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Great Falls Americans Press Release

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NA3HL Frontier Semi-Finals: Gillette stays alive with late OT goal

By Kevin Scott

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| Box Score | Game Sheet | League Scoreboard (Playoffs) | Americans Team Statistics |
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GREAT FALLS, Mont., April 2, 2021 — During Game 1 of the 2021 NA3HL Frontier Divisional Semi-Finals on Thursday night, the Great Falls Americans went on the road to Gillette, Wyoming and blanked the Gillette Wild 2-0 in a defensive battle to take the 1-0 series lead. Micah Serino and Jackson Henningsgard scored the goals for the Americans. Trever Mellen was amazing in the net as he stopped all 48 shots by Gillette's offense.

On Saturday night, the second game of the series was held in Great Falls and the Americans were looking to close out the best-of-three series with a win and send Gillette's NA3HL junior hockey franchise packing for the off-season. There was one problem and the Wild were not going to give up that easy as they wanted to extend the series for at least another night.

Declan Young scored the game-winning goal with 3:40 remaining in overtime to help the #3 Gillette Wild stave off elimination against the second-ranked Great Falls Americans during Game 2 of the 2021 NA3HL Frontier Divisional Semi-Finals on Friday night in front of a packed crowd at the Great Falls Ice Plex. The 3-2 win by the Wild ensured a third and decisive winner-take-all game on Saturday night in Great Falls.



Great Falls got off to a hot start as the home team acquired the first two goals during the first eight minutes of the first stanza. Bryson Fletcher's pass to an open Alex Jackson secured the first playoff score of the night with 16:27 left. Four minutes later, forward Brindamour Beard recorded his first goal of the playoffs off the stick of Micah Serino. Immediately after Beard's scoring drive, Gillette head coach and former Great Falls Americans assistant coach Ethan Hayes replaced starting goaltender Cole Wheaton with backup Alex Shaults. Gillette's Brock Trbojevich cut the

Wild's deficit to 2-1 at the 6:37 mark. Declan Young and Caleb Sanborn accrued the assists on the scoring drive. The Americans out-shot the Wild 20-13 before the first intermission.

The Americans lead lasted just 6:47 into the middle period when Gillette answered to even the score (2-2). Tristan Baker racked up the goal for the Wyoming squad with assists coming from Carson Kuche and Will Blake. Despite many shot attempts (27), Great Falls and Gillette couldn't find a way to put the puck in the net for the final 13 minutes of the penalty-free period.

The third period came and went with neither team able to come away with any scoring drives, so an overtime was needed to declare a winning squad. After three periods, Gillette held a 53-40 shots-on-goal advantage.

In the playoffs, the teams play a 20-minute sudden death extra period (instead of a five-minute period). The score remained tied at 2-2 until the final 3:40 when forward Declan Young broke the tie with his game-winning power play slapshot that was set up by defenseman Mason Hoffman and goaltender Alex Shaults.

Gillette out-shot Great Falls in the three regulation periods and overtime to finish with 64. The Americans had a team-high 16 shots in the third stanza to finish with 48.

In a fast-moving contest, Great Falls was whistled for three minor penalties with six minutes spent in the penalty box. The penalties came in the first and third periods with no penalties in the second or overtime periods. Gillette didn't have any penalties called on them and converted one of their five power play chances. The Americans squandered their two opportunities.

Cole Wheaton was the starting goaltender for the Wild but last just eight minutes into the contest when the Americans grabbed a 2-0 lead before getting replaced with Alex Shaults, who swatted away all 21 shots in 52 minutes of action. Wheaton had one save. Meanwhile, Ben Winkler played the entire contest for the Americans and amassed 34 saves in the loss.

NOTES: In their first game of their NA3HL Semi-Final series on Friday, the top-ranked Sheridan (WY) Hawks downed the #4 Missoula Junior Bruins 4-2 after a scoreless first period ([see the box score](#)). Five combined goals came in the final period. Game two of the best-of-three series is set for Saturday night (April 3rd) at 7:30PM from Sheridan, Wyoming.

NEXT CONTEST: The Great Falls Americans and Gillette Wild will return to action on Saturday, April 3rd at 7:30PM (MST) for Game 3 of the best-of-three Frontier Divisional Semi-Final round where the winner advances to play either the top-ranked Sheridan (WY) Wild or the #4 Missoula Junior Bruins in the Frontier Divisional Finals starting next week.

The five-division (Central, East, Frontier, South and West) winners plus a wild card team that has the highest winning percentage that lost in Divisional Finals will then head to the [2021 Fraser Cup \(National\) Tournament](#) this year held at the St. Peters Rec Plex in St. Peters, Missouri on April 15-19th. The national tournament includes two round-robin contests for each of the six teams followed by two semi-finals and the championship. The Fraser Cup will also coincide with this year's [Top Prospects Tournament](#) that will take place on Sunday and Monday (April 18-19). Schedules and rosters have not been announced by the league yet for the Top Prospects Tournament. Please [click here](#) for more information about the playoff format, Top Prospects Tourney, and the upcoming NA3HL Draft on April 28th.

To view the 2021 Playoff schedules for the 2021 Fraser Cup Championship tournament and the Top Prospects Tournament being played in Missouri, please [click here](#). [HockeyTV](#) provides the full coverage of playoff action.

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