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Great Falls Americans Press Release

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Hartge and Hayton lead Bozeman to 3-0 blanking of Great Falls

By Kevin Scott

Box Score	Game Sheet	League Scoreboard	Americans Team Statistics
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BOZEMAN, Mont., January 10, 2020 — In a surprise scheduling move, the Great Falls Americans (25-4-4) and the Bozeman Ice Dogs (27-5-0-1) have yet to play each other during the first 32 games (out of 47) of the 2019-20 North American 3 Hockey League's (NA3HL) regular season.

That is, until tonight when the two of the top three teams finally get to see who reigns supreme in the Frontier Division. The two squad will face off four more times in the final 15 games of the regular season including two at the Great Falls

Ice Plex (January 25th and February 22nd).

After going 1-2 at December's 2019 NA3HL Showcase Tournament, the Americans have won three straight division games including a New Year's Eve game at the Helena Bighorns (1-0) and two games this past weekend in Gillette, Wyoming where they defeated the Wild (6-1 on Friday and 5-3 on Saturday). The lone win at the Showcase Tournament (December 15-17th) in Minnesota came against the Lewiston/Auburn (L/A) Nordiques, a powerful team from Maine who play in the Coastal Division and played in the 2019 NA3HL Fraser Cup National Tournament championship game where they fell to the Texas Brahmas. The 3-2 win before Winter Break started their current winning streak.

Meanwhile, the Bozeman Ice Dogs, who were the top team in the Frontier Division for most of the first four months of the season, are now tied in second place with the Sheridan (WY) Hawks. The Ice Dogs struggled at the Showcase Tournament and went 0-3 at the prestigious tournament where many college and junior scouts were in attendance. After their two-week Christmas break, Bozeman has won two of their three games (2-0-0-1) winning two games last weekend against the #8 Butte Cobras but unexpectedly fell in a shootout on New Year's Eve to the Yellowstone Quake in Cody, Wyoming.

After a scoreless first period, the Bozeman Ice Dogs scored three unanswered goals and that was all that was needed to blank the Great Falls Americans 3-0 during their first meeting of the season between these two league standing leaders in the Frontier Division on Friday evening in Bozeman, Montana. Luke Hartge finished with two goals while Will Kutch chipped in two assists and goaltender Conan Hayton stopped all 41 shots in the win for the host squad. Great Falls suffered their first shutout loss of the season.

The first matchup between these two teams, who have been ranked in the top three (in the Frontier Division) for most of the first half of the 2019-20 season, saw 19 shots taken but no goals were made in the first twenty minutes of action on the ice.

A three-minute span in the following period saw the Ice Dogs get two goals over Great Falls. Luke Hartge, a returning forward from last season's Bozeman squad, scored the first of his two goals 6:45 into the middle stanza. Will Kutch, a North Dakota native, chipped in the first of his two assists on the night while Tadeas Aulehla from Czech Republic gathered his fourth assist of the season for head coach Elliot Bates' junior hockey team. A few minutes later, Hazen McKay found the back of the net against Great Falls' top goaltender, Viktor Wennberg. McKay, third on the team in points (59), received his 32nd goal of the season midway through the second with assistance from Kadyn Fennell and Luke McKay while the Americans were in the penalty box for the 2-0 lead. Bozeman's offense took 18 of the 29 shots in the period.

The Americans trailed 2-0 during the first 19 minutes of the third period. The Ice Dogs ensured their 27th win of the season with a second successful scoring opportunity by Luke Hartge with 23 seconds remaining in the final period of regulation. Despite outshooting the home team (20-9), Great Falls failed to light up the lamp.

The visiting Americans accumulated more shots than the Ice Dogs in the first and third periods to end the sixty-minute contest with 41. Bozeman attempted half of their shots (18) after the first intermission to conclude the NA3HL contest with 36.

Only one of the seven power play chances for both teams turned into a goal. Bozeman's second goal in the middle period by Hazen McKay was created with the Americans in the sin bin. There were 20 total penalties generated resulting in 41 minutes of penalty time for each junior hockey franchise.

Bozeman netminder Conan Hayton won his ninth game as a member of the Bozeman Ice Dogs after coming over from the Breezy Point North Stars in November after seeing action in six games for the Minnesota team. The Denver, Colorado standout redirected all 41 shots by Great Falls' offense from getting in the net. Viktor Wennberg took just his fourth loss of the season after compiling 17 victories. He amassed 33 saves while playing all sixty minutes.

NOTE: The shutout win by Bozeman (27-5-0-1) and the Sheridan Hawks (27-6-1-0) crushing victory over the Butte Cobras (8-2) on Friday night created a two-way tie for first place (55 points) between these two clubs and dropped the previously-ranked top team, the Great Falls Americans (25-4-4) to third place (54 points) for the moment.

NEXT CONTEST: For the first time in a month, the #3 Great Falls Americans will return to the friendly confines of the Great Falls Ice Plex to host the #7 Helena Bighorns on Saturday, January 11, 2020. The league rivals will battle it out for the seventh time this season where Great Falls has won five of those six games (5-0-1). Tune into **HockeyTV** for the 7:30PM start from Great Falls, Montana.

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