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Great Falls Americans Press Release

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NA3HL Showcase: Willmar WarHawks offensive attack stymies the Great Falls Americans

By Kevin Scott

Box Score	Game Sheet	League Scoreboard	Americans Team Statistics
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BLAINE, Minn., December 20, 2021 — As the Great Falls Americans began their eighth season as members of the eight-team North American 3 Hockey League's (NA3HL) Frontier Division in September 2021, the Americans have 13 wins in 28 contests (13-11-3-1, 30 pts.). For most of the season, Great Falls has been sitting in fourth place in the Frontier (Division) behind the Helena Bighorns (26-1-0-0, 52 pts.), the Gillette (WY) Wild (24-3-0-0, 48 pts.), and the Bozeman Ice Dogs (17-8-3-1, 38 pts.).

The Willmar WarHawks (15-10-1-0), based out of Willmar, Minnesota, are the Americans first opponent in the 2021 NA3HL Showcase Tournament that began on Monday, December 20th at the NSC Super Rink in Blaine, Minnesota (just 15 miles outside of Minneapolis, Minnesota). Willmar is a member of the NA3HL's West Division and currently sits in third place behind division leaders, Granite City Lumberjacks (Sauk Rapids, MN) (24-1-0-0) and the Iowa-based Mason City Toros (18-8-1-0). The WarHawks started September and October with a 6-4-1 record and have since gone 9-6-0-0.

Greg Sears, the fourth-year mentor for Great Falls, is led by a pair of returning forwards in Jackson Henningsgard (10 goals, 22 assists, 32 pts.) followed by Micah Serino (17 goals, 14 assists, 31 pts.). Noel Rahn, a newcomer this season, lead the team in assists with 15. Netminders Will Simpson (4-4-0-1) and Zac Hattan (4-3-2-0) are the top two goaltenders for the Montana junior hockey team. Simpson, from Anchorage, Alaska, had 273 saves and a Goals Against Average (GAA) of 3.02. Hattan, who calls Kalamazoo, Michigan and was a member of the 2020-21 Americans team, has produced 401 saves along with a 0.920 save percentage and a GAA of 3.71.

The WarHawks led by fourth year head coach Kirk Olimb, has relied on talented forwards Jeremiah Konkel (16 goals, 14 assists, 30 pts.) and Collin Kerchoff (9 goals, 18 assists, 27 pts.) to help guide the team on offense. Cooper Olson and Will Pinney are both Minnesota natives who have combined for eight of the thirteen victories and have over 300 saves in the season.

The league's best talent is shown at the prestigious three-game yearly tournament held in December with many college and junior scouts in attendance. Each of the 34 team play three games each that count in the overall season standings. Great Falls is designated as the visiting team in today's contest against Willmar and in Tuesday's contest against Texas' Mid Cities Jr. Stars. The Americans conclude the tournament on Wednesday, December 22 as the home team against the New Jersey Titans.

Due to COVID-19 concerns, the NA3HL did not hold the 2020 NA3HL Showcase tournament but the 2019 edition saw the Americans go 1-1-1-0 with a 4-1 loss to the Granite City Lumberjacks, an overtime setback to Minnesota's Alexandria Blizzard, 4-3 and closed the tournament with a 3-2 victory over Maine's L/A Nordiques.



The Willmar WarHawks proved to be the better team as they scored half of their goals in the second period to prevail over the Great Falls Americans 6-0 during the opening day of the 2021 NA3HL Showcase Tournament on Monday afternoon at the NSC Super Rink in Blaine, Minnesota. Ben Luedtke scored three points (2 goals, 1 assist) for the winning team.

The Willmar WarHawks provide the first successful scoring drive of the contest when Elbridge Dekraai was the recipient of the first goal by either team. Brady O'Brien's twentieth assist seven minutes into the contest put the host team up early. Dekraai and O'Brien are two of the twenty players from Minnesota on the squad. Great Falls wasn't able to muster any offense as they were allowed just five shots-on-goal with no goals made. Willmar finished the first twenty minutes with ten shots-on-goal and one successful score.

