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Great Falls Americans Press Release

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Americans win home opener thanks to Aidan Kennedy's late third period score

By Kevin Scott

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GREAT FALLS, Mont., September 8, 2023 — The Great Falls Americans (1-0-0-0) Junior A hockey team is back for the 2023-24 season!!!

The North American 3 Hockey League (NA3HL) enters their 14th year as the only USA Hockey-sanctioned Tier III junior hockey league in the nation. Great Falls and Yellowstone are the first teams to open the 2023-24 season tonight as most of the other 32 other squads in the league start their season next weekend.

The Americans were last seen on the ice six months ago when they finished their 17-win season (17-27-3-0) against tonight's opponent, the Yellowstone Quake. Over the offseason, many changes took place for the Great Falls NA3HL franchise including a new team owner, new website (greatfallsamericans.com), and a new online team store just to name a few ([see story](#)).

At the start of the season, the Americans will have six players returning from the 2022-23 squad including defenseman Sam Duehlmeier, Christian Crutcher, and Phil Harrell along with forwards Aaron Leaf, and Noah Osiowy. Goaltender Ryan Stowe also saw action for returning coach Greg Sears. The rest of the team will feature plenty of newcomers who will try to help the Americans succeed this season and make the playoffs after a one-year absence. Great Falls concluded last season with a 17-27-3-0 record during their 47-game regular season that failed to make the four-team Frontier Division playoffs. The Helena Bighorns, Gillette (WY) Wild, Sheridan (WY) Hawks and the Butte Cobras reached the postseason with the Bighorns and Wild facing off in the Frontier Division Finals with Helena topping the Wyoming club for the championship. Helena represented the Frontier Division at the 2022 NA3HL Fraser Cup (National) Tournament in St. Peters, Missouri in March where they reached the Semifinals before falling to eventual national champion, Granite City (Lumberjacks). [Click here](#) to see the full results/game summaries from last season.

The eight-team Frontier Division that consists of four Montana squads (Bozeman Ice Dogs, Butte Cobras, Helena Bighorns, and the Great Falls Americans), three teams from Wyoming (Yellowstone Quake,

Gillette Wild and the Sheridan Hawks) and a single team from Rapid City, South Dakota (Badlands Sabres) will return to the division with no new franchises added.

In addition to the six returning players, the Americans under sixth year head coach Greg Sears returns with a new assistant coach in Alex Leaf, who played the previous last season for the Americans. His younger brother, Aaron remains on the team and his father (Matt) is the new team owner. Trever Mellen begins his third season as the goaltenders coach while Zac Hattan is entering his second season as the Strength & Conditioning Coach.

The Yellowstone Quake, based out of Cody, Wyoming, will be the Americans first test of the season when they invade the Great Falls Ice Plex, who underwent some major facility upgrades over the summer (see story) for a two-game weekend series to open the 2023-24 campaign. The Quake will be guided by new coaches, Don Babineau (head coach) and Luke Fry will be assisting him this season. Yellowstone finished one spot behind Great Falls last season under former head coach Ryan Theros. Theros moved up to coach the North American Hockey League's Fairbanks Ice Dogs in the offseason. The Americans finished in sixth place while the Quake settled for seventh place. The Quake ended the 2022-23 season with just 13 wins (13-28-4-2). John Hughes, John Kotsilidis, Owen Schoonover, Sebe Perez, Zac Orwig and Joey Good all saw playing time last season for the Wyoming franchise. How did Great Falls fare against Yellowstone? The Americans were victorious in four of their six meetings while outscoring the Quake, 19-11.

Wisconsin native Ty O'Bey scored twice, and Minnesota standout Aiden Kennedy tallied the game-winning score with 2:42 remaining as the Great Falls Americans (1-0-0-0) overcame a three-goal deficit to defeat the Yellowstone Quake (0-1-0-0), 5-4 during Opening Night at the Great Falls Ice Plex on Friday evening. Goaltender Kaden Ryhder made 17 saves in his Americans debut in the net.

Yellowstone and Great Falls were scoreless for the first 17 minutes before the Quake scored twice in a 30 second span for the two-goal lead after the first stanza. Sebe Perez, a returning forward from the 2022-23 team, scored the opening goal with 2:22 left with assistance from Max Rotsaert and Daxton Burdak off Americans starting netminder Kaden Ryhder. Max Rotsaert needed 30 seconds to pick up his second assist on the Zach Orwig score. Yellowstone outshot Great Falls, 14-12 after the first twenty minutes.

The second period saw the Quake score a third goal during the opening 79 seconds. Wesley Amos and Caden Miller set up the scoring play as Joey Good netted his first score of the season for the visitors. Great Falls' offense responded with three consecutive scoring drives to even the score (3-3). Ty O'Bey, Christian Crutcher, and Phil Harrell each added one for the home team. Aaron James, Christian Crutcher, and Blake Komrofske earned the assists. Before the second intermission, Yellowstone's Wesley Amos accrued his first goal as the Quake reclaimed the lead with helpers from Caden Miller and David Saulle. Each team scored once while the opposing team was down a man (penalty). The Americans took 22 shots to get three goals while the Quake attempted seven shots with two successful scoring drives.

After scoring the first goal of the season for the Americans in the middle period, Ty O'Bey contributed his second goal of the game to tie the contest at 4-4 early in the third frame. Spencer Schipferling and Luke Pizzey each picked up their first assist on the game-tying score. The game would remain tied at 4-4 until Aiden Kennedy put the biscuit in the basket with under three minutes remaining. Ty O'Bey and Phil Harrell earned the assists.

Coach Greg Sears' squad accumulated 22 shots-on-goal in the second period to finish with 36. Yellowstone ended their first game of the 2023-24 season with 21 shots.

The Americans were led by three players including Ty O'Bey, who scored two goals and one assist while Christian Crutcher and Phil Harrell registered one goal and one assist in the win. Wesley Amos led the way for Wyoming by scoring one goal and assisting on another.

Rookie Kaden Ryhder (1-0) escaped with his first victory in a Great Falls uniform on Friday. The Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania native compiled 17 saves in 60 minutes. John Hughes (0-1), who also saw action last season for the Quake, allowed five goals with his 31 save performance.

NOTES: Prior to the game tonight, the Great Falls Chamber of Commerce held a Ribbon Cutting Ceremony at 4:00PM to welcome in the new Great Falls Americans locker room and the new Skills Center that will be completed soon. [Click here](#) to view the Photo Gallery of the new Americans locker room. Please check out the Americans website at www.greatfallsamericans.com for all your updated news, game summaries, rosters, photo galleries, etc.

NEXT CONTEST: The Americans will play their second of seven consecutive home games to begin the season on Saturday, September 9th when they challenge Yellowstone again for the second of their four matchups this season. The action from the Americans home venue (Great Falls Ice Plex) starts at 7:00PM (MST). Fans that are unable to attend in person can catch the action on the NA3HL's new streaming service, [NAHLTV](#).

Before Saturday's contest, the Americans will have a Tailgate Party at the Great Falls Ice Plex featuring Walking Tacos. Come join the fun before the doors open at 6:00PM for weekend finale between these two clubs.

Great Falls will sit idle next week while the other Frontier Division teams make their season debuts.

[Click here](#) for the 2023-24 Great Falls Americans schedule and results.

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