

How The Barons Became The Sun Valley Suns

By Phil Hecken with Lex Levy, on September 21st, 2019



As you guys are aware, when Paul takes his annual August sabbatical, I will put out the call for readers to submit pitches for articles. I also have “my” guys lined up for pieces. As August progressed, I found myself with too many guest pieces and not enough days in which to run them. So, here today is reader Lex Levy, who wanted to take a brief look at a much quainter time in the National Hockey League, when a professional team actually gifted its old uniforms to an amateur men’s team in the mountains of Idaho. Yes, you read that correctly. It’s a nice short read, and I think you guys will enjoy it. Here’s Lex:

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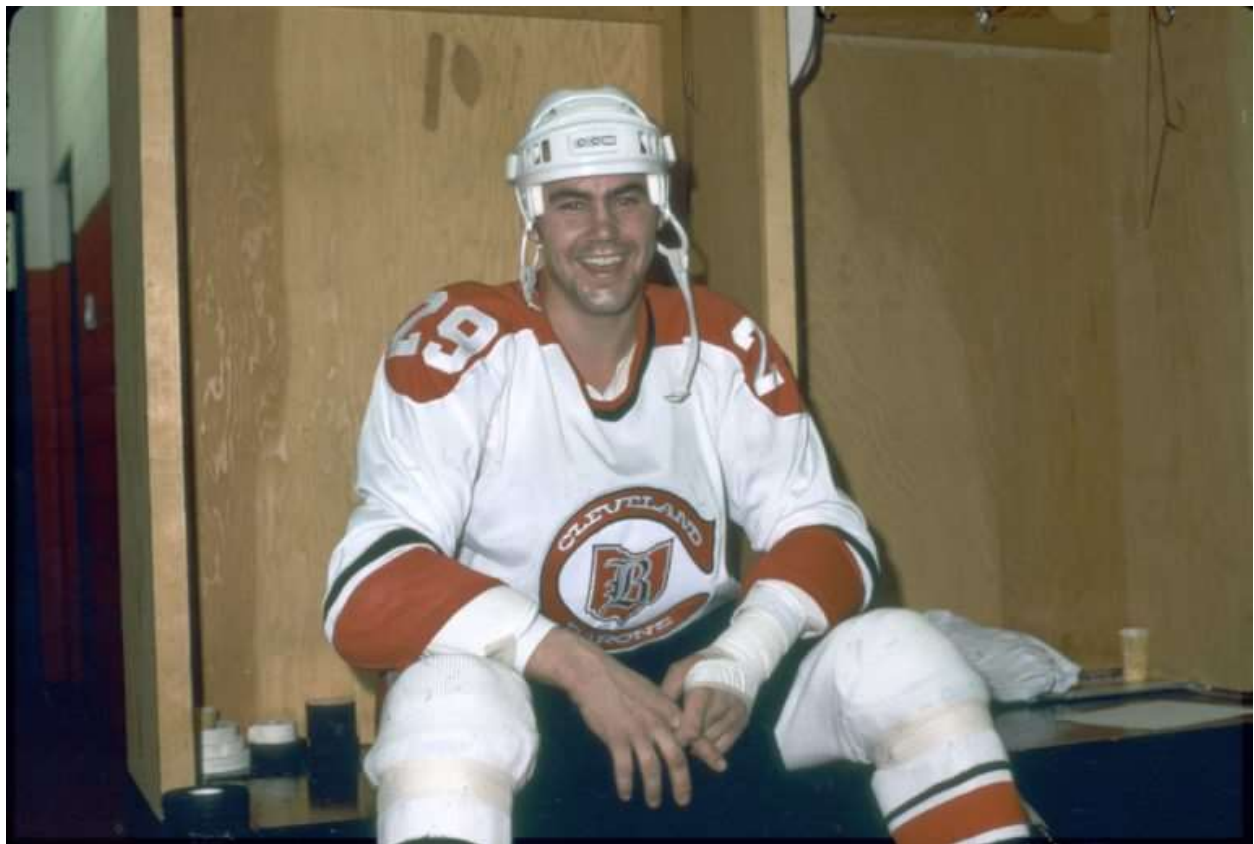
By Lex Levy

As a kid growing up in the ski town of Ketchum, Idaho in the 70’s and 80’s, I knew very little about hockey or the NHL. My time was spent skiing and sledding in the winter and playing baseball and swimming in lakes and rivers in the summer. I was aware that our neighboring community Sun Valley had an amateur men’s team. I was brought along to at least one game by my older brother because he got stuck babysitting me, a game he spent making out with his

girlfriend. I got seriously hockey crazy when the USA Olympic team won the gold medal in 1980 and started playing myself shortly after that.

Obviously, after that I became very interested in our local team, the Sun Valley Suns. I attended games regularly, was a stick boy for one season, and sold Suns t-shirts at games as a job. One thing that always stuck out to me was that the Suns had really cool jerseys. Their red, black, and white colors jumped out and looked classy, but were different than the Blackhawks, the NHL's standard bearer for the use of those colors. Over time, the story of the origin of the Suns and the unis they wore trickled down to me. Here is the short and sweet version.

The Gund brothers had been part owners of the Golden Seals during their brief run in the NHL. When the team failed to find success in California, the Gunds gave it a go in Ohio with a new team, the Cleveland Barons.



The Barons were part of the NHL from 1976 to 1978.



Lack of attendance and success on the ice led to them merging with the Minnesota North Stars, who were having their own financial issues. Prior to this, about 1975, the Gunds, who spent time in the Ketchum/Sun Valley area, helped start the Sun Valley Suns team. George Gund was one of the original Suns and was a big supporter of youth hockey in the area. When the Barons folded, Gund donated their entire uni kits to the Suns — home and away jerseys, breezers, socks, gloves, maybe even helmets too. So the Suns, which had grown into a top-notch men's team thanks to an influx of East Coast players who loved to ski and the general lifestyle of the area, now sported very classy uniforms which lent an air of professionalism to what has always been a proudly amateur team.

As for the jerseys, these were the old-school satiny ones that looked beautiful, but got very heavy with sweat and water. The home whites had red shoulder yokes and both jerseys had a very traditional design that held their own with the classic NHL designs of the day.



The Suns wore the old Barons jerseys throughout most of the 1980's, until they became too tattered and worn. I hope you get a kick out of this little-known history of how an NHL uniform set was given a second life with an amateur hockey team in the mountains of Idaho.

