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Great Falls Americans Press Release

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NA3HL Frontier Division Semi-Finals: Bighorns eliminate the Americans with series sweep

By Kevin Scott

Box Score	Game Sheet	League Scoreboard (Playoffs)	Americans Team Statistics
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HELENA, Mont., March 12, 2022 — The top-ranked Helena Bighorns (44-3-2-0) needed five goals to claim a 5-1 win against the #4 Great Falls Americans (24-22-3-2) in Friday's Game 1 of the Frontier Division Semi-Finals that took place at the Great Falls Ice Plex ([game summary](#)) before Game 2 unfolded on Saturday night with the Americans desperately needed a win to save their season.

The 2021-22 regular season concluded at the end of February with the Bighorns and Americans squaring off eight times with seven victories by Helena during the season series. While the Bighorns received a first round (Play-In Series) bye last week, the Americans had to outduel the newest member of the Frontier Division this season, the #5 Badlands Sabres, in two games last week in their best-of-three series to reach the Frontier Division Semi-Finals this week.

Helena forwards Liam Bland and Eric Gibboney combined to score half the goals for the #1 Helena Bighorns 8-2 win to sweep the #4 Great Falls Americans during the second game of the 2022 NA3HL Frontier Division Semi-Finals on Saturday night in front of a packed house of 1,520 fans at the Helena Ice Arena. Netminder Eric Buchholz recorded 50 saves to help the Bighorns move on the Frontier Division Finals next week against the #2 Gillette (WY) Wild, who needed two games to send the #3 Bozeman Ice Dogs home for the season. Jackson Henningsgard and Bryson Fletcher netted both Great Falls scores in the second stanza.



Great Falls and Helena were scoreless for the first fifteen minutes of the first period before the home team made the first score of the game. Forward Tylor Greene and netminder Eric Buchholz secured assists on the tally by Liam Bland, who played 36 games during the 2020-21 season with the now defunct Missoula Junior Bruins. Both teams combined for 38 shots but only one goal was successful.

Helena stretched the lead to 2-0 seven minutes into the middle period when Samuel Feamster, who had two assists in Game 1 on Friday night, put the biscuit in the basket for his first playoff score of the series off the stick of Tylor Greene, who added the second of his four assists on the night with 7:16 to go before the second break. The Bighorns second goal came when the Americans were in the sin bin. Tyler Bloom, a local player from Helena, also assisted on the first of his two. Jackson Henningsgard momentarily

pulled the Americans to within a goal (2-1) minutes later when he scored his second goal of the playoffs off a pass from teammate Micah Serino. Each team was able to get the puck by the opposing goaltender in the final minute. First, Liam Bland put the puck between the pipes for his fourth goal in two games with 49 seconds remaining. Tylor Greene and Taber Gutschick each dished out the assists while taking advantage of their second power play opportunity. The Americans waited until two seconds was left on the clock before they provided their second goal. Bryson Fletcher, who spent the past three seasons playing for Great Falls, scored to cut the deficit to 3-2 with one twenty minutes regulation stanza to go. Blake Nerney contributed his fifth playoff assist. The Bighorns had a 12-shot difference (45-33) over the Americans after forty minutes of play.

Helena's offense dominated and outscored the visiting team 5-0 in the third frame. Eric Gibboney accrued two goals while Helena skaters Taber Gutschick, Tylor Greene, and Andrew Deskin each scored once. Ten players from the winning side earned assists including Corbin Skinner, Taber Gutschick, Tyler Bloom, Liam Bland, Tylor Greene, Adam Harvey, TJ Norris, Andrew Deskin, Ian Vanelli, and Thomas Hollon.

The offensive attack put on by the Bighorns produced 36 of the 81 shots-on-goal in the final period. Great Falls had 33 of the 52 shots prior to the third period.

The Americans had five minors (including one double minor) and one unsportsmanlike conduct penalty that resulted in 22 minutes spent away from the ice. The Bighorns acquired all four of their minor penalties in the first two periods. The Americans finished off their final contest of the season by failing to capitalize on two power play chances. Power play opportunities proved to be a key contribution for Helena as they went 3-for-4 while Great Falls was down a man.

Eric Buchholz, who won his second straight postseason game against Great Falls, stopped 50 of the 52 shots in Helena's first playoff home game of the season. The Colorado native, who was selected to play for Team White in February's Top Prospects Tournament, improved his season record to 26-2-2-0 in 30 appearances.

Will Simpson had a busy night by finishing his final contest of the season with 73 saves. The Alaska goalie ended his 2021-22 season with a record of 13-9-0-2 in 24 games with two playoff wins along with 765 saves with 128 coming in three playoff games.

While the Bighorns march on to the Frontier Divisional Finals with a chance to make the 2022 NA3HL Fraser Cup Championships that begin at the end of March, the Americans end their campaign (with four playoffs included) with 24 wins, 22 losses, 3 overtime setbacks and two shootout losses (24-22-3-2). The fans at the Great Falls Ice Plex saw their team victorious in 12 of 19 home dates.

NEXT CONTEST: The Americans have concluded their 2021-22 season and will be back in action in September 2022.

SPECIAL THANKS: A special thanks to Dustin Bauer, who took many of the photos you have seen on the Great Falls Americans website and for Megan Lewis, who provided the play-by-play for our home [HockeyTV](#) broadcasts at the Great Falls Ice Plex this season and was the "Voice of the Americans" this season along with her son, JJ, who ran the HockeyTV camera. Megan, her husband Josh, and JJ will be moving to Spokane, Washington this summer and won't be back for the 2022-23 season. Thanks to all the Americans personnel and NA3HL officials including Head Coach and General Manager, Greg Sears, and his players for another great season of NA3HL junior hockey in Great Falls as well as to all the fans, billet families, player families, sponsors, and local media outlets who supported the Great Falls junior hockey team this season. See you in September 2022.

To view the 2022 Playoff schedules for the 2022 Fraser Cup Championship tournament played in St. Peters, Missouri, please [click here](#).

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