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**Great Falls Americans Press Release**

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**Helena's Wojtusik's three goals help the Bighorns down the Americans, 6-3**

**By Kevin Scott**

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HELENA, Mont., February 18, 2022 — The #4 Great Falls Americans (20-18-3-2) and the #1 Helena Bighorns (38-3-2-0) have met on the ice five previous times this season with the Bighorns besting the Americans in four of the five encounters.

The good news for the Americans is that the NA3HL will take the top six of eight Frontier Division squads to the playoffs in two weeks. Great Falls has clinched a spot already with four games remaining in the 2021-22 NA3HL regular season slate. Helena is already guaranteed at least one of the first two slots in the playoffs and will have a first round (Play-In) bye along with the #2 Gillette (WY) Wild.

Great Falls is now 1-5-0-0 against Helena this season with two meetings remaining. The Americans lone victory came on January 28<sup>th</sup> when they were able to escape with a 3-2 win at the Great Falls Ice Plex ([game story](#)). Jackson Henningsgard, Blake Nerney and Micah Serino all registered goals in the win. Since then, the Americans have been winless on the road with two losses apiece to the Helena Bighorns and Yellowstone Quake and a setback against the Bozeman Ice Dogs.

The #4 Great Falls American kept the game close for the first two period before allowing the top-ranked Helena Bighorns to outscore them 3-1 in the third period in a 6-3 road loss for the Americans in a packed house at the Helena Ice Arena (1,096 fans) on Friday evening. The Americans are now 1-5-0-0 against Helena this season. Bighorns forward Harlan Wojtusik scored once in each period (hat trick) and Branwen Pollett and Adam Harvey accrued two assists each in their 38<sup>th</sup> victory of the season. Jackson Henningsgard, Micah Serino and Thomas Gazich scored the tallies for the Americans.

Helena scored the first goal, but Great Falls managed to take a 2-1 lead after the first period. After Harlan Wojtusik's goal eight minutes into the contest, the Americans bounced back and scored twice in a 49 second span. Micah Serino and Jackson Henningsgard gave the visiting team the lead. Corbin Skinner and TJ Norris assisted in the lone goal for the Bighorns while Petr Van Voorhis and Daniel Crutcher helped Serino get his 21<sup>st</sup> goal and newcomer Riley Opperude and Thomas Gazich set up

Henningsgard's goal with Helena in the penalty box. The shots were tight with Great Falls totaling 18 and Helena taking 17.

Helena's Ian Vannelli, who was playing in his fifth game for the Bighorns after starting the season with the NA3HL's Rochester Grizzlies, evened the game at 2-2 five minutes into the middle period. Adam Harvey and Tyler Bloom accumulated the assists. The host team took their second lead of the game with 21 seconds to go before the teams went into the locker room. While the Americans were in the sin bin, the Bighorns utilized the power play and Branwen Pollett and Adam Harvey found Harlan Wojtusik open for the score over Americans netminder Will Simpson. Helena controlled the puck for most of the second period and their offense produced 31 shots-on-goal leaving the Americans with six.

Both Frontier teams scored once during the first three minutes of the third as Helena maintained a one-goal advantage (4-3). Thomas Gazich (Great Falls) scored first followed 31 seconds later with Erik Gibboney breaking the tie. Riley Opperude assisted for the second time of the contest (third overall) and Bryson Fletcher came away with his 14<sup>th</sup> assists on the Gazich scoring drive. Forwards Andrew Deskin and Tyler Alldrege provided one assist apiece in the first of three scores in the stanza. The offensive attack for coach Damon Hanson's top Frontier Division team added two more to ensure another victory for them. Helena's second successful power play score was made possible by Harlan Wojtusik off the pass from Erik Gibboney and Branwen Pollett. In the closing minutes, Great Falls took out goaltender Will Simpson so they could get in another offensive player, but Samuel Feamster took advantage of the visiting team's miscue and fired the puck in the back of the net for their sixth and final goal. Ian Vannelli and Johnathan Peterson assisted. Helena has won their last six games since they lost to Great Falls in the last weekend of January.

Great Falls amassed 33 of their 39 shots in the first and third frames. Helena took 52 after the first period to end the game with 69.

Tonight, was the sixth time these two opponents met on the ice and there were 15 penalties called with a game total of 80 minutes spent in the penalty box. Four of the nine goals came while the opposing team was down a man.

Eric Buchholz (22-2-2-0), who played in the 2022 NA3HL Top Prospects Tournament for Team White on February 7-8 in Pennsylvania, collected 36 saves with three goals getting by him. Will Simpson (9-8-0-2) of Great Falls lost for the third time in February despite swatting away 63 shots.

In addition to Wojtusik's three goals, the Bighorns also received scoring from Ian Vannelli, Erik Gibboney, and Samuel Feamster. Thomas Gazich (1 goal, 1 assist) and Riley Opperude (2 assists) led the Americans.

**NOTES:** The NA3HL knows who four of their six playoff teams in the Frontier Division will be with two more aiming to clinch a spot soon. The Helena Bighorns (38-3-2-0, 78 pts.), Gillette (WY) Wild (38-4-2-0, 78 pts.), Bozeman Ice Dogs (23-15-3-1, 50 pts.) and Great Falls Americans (20-18-3-2, 45 pts.) will all head to the NA3HL playoffs after next weekend's regular season concludes. The Butte Cobras and first year team, the Rapid City, South Dakota based Badlands Sabres look to be safe bets to gather the fifth and sixth seeds in the postseason in March ([see the current NA3HL standings](#)).

Helena, Gillette, Bozeman, and Badlands all defeated their opponents in Friday contests. View all of the box scores from around the league by [clicking here](#).

**NEXT CONTEST:** The Great Falls Americans have four remaining games left in the 2021-22 season including two home games with the Yellowstone Quake (Cody, WY) on the schedule for February 25-26 in Great Falls. But before that, the Americans will play the Bighorns once more this weekend (Saturday, February 19) with the puck dropping at 7:05PM (MST) from the Helena Ice Arena. Helena will also host Great Falls in the season finale for both squads on Sunday, February 27<sup>th</sup>. [HockeyTV](#) brings you all the action from the regular season and the upcoming postseason.

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