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**Great Falls Americans Press Release**

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**Hayes and Nerney star in Great Falls' 4-3 overtime win over Helena**

**By Kevin Scott**

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HELENA, Mont., January 24, 2020 — Tonight was the final time this season that the #3 Great Falls Americans (27-5-4-0) faced the #7 Helena Bighorns (10-25-1-1) for the 2019-20 season.

There is five weeks remaining in the regular season and the Great Falls Americans have already clinched one of four spots in the Frontier Divisional Semi-Finals slated to begin in early March. Helena will end their season on the road against the Missoula Junior Bruins on February 29<sup>th</sup> and will not appear in the postseason.

Great Falls is 7-0-1 against Helena this season with their one (4-3) overtime loss coming in early October on home ice. Each team has played four home contests including a January 11<sup>th</sup> win at the Great Falls Ice Plex that the Americans had led 4-1 halfway through the game against the Bighorns before they allowed three unanswered goals to force an overtime that went scoreless. Forward Levi Mese saved the night for coach Greg Sears' squad when he scored the game-winning goal in a shootout.

Great Falls was looking for a much-needed win in the Capital City on Friday night after falling in two of their last three contests with both losses coming from the #2 Bozeman Ice Dogs, who they will face in Great Falls on Saturday evening (January 25<sup>th</sup>). Meanwhile, Helena has slowly tried to turn things around as they won two straight contests at the Helena Ice Arena since their shootout setback to Great Falls. They upset the Ice Dogs 4-2 and escaped the offensive attack of the Missoula Junior Bruins to claim a 3-2 victory last weekend.

Blake Nerney and Jake Hayes scored two goals apiece including Hayes' game-winning tally in Great Falls' 4-3 overtime road victory over the Helena Bighorns on Friday evening at the Helena Ice Arena. This was the final regular season matchup between these two foes. Great Falls netminder Viktor Wennberg won his 18<sup>th</sup> game of the season as he swatted away 25 of the 28 shots.

The Americans scored five minutes into the opening period to take the early lead. A short-handed score by Jake Hayes off the stick of Dylan Olson put the visiting squad ahead. Hayes scored his 25<sup>th</sup> goal while Olson received his 15<sup>th</sup> assist. The Bighorns evened up the score later in the stanza. Isaac Ellingson and Jeremy Blondin tossed the puck over to Gavgn Galloway, who scored his first goal in his third contest as a member of the Bighorns hockey team. Both teams traded goals in the final 69 seconds of the period. Helena took the brief advantage when Ty Niskanen and Corey Miscovich found an open Darian Wilson to break the tie. Blake Nerney didn't want to see the Americans down before the first intermission as the

returning St. Louis, Missouri native found the back of the net on his own to even up the score (2-2) with 53 ticks on the clock. Four combined missed power plays and 22 total shots occurred during the period.

Both teams put up 24 total shots in the middle period, but none were successful in the net. The Americans had 31 of the 46 shot attempts before the second break.

Two goals were scored in the first 5:21 of the third stanza. Blake Nerney added his second goal of the game and ninth overall as Americans assist leader, Jack Olson garnered his 34<sup>th</sup> assist in 36 appearances. Two minutes later, Darren Donovan's slapshot sailed by Great Falls' Viktor Wennberg for the third goal of the game by the host team. Alexander Bailey and Porter Tirrill accrued the assists to tie the contest for the second time of the night. The rivalry game remained that way for the final 14:39 as an extra period was necessary. Great Falls outshot Helena 25-13 in the third period.

Thirteen seconds was all that Jake Hayes needed to put the biscuit in the basket for the game-winning goal for Great Falls in the extra five-minute overtime. The Americans team leader in points scored (48) netted his 26<sup>th</sup> goal for coach Greg Sears' playoff bound squad. Bryson Fletcher helped set up the quick goal to give the Americans their 27<sup>th</sup> victory in 36 games.

In addition to two goals by Jake Hayes and Blake Nerney, Dylan Olson, Jack Olson and Bryson Fletcher collected the assists for the Americans first overtime victory of the season. The Americans had four overtime losses since October. Three players scored for the Bighorns in their 27<sup>th</sup> setback of the season. Gavgn Galloway, Darian Wilson and Darren Donovan all had successful scoring opportunities. The six assists went to Jeremy Blondin, Isaac Ellingson, Ty Niskanen, Alexander Bailey, Porter Tirrill and Cory Miscovich.

The Americans doubled the shots taken by the Bighorns (57-28) with 25 coming in the third frame.

Eleven power plays occurred in the 60:13 contest but neither team capitalized on any scoring threats. The eleven penalties resulted in 22 minutes of time spent in the sin bin.

Viktor Wennberg, one of the best goaltenders for Great Falls in recent memory, acquired 25 saves in his 18<sup>th</sup> win. The Sweden native is the top goaltender in the Frontier Division and ranks fourth overall in the NA3HL with a Goals-Against-Average (GAA) of 1.84. Ethan Racz, who has been with the Helena NA3HL junior hockey franchise for a week after coming over from the Northeast Generals (Massachusetts), is now 1-0-1 after getting two wins for the Generals. The Calgary, Alberta native recorded 53 saves in the losing effort.

**NEXT CONTEST:** The Great Falls Americans will return to the Great Falls Ice Plex on Saturday, January 25<sup>th</sup> with the first of three straight games against the Bozeman Ice Dogs. Next weekend (January 31<sup>st</sup> and February 1<sup>st</sup>), Haynes Pavilion will be the site of the weekend series to close out the month of January. The 7:30PM nightly Frontier Division contests will be available live on [HockeyTV](#).

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