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Great Falls Americans Press Release

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Great Falls Americans open 2022-23 season with a 3-2 win over Butte

By Kevin Scott

Box Score	Game Sheet	League Scoreboard	Americans Team Statistics
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GREAT FALLS, Mont., September 10, 2022 — After a five-month offseason, the North American 3 Hockey League (NA3HL), who is entering their 13th season of existence, is the only USA Hockey-sanctioned Tier III junior league in the country. Most of the teams in the league opened the 2022-23 junior hockey season this weekend except for the Northeast (MA) Generals 6-4 road win over the Danbury (CT) Jr. Hat Tricks on Sunday, September 4th.

Great Falls will have some familiar faces returning for them on the ice this season after reaching the NA3HL playoffs last season. During the 47-game regular season, the Americans ended their 2021-22 campaign with a 22-20-3-2 including 11 wins at the Great Falls Ice Plex. The local Junior A hockey team qualified for the 2022 NA3HL Playoffs as the #4 seed in the six-team Frontier Division Playoffs. The Americans swept the Badlands (SD) Sabres, a new team in the league last season, in two games in their best-of-five Frontier Division Play-In series. Great Falls faced the top-seeded Helena Bighorns, who sent the Americans home for the season in two contests, in the Frontier Divisional Semi-Finals ([see full results/stories](#)). The Helena Bighorns and the Gillette (WY) Wild represented the Frontier Division at the 2022 NA3HL Fraser Cup (National) Tournament in St. Peters, Missouri.

Despite some rumors about possible new teams joining, the Frontier Division remained intact from last year with four Montana teams (Bozeman Ice Dogs, Butte Cobras, Great Falls Americans, and the Helena Bighorns) along with three teams from Wyoming (Gillette Wild, Sheridan Hawks, and the Cody-Wyoming based, Yellowstone Quake). The Badlands Sabres, who start their second year in the league from Rapid City, South Dakota, round out the eight-team Frontier Division in the North American 3 Hockey League (NA3HL).

The Great Falls Americans along with the 34 other North American 3 Hockey League teams, are ready for the 47-game regular season to begin. Although, the Americans lost a handful of players from last season, fifth-year mentor Greg Sears returns nine players who are hungry to make it back to the playoffs again. The Americans did have to replace Sears' assistant coach from the past two seasons as Matt

Maniglia departed the team for a new adventure with the United States Premier Hockey League's (USPHL) Elmira (NY) Enforcers. Former Great Falls Americans goaltender, Trever Mellen returns for his second season as the Goaltenders Coach and Zac Hattan, who suited up for Great Falls in the net for the past two seasons, begins his first year as the Strength and Conditioning Coach. Justin Latham will be the full-time HockeyTV Play-By-Play Commentator after spending the past two seasons in a fill-in role.

Returning for Great Falls this season are four defensemen and five forwards. Forwards Garrett Weisenberger (6 goals, 18 assists), Tyler Sunagel (14 goals, 27 assists), Jace Thomson (6 goals, 1 assist), Russ Rasmussen (1 goal, 2 assists), and Dawson Bunch (1 goal). Four defensemen are back in the lineup Aaron Leaf (2 goals, 7 assists), Sam Duehlmeier (2 assists), Christian Crutcher and Sterling Amdahl. Several newcomers also are set to make their debut too.

The Butte Cobras are the opponent for tonight's home opening game for the Americans. Butte is entering their second season with former Great Falls Americans assistant coach, Kirk Golden. Golden led his team in his first year to a 19-28-2-0 record (sixth place in the Frontier) and a playoff appearance (0-2 against the Bozeman Ice Dogs). The Cobras have 13 players back this year including standouts Cade Wessman (18 goals, 59 assists, 77 pts.) and Nick Bradshaw, who finished with 43 goals while dishing out 33 assists.

Two new players and one returning standout each scored goals as the 2022-23 edition of the Great Falls Americans (1-0-0-0) junior hockey squad edged the visiting Butte Cobras (0-1-0-0), 3-2 in the first game for either team this season at the Great Falls Ice Plex on Saturday night. Forwards Jace Thompson, Ben Cremers, and Noah Osiowy each tallied goals while Bade Powell, Tyler Sunagel and Wes Weisenburger each tacked on one assist apiece for the winners. Patrick Crooks and Tamer Billman lit up the lamp for the Cobras.

