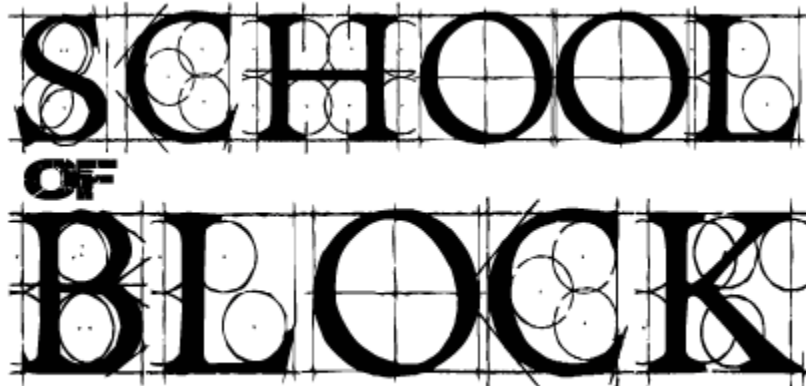


School of Block: Predators Goaltending

AUG 30TH Posted by [Justin](#) in [School of Block](#)

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The Goalie Guild's In-Depth Fantasy Analysis Found On Dobber Hockey

:: THE CURRENT STATE OF PREDATORS GOALTENDING ::

Another season has come and gone, and so too has another quality goaltender from the city of Nashville. With Dan Ellis ready to start the next chapter of his career in Tampa Bay, the current state of Predators goaltending sees a wide open door for Mark Dekanich or Chet Pickard to walk through in an attempt to jump-start their NHL career. The team's well-nourished goalie life cycle simply continues to thrive in perfect balance and harmony.

Backed by spectacular coaching and consulting from Mitch Korn, dissecting Nashville's depth chart comes with much clarity. Let it be known that Korn is considered one of the most effective teachers of all time. His ability to give each goalie – regardless of age or stage in their development – an arsenal of mental and technical tools before a season begins constantly produces positive results. Tomas Vokoun, Chris Mason, Ellis, Pekka Rinne...all very different goalies, all very successful in their own way.

As of today, the onus is currently on former Colgate goaltender Dekanich to come to training camp prepared to secure the backup role and begin his NHL career. Follow his Twitter feed at [@dexshow](#) and look at just how hard he's working in the weight room this summer. The guy is an iron-pumping machine and he's fully committed to winning the job. He knows there are no guarantees and his tweets are great insight to the sheer work ethic a goalie must have if they want to break into the NHL.



That being said, if simplicity continues to be the staple of Predators goaltending, having Dekanich fill the open void behind Rinne makes perfect sense. Not only is Dekanich a good fit for that 20-game backup role, it also allows Pickard to establish himself as a true AHL workhorse and gives Anders Lindback a place to play in North America, a job which he is certainly ready for.

The trickle-down effect that comes from this training camp is also crucial for the futures of Jeremy Smith and Atte Engren. Smith and Lindback will most likely duel for the backup role in Milwaukee, while the loser heads to the ECHL. Engren is slated to stay in Finland with TPS Turku for another season to defend his championship. Dissecting which goalie ends up where is not as clear as the Dekanich-Pickard duel, but our gut says "look out" for Lindback. Smith might be more deserving of the AHL gig, but it's impossible to pass up what Lindback could bring to the organization in regards to long-term success. He's barely scratched the surface of his potential and this is why he will probably be playing in North America this year. He can hang and thrive in the AHL.

As you all know, I love to see teams instill confidence in their prospects by showing faith in their ability to take that next step, regardless of age or experience. A team never knows what they have until they unleash a goalie's power across the league. And in that regard, Nashville is in a special place, for they could create this positive tone with more than one of their prospects.

1. Being a bigger goalie, Pekka Rinne takes away a majority of the net. What do you see as his greatest strengths and weaknesses?

