

Great Falls Americans coach Matt Frank draws up a drill for his team during their first practice on the ice at the Great Falls IcePlex Tuesday afternoon.

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# Junior A team back on the ice

By **MIKE TOWNE**  
Tribune Sports Writer

Junior hockey has officially returned to Great Falls.

The Great Falls Americans, a Junior A Tier III team that will compete in the America West Hockey League, went through their first full on-ice practice Tuesday afternoon at the Great Falls IcePlex. Twenty-one players participated in the hour and a half workout, under the watchful eyes of head coach/general manager Matt Frank.

The team will be on the ice

four times a week in preparation for its 48-game AWHL regular-season schedule, which begins Sept. 30 against the Bozeman Ice Dogs at the IcePlex.

"I like this group.

It's a good, hard-working group," said Frank, a 2001 Billings Skyview High graduate who played collegiate hockey at Ferris State and was a member of the Bozeman Ice Dogs from 2001-04. "We're young and inexperienced, but we have the mak-



ings for a good, solid team."

While Tuesday was the team's first official practice on ice, the Americans have been together since Aug. 29. "We've had two weeks of off-ice training, running and jumping. They've been through a lot of conditioning," Frank said. "It's a relief for them to be on the ice. They're sick of training workouts."

Between now and Sept. 30,

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# Americans

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the main goal is to "get the building blocks of the system down," Frank said. "We'll be a work in progress all season, but we want to have the fundamentals and be cohesive as a group. We want everyone to be on the same page."

It's awfully early, but the Americans are making progress. "During dryland training the last two weeks we've come together as a group. The guys have worked hard," he said.

The Americans will travel to Helena later this week to participate in a six-team tournament. They'll play one game per day Thursday through Saturday and, hopefully, a game for a place on Sunday. "I'm excited for it," Frank said.

AWHL teams can have as many as 25 players on their roster, 20 who can suit up and play. All 21 players currently in camp are under contract, including forward Logan Schermele, a 2011 graduate of Great Falls High, and defenseman Connor Barta, currently a junior at C.M. Russell High.

Frank plans to add three or four more players in the coming weeks, and those players will need a host family for housing, he said.

Terry Metro, a Michigan native who has vast coaching experience at several levels, is the American's assistant coach. He is a former head coach at Bozeman and is familiar with most of the skaters on the Great Falls roster.

Frank is impressed with Great Falls and looking forward to the season. "The community support has been astounding," he said.

Frank can be contacted at [mfrank@gfamericans.com](mailto:mfrank@gfamericans.com). The team office number is 205-0727.



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