



BALDY'S PUCK DROP

Weekly E-Newsletter November 16, 2023

Dear Great Falls Americans Enthusiast:

We have a very busy couple of weeks coming up and a lot of great things happening to share with you this week. I'll start with the one extremely positive thing to come out of last weekend. I shared with you a portion of #25 Nathan Bring's story back in our September 21st Edition. In summary, Nathan is a local young man with a passion for hockey and had asked to practice with us this season. He unexpectedly lost his mother in September, after losing his father a few years back, and is now the sole primary caregiver for his 97-year-old grandmother. His typical day includes taking care of his grandmother, attending practice and off-ice workouts, spending about an hour a day in the skill center and working a full-time job. He does it all with an unmatched infectious attitude and a smile. Although it was never part of the original plan and not something Nathan had asked for, his work ethic, attitude, and respect he has earned from his teammates has earned him a chance to dress for some games and play for the Americans. If you ever run into him off the ice, he will be the first to tell you it is a dream coming true for him and is so appreciative of the opportunity.



Fast forward to Saturday night in Helena and Nathan is dressed for the game and finds himself on the ice at the end of a power play late in the 3rd period during a game that has not gone the American's way. The puck ends up in the front of the Helena goal on a rebound and of the four players whacking at it (Helena to get the puck out of there and the Americans to score), it is Nathan's perseverance and unrelenting determination that wins the battle and he scores his first Junior Hockey goal. Sorry for the grainy photo pulled of the stream, but I wanted everyone to see the joy on each of our players faces – not because we scored in a game we would lose 8-1, but who scored and what it meant to the team who rallies around and respects Nathan like no one else I

have seen in my 50 + years in hockey. Nathan is the 2nd in line in the photo and only behind Aiden Kennedy who was racing to center ice to be able to secure the puck to be presented to Nathan. For their efforts, Nathan and Blake Komrofske did earn Honorable Mention Player of the Week recognition for the Frontier Division of the NA3HL.

Sorry to go long on this, but I wanted to be sure to share this story because sometimes we do lose sight of what this is supposed to be all about. I know the fans place extra emphasis on beating Helena, and of course, we all want to win. It is no different for the players and the staff and it is easy to get frustrated and lose focus on the bigger picture and then fail to take advantage of the opportunity to learn from the mistakes we make and the challenges we face. For sure, our Americans' players and staff faced some adversity the last two weeks against an opponent that is better than us right now but may not be better come February. That is something that will be determined then and I can assure you our players and staff will put in the work to be the best they can. But in the grand scheme of things, that adversity the last two weeks is nothing compared to what Nathan has successfully navigated and/or the military personnel and their families that we are honoring during our Military Appreciation weekend have sacrificed.

So, what else is happening with the Americans? This morning, the players are volunteering their time before practice to unload Christmas Trees for the Uptown Optimist Club. Tree tickets are \$50.00 per book and good for your tree, wreath, door charms or accessories purchase. Please contact Dena Schoolcraft at bod@rainbows1.com to secure your tree tickets.



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We have arranged to have an old colleague of mine, Ken Martel (Senior Director of Player Development and Coaching Education for USA Hockey), in town to work with the youth program coaches, parents and players for a couple of nights and will also spend some time with our team. Ken brings a wealth of experience as a former Division I player (Lake Superior State), national team coach, NCAA coach and a leading authority in Long Term Athlete Development principles that focuses on age-appropriate training and having fun. We'll also welcome many of our friends and family into town over the holiday week as it is a great opportunity to catch five games in 10 days and spend some time with their loved ones. All are welcome to join the team and their billet, and real families, at **The Beacon Ice House** on Thanksgiving evening for a team get together.