Rinne's strengths are his quickness, mobility, footwork and active stance. His lanky presence is truly an added benefit, as this allows him to butterfly with ease while still taking away a lot of space in the upper corners. Another one of his strengths is a very straight back, which makes him very well-balanced and mobile on his knees. I love how he focuses on the puck extremely well, especially when giving up a rebound. He has great tracking ability and when you have a goalie with that core set of talents, you'll find that he's rarely out of position. If he does get caught off his angle, he has the foot speed to transfer his weight quickly and get his body, or a piece of his body behind the puck. He can make huge desperate saves thanks to his swiftness and lanky size.

I would say a few of his weaknesses are his focus, mental toughness, angles (depth) and hyperactive hands. I say his hands are a weakness (they are also a strength) because a lot of plays in which his hands should stay at home and tight to his body end up actively trying to grab or swat at something. He needs to show more patience and let the puck or play come to him. More specifically, I think he needs to work on making saves in a more positional manner. A goalie that is too active is moving too

much, and a goalie that is moving too much is going to struggle to control pucks and maintain high levels of energy for 60 minutes. You always hear the phrase, "less is more" and this is what Rinne needs to accomplish mentally and technically in order to improve. Like most reflexive goalies, he also needs to improve his depth in the net and play above his crease more consistently. I think this is the year you will see that happen, as it comes with more experience for the skilled Finnish imports.

2. For Pickard, Dekanich and Lindback, who do you see having the highest upside? Who is most likely to be a starter?

I like Lindback's combination of size and skill and I feel he has the highest upside of the three. At the same time, he has much more work to do than Pickard. I think those two are both on track to be quality NHL starters. Pickard is more likely to be a starter before Lindback. Since Nashville churns out starters like smooth butter, both of their work ethics will go a long way in establishing which goalie is more valuable long term. It's tough to compare Lindback to Pickard without seeing Lindback compete in North America, so I think the key is to really watch for their unique traits and characteristics this season.

3. How awesome is Mitch Korn and just how much does he have to do with Nashville's ability to continue producing viable NHL goaltenders?

He has everything to do with the continued and consistent success of Predators goaltending. For a guy that has no pro playing experience, it's remarkable what he has accomplished since the 1980's. But what really sets him apart is that he's a wizard at motivating his goalies. He truly cares about making them better, so he develops awesome friendships with each and every goalie in the system. Korn's 20 years of experience brings a certain structured system to the team, so his ability to motivate and cultivate goalies through unique friendships puts him right up there with guys like Francois Allaire and Vladislav Tretiak.

Korn isn't just a goalie coach. He's a mentor and a father figure to the younger prospects. But to get more specific about his actual coaching strategies, he excels at providing instant video feedback, a regimen systematic approach to every on-ice session and drills that stress progressive skills development. His overall schematics for helping a goalie improve is custom tailored to each goalie. But one of the most beneficial aspects of working with Korn is his set of props and tools.



He takes on-ice drills to a higher level than most other coaches because of these props. Things like high shot deflection boards, low shot screen boards, mini pucks, white pucks and more help his goalies improve even when he's not able to be there. He'll put weighted wrist bands on a goalie's arms in order to strengthen their glove hands. He'll put a mesh bag over a goalie's mask to force them to "sense" the puck instead of seeing it. He tests all areas of the mind and the body and that is what truly makes him such an effective coach. [Check out his website](#) to learn more about these tools...I personally use white and mini pucks when working with my students and they're extremely effective.

Since Korn carries such an amazing reputation with him, every goalie he coaches or works with becomes a viable prospect. He probably has thousands of students under his tutelage over the years

and has helped so many goalies in the past that Nashville will always develop prospects in the Top-100 Rankings. If you want to become a pro goalie, work with Korn. It's simple, really. But remember, it's not always sheer skill and ability that makes a goalie great. A lot of it is coaching and opportunity. In Nashville, you're guaranteed to have a great reputation around the league because of Korn's reputation. It all truly amazes me.

