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Great Falls Americans Press Release

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Sheridan downs Great Falls 4-1 in battle of top two teams in the Frontier Division

By Kevin Scott

Box Score	Game Sheet	League Scoreboard	Americans Team Statistics
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GREAT FALLS, Mont., January 8, 2021 — For the first few months (October through December), the #2 Great Falls Americans (16-7-1-0, 33 pts.) have been the leaders in the Frontier Division standings in the North American 3 Hockey League (NA3HL) but now a new team is emerging from second place and has taken over the top spot in the division. The Sheridan Hawks (18-1-0-0, 36 pts.), based in Sheridan, Wyoming, have started winning while Great Falls has eight losses after starting the season 10-0-0-0.

Sheridan, playing in their second season as a member of the NA3HL's Frontier Division under head coach Andy Scheib, have won 18 straight contests this season after a 3-2 road loss in their second game of the season to last year's Frontier Division champion, Bozeman Ice Dogs (9-10-1-0, 5th place) on October 3rd. The early setback ignited an 18-game win streak, which is good enough to be the best team (record-wise) in the 31-team league. The Hawks offense has won games with as low as four goals being scored or as many as 21 when they cruised to a 21-0 victory over the eighth place, Butte Cobras (3-20-2-0).

The Wyoming junior hockey franchise boasts the top scorer in the league as Jacob Cummings has scored 64 points (19 goals, 45 assists) in 18 games. Cummings also played for the inaugural team last season. Blake Billings, who suits up for his hometown, leads the team in goals scored with 22 and has dished out 21 assists (41 points). The Sheridan native played in 46 games last season for his hometown. Meanwhile, James Downie is the top netminder for the Hawks is 8-0-0-0 and is second in the league with a Goals Against Average (GAA) of 1.11. The second-year player from Cattai, New South Wales (Australia) has a 0.952 save percentage.

Newcomer Alex Jackson (15 goals, 18 assists) leads the team in points scored with 33 along with teammate Jake Hayes. Jake Hayes, the Frontier Division Honorable Mention Star of the Week last week, has accrued 13 goals and 20 assists (33 points) for coach Greg Sears' team. Netminder Trever Mellen,

ranked 13th in the league with a GAA of 2.46, has created 635 saves and allowed 41 goals. The Minnesota native has a 0.934 save percentage for the team so far this season.

Great Falls was looking to pull off the big upset on home ice on Friday evening. Would they be able to get their offense going and pick up their 17th win of the season?

Justin Schwartzmiller and Blake Billings each scored once and dished out one assist and new netminder Thomas Kuriscak stopped 23 of the 24 shots as the #1 Sheridan Hawks beat the #2 Great Falls Americans 4-1 during the battle of the two top teams in the Frontier Division on Friday evening in Great Falls.

The Hawks netted a 1-0 lead after the first twenty minutes as Justin Schwartzmiller (Fond du Lac, Wisconsin) was the recipient of his 20th goal of the season as Jonathon Teasdale and Briar Sylvester earned the assists. Sheridan held a 17-8 shots-on-goal advantage during the first frame.

Despite getting outshot 25-10 in the middle stanza, Great Falls trailed 2-1 as the second period ended. Sheridan's Blake Billings racked up his 22nd goal of the season at the 12:34 mark to give the Hawks a two-goal lead momentarily. Defenseman Nick Tigges and forward Jacob Cummings set up the scoring drive for the visitors. The assist gave Cummings his 44th assist in 18 games played. Micah Serino pulled the Americans to within one with just over a minute after Sheridan scored their second goal. The score that was assisted by Jake Hayes occurred with 11:25 remaining. Both goals in the period came while the other squad was in the penalty box.

The Hawks added their third goal in the third frame as the Wyoming club put them back up by two goals (3-1). Zach Brydges' 14th goal came nearly seven minutes into final period of regulation. Justin Schwartzmiller and Stepan Ruta created the assists. Lucas Gudz added an insurance goal for the Hawks with two minutes left to ensure the victory by Wyoming. Jacob Cummings chipped in his second assist of the night and Blake Billings gathered his first.

The Hawks offense overpowered the Americans with a 64-24 shots-on-goal margin.

Sheridan went 2-for-5 on their power play opportunities including one goal in the second and third frames. Micah Serino's second period goal was the only successful goal (out of six chances) that came while the Hawks were in the sin bin.

Great Falls and Sheridan accrued 43 minutes of penalty time between their total of 13 infractions.

Minnesota native Thomas Kuriscak played in his first game with the top team in the NA3HL and picked up the victory by allowing just one goal in 24 attempts. Trever Mellen, the NA3HL Goaltender of the Month for December, fell for the fifth time in 19 games. Mellen amassed 60 saves despite the setback.

NOTE: Jeff Heimel, the former Great Falls Americans Head Coach and General Manager (2012-2018) and current University of Providence (Great Falls, MT) head men's hockey coach, was in attendance also doing some scouting.

NEXT CONTEST: The Great Falls Americans will play host to the same Sheridan Hawks squad on Saturday, January 9th starting at 7:30PM (MST) from the Great Falls Ice Plex for the second time this season before the Americans travel to Sheridan, Wyoming next weekend (January 15-16) to face the top team in the Frontier Division.

Since spectators are still not yet allowed into the home games in Great Falls due to COVID-19 restrictions put in place by the Cascade County Health Board, [HockeyTV](#) is the only place to watch the Americans in action. If you would like more information about subscribing to Hockey TV (All Access), please [click here](#).

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