INSIDE MITCH KORN'S SUMMER GRIND— AND THE LEGACY BEHIND IT

From Stanley Cups to summer camps, Korn explains why staying close to young goalies keeps him — and the position — evolving in this deep dive into the philosophy, structure, and purpose behind one of hockey's longest-running schools

BY
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Mitch Korn has done it all in his 35-plus seasons working with goalies in the NHL.

The goalies Korn coached have been nominated for the Vezina Trophy 10 times and won it five.

Four were for Dominik Hasek during their time together with the Buffalo Sabres, and one for Braden Holtby with the Washington Capitals—making him the only goalie coach to win it with two different teams. Hasek also won the Hart Trophy as league MVP twice under Korn, who is also the only goalie coach to win the Jennings Trophy (fewest goals against) with three different teams: Buffalo, Washington, and the New York Islanders. In 2018, Korn hoisted the Stanley Cup as the Capitals' first-year Director of Goaltending.

Simply put, Korn's resume is worthy of the Hockey Hall of Fame.

months driving a cargo van every summer.

"I do it because it takes me out of my ivory NHL tower," Korn said. "The kids start changing. Every generation is different, and being with them, you get to see what is changing and what's coming in the next few years. When things start changing in equipment and thoughts and ideas, it starts there. These kids know more than I know in some of these areas, so it's really about staying current, which is pretty valuable."

Korn may still be learning from the kids he coaches, but there's even more to be learned from this goalie coaching legend. So InGoal Magazine caught up with him for an exclusive interview about the evolution of his camps — and the lessons that come with it.

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Despite all those accomplishments — and despite turning 69 in the fall — Korn still packs up his life every summer to road trip across the country for two full months, leading the goalie schools that bear his name, starting in Nashville and ending in Washington, D.C.

The question, after all this time, is why?

First and foremost, Korn continues with camps he started in another form almost 50 years ago because he believes deeply in the work they do—not only in keeping costs down for young goalies in areas without many camp options, but also in the number who go on to become counselors and mentors themselves. Some of these "Children of the Korn" even turn it into careers, with more than 20 goalies and coaches he mentored now working in the NHL, minor pro, or college hockey—and many more throughout the game at all levels.

But that's not the only reason Korn spends two

Korn broke into the NHL with the Buffalo Sabres in 1991, but his coaching roots go back nearly two decades earlier. He started as a 15-year-old counselor at the Can-Am Hockey School in Guelph, Ontario, before becoming a goalie coach at 17. He went on to play at Kent State University, where he earned both a Bachelor of Science and an MBA — and where he also started his own goalie camps.

"After my first year, I ran my own Sunday morning goalie clinics—one in the spring and one in the fall," Korn said. "Then I started going to hockey associations and running clinics, and that's kind of how it started. On our logo, it says circa 1977."

Korn joined Miami University in January 1981 as an assistant coach and ice arena administrator before moving to the NHL less than a decade later. He

spent eight seasons in Buffalo, followed by 16 with the Nashville Predators, where he helped oversee the rise of goalies like Tomas Vokoun, Pekka Rinne, Chris Mason, Dan Ellis, and Carter Hutton into more prominent roles than many envisioned.

From there, it was on to Washington in 2014–15, a Vezina Trophy for Holtby the following season, and a Stanley Cup in 2018. Korn later held a similar Director role with the New York Islanders from 2018 through 2024 before returning to Nashville last season.

Through it all, he continued to run Korn Camp every summer.

What does a typical week look like on the road?

It starts with unpacking a large Ford Transit van loaded with the unique training tools Korn has developed over the years: deflection boards for high shots, ramps for low shots, two different types of screen boards, a giant mirror to help goalies see their net coverage while working on technique, as well as white pucks, "Pro Angle" ropes, and focus enhancers worn over the mask.

There are typically two or three coaches traveling in two vehicles, and the rest of the staff is local to that week's camp and return year after year.

"Almost everybody that works for us is cloned," Korn said. "You go from camper to counselor to coach to part of the management team. I have generations of people who have done that."

Each day runs from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. and includes two classroom sessions. After setup, the day begins with a 75-minute classroom block.

"That's where we do a lot of our teaching," Korn said. "I've got custom videos. I tell stories. I've got millions of stories — from goalies I've worked with to things that have happened—and I've gotten pretty good at doing a little Jerry Seinfeld-style stand-up to keep their attention."

