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Great Falls Americans Press Release

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Americans fall in overtime to undefeated Gillette, 6-5

By Kevin Scott

Box Score	Game Sheet	League Scoreboard	Americans Team Statistics
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GILLETTE, Wyo., September 24, 2021 — It has been a rough start to the 2021-22 NA3HL junior hockey season for the Great Falls Americans (1-1-1-1). Entering tonight's game after picking up one win in three contests, the Americans have yet to play on home ice this season.

In what was supposed to be their home opener tonight against the Gillette (WY) Wild (5-0-0-0), it has turned into another road trip for Great Falls...for the third consecutive week.

Before the season started three weeks ago, the officials at the Great Falls Ice Plex were getting the ice ready to be installed when they found some cooling pipes that were leaking and needed to be repaired before the ice went in. They are quickly trying to get it fixed and get the ice back inside the Great Falls Ice Plex and so the Americans were forced to move their game to the team they were supposed to open with, the Gillette Wild.

This is the first matchup this season between these two 2021 NA3HL Playoff squads. Last season, Great Falls took three out of their four regular season meetings including a shootout victory in October at home. The Frontier Division foes also met in the Frontier Divisional Semi-Finals last April and the Americans won their best-of-three series (2-1) including a pair of 2-0 wins and 3-2 setback in overtime. Great Falls advanced to the Frontier Divisional Finals against the top-ranked Sheridan (WY) Hawks, where they fell in three games.

Great Falls and Gillette brought back many of the same players from last year. Gillette brings back 15 players for returning head coach (and former Great Falls Americans Associate Coach) Ethan Hayes. Declan Young, the fifth top scorer in the NA3HL last season and team leader in points scored with 39 goals and 33 assists (62 points) including the playoffs, is back for another season in Wyoming. Meanwhile, Great Falls has brought back Micah Serino, a forward from Barrow, Alaska and one of 14 players from the 2020-21 season, who finished with 24 points (15 goals, 9 assists) in the regular season followed by five

goals and two assists in the playoffs for coach Greg Sears' squad. Ben Winkler also returns as one of the top goaltenders this season for the Americans. Winkler won all six of his contests (including one playoff contest). The Illinois product had a regular season save percentage of 0.813.

Gillette Wild forward Saizha Norwegian scored his third goal (hat trick) in overtime to help Gillette pull out a 6-5 win during Saturday night's rivalry game at the Spirit Hall Ice Arena in Gillette, Wyoming. Great Falls was led by Thomas Gazich, who scored twice and goaltender Zac Hattan who accumulated 43 saves in the loss. This was the first head-to-head meeting of the season for these two Frontier Division clubs.

Isaac Young and Saizha Norwegian each recorded one goal apiece to give the home team a two-goal advantage before the first intermission. Norwegian's goal came with seven seconds left in the first stanza. Tucker Lien had two of his three assists while Will Blake gathered the first of his four assists on the night. Zack Slinger also assisted on a scoring play for the Wild. The penalty-free first period saw the Wild take 15 more shots than the Americans (21-6).

The visiting Americans quickly turned things around and outscored the Wild, 2-0 in the middle period to tie the contest at 2-2. Tae Evans, who saw his first action of the season for Great Falls, scored the first goal of the night midway through the second period to cut the deficit to 2-1. Evans played the previous two seasons for the Bozeman Ice Dogs and was added to the roster today (September 24th). Returners Garrett Weisenburger and Hunter Maschke earned the assists on the power play scoring drive. Thomas Gazich scored the first of his two goals two minutes later when Great Falls native Russ Rasmussen and Henry Fusco, the only third year player on the roster for Great Falls, chipped in their first assists of the season. The Americans had 14 of their 20 total shots before the third frame. Gillette attempted 15 shots but no successful scores during the second period.

A total of six goals were registered during the final period of regulation. Both teams traded goals throughout with the score tied at 5-5 as the third period ended. Thomas Gazich amassed his second goal of the night while Micah Serino and Hunter Maschke accrued their first for the Americans. Gillette's Saizha Norwegian lit up the lamp for the second time tonight with Zac Yurkanin and Declan Young also received goals. After Thomas Gazich scored the fifth goal of the night to put the Americans in front, 5-4 with 4:56 remaining in regulation, Declan Young squeezed the puck by Great Falls goaltender Zac Hattan with 1:55 left to ensure an overtime period. Garrett Weisenburger assisted on two of the three goals while Hunter Maschke added his second in as many periods. Minnesota native Thomas Dalsin also picked up an assist for Great Falls. Will Blake assisted on two scoring plays while Tucker Lien, Saizha Norwegian, Brock Trbojevich and Isaac Young each earned one assist. The Americans bounced back to outshoot the Wild, 22-12 in the period.

In the extra period, Canadian Saizha Norwegian scored his seventh goal of the season in his first five appearances for Wyoming. The goal came 95 seconds into overtime was assisted by Will Blake, who finished with four assists (nine overall).

Gillette attempted 49 shots in the game with 21 coming before the first period concluded. Great Falls scored three goals and had 22 shot attempts in the third frame to finish with 42.

The penalties were even with each team committing three minor penalties with six minutes spent in the penalty box. The Americans only power play chance in the second period by Tae Evans was the only power play chance (and successful score) taken by either team in the 61-minute junior hockey contest.

Three players on each team contributed to the back-and-forth game. Saizha Norwegian scored four points (3 goals, 1 assist), while Tucker Lien assisted on three scoring plays and Will Blake dished out four assists to help Gillette stay undefeated after five games. Thomas Gazich scored two of the five goals for the Montana squad. Hunter Maschke scored one goal and set up two scores while Garrett Weisenburger garnered three assists.

Winning goaltender Jake Turek achieved 37 saves in his third win of the season for the Wild. Zac Hattan (1-0-1-0 record) suffered his first loss of the season despite swatting away 43 of the 49 shots by Gillette's offense.

NEXT CONTEST: The Great Falls Americans will remain in Gillette, Wyoming for the final game of their two-game series with the Wild that is set for Saturday, September 25th at 7:05PM. Great Falls is looking for their second victory of the season. Catch all the action from Wyoming's Spirit Hall Ice Arena on [HockeyTV](#).

NOTE: Repairs to the leaking cooling pipes at the Americans home venue are ongoing, but officials at the Great Falls Ice Plex are saying those ice issues are not expected to be completed before the middle of October. The Great Falls Americans will be rescheduling their home game slated for Thursday, September 30th against the Helena Bighorns for a date and a time to be announced. The two home games against the Sheridan (WY) Hawks will be moved from Great Falls to Sheridan, WY this weekend. The Hawks will host the Americans on Friday (Oct. 1st) and Saturday (Oct. 2nd) with start times each night at 7:30PM (MST).

One of our other media partners, ABC/FOX Montana, reported that once the repairs are made and if no leaking occurs, it may be another ten days before the ice is ready to skate on ([see story](#)). Please check back on the Great Falls Americans website for more details when available.

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