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Great Falls Americans Press Release

Contact: Kevin Scott, GF Americans Public Relations Coordinator

Phone: (406) 403-8146

Strong start lifts the Bighorns over the Americans in Game 1 of Frontier Semi-Finals

By Kevin Scott

Box Score	Game Sheet	League Scoreboard (Playoffs)	Americans Team Statistics
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GREAT FALLS, Mont., March 11, 2022 — The #4 Great Falls Americans (24-21-3-2) and the top-ranked Helena Bighorns (43-3-2-0) are two of the four remaining teams in the North American 3 Hockey League's Frontier Division Semi-Finals series that began this week.

While the Bighorns and the second place Gillette Wild had a week off last week as a result of being the top two teams in the Frontier Division, the #4 Americans faced off with the #5 Badlands (SD) Sabres, based out of Rapid City, South Dakota in the Frontier Division Play-In Series. Great Falls registered a 7-2 win during last Wednesday's (March 2) Game 1 in South Dakota. Five different players for Great Falls registered goals after two periods including Henry Fusco, Hunter Maschke, Blake Nerney, Thomas Gazich and Jace Thompson. Jace Thompson added his second and Jackson Henningsgard each buried the puck in the net in the third while allowing just two goals by the Sabres leading to a 7-2 win ([game story](#)). After two full days of rest, both teams made the journey back to Great Falls, Montana for the second game. The results were the same as the Americans scored six goals in two periods to close out the series in two games (in their best-of-three series) by posting a 7-1 win in front of over 400 excited fans at the Great Falls Ice Plex on Saturday, March 5. For the second straight game in the series, forward Jace Thompson accumulated two goals in the series-clinching victory ([game story](#)).

The other Semi-Finals series had the #2 Gillette (WY) Wild (42-4-2-0) hosting the #3 Bozeman Ice Dogs (28-18-3-1). On Wednesday, Gillette scored three of their four goals in the third period to earn a 4-1 decision over the Bozeman Ice Dogs in Game 1 of the Frontier Division Semi-Finals that took place in Bozeman's Hayes Pavilion ([box score](#)). Games Two was Friday night in Wyoming.

A week earlier, Bozeman sent the #6 Butte Cobras, a first-time entrant into the playoffs in the NA3HL, packing for the off-season after the Ice Dogs won the first two games of their best-of-three NA3HL Frontier Play-In Series. Bozeman's offense scored five goals and allowed Butte to score two in the first game of the series (March 4) in Bozeman, Montana ([box score](#)). The following evening (March 5), both teams played in Butte's Butte Community Ice Center, where the Ice Dogs downed the Cobras to eliminate them from the postseason, 5-3 ([box score](#)).

How did the Americans fare in the regular season against the Bighorns, one of the top teams in the North American 3 Hockey League this season? Great Falls was able to come up with just one win in eight

games. The Americans lone win came on January 28th at the Great Falls Ice Plex where they came away with a 3-2 advantage. See the entire Great Falls Americans game summaries from the entire 2021-22 season by [clicking here](#) including the eight contests against the Bighorns.

Liam Bland and Adam Harvey scored twice before the second intermission as the top-ranked Helena Bighorns scored all five goals in the first two periods to down the #4 Great Falls Americans, 5-1 in front of the largest crowd of the season (1,017 fans) at the Great Falls Ice Plex during Friday's Game 1 of the 2022 NA3HL Frontier Division Semi-Finals.



Helena's Liam Bland and Tyler Bloom took charge early on and scored one goal apiece within the first three minutes of the first stanza. Colorado natives Samuel Feamster and Tylor Greene earned the assists for coach Damon Hanson's squad. Four minutes after the second goal by Bloom, Liam Bland connected on his second score of the postseason off the stick of Samuel Feamster for the second time of the period. Great Falls prevented the period shutout with a score from Blake Nerney (third playoff goal) with a setup by Bryson Fletcher (third playoff assist) with five minutes left before the first intermission. AJ Benit delivered his second assist in the postseason. The Bighorns offense put up 17 shots and limited the Americans to 7.

The visiting Bighorns increased the lead to 4-1 with Adam Harvey's first playoff score with a helper from Branwen Pollett. The final two minutes of the middle period is when Adam Harvey lit up the lamp for his second playoff scoring drive. A pair of Bighorn players from Colorado Springs, Colorado accrued the assists. Tylor Greene acquired his second assist while Taber Gutschick gathered his first. Helena added 21 shots-on-goal for a total of 38 before the second intermission. The Americans attempted 11 of their 18 shots in the middle stanza despite trailing 5-1.

A total of 27 shots were taken during the third frame but neither team was able to break through for any successful scoring opportunities.

Helena led the way in the shots-on-goal category in each of the three periods and finished with 55. The Americans struggled offensively and created 21 of the 28 total shots after the first period.

The Americans maintained a penalty-free contest during the first two periods. A ten-minute unsportsmanlike penalty and a minor slashing penalty in the third frame was all the stoppages of play the Americans allowed. The Bighorns had six (minor) infractions spread out among the three periods. Power play opportunities could have changed the momentum for either squad. Great Falls had six chances, but Helena's defense redirected them. Helena had one failed power play attempt.

A trio of players got in the scoring column for the visiting team. Liam Bland and Adam Harvey scored two goals each and Tyler Bloom contributed one goal. Blake Nerney had the lone goal for Great Falls with the assists going to Bryson Fletcher and AJ Benit.

First-year goaltender Eric Buchholz played and won his first junior hockey playoff game for the Bighorns. Buchholz, one of eleven players from the state of Colorado, allowed one first period goal but played flawless for the second and third periods to finish with 27 saves. Meanwhile, Zac Hattan started in the net for the Americans after seeing action in one of the two games against the Badlands Sabres in last week's Frontier Division Play-In Series. The Michigan netminder registered 50 saves in 60 minutes.



FRONTIER PLAYOFF UPDATE: The #2 Gillette (WY) Wild earned a trip to the Frontier Division Finals by sweeping the #3 Bozeman Ice Dogs in the Frontier Division Semi-Finals best-of-three series, 2-0 on Friday. Gillette outscored Bozeman 10-3 over the span of two games. After claiming a 4-1 victory on Wednesday, the Wild, coached by former Great Falls Americans Associate Coach, Ethan Hayes, cruised to a 6-2 win as 840 spectators at the Spirit Hall Ice Arena watched the home team win the series ([box](#)

[score](#)).

NEXT CONTEST: Great Falls and Helena will meet in Game Two of the best-of-three Frontier Divisional Semi-Finals on Saturday (March 12) with the series moving to Helena, Montana for a 7:05PM showdown at the Helena Ice Arena. If Helena wins, the season ends for the Americans and the Bighorns will move on to next week's Frontier Division Finals against the #2 Gillette Wild, who swept the #3 Bozeman Ice Dogs on Friday night in the other semi-final series. If the Americans upset the Bighorns on Saturday, a third and decisive Game 3 will also be hosted by the Bighorns at 6:05PM (MST) on Sunday, March 13th. All playoff games can be seen on the NA3HL's official streaming service, [HockeyTV](#).

To view the 2022 Playoff schedules for the 2022 Fraser Cup Championship tournament played in St. Peters, Missouri, 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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