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Great Falls Americans Press Release

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Gazich stars with four goals as the Americans win their home finale over Yellowstone

By Kevin Scott

Box Score	Game Sheet	League Scoreboard	Americans Team Statistics
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GREAT FALLS, Mont., February 26, 2022 — Although the Americans do not officially wrap up their regular season until Sunday (February 27th) when they travel to Helena, Montana to challenge the top-seeded Helena Bighorns (41-3-2-0), the home team play one last game of their 2021-22 NA3HL home schedule on Saturday evening in front of a great crowd at the Great Falls Ice Plex.

On Friday, the Americans (22-19-3-2) broke their six-game losing streak by downing the #7 Yellowstone Quake (13-29-3-0), who will see their season come to end on Monday morning when they face the #3 Bozeman Ice Dogs in their season finale. The Quake were eliminated from postseason contention with Butte's 8-0 victory over #8 Sheridan (WY) Quake on Friday. The Cobras clinched the sixth and final spot in the playoffs that will start this next week.

Tonight, the Americans were looking for their second consecutive win in their home finale.

Thomas Gazich scored four goals and dished out two assists as the #4 Great Falls Americans rolled over the #7 Yellowstone (WY) Quake, 9-1 in Great Falls' home finale of the 2021-22 season. The Americans second win in as many nights was witnessed by 777 faithful and energetic fans at the Great Falls Ice Plex on Saturday evening. Saturday night was also the annual Billet Family Appreciation Night where host families and the players were honored during the first intermission. Photographer Dustin Bauer took photos that are posted above in the [photo gallery](#).

Before the game began, the Americans were awarded a power play as there were too many men for Yellowstone crossing the red line during warmups. Great Falls' Jace Thompson and Thomas Gazich each scored one goal apiece during first period action in the home season finale for the Americans. Thompson, who is one of four new players on the roster this month, added his second score of the season off the stick of teammates Tyler Sunagel and Silas Hughes while the host team was on a power play. Sunagel's 25th assist came with eleven minutes left in the stanza. One minute later, JJ Martin's pass to Thomas Gazich increased the lead to 2-0. Jackson Henningsgard produced the secondary assist. The second

scoring drive also came courtesy of a penalty by the Quake. Great Falls controlled the puck offensively for most of the period and outshot Yellowstone, 34-6.

The Americans scored twice more in the second frame as Jay Alford netted his sixth goal of the year and Thomas Gazich garnered his second goal of the game (26th of the season). Jackson Henningsgard set up his second and third scoring drives of the night with assists on Alford's and Gazich's scores. Micah Serino and Riley Opperude also earned helpers. Yellowstone's offense quickly scored 18 seconds later when a pair of players from Yellowstone earned their first points of the season. Bryce Whittier, a first-year player for coach CJ Sweigart's squad, put the biscuit in the basket for his first score and Isaiah Burchett picked up his first assist. The Americans, coached by fourth year coach Greg Sears, made their fifth tally of the night with two minutes left before the second intermission. Thomas Gazich and Riley Opperude assisted on JJ Martin's third career goal. After the first forty minutes, the Americans offensive attack led to 61 total shots (27 in the middle period) and Yellowstone had 12 shots-on-goal in the second after having just six in the opening period.

Great Falls raced out and scored three goals in five minutes in the third and final period. Thomas Gazich scored two of the three goals to bring his total of four goals in the sixty-minute contest. Forwards Jackson Henningsgard and Garrett Weisenburger, defenseman Petr Van Voorhis and goaltender Will Simpson all gathered assists on the first two goals of the third stanza. Silas Hughes made sure he collected his eleventh goal of the season with assistance from Tyler Sunagel and Jace Thompson, who earned his first helper in his seventh game with the organization. All three scoring drives came during a 40-second span early in the third. Great Falls maintained an 8-1 advantage for the next 9:32 before Jackson Henningsgard lamp lighter thanks to assists from Thomas Gazich and Henry Fusco to put the game out of reach and ensure an Americans victory.

A night after the Americans 5-2 win over the Quake where they erupted for 76 shots-on-goal (and held the visiting team to 18), the final meeting between these two clubs had both teams combine for 110 shots (Great Falls took 85 of them).

Seven of the eleven total stoppage of play came before the first period ended. The Cody, Wyoming based junior hockey team had six minor penalties that resulted in 12 minutes in the penalty box. Great Falls was called for three minors and two major penalties with 26 minutes of time spent off the ice. Penalties proved to be costly for Yellowstone as Great Falls scored on four of their six power plays. The Quake could not turn their three power play chances into goals as the defensive front put on by Great Falls was stellar.

Thomas Gazich scored six points (4 goals, 2 assists) and Jackson Henningsgard scored once and created four successful scoring opportunities for the winning squad. Bryce Whittier chipped in his first goal and Isaiah Burchett accumulated his first assist in Yellowstone's lone goal in the middle period.

For the second night in a row, Will Simpson was the winning netminder. He swatted away 24 of the 25 shots by the Quake's offense. Simpson won his eleventh game in 21 appearances including Friday's 5-2 win against the Quake. Meanwhile, Edvin Falkenstrom started the game and lasted two periods earning 56 saves and giving up five goals. Backup Cole Eastman came in for the third period and blocked 20 of the 24 shots sent his way. Falkenstrom was credited with his tenth loss in 17 games.

NOTES: There was not many surprises around the NA3HL's Frontier Division as half of the teams put the finishing touches on the regular season. The #1 Helena Bighorns bested the #3 Bozeman Ice Dogs 3-1 for the second straight night ([box score](#)), the second-ranked Gillette (WY) Wild needed a shootout to pick

up their 41st win in 46 contests by posting a 3-2 victory over the #5 Badlands (SD) Sabres ([box score](#)) and the #6 Butte Cobras won 6-2 over the #8 Sheridan (WY) Hawks thanks to a hat trick by Nick Bradshaw ([box score](#)). [Click here](#) for the Saturday box scores from around the NA3HL.

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. The #4 Great Falls Americans will battle the #5 Badlands (SD) Sabres, a first-year team in the NA3HL's Frontier Division, in the NA3HL Playoff Play-In Series best-of-three series slated to start this upcoming week. Days, times, and locations will be determined soon.

NEXT CONTEST: Great Falls will end their 2021-22 North American 3 Hockey League (NA3HL) regular season on the road to face the Helena Bighorns with their showdown set for 4:00PM (MST) live from the Helena Ice Arena in Helena, Montana on [HockeyTV](#) on Sunday, February 27th.

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