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Great Falls Americans Press Release

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Americans suffer first setback with 6-2 loss to rival Helena

By Kevin Scott

Box Score	Game Sheet	League Scoreboard	Americans Team Statistics
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GREAT FALLS, Mont., September 16, 2022 — The Great Falls Americans (1-1-0-0) entered their second week of the 2022-23 NA3HL season with one victory under their belt. Great Falls, who starts the season with five consecutive home dates, edged the Butte Cobras 3-2 last Saturday in the season premiere. Jace Thompson, a returning forward and newcomers Ben Cremers and Noah Osioy all scored in the 3-2 win for the host squad. First-year goaltender Josh Koziol recorded 65 saves.

Great Falls faced their closest opponent (just 90 miles separates these two cities) on Friday night as the Helena Bighorns (3-0-0-0) entered the Great Falls Ice Plex hoping to cash in on another victory under new mentor Scott Cunningham. The Americans were hoping to hand them their first setback of the new season.

Fifth-year Americans head coach Greg Sears brings back ten players from last year's playoff bound team including Garrett Weisenburger, Silas Hughes, Aaron Leaf, Christian Crutcher, Tyler Sunagel, Jace Thompson, Dawson Bunch, Russ Rasmussen, Sterling Amdahl, and Sam Duehlmeier.

Meanwhile, the Bighorns under new coach Scott Cunningham return a strong nucleus of players from their (Fraser Cup) national tournament appearance during the 2021-22 junior hockey season.

Goaltenders Aiden Wright and Gabe Swanson along with six forwards (Andrew Deskin, Tyler Bloom, Harlan Wojtusik, Tyler Allredge, Logan Matheny, and TJ Norris) and defenseman Garrett Bogan, Dylan Cunningham, and Thomas Hollon. Helena started off the season on the road against second-year squad from Rapid City, South Dakota, the Badlands Sabres where they easily won both contests, 8-3 and a 4-0 shutout last weekend.

The Americans were trying to move to 2-0 and give the Bighorns their first loss on Friday in front of the home crowd. Would they succeed?

The Helena Bighorns offense controlled the puck for most of the game as they topped the Great Falls Americans in Great Falls 6-2 during Friday's NA3HL junior hockey action. Tyler Bloom scored two of his three goals of the season to keep the Bighorns undefeated after the second week of the season. TJ Norris also had two pucks go in the net. Tyler Sunagel and Baden Powell scored the tallies for the Americans.

The Bighorns' Harlan Wojtusik broke the scoreless tie eight minutes into the first period on a pass by Dylan Cunningham while the Americans were in the penalty box. Cunningham provided his fourth assist of the season while Wojtusik added his second goal. Helena racked up their second scoring drive 78 seconds later for the 2-0 advantage. Sweden's Edvin Astrom found a streaking Logan Powers for the score. The Americans cut the deficit to 2-1 six minutes later as Baden Powell, one of four Canadians on the roster, lit up the lamp for his first goal with the Americans. A pair of returning forwards (Jace Thompson and Tyler Sunagel) earned the assists on the power play scoring drive. The visiting team took twice as many shots (22-11) than the Americans after the first twenty minutes of the stanza.

The host team needed just five minutes into the second frame to even the score (2-2). Tyler Sunagel's slap shot sailed over Helena netminder Jesse Schindel for the equalizer. Silas Hughes and Alex Leaf were credited with the assists on the power play opportunity. Sunagel's first goal of the season came while the Bighorns were down a man (penalty) with 5:40 on the clock. Helena's Tyler Bloom would propel his team back on top with 7:12 remaining with a primary assist going to Padraic Whited and the secondary assist going to Braden Cunningham. Great Falls' defense had a breakdown that led to two Bighorn goals during the final 45 seconds before the second intermission. Forward TJ Norris registered both goals with helpers coming from Andrew Deskin, Joe Feamster and Harlan Wojtusik. The Bighorns held a three-goal advantage (5-2) after forty minutes of action on the ice. Great Falls and Helena combined for 29 shots.

After having one goal in the second period, Tyler Bloom answered with his second of the game (third of the season) with a dish from Dylan Cunningham, who now has five assists after three contests. The sixth scoring drive came late in the last period of their first rivalry of the season.

The Bighorns, under the direction of head coach Scott Cunningham, attempted 28 of their 50 shots after the first intermission and four successful goals. The Americans had a game-high of 13 shots-on-goal in the middle period to finish with 29.

Tyler Bloom and TJ Norris, both returners off last season's national championship appearance, combined for four of the six scoring chances for Helena. Tyler Sunagel of the Americans garnered one goal and one assist in the loss.

Eighteen penalties occurred between these two rivals and 101 minutes were spent in the sin bin. Both Montana NA3HL clubs capitalized on two of their four power plays.

Helena goalie Jesse Schindel (2-0-0-0) acquired his second consecutive victory in a week by stopping 27 of the 29 shots faced by the Americans offense. Josh Koziol (1-1-0-0) got his second start but came up short but not before getting 44 saves.

NOTES: Silas Hughes arrived back in Great Falls for his second season with the team this week. The Alaska forward scored 27 points (11 goals, 17 assists) in 39 appearances last year. He had one assist in his debut.

FRONTIER DIVISION UPDATE: The Badlands (SD) Sabres (1-2-0-0) pulled out their first win of the season by downing the Yellowstone Quake (1-2-0-0), 5-2 at home ([box score](#)). AJ Petrotto and Carter Johnson each had one goal and one assist for the winning side. Teagan Scheurer scored the goals for Yellowstone. In other action tonight around the Frontier Division, the Butte Cobras, coming off a 3-2 defeat to the Great Falls Americans in their season debut last week, scored four goals in the second to down the Sheridan Hawks, 5-2 in Sheridan, Wyoming. Caelin Chinery scored twice and had one helper while Caleb Cross was excellent in the net with 33 saves ([box score](#)) for Butte. The Bozeman Ice Dogs and Gillette (WY) Wild did not play tonight.

NEXT CONTEST: The Yellowstone (Cody, WY) Quake are the next opponent for Great Falls next weekend. The action on the ice begins on Friday, September 23rd and Saturday, September 24th at 7:30PM (MST) nightly from the Great Falls Ice Plex. Both games can be seen on the NA3HL's streaming service, [HockeyTV](#).

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