

= Willie Mitchell ( ice hockey ) =

William Reid Mitchell ( born April 23 , 1977 ) is a Canadian professional ice hockey defenceman who is currently an unrestricted free agent who most recently served as captain of the Florida Panthers of the National Hockey League ( NHL ) . He is known primarily as a physical defensive defenceman . Mitchell played Junior A in the British Columbia Hockey League ( BCHL ) and Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League ( SJHL ) before joining the college ranks with the Clarkson Knights of ECAC Hockey in 1997 . He won an ECAC championship with Clarkson in 1999 , while also earning playoff MVP and ECAC First Team All @-@ Star honours .

Selected by the New Jersey Devils in the 1996 NHL Entry Draft , he played two seasons with the Albany River Rats of the American Hockey League ( AHL ) while earning limited playing time with the Devils over two seasons . In 2001 , he was traded to the Minnesota Wild where he played four seasons before a brief stint with the Dallas Stars . He signed with the Vancouver Canucks in the 2006 off @-@ season and was named the team 's top defenceman twice , in 2008 and 2009 . After four seasons in Vancouver , Mitchell signed with the Los Angeles Kings in August 2010 . While with Los Angeles , Mitchell won two Stanley Cups ( 2012 and 2014 ) before signing with the Florida Panthers in the 2014 off @-@ season .

Internationally , he has represented Team Canada once at the 2004 World Championships , capturing a gold medal .

= = Early life = =

Mitchell was born on April 23 , 1977 , to Reid and Nadija Mitchell . He has a sister named Chantal . His father works as a heavy @-@ duty mechanic with Western Forest Products , while his mother is a Croatian @-@ born immigrant who works as a terminal service agent for B.C. Ferries . Mitchell 's grandfather , Les Mitchell , played amateur senior hockey and once earned a tryout with the New York Rangers during the Original Six @-@ era .

Mitchell was born and raised in Port McNeill , British Columbia , a small logging town on Vancouver Island . He grew up working on the docks in his hometown unloading fish and cleaning equipment . He first began skating at the age of four and took figure skating . Growing up as a Vancouver Canucks fan , his father would take him across to the mainland to see games at the Pacific Coliseum . He played minor hockey as a winger with the North Island Eagles and won back @-@ to @-@ back double @-@ A provincial titles in pee wee and bantam with the club . At the age of 15 , he left home after being recruited to play for Athol Murray College of Notre Dame , a high school in Wilcox , Saskatchewan . It was there that he switched from wing to defence . He played with the Notre Dame Hounds ' midget team of the Saskatchewan Midget Hockey League ( SMHL ) and recorded 15 points over 31 games in 1993 ? 94 . From there , he earned an athletic scholarship with Clarkson University in Potsdam , New York .

= = Playing career = =

= = = Junior and college hockey ( 1994 ? 99 ) = = =

As a junior hockey player , Mitchell began in the BCHL with the Kelowna Spartans in 1994 ? 95 , recording 11 points over 42 games . After one season with Kelowna , he joined the Melfort Mustangs of the SJHL . Following his first season with Melfort in 1995 ? 96 , he was selected by the New Jersey Devils in the eighth round , 199th overall , in the 1996 NHL Entry Draft . He returned to Melfort for a second season and recorded 56 points in 64 games to earn the Top Defenceman Award and SJHL First All @-@ Star Team honours .

Beginning in 1997 ? 98 , Mitchell began two seasons of college hockey with Clarkson University Golden Knights of the ECAC . In his freshman year , he recorded 26 points over 34 games , fourth among league defencemen , and was named co @-@ Rookie of the Year with Clarkson teammate

Erik Cole . He also earned ECAC All @-@ Rookie and ECAC Second All @-@ Star honours . Clarkson advanced to the ECAC Tournament Final against Princeton University , but lost 5 ? 4 in double overtime . The following season , Mitchell led all Golden Knights defencemen in scoring with 29 points ( 10 goals and 19 assists ) and a + 13 rating in 34 games . He finished the season with a league player of the week recognition on March 1 , 1999 . As Clarkson met Princeton in the 1999 ECAC Semi @-@ final , Mitchell scored the game winning goal with a slap shot from centre ice with three seconds remaining in regulation . Clarkson went on to defeat St. Lawrence University 3 ? 2 in the final to capture the ECAC championship . Mitchell earned tournament MVP honours and was also named to the ECAC First All @-@ Star Team and NCAA East Second All @-@ American Team .

