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Great Falls Americans Press Release

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Great Falls escapes with 5-4 shootout win over Helena

By Kevin Scott

Box Score	Game Sheet	League Scoreboard	Americans Team Statistics
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GREAT FALLS, Mont., January 11, 2020 — Twelve days ago was the last time the #2 Great Falls Americans (26-4-4) met the #7 Helena Bighorns (8-25-0-1) on the ice in Helena, Montana.

Both teams returned to the ice for a New Year's Eve night showdown where the Americans needed just one goal to get past the Bighorns. Brody Boyce's goal late in the first stanza turned out to be the game-winning goal. Viktor Wennberg was the winning netminder with 20 saves. Great Falls hasn't had much trouble this season picking up victories against their interstate rivals that are 90 miles apart. Great Falls leads the season series 6-0-1.

Great Falls has won two of three games since the last meeting against Helena. The Americans, who are 16-1-3 at the Great Falls Ice Plex this season, won two road games last weekend in Gillette, Wyoming against the Wild (16-18-0, 4th in Frontier). Their offense struggled last night (Friday) against the Bozeman Ice Dogs (28-5-0-1) and failed to score as they fell to the top team in the Frontier Division, 3-0 in Bozeman. This was their first time they faced the Ice Dogs this year.

Meanwhile, the Helena Bighorns started off the month of January with a 3-0 record with all wins coming at the Helena Ice Arena. The Cody, Wyoming-based Yellowstone Quake (12-19-2-1, 5th in Frontier) were the opponents that Helena bested last weekend by a combined score of 11-4. Helena picked up their third consecutive victory on Friday (last night) slipping by the Missoula Junior Bruins (11-23-0, 6th in Frontier), 3-2.

Would the Americans pick up their sixth victory (in seven contests) against their rivals?

The Great Falls Americans nearly lost their ninth game of the season as the host squad held a 4-1 advantage against the Helena Bighorns midway through the third period but surrendered three goals in the last seven minutes to force an overtime. After the overtime was unsuccessful, the Americans won in a 5-4 shootout on goals by Jake Hayes and Levi Mese. A crowd of over 1,000 spectators were watching at the Great Falls Ice Plex on Saturday evening in the Americans first home game in over a month.

The first 13 minutes of the opening period was scoreless but during a span of 74 seconds the Great Falls Americans had a 3-0 advantage over the Bighorns. Jake Hayes scored the first tally over Helena netminder Rylan Labrie with 13:30 remaining with help from Nick Ramstad. Hayes' first goal was followed 38 seconds later as Dylan Olson and Tommy Janes earned the assists on Blake Nerney's seventh score

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of the season for the returning forward from Missouri. The final goal was made by Kellen Harris with help from Harley Nyhuis and Brody Boyce. Immediately after the three goals were acquired by the host team, the Helena Bighorns replaced netminder Rylan Labrie with Kevin Tauntman, who finished out the rest of the stanza. The American out-shot the Bighorns, 10-8.

Jeremy Blondin got the visiting team on the board 2:37 into the middle period when his shot was deflected off an Americans player and went by Great Falls starting goaltender Trever Mellen for the score. Andrew Deskin and Jiri Benes were credited with the assists to cut the Americans lead to 3-1.

After the second intermission concluded, the Great Falls Americans responded with their first goal since the opening period. Dylan Olson's shot over Helena netminder Kevin Tauntman elevated the Americans back to a three-goal lead (4-1) midway through the third period. Levi Mese and Blake Nerney set up the first scoring opportunity for either team in the final frame. Minutes later, the Bighorns answered back while on a power play as Isaac Ellingson and Andrew Deskin found Jiri Benes for their second score with 7:02 left in the Americans first home game of 2020. Helena scored two goals in the final 1:37 to even the contest (4-4) and send the game into a five-minute overtime. Alaska native Darren Donovan chipped in both goals. The assists on the final two Helena goals went to Porter Tirrill (2 assists), Abraham Laggis and Isaac Ellingson each had one.

The five-minute extra frame skated around without a score, so a shootout was needed to declare a winner.

Jake Hayes and Levi Mese provided the one-on-one shootout goals including Mese's game-winning score over Helena's Kevin Tauntman. Darren Donovan was the only Bighorns player to score in the shootout for Helena while Darian Wilson and Abraham Langis came up empty against the defensive effort of Americans goalie Trever Mellen.

Despite the loss, the Bighorns attempted more shots than the Americans (29-27) after the contest finished.

The great crowd of 1,095 at the Great Falls Ice Plex witnessed eight minor penalties with six of them being whistled on the home team. Helena used their power play chances (2-for-6) to their advantage as they scored half of their goals with Great Falls in the penalty box. Great Falls failed to deliver any goals on their two power play opportunities.

Dylan Olson and Blake Nerney led the way for coach Greg Sears' squad. The pair each contributed a goal and an assist in the 26th win for the Americans. Helena was paced by Darren Donovan who scored the final two goals in the third period to help the Bighorns tie the contest at 4-4 and send the contest to an extra stanza. Isaac Ellingson, Andrew Deskin and Porter Tirrill had two assists apiece for coach Bob Richards' unit.

Trever Mellen won for the ninth time in 15 games for Great Falls. He has 446 saves and a save percentage of 0.939. Rylan Labrie started the game but was relieved of his duties 14:54 into the first period after giving up three goals to Great Falls. Kevin Tauntman came in as Labrie's replacement and earned 15 of the 22 saves.

NOTE: The #1 Bozeman Ice Dogs (28-5-0-1), #2 Sheridan (WY) Hawks (28-6-0-1) and the #3 Great Falls Americans (26-4-4-0) have all clinched playoff berths for the 2020 NA3HL Playoffs set to begin in March 2020 according to the [NA3HL standings webpage](#).

NEXT CONTEST: The Great Falls Americans will be on the road to face the Bozeman Ice Dogs in their lone game of the week next Saturday (January 18th). The Americans are hoping for a better outcome in their second encounter in two weeks. [HockeyTV](#) will provide the game that will begin at 7:30PM from Haynes Pavilion.

The Americans next home game will be in two weeks (January 25th) when the Bozeman Ice Dogs come to town for the first time this season for a 7:30PM contest at the Great Falls Ice Plex.

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