4. Does Pickard fit into Nashville's long term plans or is he going to be chasing the #1 spot forever? If Rinne is the man, what is the likelihood we see Pickard traded and how far away would that be? How many years away is Pickard from entering the NHL and making an impact?

Remember that no one goalie is more important than the system as a whole. Nashville won't change the way they manage their goalies. That being said, the book is still out on Pickard's future in Nashville. I don't think he will be chasing the #1 spot forever, but that depends entirely on Rinne's ability to keep improving and performing at his best. Pickard will either push Rinne for the starting job or, similar to Ellis, play well enough to warrant interest from other teams. And since Nashville always has someone else with great potential coming up the pipelines (Lindback, Engren), trading Pickard won't be a tough choice to make.

I see the latter happening (trade or free agency move) because Rinne is too good to lose the job, unless he gets complacent and falls off the tracks for an extended period of time. If that time frame gets to the point that Pickard can get into a good rhythm and steal a chunk of impressive starts, the Predators will have to make the same decision they've made many times before. One will stay, one will go. But both will be starters or 1A-1B goalies regardless of where they end up. I think Pickard would be three years away from a trade. So not the 2011-12 season, but the one after that.

5. What would your prediction be for games played, wins and shutouts this year for Rinne?

I think you'll see Rinne push for 35 wins, with a big influence on that number coming from the team's play in October and November. Nashville's defense has a recent history of struggling early and then coming together at the halfway point for a strong playoff push late. So if he has a really good start to the season, 35 wins is clearly in reach. I could see him pitching five or six shutouts. Expect close to 60 starts for Rinne, including almost every game in the final six weeks of the season.

6. Based on skill alone, where would Rinne rank compared to other NHL goalies?

Rinne is easily one of the top ten goalies in the NHL, but just outside of the top five. I think because he is still relatively early in his pro career, he isn't worthy of being ranked ahead of guys that are similar in talent level, but more experienced. For example, I would say Tomas Vokoun is very close in skill level to Rinne. They have similar traits that make them successful and Rinne's big advantage is size, while Vokoun's is clearly his experience and ability to stay strong when facing a heavy workload. So to rank Vokoun above Rinne is fair, as mental toughness, experience and sheer "term of dominance" clearly plays a role in overall ranking. Regardless of all those semantics however, Rinne is still easily one of the best "skilled" goalies in the league. He's flashy, he's quick and he's really active. It's fun to watch and he's only getting better positionally.



If you were to rank the best goalies that have only been in the league since 2007-08, Rinne, Rask, Price and Hiller are all very close in that regard. They are the best young studs in the league and Rinne is ready to reach for that next level.

7. What would stop Pickard from being the number one in Nashville? What are the biggest flaws that you see in his game? Is he a potential franchise goalie?

I think Rinne's longevity as a workhorse is the only thing keeping Pickard from evolving into an NHL starter. Pickard has to carve his own path, but Nashville will side with Rinne long term since he's already established. I think some of Pickard's flaws are his complacency and mobility. He's a bigger goalie that relies on his size to get body parts behind pucks. It's the polar opposite of Rinne, who tries to go out and stop everything. Pickard likes to let pucks hit him and then react from there. He's still capable of being a "franchise" goalie because Pickard has awesome durability and technique. When the foundation is there, anything is possible over the course of two or three seasons. So it's impossible to judge their ability's ceiling or floor. It really just depends on each and every game they play. I like his confidence level and his mental toughness but he needs to speed up his footwork if he wants to be effective in the NHL.

The Goalie Guild's [The Current State](#) feature is an in-depth look at each NHL team's goalie depth chart. It is an interactive thread in the [School of Block forums](#) that allows readers to vote on which team is put under the microscope. Once a team is determined, readers leave their questions relating to the team's goalies and we answer them for all to see!

[anders lindback](#), [atte engren](#), [chet pickard](#), [dan ellis](#), [dobber hockey](#), [jeremy smith](#), [mark dekanich](#), [mitch korn](#), [pekka rinne](#), [School of Block](#), [the current state](#)

Depth Charts: Alteration Marks Guide