

Predators Legend Mitch Korn Excited to Rejoin Franchise as Director of Goaltending: 'I Can't Put It Into Words'

Stanley Cup Winning Goalie Coach & Veteran of 33 NHL Campaigns Talks Working Alongside Barry Trotz, Philosophies Between the Pipes



By **Zach Gilchrist**
@ZachGilchrist Beat Writer & Content Manager

August 06, 2024

First it was former head coach Barry Trotz. Then it was former forward Andrew Brunette. Now, as the Nashville Predators get ready for the upcoming 2024-25 National Hockey League season, it'll be former goaltending coach Mitch Korn returning to the franchise he helped lift off the ground nearly three decades ago and spent nearly half of his prolific, 34-year NHL career shaping into a perennial goaltending powerhouse.

Named the Predators' first Director of Goaltending in May, Korn will oversee the organization's entire netminding department, work with the team's goalies and prospects in Nashville, Milwaukee and overseas and assist in the scouting of professional and amateur talent.

For Korn, the chance to work alongside Trotz once again was too great an opportunity to turn down.

"We're on the same page and he gets what I do," Korn said. "I've got colleagues in this business who spend time putting out fires that their head coaches create. And when you're putting out fires, you can't build mountains. And Barry gets it, and always got it... We were just extremely complementary to each other, in terms of the way he coached and how I would prepare the goalies."



That chemistry kept the pair inseparable for more than two decades and allowed Korn to mold elite goaltending talent for his head coach in a number of different NHL locales, from Vezina Trophy winner Pekka Rinne in Nashville, to Stanley Cup champion Braden Holtby in Washington, D.C. and Jennings Trophy winners Robin Lehner and Thomas Greiss on Long Island.

All of them, Korn asserts, had one trait in common.

“They have to love to play,” Korn said. “When you talk about Pekka Rinne, or Tomas Vokoun or Juuse Saros, you have to throw them off the ice. They just love to play, they love to be out there, they love to compete and that seems to be a trend. Even when I coached Braden Holtby or Dominik Hasek, that’s a trait of all of those guys. They love to compete, they love to play. You don’t have to beg them to do those kinds of things. And then, because they do that, it’s not work. It’s effort, and they need to put forth effort, but it’s not work because they just love it.”

Make no mistake, there’s plenty more that goes into crafting NHL-caliber talent between the pipes. After all, if hockey is the most difficult sport in the world, goaltending is surely its most difficult position.

Being a cut above the rest is even harder.

“If you think there’s one magic drill, one magic meeting or one magic video that you can show an athlete and make him go from clod to God, it’s not possible,” Korn said. “It is a process, and the attention to detail that’s required during that process and the ability to be tough mentally, during tough times to battle through things is part of it. For example, when a goalie slides into his post in what we call reverse, you’re hitting that post with that toe bridge of your pad perfectly. You’re going

to do that 25 to 30 times a game, and you can't miss... If you have a 2.20 goals against average, you're probably a Vezina finalist. If you have a 3.20 goals-against average, you're probably a finalist to go to the minors. That's one goal a game... So, it is so fragile. And you have to embrace that. Goalies embrace that, they love that, and that's the challenge of it. And once again, you got to love to play and love those challenges."

If a love for the game stands as a non-negotiable for those outside the playing surface as well - and it most certainly does - Korn has joined his most accomplished netminders in giving the sport his whole heart.

Indeed, in the months leading up to NHL training camp, Korn spends nearly all his time giving back to the next generation of netminding talent at his annual goaltender camps, which have visited local rinks across the continent for what Korn estimated was "close to 1,000 years."

He'd do it for 1,000 more if he could.

"I love the camps, because they're pure," he said. "There's no scoreboard, there's no agenda, there's no contracts - it's just pure. And we do good work. We help a lot of people, including those that work for us. I run a mentorship program where we get coaches from literally all over the world. They come in for a week on their dime to experience what we do. I've created a lot of competition in the goalie school camp industry for myself, just because we've trained people and they've gone on to do their own thing. But I've been doing it a very long time, and my dad used to have a saying, that a body in motion stays in motion. And as I age - and I am aging - I think I need to stay in motion."

Korn will no doubt keep his momentum at a steady clip once he fully begins his new role with the Predators. Right now, with training camp just weeks away, Korn is mostly just looking forward to reconnecting with many of his old friends.



"I can't put it into words how excited I am, and there's a lot of reasons, but it comes back to the people," Korn said. "I can list them, and it takes two hands, but of all the guys that I was very tight with - obviously, Barry Trotz and [Equipment Manager] Pete Rogers and [Assistant Coach - Video] Lawrence Feloney, [Director of Team Services] Brandon Walker, [Strength and Conditioning Coach] David Good and a couple of the trainers, just to name some - it's just incredible how many people are still here. And, of course, who could forget that Coach Brunette scored our first goal?"

Of course, Predators Goaltending Coach Ben Vanderklok, who Korn brought up to the NHL as an assistant almost 15 years ago to the day, is still here, too.

Fifteen years later, it was Vanderklok who proved instrumental in bringing his old boss back to 501 Broadway.

"He wanted this more than I think I even did, and he pushed me to do this probably more than anybody," Korn laughed. "We have a great relationship. And I often say that goalie coaches don't really have somebody to have synergy with... When the five coaches and video guys are sitting around the war room table deciding what the lines are going to be or what drills we're going to do for practice, the goalie coach often walks into the washroom, looks in the mirror and says, 'What do you want to do today?'"

"So, part of me coming back - my mission - is to create that synergy for the goalie coaches, and that's Benny and [Goaltending Development Coach Jason Barron]."