= = = New Jersey Devils ( 1999 ? 2001 ) = = =

Following his sophomore season with Clarkson , Mitchell decided to forgo his final two seasons of college eligibility to turn professional in the New Jersey Devils system . He played the final six games of the 1998 ? 99 AHL season with the Devils ' minor league affiliate , the Albany River Rats , registering a goal and three assists .

In his first Devils ' training camp in September 1999 , he broke a finger in his left hand during a fight in a rookie game against the Boston Bruins . The injury required three pins to set the finger in place . Although sidelined , the Devils signed him to a rookie contract in September 1999 . After recovering , he was assigned to the River Rats . Mitchell received a call @-@ up late in the season and made his NHL debut on March 27 , 2000 , in a 5 ? 2 loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs . He stayed with the Devils for a week before being returned to the AHL . He finished the 1999 ? 2000 season with 19 points over 63 games with the River Rats and no points in two games with the Devils .

The following season , Mitchell made the Devils ' opening lineup , but was a regular healthy scratch . After appearing in 11 games , he was returned to the AHL on November 22 , 2000 . He registered his first NHL point , an assist , during his initial stint . After injuries to Devils defencemen Scott Niedermayer and Brian Rafalski , Mitchell was recalled on February 10 , 2001 . The following month , after having been sent back down to the AHL , he was traded to the Minnesota Wild on March 4 , 2001 , in exchange for defenceman Sean O 'Donnell .

= = = Minnesota Wild and Dallas Stars ( 2001 ? 06 ) = = =

Following the trade , Mitchell became a full @-@ time NHLer , playing in 17 games with the Wild to finish the season . He completed his rookie NHL season with a goal and 10 assists over 33 games between the Devils and Wild . In his first full season with the Wild in 2001 ? 02 , he recorded three goals and 13 points in 68 games , while earning \$ 550 @,@ 000 from his initial rookie contract with the Devils . He missed 14 games due to three separate shoulder , groin and wrist injuries . Establishing himself as a top @-@ four defenceman on the team , paired with Brad Bombardir , Mitchell ranked third on the team in average ice time with 21 : 25 minutes per game . The following season , he improved to a third @-@ ranked plus @-@ 13 on the team after going ? 16 the previous season . He went on to help the club make a run in the 2003 playoffs to the semi @-@ finals , leading the team with a + 5 rating in 18 post @-@ season games . He suffered a cheekbone injury during the first round against the Colorado Avalanche that required him to wear a fully visored helmet for the remainder of the playoffs . After defeating the Avalanche and Vancouver Canucks in the first two rounds , the Wild were eliminated in four games by the Mighty Ducks of Anaheim in the semi @-@ finals .

In the off @-@ season , he was re @-@ signed to a one @-@ year contract by the Wild on August 11 , 2003 . He recorded 14 points over 70 games in 2003 ? 04 , while leading the Wild with a + 12 rating and ranking second in average ice time at 22 : 35 minutes per game . Minnesota failed to qualify for the playoffs .

On June 30 , 2004 , the Wild tendered Mitchell a qualifying offer , but he later filed for arbitration on July 7 . The two sides avoided arbitration by agreeing on a one @-@ year , \$ 1 @.@ 775 million

deal on August 12 , 2004 . However , due to the NHL lockout , Mitchell was inactive in 2004 ? 05 . With NHL play set to resume for 2005 ? 06 , he re @-@ signed with the Wild to another one @-@ year , \$ 1 million contract on August 9 , 2005 . In December 2005 , he was named team captain as part of the Wild 's monthly rotating captaincy ( he was then succeeded by Brian Rolston in February 2006 ) .

At the 2005 ? 06 NHL trade deadline , Mitchell was traded away to the Dallas Stars as a rental player in exchange for defencemen Martin ?koula and Shawn Belle on March 9 , 2006 . Mitchell closed the season playing 16 games and one playoff round with Dallas before becoming an unrestricted free agent in the off @-@ season .

= = = Vancouver Canucks ( 2006 ? 2010 ) = = =

On July 1 , 2006 , the Vancouver Canucks signed Mitchell to a four @-@ year , \$ 14 million contract . Canucks General Manager Dave Nonis had previously attempted to acquire him at the previous season 's trade deadline before he was sent to Dallas . His acquisition as a free agent followed the signings of goaltender Roberto Luongo and Head Coach Alain Vigneault , which reflected an effort from Nonis to develop a defence @-@ first system .

