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Great Falls Americans Press Release

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Americans clinch playoffs with 5-2 win over the Butte Irish

By Kevin Scott

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GREAT FALLS, Mont., March 1, 2024 — The final weekend of the 2023-24 NA3HL junior hockey season has arrived and there were playoff implications in the mix for the Great Falls Americans and Badlands (SD) Sabres (18-22-3-3, 42 pts.) in the Frontier Division.

The Badlands (Rapid City, SD) Sabres are also fighting for the final fourth spot and they traveled this weekend to Gillette, Wyoming for a showdown with the #2 Gillette (WY) Wild (40-5-0-1) in a two-game series.

But first, the #4 Great Falls Americans (21-23-0-2, 44 pts.) play a home-and-away series against the #7 Butte Irish (16-29-1-0) to conclude the regular season. After hosting Great Falls tonight, the Americans will travel to Butte, Montana for a 7:05PM season finale on Saturday.

The Americans and Irish have each won three games in their season series. Andrew Browe leads the Irish in goals scored (22) and is the team leader in total points (53). Defenseman Weston Villers has 34 assists to lead all players for Butte. Ty O'Bey and Dmitri Kuleshov, newcomers this season, continue to pave the way for the Americans. O'Bey and Kuleshov both have acquired 30 goals while O'Bey is the assist leader (24) and points leader (54) for coach Greg Sears' squad.

Ty O'Bey and Dmitri Kuleshov scored two goals each and Aaron Leaf playing in his last regular season contest for the #4 Great Falls Americans added one as the Great Falls Americans downed the #7 Butte Irish, 5-2 in front of the home crowd at the Great Falls Ice Plex on Friday night. A win by Great Falls and a (7-2) loss by the Badlands (SD) Sabres to the #2 Gillette (WY) Wild gave the Americans the fourth seed in the 2024 NA3HL Frontier Division Playoffs that start next week.

Great Falls will have an uphill battle facing the top-ranked Helena Bighorns (43-2-1-0, 87 pts.) in the best-of-three series starting Friday (March 8th) starting at 7:05PM (MST) in Game 1 at Steed Arena in Helena, Montana. The Americans will host the Bighorns on March 9th at 7:00PM (MST) for Game 2. If a third and decisive game is needed, it will be on Sunday (March 10th) in Helena, Montana.

Ty O'Bey and Dmitri Kuleshov scored one goal each in the first period to give the Americans the early (2-0) lead in the first stanza. Dmitri Kuleshov and Cal Laggis assisted on O'Bey's first score with twelve minutes remaining while O'Bey and Cal Laggis earned the helpers on Kuleshov's score ten minutes later.

The Irish cut the Americans lead in half (2-1) with 3:31 remaining in the middle period. Toby Kerr scored his ninth goal of the season for Butte off a pass from Luke Bouzas and Cade Holland. Both teams combined for 60 offensive shots-on-goal after the first intermission.

The third period saw the Great Falls offense rack up three third period goals while giving up one goal. Dmitri Kuleshov and Ty O'Bey put in their second goal of the night and 30th overall. Aaron Leaf, one of four players who have aged out and will not return next season, accumulated his sixth goal of the season. Butte's second (and final) goal of the contest occurred seven minutes into the final frame when William Clark lit up the lamp for his third goal with assists going to Corbin Breen and Ryan Sikorski.

The Americans outshot Butte in all three periods (52 total) while the Irish made 27 of their 40 in the middle period.

The Americans and Irish committed a total of eight minor penalties with 16 minutes spent in the penalty box. Butte's second goal by Toby Kerr was the only scoring drive made while the Americans were down a man (penalty). Great Falls went 0-for-4 with Butte in the sin bin.

Kaden Ryhder (14-10-0-1) made 38 saves as he won his third game in four appearances against Butte this season. Irish goaltender Adler Hoagland, who had four setbacks (0-4-0-0) to start the season with Great Falls, is now 2-2-0-0 with Butte. He acquired 47 saves as his record fell to 2-6-0-0 against his former club.

FRONTIER DIVISION UPDATE: Tay Kurpius led the way for the #2 Gillette (WY) Wild (40-5-0-1) by scoring two goals and goaltender Cole Wheaton stopped 33 shots in a 7-2 rout over the #5 Badlands (SD) Sabres (18-22-3-3) in Gillette, Wyoming. Gillette's win helped Great Falls receive a postseason berth in the upcoming playoffs next week as Badlands needed to win to stay alive. Alexander Petrotto and Brooks Roaldson scored the goals for the Sabres in the second period. Cole Wheaton (14-4-0-1) was the victorious netminder for the Wild. Easton Eriksmoen (9-12-1-0) allowed seven goals and finished with 52 saves ([Box Score](#)).

