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Great Falls Americans Press Release

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Bozeman edges Great Falls 5-4 in a wild shootout

By Kevin Scott

Box Score	Game Sheet	League Scoreboard	Americans Team Statistics
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GREAT FALLS, Mont., January 15, 2022 — After postponing their two away contests last weekend against Helena (Bighorns) and Bozeman (Ice Dogs) to get their players healthy and ready for the final six weeks of competition in the NA3HL regular seasons, the #4 Great Falls Americans (15-13-3-2) were ready to get back on the ice for their home and away series against the Ice Dogs on Saturday evening in Great Falls.

The Americans will make up both of their missed games. Helena and Great Falls are scheduled to meet at the Helena Ice Arena on Sunday, February 27th at 4:00PM to close out the regular season. The Americans road game with Bozeman has not been rescheduled yet but will be finalized soon.

Speaking of Bozeman (19-11-3-1), the Americans lost their two contests against the #3 team in the Frontier Division. In Great Falls' third game of the season on September 18th, Bozeman led 3-0 after the second period in Bozeman's Haynes Pavilion before the Americans clawed back and tied the contest before the final buzzer sounded to conclude the third period. Neither team capitalized during the five-minute extra period, so a shootout was needed. The Ice Dogs' Ian Bowman and Nick Stevens scored the only goals to help their team win 4-3 ([see story](#)).

Great Falls and Bozeman squared off again in Great Falls on October 29th. Great Falls led 2-0 thanks to goals by Thomas Dalsin and AJ Benit but Bozeman would score four of the next five goals prior to the start of the third stanza to defeat the home team, 6-4. Each team scored once during the third period ([see story](#)).

Great Falls was hoping to trip up Bozeman for the first time this season during Saturday's action at the Great Falls Ice Plex. With Great Falls sitting idle last weekend, Bozeman went 1-1 with Helena cruising by the Ice Dogs 10-3 on Friday in the Capital City and Bozeman rebounding the following night with a 3-1 victory over the Butte Cobras in Butte, Montana.

Former Sheridan Hawks forward Makhai Sparks scored two goals for the Bozeman Ice Dogs while Bentley Simcox tallied the only goal in the shootout by either squad as the visiting team earned a 5-4 victory over the Great Falls Americans on Saturday in primetime at the Great Falls Ice Plex. Thomas Gazich scored two second period goals for the host team.

The Ice Dogs scored just 49 seconds into the first period to take the early lead. Sparks, who came over in a trade from Sheridan on New Year's Eve that sent Colton Boyd to the Hawks, recorded the first of his two goals with help from Ian Bowman. Bozeman's advantage would last 2:57 when the Americans gave the home crowd of 634 a scoring drive of their own. Micah Serino's 15th assist came when Daniel Crutcher put the biscuit in the basket to even the game at 1-1. AJ Benit also was credited with an assist on the Americans first scoring play. Bozeman contributed 19 shots while Great Falls had 10 after the first stanza.

In the following period, Great Falls' Thomas Gazich tallied the first of his two goals of the period with 19:23 remaining before the second intermission. Great Falls took advantage of one of their five power play chances as Jackson Henningsgard collected his 24th assist and Tyler Sunagel picked up his 16th. Great Falls held their first and only lead for 6:46 when Bozeman embarked on the first of their three consecutive scoring drives. A pair of California products (Nate Brunelle and Cole Busher) and an Idaho native (Makhai Sparks) helped Mike Perkins' squad take a two-goal lead (4-2) with under six minutes remaining. Five different players received assists including Ian Bowman, who acquired his second assist of the night, while Luke Busher, Nick Smith, Clayton Brown, and Grayden Pond had one helper apiece. Great Falls' offense did not let up and registered the last two goals before the period concluded to tie the contest for the second time. Thomas Gazich, one of 17 returning players for coach Greg Sears' team from last year, scored for the second time over Ice Dogs netminder Cameron Milewski, who has been with the Bozeman NA3HL franchise for a week. Blake Nerney, who rejoined the Americans team on the final day of 2021, chipped in his first assist since coming back to the team after playing for the past three seasons with Great Falls. Jay Alford had the secondary assist. Hunter Maschke buried the game-tying goal with 65 second left before the second intermission with an assist going to Micah Serino and Daniel Crutcher. The home team did outshoot the Ice Dogs (16-8) in the period.