This Friday and Saturday nights is Military Appreciation weekend where we honor those involved with the Military with discounted tickets, drinks and merchandise. We host the Sheridan Hawks with doors opening at 6:00 PM both nights. On Saturday, I will have the honor of recognizing my son and Captain, #21 Aaron Leaf, who will have played his 100th game with the Americans on Friday night. I fully understand I am a little biased on this one, but I can say with a tremendous amount of certainty how proud myself, his mother Vicki and his brother Alex are of what Aaron has accomplished both on and off the ice, not to mention his #1 fan, Aunt Robin, who will also be in town this weekend.



We then have a quick turn-around after Thanksgiving Thursday with Friday and Saturday night matchups with Butte followed by a Sunday game with Bozeman. Sunday's (November 26th) theme will celebrate Girls'/Women Hockey and will be preceded by a "Wine, Women and Hockey" seminar from 4:00-5:30 PM prior to the game. We are assembling an amazing panel of Women who are pioneers/leaders in the hockey community who will share their stories and answer questions from anyone in attendance. Girls'/Women of all ages are welcome to attend with a game ticket and the Americans will provide refreshments and snacks at no additional cost. For those who would like to attend, please pre-register by emailing me at (MattL.GFAmericans@gmail.com).

Next weekend also provides us an opportunity to partner with the Great Falls Community Food Bank to collect non-perishable food items during each of our three games to support their fight against hunger in North Central Montana. Any fan bringing a non-perishable item will receive a \$2 discount on their ticket at the door.

A quick reminder tonight is our Booster Club's "Raise a Pint" fundraiser at **Annie's Taphouse** (112 Central Avenue). The event will run from 5:00 PM-8:00 PM and Annie's will donate to the Booster Club for every pint of Beer or glass of Wine sold. This is another great opportunity to mingle with passionate hockey fans and enjoy some amazing craft beer in a relaxing and comfy atmosphere.



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Player Profile – Captain #44 Phil Harrell (St. Louis, MO) 6’0” 170 lbs. DEF - Shoots Right

Favorite Team: St. Louis Blues **Favorite Player:** Erik Karlsson

Favorite Movie: Step Brothers **Favorite Actor/Actress:** Margot Robbie

Favorite Food: Pineapple **Favorite Pre-Game Meal:** Chicken Alfredo

Musical Group You Won't Miss in Concert:

Song or Artist Guaranteed to get you hyped: "Soldiers" by Otherwise

One Item you would bring with you to a deserted Island: Fly Rod

Hobbies other than Hockey: Golf, Fishing, Poker

Three People you would invite to Dinner: Adam Sandler, Will Ferrell, Elon Musk

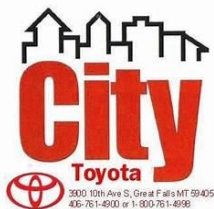
College/University of Choice: Grand Canyon University

Like Most About Great Falls: The outdoors.

How would you define a successful season: Nonstop winning!



Also, thank you to all our existing **Eagle's Nest, Diamond and Platinum Level** partners for their continued support.



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Time to highlight one of our partners and this is an exciting one as **"Play it Again Sports"** has just opened a new location in Great Falls. They are in the process of stocking their store and will have a grand opening in early December. They are located at: 1115 10th Ave. South.

For those not familiar with the "Play it Again" model, they buy and sell new and used sports equipment of all types and is a valuable resource for those participating in any type of activity. For the parents who have kids that are



constantly growing, they can sell the sports equipment that has been outgrown and then purchase used equipment in great condition at a reasonable price and then do it all over again in 6 months when their son/daughter has grown another 3 inches. For the adult who wants to try something new, they can also obtain used equipment at a reasonable price to be able to give their new endeavor a try before going all in with a new set of equipment. **"Play It Again Sports"** has proven to be a valuable

resource for every community they are in, and we welcome the opportunity to partner with Brad McCullough and his team to provide affordable hockey equipment to what we sincerely hope will be a growing hockey program here in Great Falls.

Thank you for being a part of our family and we look forward to seeing you at the rink.

Matt Leaf
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