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Great Falls Americans Press Release

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Americans explode in 7-2 victory over the Sabres in Game 1 of Frontier Play-In Series

By Kevin Scott

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| Box Score | Game Sheet | League Scoreboard (Playoffs) | Americans Team Statistics |
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RAPID CITY, SD., March 2, 2022 — The Frontier Division finished up their 2021-22 North American 3 Hockey League (NA3HL) on Monday, February 28th.

Since the Frontier Division has eight teams and concluded their regular season a week earlier than the other four divisions, they started their playoffs with a Play-In Series that featured the #6 Butte Cobras vs. #3 Bozeman Ice Dogs and the #5 Badlands Sabres vs. #4 Great Falls Americans. This season, the Frontier Division qualified six of their eight teams for postseason play. The #1 Helena Bighorns and the #2 Gillette (WY) Wild have byes and will play the winners of the Play-In Series in the Frontier Divisional Semi-Finals that begin next week. The #7 Yellowstone (WY) Quake and the #8 Sheridan (WY) Hawks were left out of the playoff picture.

Great Falls won five of their six regular season meetings with the Badlands Sabres, the newest members of the division who call Rapid City, South Dakota home. In November, the Americans split their first weekend series at home with the Sabres ([4-2 L](#) and [7-3 W](#)) and came out on top in December on the road ([4-2 W](#) and [7-6 W](#)) and at home in January ([6-4 W](#) and [7-3 W](#)).

Fourth year Americans mentor Greg Sears saw his team win eleven home games at the Great Falls Ice Plex and 11 games on the road with just six home losses (11-5-0-1) and an 11-15-3-1 on the road.



Americans forward Jace Thompson scored in each of the last two periods while Daniel Crutcher, Thomas Dalsin, Petr Van Voorhis and Christian Crutcher each assisted on two scoring plays as the #4 Great Falls Americans scored the first five goals and claimed a 7-2 victory over the #5 Badlands Sabres during Game 1 of the Frontier Division's Play-In Series on Wednesday evening at the Roosevelt Park Ice Arena in Rapid City, South Dakota.

Badlands finished up their inaugural regular season in the North American 3 Hockey League (NA3HL) with a 19-25-2-1 and Great Falls had eleven wins apiece at home and on the road for a regular season record of 22-20-3-2.

Great Falls' Henry Fusco, Hunter Maschke, and Blake Nerney all netted goals in the opening period to take a 3-0 lead over the Sabres. Thomas Dalsin, Blake Nerney, Daniel Crutcher, Garrett Weisenburger, Christian Crutcher, and Henry Fusco all assisted on the scoring plays. Great Falls had 17 of the 24 shots-on-goal.

Twenty seconds into the second, Thomas Gazich racked up his first postseason goal while the Sabres were in the penalty box. Riley Opperude and JJ Martin, two of the newer additions to the team in the last month, set up the Americans fourth goal of the game. Near the end of the period, Jace Thompson connected on the first of his two successful scoring drives to put the visitors in a commanding 5-0 advantage. Forward Daniel Crutcher added his second playoff assist while Petr Van Voorhis set up his first. After twenty minutes of ice time, Great Falls scored five goals while taking 32 shots. Badlands had 17 shots go unanswered.

The home team, debuting in their first-ever playoff appearance, waited 40:34 into the contest before burying their first goal. Zach Vockler cut the deficit for the home team to 5-1 with helpers going to Reid Murray and Hunter Fischbach. The Americans scored two goals in a row in the third frame with Jace Thompson capitalizing on his second score and Jackson Henningsgard, the team leader in assists (34) and points scored (52) during the regular season, silenced the crowd at the Roosevelt Park Ice Arena with the Great Falls' seventh goal. Towards the end of regulation, the Sabres' Zach Vockler accumulated another goal for his team. The short-handed scoring opportunity was assisted by Brady Ridnour.

The visiting team from Montana, who scored two goals in the third on nine shot attempts, totaled 41 after sixty minutes in Game 1. Badlands had a team-high of 13 after the second intermission to finish their first game in the Frontier Division playoffs with 30.

Great Falls kept the penalties to a minimum by being called for four minors. Badlands was whistled for eight minors and two majors (unsportsmanlike conducts) that resulted in 36 minutes of penalty time.

One goal each in the second and third Coach Greg Sears' playoff ready team occurred while the opposing squad was down a man. The Montana NA3HL team went 2-for-8 on the power play. Will Simpson never wavered in the net as he denied the four power play chances by South Dakota from getting by him.

Will Simpson got his first playoff win by stopping 28 of the 30 shots for the Americans. Maxim Currie and Zach Broxterman both played in the net for the Sabres and combined for 34 saves.

FRONTIER PLAYOFF UPDATE: In the other Play-In Series that begins on Friday (March 4), the #6 Butte Cobras, who are making their first playoffs since they joined the league during the 2018-19 season, are taking on the third-seeded Bozeman Ice Dogs in their best-of-three series that begins at Bozeman's Haynes Pavilion. On Saturday (March 5), the teams will shift to the Butte Community Ice Center for Game 2. Both games start at 7:30PM (MST). If both teams win once, Haynes Pavilion will be the site for a winner-take-all third game set for Sunday, March 6 with a 4:00PM (MST) start.

NEXT CONTEST: Game Two will be played at the Great Falls Ice Plex on Saturday, March 5th with the puck set to drop at 8:00PM (MST). A third game (if necessary) will also be played in Great Falls on Sunday (March 6th) starting at 6:00PM (MST). All playoff games can be seen on the NA3HL's official streaming service, [HockeyTV](#).

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