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[Nashville: Unlocking the Keys to Goaltending Success](#)

Posted on 09. Aug, 2010 by [Stu Dickson](#) in [Stu Dickson](#)



Some things stay constant in life. For many, death and taxes are the standard big two that usually come to mind. However, if Nashville Predator fans have anything to say about it, they'd like to add one more: exceptional Predator goaltending.

Since Nashville joined the league in 1998 they have gone through five starting keepers: Mike Dunham, Tomas Vokoun, Chris Mason, Dan Ellis and now Pekka Rinne. All five have exceeded expectations in Tennessee and around the league, and it

raises the question, just why is Nashville so good at grooming big league goalies? An in-depth look at Nashville's three hockey aficionados provides some clues to the Preds' consistent pattern of success:



Mitch Korn has been a professional goalie coach for 20 years with the last 13 spent with the Predators. Korn considers his specialty to be a great sense of humour, an easy-going and affable attitude that enables him to gain the trust and respect of his pupils. He is also a diligent worker with a keen eye, able to expertly scrutinize a goalie's weakness and help guide to improvement.

Korn not only works with goalies currently dressing for the big club, he works with their prospects throughout all the franchise's ranks. And Korn's labours have had proven and dramatic results, not only in Nashville.

Dominik Hasek, arguably the most dominant goalie of the last two decades, is another former Korn student, all of whom are aptly dubbed "Children of the Korn". Hasek is also the most decorated of Korn's former protégés, while Korn and Hasek were with the Sabres in the mid 90s, Hasek's reign of excellence included four Vezinas, two Harts and a Jennings. Korn has the attitude, expertise and talent to fine-tune and optimize a goalie's game.

Up until this year, **Barry Trotz** had never been nominated for the Jack Adams Award for NHL coach of the year. This may just be one of the NHL's greatest miscarriages of justice as Trotz's coaching record is simply record-breaking. The only coach Nashville has ever seen holds the league record for most games coached by the first coach of an NHL franchise, currently clocking at over 900 games. Trotz's longevity is due to his ability to cobble together a tightly knit crew year after year.



The Predators are always a defensively responsible club that plays a well-structured and balanced game, easing the pressure on the goalie. Rarely is a Nashville goalie peppered with close range shots; in the 13 years Nashville has been an NHL franchise they have an average of only 29.6 shots-at per game. Nashville's high-tempo counter-attacking system allows the team's goalie to see the puck and make the save, improving the goalie and the team's overall stats. Trotz is a respected coach by his players, not because he looks like a Mafioso hit man, but because he is able to make his team and its players better (including its goalies), year after year.

It wouldn't be surprising if people started to think Barry Trotz had another wife, as his relationship is so close to Nashville GM **David Poile** they are literally inseparable. Since the franchise's inception, Poile and Trotz have been together molding the team; their fingerprints are all over the Nashville lineup like a sweet-toothed criminal in a candy shop.

Poile goes after the personnel to complement Trotz's on-ice vision, and is able to plumb the depths of the draft and waiver wire to find the right pieces to fit the system. Indeed, all of the aforementioned goalies (save Rinne) have been the scraps of other teams: Dunham and Vokoun were Expansion Draft vagabonds, Chris Mason and Dan Ellis free-agent afterthoughts. Poile also executes patience with his prospects, instead of flash frying them in the glare of expectations (à la Patrik Stefan of the Atlanta Thrashers) he allows them to season and marinate in the Juniors, then the farm leagues, before making the jump to the Bigs. Such patience allows Poile to build his players and groom them to match Trotz's on-ice system.

Quite simply, Poile knows how to find the right pieces and takes the time to make sure they are ready to contribute, getting the best return on investment.

Of course Korn, Trotz and Poile are huge factors in the success of the Nashville goalies, but the goalies themselves are due some credit. Chris Mason for instance, before joining the Nashville ranks, languished with the New Jersey Devils and was unable to crack the roster for a single NHL game. Mason had the makings to become a supreme NHL talent, he just needed the right ingredients and treatment to have that potential realized. Once the Preds picked him up, he spent 4 seasons honing his craft with the Milwaukee Admirals.

When he finally got the chance to be an NHL starter in the 2006-07 season, Mason burst from obscurity to post a sparkling .925 SV% and 2.38 GAA. With St. Louis, his next stop, he marshaled the team's epic half-season push into the playoffs, posting a skimpy 2.41 GAA and a 25 – 9 – 7 record in the second half of the year. All Mason needed was something to get him over the hump, and Nashville was there to do it, just like they have been before and will be again. As with most success stories, there is a degree of interdependence insuring one's triumph. No one ever really does it by themselves; there's either a wife, or a partner or a good friend behind the scenes guiding and assisting, providing invaluable support, advice and aid to bring one's dreams out of the ether and into reality.

Nashville's three aficionados provide just that kind of support to all players and goalies in their system. All three have bought in and all three work together to realize their common aims. Like their Central Division rivals – the Detroit Red Wings – Nashville appreciates that all professional athletes are preternaturally skilled individuals; they are high-performing talents before they even reach the NHL. Like Detroit, Nashville expends a huge amount of energy making sure their players are developed and ready to shoulder the challenges and expectations of being a professional athlete.

So why does Nashville seem to have a goaltending pipeline as unquenchable as the Gulf's? Because Nashville has the right goalie coach, the right system and the right scout in Korn, Trotz and Poile. These three are respective experts who are able to complement and play off of each other. The combined fruit of their efforts is a climate for success, one that is conducive to breeding top-caliber keepers and a team that continually defies expectations.

So, come 2011, look for some things to remain constant: people will die, you will get taxed and Nashville will have excellent goaltending. Count on it.

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