Early in the 2006 ? 07 season , Mitchell suffered a concussion on October 23 and missed nine games . He then missed 11 more games due to a recurring groin injury in February and March 2007 . He finished his first season with the Canucks recording a goal and 11 points in 62 games . His 4 : 57 minutes of average shorthanded ice time per game ranked third in the NHL behind Derian Hatcher and Adam Foote . He helped the team to the second round of the 2007 playoffs , where they were defeated by the Anaheim Ducks in five games .

During his second season with Vancouver , he missed ten games with a fractured vertebra . The injury was sustained on December 31 , 2007 , in a loss to the Calgary Flames , while trying to dodge a check . However , Mitchell continued to play with the injury for nine games afterwards . He recorded two goals and 12 points , while leading the team with 108 blocked shots and 1 @,@ 646 : 20 minutes in total ice time . At the end of the 2007 ? 08 season , he was awarded his first Babe Pratt Trophy as the Canucks ' top defenceman .

With the departure of long @-@ time Canucks captain Markus Näslund to free agency in the 2008 off @-@ season , Mitchell was considered a leading candidate for captaincy . The Canucks instead appointed team MVP Roberto Luongo as the first goaltender to be a captain since 1947 ? 48 on September 30 , 2008 . Mitchell was named alternate captain along with forward Ryan Kesler and defenceman Mattias Öhlund . Due to Luongo 's limitations as a goaltender , Mitchell was designated the captain 's traditional role of disputing calls by the officials and relaying messages to the coach .

During the subsequent 2008 ? 09 season , Mitchell recorded career @-@ highs with three goals , 20 assists , 23 points and a team @-@ best + 29 rating , earning his second consecutive Babe Pratt Trophy . He added two assists and led all Canucks in average ice time at 24 : 12 minutes per game in the post @-@ season . He helped the Canucks advance to the second round , where they were eliminated by the Chicago Blackhawks in six games .

Early on in the 2009 ? 10 season , Mitchell delivered an open @-@ ice hit that concussed Blackhawks captain Jonathan Toews in the two teams ' first game against each other since the 2009 playoffs . Mitchell had just exited the penalty box when he caught Toews with his head down receiving a pass in the neutral zone ; the hit was deemed legal as Mitchell checked Toews with his shoulder . Toews was sidelined for six games as a result . Later on in the season , Mitchell suffered a concussion himself , receiving a hit from opposing forward Evgeni Malkin , causing his head to hit the end boards , during a game against the Pittsburgh Penguins on January 16 . He was sidelined for the remainder of the season with post @-@ concussion syndrome , finishing with 12 points and a + 13 rating in 48 games .

Unsure if the injury had ended his career , Mitchell later recalled his subsequent recovery as " the toughest year of [ his ] life . " Not speaking to the media until after the Canucks were eliminated in the playoffs , he expressed criticism towards both Malkin for the hit resulting in his concussion and to NHL Senior Vice President Colin Campbell for not taking any disciplinary action . He denounced

Campbell for being " inconsistent ... hand [ ing ] down suspensions and fines on result [ instead of the nature of a hit ] , " as Mitchell 's injury was not immediately apparent following the game .

Mitchell 's four @-@ year deal with the Canucks expired on July 1 , 2010 , and he became an unrestricted free agent . Mitchell was still involved in negotiations with Vancouver to re @-@ sign , but concerns over his head injury , as well as the new defensive acquisitions of Keith Ballard and Dan Hamhuis in the off @-@ season factored against the possibility of remaining with the Canucks .

= = = Los Angeles Kings ( 2010 ? 2014 ) = = =

On August 25 , 2010 , Mitchell signed a two @-@ year deal worth \$ 3 @.@ 5 million per season with the Los Angeles Kings . He had interest from several other teams , including the Washington Capitals and San Jose Sharks . The Canucks were also offering a one @-@ year contract between \$ 1 @.@ 8 and \$ 2 million , but were not willing to match the Kings ' deal . Mitchell expressed disappointment in leaving the Canucks , but stated he was " looking forward to going to a team which , I get the feeling , is really passionate about having me there . "