Afterward, goalies hit the ice for 90 minutes.

"That's where we teach and drill and develop muscle memory," Korn said. "We do it as a group. I have a wireless microphone, 10 other coaches, and we teach and drill, teach and drill. I always say: 'You can't fix it until you feel it.' We try to teach them what it feels like when you do it right — and wrong. Some of these kids have to learn body control and they've got to be able to maneuver. Again, every day is different. Everything builds. We have a whole day where we do nothing but scramble plays, broken plays and those kinds of things that are out of the ordinary — because we have to create a strategy for that too."

The day continues with a short lunch before 2.5 hours of station work.

"We run 10 stations," Korn said. "Four goalies per station, 14 shooters, 10 coaches, four counselors. Each station runs nine minutes. When you watch from the stands, it's organized chaos. It's like I'm conducting an orchestra — I don't make the music, I just direct it."

"I hate the term 'set your feet,' if the puck is always moving, how can you stay square by setting your feet?"

Despite having up to 40 goalies on the ice, Korn makes no apologies for the numbers, noting the camps are designed to remain accessible—not elite-only environments.

"I don't make any bones about it, this is a group lesson," Korn said. "We give individual attention, instruction and correction to everybody. Yeah, that's a lot of goalies. We run 10 stations. We have plenty of coaches. There's an unbelievable synergy. There's 70-something people out there with shooters and coaches and goalies. There are 200-something pucks out there. There are all these props. It's an unbelievable experience to watch. There's a lot of guys that have come into us as mentors who have never seen what we do, and I tell them we have 40 goalies, and they look at me like I have three heads, and then after the first day, they go, 'holy crap.' I hold those kids' attention, we manage that thing with an iron fist ... We teach minutia too, but you're not paying $300 an hour. You're not paying like that. That's not what we do."

The day wraps with a final classroom focused on positioning.

"The second classroom is all about positioning and we actually get into the nuts and bolts," Korn said. "We talk about being flat, talk about too much depth, talk about your width, talk about being square, talk about the roadmap on the ice, and show them all kinds of video, like how you can be off by three inches and it ends up in the net, we show them that."

What drives the teaching philosophy?

Korn starts with skating and stance on Day One.

"For me, goalies have a handful of enemies," he said. "Width. Depth. Posture. Shuffles that are too big. You can't change direction if your shuffle is too big. Shuffles need to be smaller than the good old days, no matter how tall you are. We do our shuffles and our t-pushes and our reloads and our fade — all our skating and mobility — on Day One."

From there, mobility is layered into everything else.

"I hate the term 'set your feet,'" Korn said. "If the puck is always moving, how can you stay square by setting your feet? When we set our feet, we become a brick wall and cannot move or adjust. The opposite is being totally fluid like water, where we are all over the place. We need to be Jell-O: solid enough and fluid enough."

That philosophy extends to teaching situational play — even at younger levels. "I don't create goalie school goalies. I teach how the game is being

played," Korn said. "You could talk to an NHL guy and he'll never teach a half-butterfly but we teach eight different half-butterflies depending on the situation—because a 5-foot-1 kid isn't reaching what Darcy Kuemper can reach when he goes down. You have to teach so they can play."

That blend of realism and adaptability carries through every part of the camp.

"The kids they're playing against aren't nearly as deceptive as guys we watch in the NHL, but the level of deception, the level of creativity, the level of skill, the volume of lateral plays, all these things are part of our game now," Korn said. "We talk about all of that."

There is also an equipment lecture and a mental classroom day mixed into the week and with goalies ranging from ages 9 to 18 — and occasionally adults — Korn leans into the diversity.

"When we're on the ice, you're going to do everything as an individual, so it doesn't matter who's standing next to you," Korn said, adding older goalies often help younger ones. "If you're worried about the guy next to you, you're not worried enough about yourself."

By the end of each camp, those individuals become something more.

"I tell everybody we're starting as a group of 40 individuals, but when we're done in four days, this will be a fraternity. And it is," Korn said. "We create this family and this fraternity and it's really special. You can't imagine it until you've experienced it."

And that, more than anything, is why he keeps coming back — almost 50 years after it all began. ■