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**Great Falls Americans Press Release**

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**Butte Cobras top Great Falls Americans 5-2 to close out 2021**

**By Kevin Scott**

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GREAT FALLS, Mont., December 31, 2021 — The New Year (2022) is upon us, but before that happens, the #4 Great Falls Americans (15-12-3-1) and the #5 Butte Cobras (13-18-2-0) get to clash on the ice once more as the home team hopes to close out 2021 with a victory before the new year begins.

The Cobras came to the Great Falls Ice Plex for their fifth meeting against the Americans on Friday evening. Great Falls has a 3-2 series lead this season with the first setback on October 30<sup>th</sup> when Butte utilized their home crowd to win 4-2 ([game story](#)). Four weeks ago, both NA3HL squads collided on the ice at the Butte Community Ice Center with the Americans picking up a 5-3 decision ([game story](#)).

Great Falls and Butte are coming off last week's NA3HL Showcase Tournament in Blaine, Minnesota with matching 2-1-0-0 records. The fourth-ranked team in the Frontier Division defeated the Mid Cities (TX) Jr. Stars and the New Jersey Titans after starting the three-day tournament with many scouts in attendance with a six-goal shutout loss by the Minnesota-based Willmar WarHawks. Meanwhile, Butte lost by a goal on the opening day (December 20) to the Danbury (CT) Jr. Hat Tricks (1-0) and then won two consecutive games against the St. Louis Jr. Blues (7-4) and the Austin (TX) Ice Bats, 6-2.

Since their first encounter to start off the month of December, Great Falls (counting tonight) is 5-3-1-0 with a pair of road victories versus the #6 Badlands (SD) Sabres plus one regulation loss and one overtime blunder to the #2 Gillette (WY) Wild. As for Butte, who is coached by Kirk Golden and was on the bench for the Americans last season in an assistant coach capacity, is 4-6-0-0 in the final month of 2021. In addition to the 2-1 record at the Showcase Tournament and a loss at home to Great Falls on December 1<sup>st</sup>, they went 1-1 against the #7 Yellowstone (WY) Quake and 0-3 to the top ranked team in the Frontier Division, the Helena Bighorns.

Great Falls was hoping to improve to 4-1 against one of their three Montana rivals on the ice but the Cobras offense stood in the way.

The #4 Great Falls Americans and the #5 Butte Cobras were tied at 2-2 after two periods before Cobras pulled away with three goals in the third to top the host team, 5-2 on New Year's Eve at the Great Falls Ice Plex. Butte forward Nick Bradshaw scored three of the five goals for a hat trick while Tyler Sunagel and Jackson Henningsgard scored the goals for Great Falls as they fell for fourth time at home this season on Friday evening.

The Butte Cobras broke the scoreless tie 2:44 into the first period when Luke Schleusner and Cade Wessman delivered the puck to Nick Bradshaw, who recorded his 28<sup>th</sup> goal of the season. The first goal came while the Americans were in the penalty box. Before the period ended, the Americans netted their first goal of the night with 1:26 remaining to even the score (1-1). Wisconsin native Tyler Sunagel, who is in his first year with Great Falls, recorded his 13<sup>th</sup> goal of the season. Thomas Gazich and Bryson Fletcher gathered their fifteenth and third assists, respectively. Both squads attempted 28 shots in the first stanza.

Great Falls and Butte each scored within the first seven minutes of the middle period. Jackson Henningsgard lit up the lamp for the 13<sup>th</sup> time this season with 17:34 left before the second intermission. Daniel Crutcher and Hunter Maschke set up the play to give the Americans their first lead of the game. Minutes later, Luke Schleusner got the puck around Great Falls netminder Will Simpson for the equalizer with helpers from Cade Wessman and Carson Streich. Both teams had many chances to score during the final 13:06 but were denied and each team acquired two successful scoring opportunities after the first forty minutes. The home team could only muster one goal in the second despite taking 24 shots and limiting the Cobras to 10.

The Americans gave up two goals to Butte during a five-minute scoring spree that started with a Nick Bradshaw score and ended with a David Hanny tally to put the visiting team out in front, 4-2. Luke Schleusner and Cade Wessman were awarded the assists on the Bradshaw score 83 seconds into the final period while Hanny's 12<sup>th</sup> goal was made possible by Caelin Chinery and Fabian Vik and occurred with 6:31 left. Wessman's 43rd assist, came while on a Butte power play. The Butte forward ranks second overall in the league in assists made and seventh in points (54). The Cobras added one more score with Nick Bradshaw receiving his third goal of the night with Luke Schleusner getting his second assist with 41 seconds left. The Americans pulled goaltender Will Simpson before the last goal that resulted in an empty net score.

Despite just scoring two goals, the Americans outshot the Cobras in each of the three periods to finish with 71. Butte had 19 of their 39 in the third period where they connected on three scoring drives.

In their second-to-last regular season meeting, both teams were called with four minor infractions with eight minutes spent in the sin bin. The Cobras scored on two of their four power play chances. Butte's defense held up and didn't allow Great Falls to score on any of their four power plays.

The winning netminder was Butte's Caleb Cross. Cross (7-10-1-0) is one of six players on the roster who calls Minnesota home and ended his 19<sup>th</sup> contest with 69 saves. Caleb won for the first time since November 26<sup>th</sup> when he accumulated his sixth victory by helping his team defeat the Yellowstone (WY) Quake, 6-2 in Cody, Wyoming. Great Falls' Will Simpson allowed one each in the first two periods and two in the third frame to finish with 34 saves. Simpson saw his record fall to 5-5-0-1.

In other scores around the Frontier Division, the top two teams in the Frontier Division played tonight and each came away with a victory. The #1 Helena Bighorns downed the #6 Badlands Sabres, 6-3 in Rapid City, South Dakota ([see box score](#)) and the #2 Gillette (WY) Wild also won 6-3 on the road at the #8

Sheridan (WY) Hawks in Wyoming ([see box score](#)). Helena and Gillette are separated by three points (56-53)

**NOTES:** Great Falls Americans Head Coach and General Manager, Greg Sears has agreed to a three-year contract extension to stay with the club. Ryan Connell, a Sports Reporter for ABC/FOX Montana (KFBB in Great Falls), filled in for Megan Lewis on the HockeyTV broadcast tonight. A special thanks and best of luck to ABC/FOX Sports Reporter Elijah Collins, who regularly covers the Americans for the local Great Falls TV station, as he embarks on a new journey in Indiana and tonight was his final time of covering the Americans. Also, the Americans brought back forward Blake Nerney for the rest of the season after he played the previous three seasons for Great Falls. [Click here](#) to view his stats.

**NEXT CONTEST:** The Americans and Cobras will face off for the final time in the regular season on Saturday, January 1<sup>st</sup>. The New Years Night affair on the ice will begin at 7:30PM (MST) from the Great Falls Ice Plex. After Saturday's contest, Great Falls will have six more home games before the 2021-22 season concludes on the final weekend of February. All home and away games can be streamed on [HockeyTV](#).

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