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Great Falls Americans Press Release

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UPSET WIN!!! Great Falls downs Helena 3-2 for 20th win of the season

By Kevin Scott

Box Score	Game Sheet	League Scoreboard	Americans Team Statistics
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GREAT FALLS, Mont., January 28, 2022 — The #3 Great Falls Americans (20-13-3-2) rivalry with the #2 Helena Bighorns (32-3-2-0) continued Friday night in Great Falls with the Americans seeking their first victory of the season against one of the toughest opponents in the North American 3 Hockey League (NA3HL).

Great Falls has not been victorious over Helena this season as they are 0-3-0-0. On October 8th, Great Falls trailed 5-0 in the second period before eventually falling 6-4 ([game story](#)). The following night (October 9th), Great Falls led 3-1 after two periods but Helena outscored the Americans, 4-0 in the third to win 5-3 ([game story](#)). Both games were played at the Helena Ice Arena. After a scoreless first period on November 14th in Great Falls, the Americans had a 2-1 advantage before the Bighorns offense put the biscuit in the basket three times in the third to win by two goals, 4-2 ([game story](#)).

Helena, who has been one of the top teams in the 34-team NA3HL this season and has been no lower (seeding) than second place in the eight-team Frontier Division, has four losses after 36 games. Two of the four losses came during the 2021 NA3HL Showcase in Blaine, Minnesota in December. They lost in a pair of shutouts to the Granite City (MN) Lumberjacks (3-0) and the Rochester (MN) Grizzlies (4-0). Two weeks ago on January 14-15, they fell by identical scores of 4-3 in overtime each night to the #1 Gillette (WY) Wild in Wyoming.

Great Falls is enjoying the month of January with four consecutive victories after falling to the Butte Cobras (Jan. 1) and Bozeman Ice Dogs on January 15th in a 5-4 shootout. Great Falls rebounded with two wins each at home against the Badlands (SD) Sabres and two road wins against the Ice Dogs since January 16th.

Would the Americans pull out the win in the final (regular season) contest between these two foes in Great Falls?

The #3 Great Falls Americans took a 2-1 lead into the locker room for the second intermission and held on for a huge 3-2 upset win over the #2 Helena Bighorns during Friday night's action at the Great Falls Ice Plex. Helena has only lost (twice) to the Gillette Wild in the Frontier Division and two losses at the NA3HL Showcase in December. Jackson Henningsgard, Bryson Fletcher, and Micah Serino all scored for the Americans. Thomas Gazich assisted on two of the scoring plays and goaltender Will Simpson swatted away 40 shots.

The Helena Bighorns scored just one goal in the first twenty minutes but getting that one goal took 18 minutes off the clock as Great Falls' defense kept the Bighorns offense from scoring more goals. Defenseman and Helena, Montana native Dylan Cunningham (fifth assist) got the puck to forward Samuel Feamster for his 34th goal of the season with 83 seconds to go before the first intermission. A total of 21 shots-on-goal was created between these two clubs.

Jackson Henningsgard and AJ Benit, who will be teammates at the Top Prospects Tournament in February for Team Blue, connected for the game-tying Americans with 11:29 left in the second period. Benit recorded his 20th assist while Henningsgard made his 16th goal in a wild period that featured a few ejections for fighting from both teams. Great Falls' offense broke through and took their first lead of the game with 65 seconds remaining before the second intermission. Thomas Gazich and Blake Nerney each assisted on Bryson Fletcher's fourth goal of the season that put the Americans ahead 2-1. Despite scoring two goals, the home team trailed in the shots-on-goal category 16-12.

The 2-1 score in the third period held up until the final 70 seconds when each squad lit up the lamp. First, Thomas Gazich collected his second assist of the night when Micah Serino put the puck between the pipes and over Helena goaltender Gabe Swanson. Taber Gutschick and the Bighorns did not give up as the Colorado native netted his eighth goal that was set up by teammates Adam Harvey and Erik Gibboney, who acquired their 33rd and 36th assists of the year, respectively. The goal was too little too late for the visiting team as the score came with 24 seconds left in the contest.

Helena outshot Great Falls in all three periods (42-29) but managed just two goals in three periods.

The penalty minutes added up when two players from each side was whistled for fighting and ejected in the second stanza as tempers flared. Helena head coach Damon Hanson also was sent to the locker room early. After a penalty-free first period, Great Falls had three minors and three majors that resulted in 51 minutes spent off the ice in the last two periods. Four infractions with ejections included resulted in 65 minutes that Helena was not at full strength. Three power play chances went unanswered for the Bighorns.

Will Simpson won his ninth game (9-5-0-2) including four wins in his last four games he played in. The Alaska goalie is now 1-2-0-0 against the Bighorns after picking up 40 saves. His counterpart, Helena native Gabe Swanson took his first loss in three games played this season and finished with 26 saves. Last Friday (January 21), he was instrumental in the Bighorns road win against the Butte Cobras, 7-2 where he produced his first victory.

NOTES: The North American 3 Hockey League (NA3HL) announced their team rosters this week including players and coaches that will take part in the 2022 NA3HL Top Prospects Tournament on February 7-8, 2022, in Cranberry Township, (near Pittsburgh) Pennsylvania. The Americans have three players (AJ Benit, Jackson Henningsgard, and Micah Serino) that will be members of Team Blue. [Click](#)

[here](#) to read the Americans press release about the prestigious tournament with many scouts in attendance.

Just four other teams were in action on Friday night in the Frontier Division. The top-ranked Gillette (WY) Wild kept their winning streak alive by slipping by the Butte Cobras 6-4 at the Butte Community Ice Center ([box score](#)) and the Yellowstone (WY) Quake put another win on their resume with a 4-2 win over the Sheridan (WY) Hawks ([box score](#)).

NEXT CONTEST: The Americans begin a three-week stretch away from the friendly confines of the Great Falls Ice Plex. The Americans and Bighorns will collide on the ice to close out the month of January with a 7:05PM matchup on Saturday, January 29th. In addition to Helena, they will also be in Bozeman, Montana (once) and will make the trek to Cody, Wyoming to take on the Yellowstone Quake before facing Helena twice more. Later in February, the Quake will visit Great Falls (Feb. 26-27) for the final weekend of competition in the regular season.

[HockeyTV](#) is the place to catch all the action for fans that can't make the games in person.

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