Mitchell began the season on a defensive pairing with Drew Doughty . Nearly a month into the campaign , he notched his first goal as a King , scoring short handed against the Dallas Stars in a 5 ? 2 victory on October 28 , 2010 . In November 2010 , he sustained a wrist injury during a game against the Nashville Predators , sidelining him for 12 games . After recovering , he suffered a knee injury , keeping him from another 11 games . Later in the season , during a game against the Phoenix Coyotes , on March 3 , 2011 , Mitchell was hit in the face by a shot from opposing forward Kyle Turris , requiring 53 stitches . He did not miss any additional games , however . Mitchell finished the season with five goals and five assists over 57 games , ranking third in average ice time per contest with the Kings . He added a goal and an assist in six playoff games as the Kings were eliminated by the San Jose Sharks in the first round . On February 24 , 2012 , Mitchell signed a two @-@ year contract extension with the Kings . In the 2012 playoffs , Mitchell helped the Kings defeat the Vancouver Canucks in the first round , the St. Louis Blues in the semi @-@ finals ( winning four games straight ) and the Phoenix Coyotes in the Conference Finals . The Kings made the Stanley Cup Finals for the first time since 1993 and defeated the New Jersey Devils ; this also marked Mitchell 's first appearance in the Stanley Cup Final . Mitchell was the second player , after team captain Dustin Brown , to hoist the Cup after the win .

During the 2012 ? 13 NHL lockout , Mitchell began having knee problems , requiring a first surgery to clean up debris and a second surgery after re @-@ injuring the knee during rehabilitation prior to the 2012 ? 13 King 's training camp . Mitchell was out for the remainder of the 2012 ? 13 season and questionable for the 2013 ? 14 season .

Mitchell did return alongside Slava Voynov in the 2013 ? 14 season . Mitchell missed a handful of games in the second round of the 2014 Stanley Cup playoffs due to an injury , but returned to beat the Chicago Blackhawks in the Western Conference Finals and win his second Stanley Cup over the New York Rangers .

= = = Florida Panthers ( 2014 ? 2016 ) = = =

With the Kings facing cap constraints , Mitchell was not retained as a free agent . On July 1 , 2014 , he signed a two @-@ year \$ 8 @.@ 5 million contract with the Florida Panthers . On October 6 , 2014 , Mitchell was named the eighth captain in Florida Panthers history .

= = International play = =

Mitchell has made one international appearance for Canada in his career . After the Minnesota Wild failed to qualify for the 2004 playoffs , he was named to the national team for the 2004 World Championships in the Czech Republic . He was joined on the squad by Wild teammate Nick Schultz in the first group of players chosen by General Manager Jim Nill on April 5 , 2004 . Appearing in nine

games , Mitchell helped Canada to a gold medal , defeating Sweden 5 ? 3 in the final .

= = Playing style = =

Mitchell plays in the style of a stay @-@ at @-@ home defenceman . While with the Vancouver Canucks , he established himself as their top shutdown defenceman , being matched up against opposing teams ' best players and spending significant time on the penalty kill . He had usually formed a defensive pairing on the Canucks with the often offensive @-@ minded Kevin Bieksa . Bieksa has credited Mitchell with teaching him to be more aware of game situations before jumping into the rush .

In order to defend effectively , Mitchell opts to use a longer @-@ than @-@ usual hockey stick . Prior to a game against the Calgary Flames on February 17 , 2009 , opposing Head Coach Mike Keenan accused Mitchell of playing with an illegal hockey stick . Mitchell responded by asserting he uses the League maximum length at 63 inches .

Mitchell is also known for his leadership qualities , serving as an alternate captain on the Canucks . During his tenure with the Minnesota Wild , he was named captain once for the months of December 2005 and January 2006 as part of the Wild 's rotating captaincy system . At the start of the 2014 ? 15 season , Mitchell was also named the captain of the Florida Panthers .

= = Personal life = =

Mitchell married Minnesota @-@ native Megan on August 17 , 2006 , in Napa Valley , California . They reside in the Yaletown neighbourhood in downtown Vancouver , while returning to Mitchell 's hometown of Port McNeill during the summer , where he fishes avidly .

Mitchell is an active philanthropist around the Port McNeill community . In 2004 , he hosted the first Willie Mitchell Classic , a celebrity golf tournament to raise scholarship funds for high school students around his hometown . He has also regularly donated game @-@ used equipment to fundraise for his former minor hockey team , the North Island Eagles .

In the summer of 2009 , Mitchell threw the first pitch at a Seattle Mariners game against the Toronto Blue Jays at Safeco Field in Seattle , Washington .

= = Career statistics = =

= = = Regular season and playoffs = = =

= = = International = = =

= = Awards = =

= = = SJHL = = =

= = = College = = =

= = = NHL = = =

= = = Vancouver Canucks = = =

