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Great Falls Americans Press Release
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Americans snap six game skid with 5-2 win over the Quake

By Kevin Scott

Box Score	Game Sheet	League Scoreboard	Americans Team Statistics
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GREAT FALLS, Mont., February 25, 2022 — Two weeks ago, the #4 Great Falls Americans (21-19-3-2) and the Cody, Wyoming based #7 Yellowstone Quake (13-28-3-0) met for a two-game series in the Cowboy State with Yellowstone winning both games.

Gabe Cappo broke the scoreless tie in the third period on Friday (February 11th) with two goals in the Quake's 2-0 victory ([game story](#)). On February 12th, Great Falls' offense looked better as they traded goals in each of the three periods before the Quake's Benjamin Angelli chipped in the tie-breaking goal with six minutes remaining to deliver their second win (4-3) of the weekend. Garrett Weisenburger was one goal short of a hat trick (two goals) and newcomer JJ Martin scored the other goal for the Americans ([game story](#)). Martin, along with Jace Thompson, Riley Opperude and Christian Crutcher all joined Great Falls since the Americans last home game on January 28th against the Helena Bighorns.

Since then, both teams have struggled on the ice, but Great Falls does qualify for postseason play next week. Great Falls dropped their three games (two games against Helena and a solo contest to the Bozeman Ice Dogs) while Yellowstone topped the Badlands (SD) Sabres once and lost twice including an overtime setback in their three-game series in Rapid City, South Dakota.

Prior to their four games in February, both teams tangled on the ice in the season opening weekend in September (10-11) where each team came out on top. The Americans fell 5-3 on September 10th ([game story](#)) and then needed an overtime to escape the Quake, 4-3 the following evening ([game story](#)).

Entering Friday's primetime game in Great Falls, the Americans were 1-3-0-0 on the season against the Quake, who will miss this year's playoffs.

The Great Falls Americans and the Yellowstone Quake were all tied at 2-2 thirteen minutes into the first period, but Great Falls' offense rattled off three goals the rest of the way to down the Yellowstone Quake 5-2 as the Americans played in front of their fans at the Great Falls Ice Plex for the first time since their 3-2 upset win over the #1 Helena Bighorns on January 28th. The win helped the Americans stop a six-game losing streak with two regular season contests remaining. Five different players put the puck in the net including Tyler Sunagel, Micah Serino, JJ Martin, Thomas Gazich and Daniel Crutcher.

Great Falls scored two goals during the first 6:26 into the first period. Tyler Sunagel chipped in his 14th goal with assists going to Bryson Fletcher and Silas Hughes with 14:44 on the clock. Micah Serino followed Sunagel's score by giving the home team a 2-0 advantage 70 seconds later. Serino's 23rd goal of the season with Jackson Henningsgard gathering his 30th assist and JJ Martin, who is making his home debut after coming onto the team on February 11th, made his first assist with the squad. Yellowstone did not give up and countered with a pair of scoring drives from forwards Gustav Ostman and Gabe Coppo to tie the contest at 2-2 with under seven minutes before the first intermission. Bryce Whittier assisted on Coppo' score and Ostman's tally went unassisted. On a controversial goal that initially was not called a goal, the referees huddled and determined JJ Martin did score his second goal with the Americans and awarded the host team their third goal of the game. That score with an assist by Joshua Serino, came with 4:20 in the stanza and Great Falls and Yellowstone skated the rest of the period away. Great Falls easily outshot the Quake, 22-5 and neither team had any penalties during the first frame.

The Americans and Quake both came out to play after the first intermission, but Great Falls was the only team to light up the lamp. Newcomer Riley Opperude made his fourth assist with Great Falls as he gave Thomas Gazich his 24th goal of the season early in the period. Great Falls took a 4-2 lead into the third period. For the second straight period, the Americans held the Quake to just five shots-on-goal and Great Falls accrued over 20 shots.

Daniel Crutcher's lone goal in the third off the stick of AJ Benit proved to be the one and only successful scoring drive of the third stanza for Great Falls.

Offensively, Great Falls kept attacking Yellowstone netminder Cole Eastman in the net as they peppered him with 76 shots in three periods including 30 in the final period of play. Will Simpson fared better as the starting goaltender for the Americans. The Quake created 18 shots, with most of them (8) coming after the second intermission.

The league officials did not blow their whistle very often as both teams combined for four penalties that resulted in 16 minutes spent in the penalty box.

The Americans did not have any penalties during the first two periods before Jay Alford was whistled for a holding penalty early in the third period. All the penalties came after the first twenty minutes of action. Great Falls' Thomas Gazich connected on the lone power play for either team in the middle period. The Quake could not take advantage of their only power play.

Will Simpson (10-8-0-2) picked up his tenth win and the first victory in four appearances in the month of February. The Alaska goalie let the puck slip by him twice (all in the first period) before being perfect the rest of the way finishing with 16 saves. Cole Eastman, the only returning netminder for Yellowstone, stopped 71 shots but allowed at least one goal in each of the periods on Friday night. Eastman let his record fall to 3-12-1-0 in 18 games played.

JJ Martin was the star of the night as he made his second goal and his first assist as a member of the Great Falls Americans Junior A hockey team. Tyler Sunagel, Micah Serino, Thomas Gazich and Daniel Crutcher all racked up goals for the Americans tenth home win of the 2021-22 season. The scoring was limited for the Cody, Wyoming based Quake as Ohio native Gustav Ostman and Michigan's Gabe Coppo each scored for the visitors. Bryce Whittier, who calls Farmington, Utah home, had the only assist for coach CJ Sweigart's seventh place Frontier Division team.

NOTES: Five of the six playoff spots have already been determined but the Butte Cobras got a step closer in seeing their season continue past this weekend when Cade Wessman's three goals helped his team blank the #8 Sheridan (WY) Hawks 8-0 in Wyoming on Friday evening ([box score](#)). The #1 Helena Bighorns outplayed the #3 Bozeman Ice Dogs when their 2-0 lead in the first led to a 5-1 decision in Bozeman, Montana ([box score](#)). The second-ranked Gillette (WY) Wild allowed one first period goal by the Badlands (SD) Sabres before reeling off six unanswered goals for a 6-1 victory. Isaac Young registered a hat trick for the winners ([box score](#)). So far, the Helena Bighorns, Gillette (WY) Wild, Bozeman Ice Dogs, Great Falls Americans and Badlands Sabres are all playoff bound. [Click here](#) for the box scores from around the NA3HL on Friday night.

Check the Great Falls Americans website (www.gfamericans.com) and the North American 3 Hockey League website (www.na3hl.com) on Monday (February 28th) or Tuesday (March 1st) for the playoff details.

NEXT CONTEST: [HockeyTV](#) will provide the coverage of the Americans finale weekend including Saturday's home regular season finale for the Great Falls Americans before the 2022 NA3HL Play-In Playoffs begin next week. Great Falls will meet Yellowstone for the sixth and final time on Saturday, February 26th with the puck dropping at 7:30PM (MST) from the Great Falls Ice Plex. Before the season concludes, the Americans will travel to Helena, Montana for their road finale against the #1 Helena Bighorns on Sunday, February 27th with the afternoon game starting at 4:00PM (MST) in a make-up game from earlier this season.

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