will square off for the final time in the regular season with their sixth meeting (all coming in Gillette, Wyoming) with the game time set for 7:05PM (MST) on Saturday, December 11th. The Americans and Wild were supposed to play two games at the Great Falls Ice Plex in September but ice repairs were needed at the Great Falls arena and the games on September 24-25th were moved to Wyoming. [HockeyTV](#) will once again provide the coverage for fans that will not be able to attend.

Before the Christmas break, the Americans will play three games (that count in the NA3HL standings) at the 2021 NA3HL Showcase Tournament on December 20-22, 2021, at the NSC Super Rink in Blaine, Minnesota. [Click here](#) to see the NA3HL's official press release and who the Americans will be matching up against in the prestigious tournament that will see many scouts in attendance.

Great Falls' next home appearance will be on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day where the Butte Cobras will make the 155-mile one-way trip to Great Falls to play the Americans. Both games (December 31-January 1) will begin at 7:30PM (MST) from the Great Falls Ice Plex.

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