Willmar forwards Ben Luedtke and Michael Sweetland each earned goals during the opening 35 seconds of the middle stanza to increase the lead for the WarHawks. Defenseman Samuel Miller provide his tenth helper on Luedtke's score 19 seconds into the second. Collin Kerchoff and Ben Luedtke set up Sweetland's score 16 seconds later. The WarHawks added another score near the fifteen-minute mark. Wisconsin native Marcuse Mack put in his team's fourth goal for the Minnesota team with Fargo, North Dakota's Tyler Misialek gathering the assist. The WarHawks offense continued their dominance and outshot Great Falls 22-3 in the second stanza and 32-8 after two periods of play.

Ben Luedtke picked up where he left off in the previous period. His second goal of the game (along with a single assist) came while the Americans were in the penalty box (power play) off the stick of Samuel Miller, who also assisted on a Luedtke's goal in the middle frame. Miller came to Willmar from the Oklahoma City Ice Hawks after playing in eleven games with them on December 14th. The WarHawks led 5-0 with 13-minute remaining. Mikhail Kukareka, who calls Moscow, Russia home, registered his first goal midway through the last period of regulation in his second game after being added to the team on December 14th. Michael Sweetland and Jeremiah Konkell assisted on what proved to be the last goal that saw the WarHawks offense overpower the Americans during the sixty-minute contest.

Willmar simply outplayed Great Falls on the offensive side as they held the Americans to just 14 shots while they produced 22 of their 47 (shots) in the second period.

The two-hour-and-eleven-minute game had 13 minor penalties that resulted in 26 minute of combined penalty time between these two NA3HL clubs. Ben Luedtke's second goal in the third period was the only power play that was made.

Will Kunka improved his record to 6-2-0-0 in his eight appearances in his first season with Willmar. The Moorhead, Minnesota netminder prevented all 14 shots by the Americans from getting between the pipes. Zac Hattan added 41 saves to give him 401 on the season. In ten games, his record is now 4-3-2-0.

[Click here](#) for more information about the tournament that will feature many college and junior scouts in attendance or see the league press release and full results by [clicking here](#).

NOTES: Here is a look at how the other seven Frontier Division squads fared during the first day at the Showcase Tournament. The top team in the Frontier Division, the Helena Bighorns ran into a road block when they were on the opposite end of a 3-0 loss to the Granite City (MN) Lumberjacks ([box score](#)). The #3 Bozeman Ice Dogs and the Oklahoma City Ice Hawks needed a shootout to declare a winner and the Ice Hawks defeated Bozeman 6-5 ([box score](#)). The Danbury (CT) Jr. Hat Tricks scored the one and only goal in the second period to hold off the #6 Butte Cobras, 1-0 ([box score](#)). The #8 Sheridan (WY) Hawks defeated their opponent, the Atlanta Capitals, 5-4 in overtime ([box score](#)) and the #7 Yellowstone (WY) Quake defeated the Connecticut-based Norwich Sea Captains, 7-1 ([box score](#)). The Mason City (IA) Toros scored four goals and blanked the #2 Gillette (WY) Wild, 4-0 ([box score](#)). The #5 Badlands (SD) Sabres scored twice in the middle period and once in the third to edge the Bay State (MA) Bobcats, 3-1 ([box score](#)).

NEXT CONTEST: The Americans next opponent at the [2021 NA3HL Showcase Tournament](#) is the Mid Cities Jr. Stars from Euless, Texas. The Tuesday morning affairs starts at 9:45AM local time or 8:45AM (MST) from the [National Sports Center \(NSC\) Super Rink](#). The Stars are 7-17-0-0 on the season and are in sixth place in the eight-team South Division. In Monday's action at the Showcase Tourney, the Stars ran into trouble with the Minnesota Loons as they trailed 8-0 in third before losing 8-2 ([box score](#)).

Great Falls and Mid Cities both met on the ice on December 17, 2017, at the 2017 NA3HL Showcase in Blaine, Minnesota where the Montana squad won easily, 5-1 ([game story](#)).

Great Falls is set to play the New Jersey Titans at 10:45AM (MST) on December 22nd on the final day of competition. Every game from the Showcase tournament will be broadcast live on [HockeyTV](#). [Click here](#) to see the NA3HL's official schedule press release.

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