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Wednesday, August 3, 2011

SPORTS

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Americans add home-grown, foreign talent

By **SCOTT MANSCH**
Tribune Sports Editor

The Great Falls Americans are looking near and far to build the roster that will compete this fall as a spanking new franchise in the America West Hockey League.

Matt Frank, the head coach/general manager of the Junior A Tier III hockey club, announced the signings Tues-

day of two young players from Great Falls. He also said two foreign talents will be playing for the Americans this winter.

"Matt's done a great job with recruiting," said team owner Jim Keough. "Not only do we have four really good, talented local kids, but we also have kids from all



over the country." Logan Schermele, a recent graduate of Great Falls High, and Connor Barta, who will be a junior at C.M. Russell High, are two Electric City products who have recently signed with the Americans. They join Great Falls natives Dylan Anderson and Brady Christi-

aens, who previously announced plans to play with the newly formed team.

Schermele is a forward and Barta, a 6-2, 180-pounder, is a defenseman. Schermele scored 17 goals and scored 33 points in 24 games last

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Brady Christiaens, left, and Logan Schermele have both signed with the Great Falls Americans



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winter for the Great Falls high school-aged Midget team. Barta scored 12 goals and had 21 points in 25 games.

"They're good local kids," said Frank. "I'm also excited with our new goaltenders."

Andrew Alberda of Bozeman and Ben Zienty, a Chicago native whose family lives now in Virginia, are two new Great Falls goalies. Alberda is 19 and Zienty, 17, will be a junior at C.M. Russell High in the fall.

Each AWHL team is able to sign two foreign players. The Americans have signed Russian Igor Nomokonoff and Erik Swahn of Sweden.

Nomokonoff is a 6-5, 230-pound enforcer who has lived in the United States for a dozen years. The 17-year-old, who will be attending CMR this fall, played last year in Kansas City. The 6-3 Swahn, 18, is another high school senior-to-be who plays defense. "He's a big, puck-moving defenseman," said Frank.

Rikard Gronborg, who led the Americans to considerable success years ago and lives now in the Salt Lake City area, helped Frank recruit several of the new signees, including Swahn.

Frank said he has 11 players under contract. Practice begins Aug. 29. The first on-ice practice for the Americans at the Great Falls Ice-Plex will be Sept. 12.

"We've got a good combination of speed and size," Frank said. "They're very smart young players who we believe have a lot of upside."

The Americans are looking for a few more host families to house the athletes, who will be arriving Aug. 22. The athletes will be expected to pay \$300 per month. Host families will also receive two season tickets.

"It's a good opportunity to form a relationship with young men coming into the community," said Frank. "Several of them will be attending high school here."

Frank can be contacted at mfrank@gfamericans.com. The team office number is 305-0727.

The Americans' home opener is Friday, Sept. 30 vs. Bozeman, a 7:30 p.m. start. The Great Falls club will participate Sept. 16-18 in a pre-season tournament in Helena prior to its AWHL opener.

Frank will be assisted by Terry Metro, a Michigan native with vast coaching experience both in college and in Montana Junior A towns. Metro is a former head coach at Bozeman who is familiar with most of the skaters on the Great Falls roster.

Frank said he hasn't seen Nomokonoff or Swahn skate, but he knows the reputation of hockey players from Russia and Sweden.

"They're usually very highly skilled," said Frank. "Good skaters. Good stick-handlers. Usually they have good vision and good puck awareness."

The 48-game schedule runs from September through March, with playoffs to follow. Four of the six AWHL teams will qualify for the post-season. The AWHL playoff champion, plus an at-large representative from the league, advances to the USA Hockey Junior A Tier III national tournament, which is in Rochester, Minn.

Meanwhile, the Frozen Explosion is slated Aug. 12 at the Heritage Inn. The event is an annual fundraiser for the Great Falls Ice Plex, organized by the Great Falls Ice Foundation.

The popular band "The Thrillibillies" will be playing. Raffles and a silent auction will take place. More information is available by 727-2294.

Renovation is ongoing at the IcePlex, with construction of new permanent locker rooms planned in the coming days. The parking lot has been paved since last winter and several other improvements are now in place.

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