Bozeman and Great Falls combined to generate 26 shots-on-goal in the third frame but neither team was able to break the 4-4 tie. Both teams proceeded to a five-minute overtime that saw just nine shots taken but neither offense could produce a game-winning score.

Five players from each team went one-on-one with the opposing goaltender in hopes of declaring a winner in a shootout. Bentley Simcox ensured the 19th victory for the third ranked team in the Frontier Division with his scoring opportunity the only one that was successful. The Great Falls goaltender denied Luke Busher, Ian Bowman, Grayden Pond, and Makhai Sparks opportunities. Daniel Crutcher, Thomas Gazich, Jackson Henningsgard, Bryson Fletcher, and Micah Serino one-on-one efforts against Bozeman netminder Cameron Milewski were unsuccessful.

Bozeman is now 2-1 this season in shootouts. The Ice Dogs downed the Americans on September 18th in a game played at Haynes Pavilion and then fell short in their first contest at the 2021 NA3HL Showcase in December to the Oklahoma City Ice Hawks (NA3HL South Division), 6-5. This was Great Falls' second shootout of the season.

The Americans offense compiled 42 shots with their opponents creating 47.

Bozeman was whistled for six penalties including five minors. Great Falls stayed out of the penalty box for most of the night by having two first period trips to the sin bin. Great Falls went 1-for-5 on power plays while Bozeman was denied a goal on their only try.

Cameron Milewski improved to 2-0-0-0 on the season including his first (3-1) win last week against the Butte Cobras. The California goalie now has 96 saves in two games played including 38 tonight. Zac Hattan (4-4-2-0) started for the Americans in the net and gathered 21 saves before being replaced in the second period by backup Will Simpson (5-5-0-2), who despite having his second shootout loss, finished with 21 saves.

FRONTIER DIVISION UPDATE: In other action tonight around the Frontier Division, the Yellowstone Quake earned a 4-3 road victory over the Butte Cobras ([box score](#)), the Badlands (SD) Sabres made the home fans happy by downing the Sheridan (WY) Hawks, 7-3 ([box score](#)), and the game of the night was between the two top teams in the Frontier Division, the Helena Bighorns (30-2-1-1) and the Gillette (WY) Wild (31-3-1-0) with the Wild taking over first place by knocking off the Bighorns, 4-3 in overtime ([box score](#)).

NOTES: The Americans road game that was scheduled to take place against the Helena Bighorns in Helena, Montana on January 8th has been rescheduled for Sunday, February 27th at 4:00PM (MST) from the Helena Ice Arena. Also, Great Falls has rescheduled their January 9th game against the Bozeman Ice Dogs for Sunday, January 23rd at 4:00PM (MST) in Bozeman, Montana.

The Americans traded defenseman Noel Rahn to the Bozeman Ice Dogs on January 7th. He scored 15 assists for the Americans in 24 games this season.

NEXT CONTEST: The Americans and Ice Dogs will battle on the ice again for the fourth time this season with a 7:00PM (MST) performance at Haynes Pavilion in Bozeman on Sunday night (January 16th). Before the season concludes at the end of February, both teams will face-off twice more including a January 23rd and a February 13th game in Bozeman. [HockeyTV](#) is the home for all your Great Falls Americans hockey games this season.

The Americans next home games will be the weekend of January 21-22 when the South Dakota based Badlands Sabres come to the Great Falls Ice Plex for a pair of 7:30PM (MST) games.

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