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Great Falls Americans Press Release

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Americans advance to the Frontier Semi-Finals by cruising past the Sabres, 7-1

By Kevin Scott

Box Score	Game Sheet	League Scoreboard (Playoffs)	Americans Team Statistics
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GREAT FALLS, Mont., March 5, 2022 — The Great Falls Americans started their playoff journey on Wednesday, March 2, 2022, when they made the 535-mile-long trek to Rapid City, South Dakota to begin Game 1 of the 2022 NA3HL Play-In (first round) Series against first-year Frontier Division member, the Badlands Sabres. Five different players scored over the first two periods to give Great Falls a five-goal lead after two periods before the Sabres got on the scoreboard. The Americans chipped in two third period scores and downed the home team, 7-2.

Jace Thompson acquired two goals and Blake Nerney, Jackson Henningsgard, Thomas Gazich, Hunter Maschke, and Henry Fusco were each credited with a score for the Americans. Goaltender Will Simpson made 28 saves to earn his first postseason victory in an Americans uniform. Meanwhile, Badlands forward Zach Vockler scored both third period tallies for his team. [Click here](#) to view the full game summary from Wednesday's Game 1 in South Dakota.

The Great Falls Ice Plex was the host venue on Saturday night for Game 2 of the 2022 NA3HL Frontier Division Play-In Series in prime time. The Americans needed one win to close out their best-of-three series and send the Sabres back to South Dakota for the off-season. The Sabres, who 19 games this season, were not going to go down without a fight as they looked for redemption from Wednesday's game and wanted to extend their playoff hopes.



Jace Thompson proved to be a valuable member of the fourth-ranked Great Falls Americans in Wednesday's playoff contest against the sixth seeded Badlands (SD) Sabres and he didn't disappoint the home fans by scoring twice and teammate Blake Nerney earned four points (1 goal, 3 assists) as the Americans swept the Sabres by posting a 7-1 win during Saturday's Game Two of the 2022 Frontier Division Play-In Series as over 400 fans showed their support at the Great Falls Ice Plex.

The home team came out of the first stanza leading by two goals (3-1). The Americans scored three goals in the first 18 minutes of action. Henry Fusco, Micah Serino, and Jay Alford accounted for the first scores. Blake Nerney recorded two assists and JJ Martin, Bryson Fletcher, Jackson Henningsgard and AJ Benit had the helpers. Alford's score occurred during the penalty kill with four minutes left. The Sabres cut into the lead with 81 seconds remaining before the first intermission as Kael Delzer's pass to Seth Stock, who buried the puck into the net over Americans netminder Will Simpson. Derrick Brown had a

secondary assist. The shots were closer than in Wednesday's Game 1 in South Dakota with the Americans creating four more (18-14) than the Sabres.

Great Falls' offense provided three second period goals and Americans goalie Will Simpson stopped all shots that came his way. Jace Thompson, a North Dakota product, contributed his third postseason goal with the first two coming in Game 1, Blake Nerney garnered his second playoff goal and Bryson Fletcher accrued his first during the middle stanza. Fletcher's goal with 4:32 left occurred while the Sabres were in the sin bin. The assists went to Jay Alford, Tyler Sunagel, Bryson Fletcher, Blake Nerney, and Henry Fusco. There was an eight-shot difference with Great Falls topping the shots-on-goal category with a 36-28 advantage after forty minutes. The home team had 18 in the second.

The Americans defense shined throughout the night but especially in the third frame when they kept the Sabres offense off the scoreboard. Great Falls led 6-1 entering the third period and Jace Thompson put the final additions on the scoreboard as Silas Hughes and Riley Opperude dished off to Jace Thompson to light up the lamp with 11:41 remaining. That goal proved to be the last goal of the series. Thompson finished with his fourth playoff goal in two games.

The Americans outshot the Sabres by at least four shots in each period to complete the contest with 53 including 18 each in the first and second periods. Badlands had 28 of their 40 before the second intermission.

Both playoff teams combined for ten minor penalties for a total of 20 minutes spent in the penalty box. All the penalties came in the first two stanzas. Jay Alford's first period lamplighter and Bryson Fletcher's second period successful scoring drive were the only two of the five power play chances that were converted. Seth Stock of the Badlands scored the lone goal for his team near the end of the first period while the Americans were not at full strength. The Sabres did not convert their other two power play opportunities.

Leading the charge in the Americans series ending victory were Blake Nerney (1 goal, 3 assists) followed by Henry Fusco and Bryson Fletcher, who scored once and distributed two assists apiece. Jace Thompson had a game-high of two goals. Defenseman Seth Stock scored the only goal with assists going to Kael Delzer and Derrick Brown.

Great Falls utilized goalies Will Simpson (13-8-0-2) and Zac Hattan, who combined for 39 saves. Simpson, who won his second postseason contest, had 27 saves before the second break and then was relieved by backup Zac Hattan, who was perfect in the net with 12 saves.

Maxim Currie, who played in his final NA3HL junior hockey game of his career due to eligibility requirements, stopped 46 of the 53 shots put on by the Americans offense. Currie (10-16-1-1), a native of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, went 1-for-3 in the regular season against Great Falls and now finishes by losing both playoff games. He also played in 31 games (14-13-0-0) for the Missoula Junior Bruins last season, who relocated to Rapid City, South Dakota and are now the Badlands Sabres.

FRONTIER PLAYOFF UPDATE: In the other Play-In Series, the #3 Bozeman Ice Dogs (28-17-3-1) swept the #6 Butte Cobras (19-27-2-0) in two games by scores of [5-2 \(Friday in Bozeman\)](#) and [5-3 \(Saturday in Butte\)](#). Butte is coached by former Great Falls Americans Associate Coach, Kirk Golden in his first season with the team. Bozeman will now move on to take on the #2 Gillette (WY) Wild in the NA3HL Frontier Division Semi-Finals with the dates and times of the series slated to start next week to be determined.

NEXT CONTEST: The fourth-seeded Great Falls Americans (24-20-3-2) will now meet the top-seeded Helena Bighorns (42-3-2-0) in the next round of the playoffs. The 2022 NA3HL Frontier Division Semi-Finals will see the Bighorns have home-ice advantage after having a bye week for being one of the top two teams (Gillette Wild is the second seed) after the 47-game regular season concluded at the end of February. Game 1 of the series will start at 7:30PM (MST) on Friday, March 11 at the Great Falls Ice Plex. The second game of the series will move to the Helena Ice Arena in Helena, Montana on Saturday, March 12 for a 7:05PM (MST) puck drop. If a third game is needed, that game will take place on Sunday, March 13 in Helena at 6:05PM (MST). All playoff games can be seen on the NA3HL's official streaming service, [HockeyTV](#).

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