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Great Falls Americans Press Release

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Bighorns complete weekend sweep by blanking the Americans, 4-0

By Kevin Scott

Box Score	Game Sheet	League Scoreboard	Americans Team Statistics
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GREAT FALLS, Mont., December 31, 2022 — The fifth-ranked Great Falls Americans (13-16-1-0) and the #2 Helena Bighorns (22-7-1-1) battled it out for the final time on the ice before the new year begins.

Great Falls was trying to find a way on Saturday to defeat Helena after four previous meetings resulted in a loss for the Americans. On Friday, Helena led 2-1 early in the second stanza but that was as close as the home team would get with Helena scoring once more before the second intermission and a short-handed goal in the third to put the game away. The 4-1 victory by the Bighorns improved their record to 4-4-0-0 for the month of December. Great Falls fell to 4-3-1-0 in December with their fourth consecutive loss to the Bighorns this season ([game story](#)).

TJ Norris scored once and assisted on another and goaltender Jesse Schindel was perfect in the net redirecting all 18 shots as the #2 Helena Bighorns cruised to a 4-0 shutout victory over the #5 Great Falls Americans to complete the weekend sweep on Saturday in Great Falls, Montana. Great Falls fell to 0-5 in the season rivalry against Helena.

A scoreless first period had Great Falls and Helena misfire on both of their two power play opportunities and combined for 23 shots-on-goal.

Helena forward Derek Russell's scored near the net to break the scoreless tie midway through the middle period. TJ Norris collected his 14th assist and Harlan Wojtusik gathered his 10th assist on the game's first successful scoring drive. Offensively, Helena had control of the puck throughout the period outshooting Great Falls, 21-4 during the penalty-free period.

In the third frame, Andrew Deskin's pass to Tyler Bloom, whose slapshot hit the back of the net during the first two minutes increased the Bighorns lead to 2-0. Bloom scored for the eighteenth time this season. Padraic Whited had the first of his two assists on the first score of the third stanza. The Bighorns showed why they are the second-best team in the NA3HL's Frontier Division when they tacked on two more goals during a 67-second span. The third and fourth goals by Helena were scored by Mason Eggen and TJ Norris, respectively. Lyndon Orr and Padraic Whited set up Eggen's score with 12:37 left while Helena native Dylan Cunningham recorded his 20th assist on Norris' score one minute later. After having an assist in the first twenty minutes, Harlan Wojtusik had another on the final goal of the contest.

Helena's offense outshined the Americans by amassing 62 shots including 46 after the first period. Great Falls attempted no more than seven shots in each period to end with 18.

All nine combined penalties occurred during the 60-minute rivalry. The Americans committed five minor infractions and Helena had four penalties (including one major infraction for spearing that resulted in a game misconduct and ejection) that resulted in 29 minutes spent off the ice. Both squads went 0-for-2 on their power play chances.

Jesse Schindel (18 saves) won for the fifth time in eight appearances (5-1-1-0) for coach Scott Cunningham's NA3HL squad. The Canadian netminder also was credited with a 6-2 win over the Americans on September 16th. Due to the resurgence of former Great Falls Americans goalie Josh Koziol, who left this week for college in Minnesota, Saturday's starting goaltender Ryan Stowe (58 saves) had only been on the ice for five games this season. This was his first meeting against Helena, and he saw his record go to 1-2-0-0.

NOTES: The Great Falls Americans (13-16-1-0) remain in the fifth spot in the Frontier Division despite the loss and a win by the #6 Bozeman Ice Dogs (13-17-0-1). Both rivals have 27 points, and the Ice Dogs are the only team the Americans haven't faced this season. That will change on Saturday, December 14th in Great Falls for the first meeting.

FRONTIER DIVISION UPDATE: In a rare afternoon game (2:00PM MST start), the #6 Bozeman Ice Dogs (13-17-0-1) challenged the #8 Badlands (SD) Sabres (8-19-2-2) in Rapid City, South Dakota on Saturday. Bozeman led the entire contest as they scored three in the first, one in the middle stanza and held the Sabres to one score in the third. The home team prevented the shutout with Dylan Woolstenhulme's score with 3:16 remaining in the contest. Duncan Weedham, Bodie Shepardson, Sam Ingram and Hunter Campbell all put the biscuit in the basket for the visiting Montana team. Matthias Godfrey tallied two assists for the Ice Dogs, who earned the weekend sweep over the lone NA3HL squad that calls South Dakota home. On Friday, Bozeman earned a 3-2 win over Badlands and the Ice Dogs earned the sweep by posting a 4-1 victory during the Saturday matinee. Bozeman is now 3-3-0-0 against Badlands this season. Cam Milewski improved his record to 10-10-0-0 in his 21st game for the Ice Dogs. Zach Broxterman continues to struggle for the Sabres with his 2-15-1-2 record ([box score](#)).

The #4 Butte Cobras (15-14-1-0) got revenge on the #7 Yellowstone (WY) Quake (10-17-3-1) in the second game of their weekend series in Cody, Wyoming on Saturday evening. Yellowstone's Ben Carlson scored the lone opening period goal, but the Cobras outscored the host team, 4-0 over the second and third stanzas for the 4-1 win. Nick Bradshaw, Caelin Chinery, Patrick Crooks, and Luke Schluesner each tallies scores for Butte. Schluesner's score came with 26 seconds remaining with an empty net. The Quake had taken out starting netminder Steven Kelley earlier so they could get an extra

player on the ice. Caleb Cross of Butte gathered 41 saves and allowed one goal in the victory. Steven Kelley finished with 58 saves for Wyoming ([box score](#)).

The Gillette (WY) Hawks continue their domination in the North American 3 Hockey League and the Frontier Division. The Wild won their sixth December game and earned the sweep with a convincing 9-1 win over the #3 Sheridan (WY) Hawks, one of their two rivals in Wyoming. Gillette, coached by former Americans assistant coach, Ethan Hayes, was led by a hat trick by Anthony Foster (3 goals, 1 assist) and Isaac Young who netted two goals and had two helpers. Dominic Hite (6-0-0-1) played a great game in the net by allowing just one second period goal from McCaffrey Billings and ending the night with 29 saves. Thomas Mellenthin suffered a third loss in seven games (3-2-1-0) as nine pucks sailed by him tonight ([box score](#)).

NEXT CONTEST: The Americans will be back on the road for a single game next week. The Butte Cobras will host the Americans for a 7:30PM (MST) start on Friday, January 6th inside the Butte Community Ice Center in Butte, Montana. [HockeyTV](#) will provide the game coverage from Butte.

Great Falls has won three of the four contests this season including a 4-3 overtime victory on October 7th at the Great Falls Ice Plex. The Butte Cobras have announced a coaching change as Marc Brodeur takes over as the new Head Coach and General Manager replacing former Great Falls Americans Associate Coach, Kirk Golden (Americans Assistant 2020-21 season), who compiled a 33-39-3-0 record in his second season with the Cobras before being dismissed after a 14-13-1-0 record this season ([see story](#)).

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