Returning forward Jace Thompson gathered the first goal for the Americans this season as he helped break the scoreless tie against Butte late in the first stanza. Tyler Sunagel, another forward back from last season and newcomer Alex Leaf set up the play to give the home team the 1-0 advantage. Great Falls recorded 13 of the 28 total shots-on-goal.

Both teams came back from the locker room after the first twenty minutes ready to provide more offense in the second period. Great Falls needed just 74 seconds to provide their second scoring drive of the season. Baden Powell, one of three Canadian players on the roster, chipped in his first assist while Alex Leaf garnered his second with Wisconsin native Ben Cremers tallying his first goal while Butte was down a man (penalty). The score would remain 2-0 for the next twelve minutes before Butte buried their first goal. Helena native Tamer Billman got the puck through Great Falls goalie Josh Koziol to light up the lamp and cut the deficit to 2-1. Caelin Chinery and Patrick Brooks assisted on the Cobras first score of the game. Billman and Chinery were both members of the 2021-22 Butte Cobras squad. Two more new teammates saw their name in the stat sheet for the Americans as Wes Weisenburger earned his first assist with his pass to Noah Osiowy before time expired in the second frame. Despite trailing after the first forty minutes, the visiting team attempted 43 shots while the home team managed 32.

Patrick Crooks, who spent time with the Great Falls Americans the past two years, pulled the Cobras to within one goal (3-2) after a successful pass by Tamer Billman with 6:41 left in regulation. Caelin Chinery provided the secondary assist while Great Falls was in the penalty box. Great Falls was able to run out the clock with a great defensive effort.

Great Falls took 48 shots that resulted in three goals scored. Despite taking 67 shots, Butte was successful just twice in the net.

Alex Leaf scored two points (two assists) with the three goals scored by Jace Thompson, Ben Cremers, and Noah Osiowy. In addition to two assists by Alex Leaf, Baden Powell, Tyler Sunagel and Wes Weisenburger also set up scoring plays for the home team. Meanwhile, the Cobras were led by Tamer Billman and Patrick Crooks, who each scored once and dished out one assist. Caelin Chinery earned assists on both scores.

Great Falls committed nine minor penalties that resulted in 18 minutes spent in the penalty box. Butte finished with six penalties with the Cobras spending 30 total minutes off the ice. Both NA3HL Frontier Division squads took advantage of one power play that resulted in a goal.

Josh Koziol earned his first win in his first game as a member of the Great Falls junior hockey team. The Elk River, Minnesota native totaled 65 saves in sixty minutes of action. Caleb Cross, who had 79 total saves in two playoff games last season for the Cobras after joining the team in March, allowed all three goals and ended his night with 45 saves.

NOTES: The Americans added another veteran to their lineup on Saturday. Defenseman Christian Crutcher, who made an appearance last season for the Americans, was activated for tonight's game. The 5'10" player calls Aberdeen, South Dakota home. [Click here](#) for the Americans full roster and stats.

FRONTIER DIVISION UPDATE: In other action tonight around the Frontier Division, the Yellowstone (WY) Quake, Gillette (WY) Wild and the Helena Bighorns all were victorious against their opponents. Yellowstone made the fans in Cody, Wyoming happy by posting a 4-1 win over rival, Sheridan (WY) Hawks ([box score](#)) while the Wild downed the visiting Bozeman Ice Dogs, 6-1 ([box score](#)). Helena blanked the Badlands (SD) Sabres, 4-0 on the road ([box score](#)). View the current league standings by [clicking here](#).

NEXT CONTEST: The Americans will continue their month of September homestand with their second game of the 2022-23 season against last year's Frontier Division champion, Helena Bighorns, in the first of their eight meetings this season. On Friday, September 16th, the Americans will entertain the Bighorns at 7:30PM (MST) from the Great Falls Ice Plex. Fans that can't make it to the game can watch the game on the NA3HL's official streaming service, [HockeyTV](#) with Americans Play-By-Play announcer Justin Latham handling the call. [Click here](#) for the 2022-23 Great Falls Americans schedule and results.

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