

THE JERSEY CRITIC

SO WHY IS Jeff Barak the guy who gets to be the jersey critic for *The Hockey News*?

"I definitely have an eye for what people like and don't like," said Barak, whose online blog *thirdstringgoalie* – slang for 'a fan who sits in the stands wearing a jersey' – has cultivated a blossoming fan base since weaving its way onto the web in May, 2009.

A freelance photographer from Minnesota, Barak has devoted a lot of his spare time – and spare income – to amassing 460 jerseys from various leagues.

"I've been collecting them for 25 years," Barak said. "I've got a pulse for what people feel is a good jersey."

Barak ventures beyond the (not always) pretty pictures on a player's uniform and delves into hockey's early days to "feature different jerseys from my collection with a historical perspective" on his blog.

His photographer's eye was drawn to these workaday items as palettes for color, concept and creativity. The NHL's post-Original Six era unleashed a pack of howling jerseys, but Barak finds visual relief in an earlier age – 1909 to 1920.

"I'm tuned in to the aesthetics of the throwback vintage feel and what looks right from having an appreciation for hockey history, which is kind of what my blog is about," Barak said.

The collecting bug bit him by accident in the late 1980s at a University of Minnesota Golden Gophers exhibition game versus Moscow Dynamo when he managed to barter some pins and cash for one of the Russian player's jerseys.

This publication won't take the credit (blame?) for Barak's hobby, but we'll accept responsibility for our small involvement; his prized possession is "a Pavel Kostichkin Soviet Red Army game-worn jersey – purchased through an ad in *The Hockey News* in 1991."

Aside from his Cold War cache, Barak's most treasured pieces tend to be underdogs; items so weird, curious and ugly that only the mother of the name on the back could love them.

Without further delay, here's Barak's list of the NHL's most curious, weird and ugly looks.

– *Monika Moravan*