Gavin Barr scored two goals and Patrick Crooks scored once and had two assists as the #1 Helena Bighorns (43-2-1-0) continued their winning ways this season in a 5-1 road victory over the #3 Bozeman Ice Dogs (30-15-0-1). Mason Czarnecki scored the lone goal for the Ice Dogs in the second stanza to spoil Helena netminder Jesse Schindel's (16-0-1-0) perfect game, who ended the night with 21 saves. Bozeman's Isaac Weatherford (3-2-0-0) added 54 saves to his resume in the loss ([Box Score](#)).

Despite a scoreless first period, the #6 Sheridan (WY) Hawks (18-24-2-2) scored eight unanswered goals over the second and third periods for the easy 8-0 shutout victory over their rivals in Cody, Wyoming (#8 Yellowstone Quake). The Quake (0-43-3-0) has struggled offensively throughout the season as they have one final game on Saturday to try to get a victory. Makhai Sparks scored three of the eight goals for the Hawks. John Simon is now 2-8-2-0 on the season in four appearances for Sheridan and eleven with the Quake as he redirected all 23 shots by Yellowstone. Ben Delisi (0-9-0-0) had 78 saves for the Quake ([Box Score](#)).

NOTES: The Great Falls Americans had to say goodbye to four of their players (Nathan Bring, Alec Browning and team captains Sam Duehlmeier and Aaron Leaf) as they were honored during the first intermission of tonight's game.

Friday was also "Billet Family Appreciation Night" at the Great Falls Ice Plex as host families along with the players they hosted were introduced to the fans on the ice. A special thanks to Friday night sponsors, City Toyota and Life in Bloom Floral and Gift Boutique. Fans took advantage of the 30% to 40% discount off Americans merchandise at the team store. Check out the photos this weekend of the Billet Family Appreciation Night by [clicking here](#).

A Special Thanks to the following Billet families who hosted the following players during the 2023-24 season.

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| Jamie and Dawn Boyer: | Hosted Zac Orwig and Caleb Gamboa |
| Deb Courcey: | Hosted Kaden Ryhder |
| Bob and Wendy Dick: | Hosted Spencer Schipferling |
| Mike and Katie Hanning: | Hosted Anyon Bennett and Garren Narvaez |
| Jim and Tony Quick: | Hosted Blake Komrofske and Noah Van Herik |
| Greg and Serena Sears: | Hosted Aiden Kennedy |
| Ryan and Krista Smith: | Hosted Aaron Leaf, Ty Brander, and Dmitri Kuleshov |
| Adam and Pam Stanczak: | Hosted Sebe Perez, Masen Kerr and Tariq Khan |
| Kris and Laura Steichen: | Hosted Ty O'Bey and Austin Trout |
| Mat and Jamie Stevens: | Hosted Phil Harrell, Alex Browning, and Luke Pizzey |
| Edward and Maria Perez: | Hosted Garrett Driscoll and Cal Laggis |
| Jim Duehlmeier: | Hosted Sam Duehlmeier and Hayden Grabas |

The Americans are auctioning off a White (home) and Red (Away) jersey signed by the players and staff. The jersey auction through our partner, DASH will run until 9:00PM (MST) on Monday, March 4th. These will be only signed jerseys that will be offered so don't miss out on the opportunity to get some memorabilia. Click here for the auction: www.winwithdash.com/gfamericans.

Great Falls goaltender Kaden Ryhder received the Frontier Division Star of the Week and forward Dmitri Kuleshov received Honorable Mention honors for the weekly "NA3HL Stars of the Week" for the week ending February 25, 2024, for their play last week against the Badlands (SD) Sabres. [Click here](#) for more information.

Kaden Ryhder (Goaltender), Dmitri Kuleshov (Forward) and Garrett Driscoll (Defenseman) were named as Honorable Mention candidates for the NA3HL "Stars of the Month" for February 2024. [Click here](#) for more information.

This week, another episode of the "Americans Podcast with Jim Quick" was completed with his guest Luke Pizzey, a forward from Black Diamond, Washington. Quick has done thirteen podcasts this year featuring the history of the Americans, interviews with former American and now Associate Coach, Alex Leaf, and some current players. Fans can listen to the full podcasts by [clicking here](#).



The NA3HL released their all-new and updated App this week for the App Store and Google Play. Download and set your favorite team to the Great Falls Americans today and stay up to date with the NA3HL. Click here to download from the App Store (Apple) or click here to download from the Google Play Store (Android).

Check out all the Americans photos throughout the season including some taken by Americans photographer, Dustin Bauer. [Click here](#) to view all the photos from the 2023-24 season.

[Click here](#) to view the Americans online team store that features a variety of different souvenirs to purchase. A store is available at all home games. Fans can also buy game day tickets on the website prior to the game by



[clicking here.](#)

Please check out the Americans website at www.greatfallsamericans.com for all your updated news, game summaries, rosters, photo galleries, etc.

NEXT CONTEST: The Butte Community Ice Center is where the Americans and Butte Irish will face off during the 2023-24 NA3HL regular season finale on Saturday, March 2nd at 7:05PM (MST). The game in Butte can be seen live on [NAHLTV](#). To learn more about how to watch the Americans in action on NAHL TV, please [click here](#).

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

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