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# Sports

## Once he was down, Murdock ended up out of goal for MSU

“Whoever plays the best is going to play. Whoever works the hardest is going to play.”

Those words were spoken by Kevin Murdock, just before the Minnesota State men’s hockey season began last October.

Back then, the competition for the Mavericks’ starting goaltending job was wide open. Not one of the three goalies — Murdock, Phil Cook and Austin Lee — had played a second of college, and coach Troy

Jutting said he was making no promises to any of the three in regard to playing time.

“I’ve told three of those kids, ‘I’m looking for somebody who wants to be that guy,’”

Jutting told The Free Press last fall.

“All three have the capability. ... I look at it as a great opportunity for them.”

If you were betting on who would emerge from the group, the odds-on favorite probably would have been Murdock, who was coming off one dandy of a season in the United States Hockey

League. A few college-hockey followers ranked him among the top incoming rookie goalies in the nation.

Today, however, Murdock is the odd man out at MSU. Jutting said last week and Murdock later confirmed in an e-mail that the goalie would be leaving Minnesota State and going back to junior hockey next season.

Murdock, who is finishing up the semester this week, wrote that he was planning on going back to the USHL’s Lincoln Stars “unless something changes.”

He also said he didn’t know whether he’d be returning to Mankato or transferring to another college after that, writing, “as for coming back to MSU or not, I’m not 100 percent sure as what I will be doing.”

It was clear that Murdock fell behind Lee and Cook as the season went on.

Murdock had early opportunities to earn the top job, starting five of the Mavericks’ first 12 games (Lee had the other seven starts). After a particularly rough outing on Nov. 21 at Alaska-Anchorage, though, Murdock never got in another game.

Lee started the next four games, and Cook was added to the mix in December, getting his first career start at Bemidji State (all three goalies won in his college debut). By the time the WCHA playoffs came around, Cook was the No. 1 starter, Lee was the backup and Murdock was not part of the travel party to St. Cloud.

Some have wondered if Murdock deserved another chance after that mid-November loss to the Seawolves.

Perhaps.

However, he also ended up falling to the bottom of the depth chart during that time. And when that happens, especially at a sport’s higher levels, sometimes you never get another chance to climb back to the top.

Think of a Minnesota Vikings training camp in Mankato: When there’s open competition for a job, the players who make the most of their reps move up. Meanwhile, the players who fumble fall behind and end up watching from the sidelines.

Murdock looks like he’ll be a good college goalie someday, whether it’s back

with the Mavericks in a couple of years or with another team. Wherever he ends up, he’ll certainly remember his own words:

“Whoever plays the best is going to play. Whoever works the hardest is going to play.”