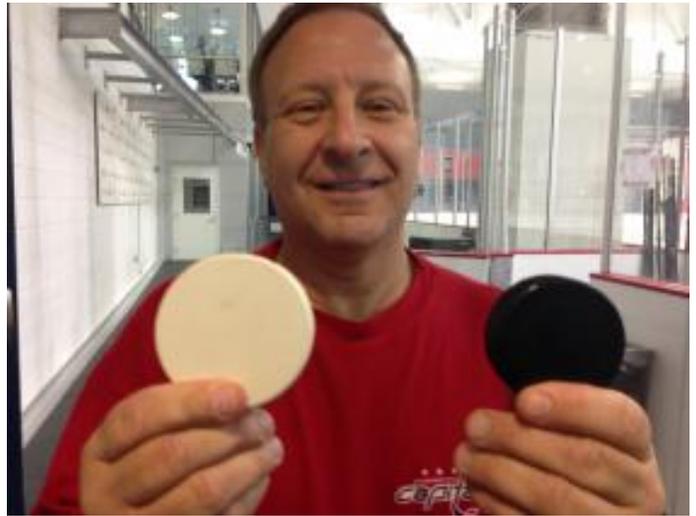




CAPITALS

BY JILL SORENSON

You can't miss him. Standing behind the glass at the Capitals' practice rink, the boards only reach his chest. The players tower over him. I know this because I stand 5'5" with heels on and can look at him eye to eye. Dressed in Capitals red sweatpants and a red long sleeve shirt, Mitch Korn is smiling. In fact, he's almost always smiling.



He's engaging, enthusiastic and talking to him for about 15 minutes gives you a good sense of why he is so respected in the goalie coaching world. Korn's easy-going personality is magnetic, and it's easy to see why Barry Trotz kept him in Nashville for 16 years. No small feat, when you consider that coaching staffs spend more time with each other than their own family.

In fact, Korn says, they became family. "In those 16 years my life changed a lot," Korn said. "My dad passed away, my daughter grew up, I got divorced. And you spend that much time you truly become family, and [Trotz] and his family in a lot of ways replaced some parts of my family."

Korn continued talking about the sense of family that developed in Nashville.

"We work so many hours in close quarters you better really enjoy the people you work with. There better be an atmosphere of humor and fun, but efficiency and effectiveness. And [Trotz] fosters all that. So you really actually enjoy going to dinner on the road, so it's not stuffy and you're not afraid to crack a joke."

And that fun but productive relationship also goes for Korn and his goalies. Korn's disciples are well known, ranging from Olie Kolzig and Dominic Hasek to Pekke Rinne. He's already begun working with Braden Holtby on a very optional and informal basis using some of the tools he's become known for: medicine balls, white pucks, mini pucks, wireless lights, and screenboards.

Korn has seen film of Holtby, and worked with him for a couple of days now. From that, the coach says his impression is that Holtby is "tremendously athletic, fantastic powerful skater, big body, strong puck handler, catches a good number of pucks. I think that in general he competes like a son of a gun. The battle never ends in his game, all those things are great."

He hasn't spent much time getting to know Holtby beyond a couple of phone conversations before Braden arrived back at Kettler this week. But Korn believes that will happen as the relationship grows, adding, "It's not like I have to inspire him or light a fire or any of that."

Holtby has always been the first one to say that he can be better, no matter how well he played or how much he struggled, but at times has internalized his performances. Korn recognizes that aspect of Holtby's game.

"That's what happens when you get in your own way," Korn said. "You can't get in your own way."

Korn conducts goalie clinics across North America, so 23 years of coaching the position in the NHL and playing it himself has given him a great understanding of the goalie's brain. He pointed to a line by former Capitals goalie Clint Malarchuk - Korn's good friend - who according to Korn said, "90 percent of goaltending is mental, the other 10 percent is in your head."

And this is how Korn approaches his goalies.

He breaks down games in three aspects: physical, mental and emotional. Notice that two-thirds of his analysis relies on the intangibles that a goalie brings to his game.

"Honestly when you talk confidence," he says, "no matter how mentally tough you are, that's emotional. It's more emotional, even though you try to control some of that, it's more emotional."

Focusing mostly on the mental and emotional aspects of Holtby's game is a big departure from previous head coach, Adam Oates, who preached technique, scenarios, and rules, even to his goalies. Only when then goalie coach Olie Kolzig stepped in to help simplify things about halfway through the season did Holtby find his game.

Korn injects humor into his method of teaching how to control emotion. He says there's a computer game in "all of our brains... it's called I am the best goalie on the planet 2.0. It's the new version," he says with a laugh.

"It takes 50 [megabytes] of ram to run this program. You have virtually no room for anything else to get in the way. So at a moment that a bad call, a defensive turnover, a call you don't like, you get emotional. It takes 3 megs of ram to get emotional. Now you have 47 megs of ram. What happens to your program? It crashes, so you have to be able to control that because you don't have enough megs of ram for all of it to occur."

Which brings us full circle back to Korn's props for training goalies. Take for example, the screen board.



"A screen board is this big monstrosity that sits in front of you so you can't see the puck and now the puck's going to come under the board," Korn said. "The board's gonna be about 6-feet in front from you, so now you gotta react as the puck comes under the board without having the pleasure of a stick blade release it, or the pass go around it, and we're gonna do a whole bunch of different things off that to increase the visual acuity and the reaction time."

The same goes for the white pucks and mini pucks, which he says, "forces a more

[Mitch Korn @mitchkorncaps](#)

Put together my new screen board courtesy of Jim Olcott from Duluth MN. Ready to challenge Holtby and Peters tomorrow [7:11 PM - 3 Sep 2014](#)



intense level of focus and puck tracking, and that is how you improve those areas. We want to make practice more difficult than a game, and we want to create circumstances that are very hard to create in a practice setting that's why I use these props."

Those drills tie in the physical and mental aspects of his mantra, and in turn, Korn says with a big smile on his face, "when you start having success what happens to your confidence? It's emotional! You feel good about yourself. You feel awesome, and as a result, you feel better."

Korn's three pronged approach to teaching and analyzing his students is always highlighted by what he says is a genuine desire to make his goalies better. As for gaining Holtby's trust, he says, "I just be myself. There's no power plays, there's no hidden agendas. If he believes that nothing I ask is selfish, or I'm trying to get ahead,

or I'm trying to get publicity. If he recognizes that everything is geared that he can be the best he can be we should be fine."