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Nations on their Shoulders:

How Member Nations' Flags Past and Present Dictate what their Jerseys Look like in the International Ice Hockey Federation

Brien Puff '09

CORE 152

For the most part, the flags of the world's nations have changed very significantly and rather dramatically since 1898. Some countries have grown larger, others smaller. Some have disappeared, others have been created. Some have had a combination of several of those actions occur in their twentieth-century histories. But, whether these things have happened voluntarily, violently, or otherwise, the flags of the changing ("change" in the sense of evolution—for the better—or devolution—for the worse) country have been similarly changed, matching the image that the leaders of that country want to both project to the outside world and what they want to have its citizens honor and believe about their home.

As the world has progressed through the years, it has also become more social. There have been revolutions and wars, yes, but there has also been the revolution of an increased sense of international friendship and sportsmanship. While this has grown, battles between countries on fields have sprouted up, and from those sprouts have come international tournaments and competitions in almost any kind of sport one can think of. Most prominent in this international arena, of course, is the Olympics, which allows all these countries to parade around and compete under the banner of their flag, letting the rest of the world know what it is that they as a people stand for; it gives the smaller countries a chance to fight the bigger ones without actually engaging in war, which, in the end, is always a victory for all the parties that are involved in the situation.

But, since national teams have been

competing against each other in athletic competitions, they have needed a uniform to identify them. This has rung true for any sport (just take a look at every sport in the Olympics, where no one does not have at least the name of his or her representative country somewhere on his or her person—even swimmers). And, naturally, as sports uniforms have progressed, they have needed an inspiration on which to be designed. So, as a flag is the symbol of a country in diplomatic and, in a way, land-claiming sense (which operates under the assumption that a country owns a certain piece of land when their flag is displayed prominently above it), the jersey of the national team is the symbol of a country in a sports apparel way. The athletes cannot wear their homes' actual flags on their backs (if they could, jerseys and uniforms themselves might not exist today), so they must turn to the cloth and fabric of jerseys.

As one surely is aware, there are certainly many different types of sports in the world. But, not all of them garner as much international attention as others. Soccer, of course, is by far the most popular international sport being played in, quite possibly, every country in the world. National soccer uniforms (or, “football kits,” as they are known in Europe) have a tendency to be, to put it quite bluntly, rather bland, often using only two colors from a country since simple designs have become trendy in the late part of the last century and early part of the current century. As far as national or even team symbols on the jersey go, national teams only have their national soccer organization’s patch (or “badge”) on the upper left hand corner of the shirt. And, since the 1970’s European soccer teams have been allowed to feature sponsor logos on the fronts of their kits in order to increase revenue (from both the sponsor and the sales of replica and authentic jerseys to the public), which are more often than not larger, more prominent, and seemingly more central to the kit than the actual team badge.¹

There are other sports that are internationally popular and have their own independent world organizations and competitions. Basketball has had a rather recent rise in global popularity thanks to the resurgence of the National Basketball Association in the 1990’s, but it is still working its way up in the world. Coincidentally, their uniforms are quite nice in comparison to the soccer kits; though still rather conservative for the most part, they do a good job displaying (typically) the country’s name and representing the flag with a mixture of the flag’s primary colors mixed with text, stripes, or trim in a secondary color (i.e. Qatar). And, though

less common, some national teams incorporate sponsor logos across the front of their jerseys as well; expectedly, it’s the bigger, usually better, more popular teams (i.e. France and sometimes Argentina) that have the sponsors across their chests, while the smaller, less popular teams (again, as in Qatar) have clear, sponsor-free uniforms.

There is one other sport that remains popular through most of the world, and that is ice hockey. Most of the world plays the sport, and though it may not seem like it sometimes in the United States, it is still one of the most popular games, especially in, of course, Canada, Europe, and Asia. It has grown so much that it has its own annual world championships (for men, women, under-18, and even for seniors, or what they call “oldtimers”) run by the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF)². In the Federation, there are fifty teams that compete in three different divisions, the highest being Division I whose tournament pits sixteen teams against each other in a different country each year.

These sixteen teams usually come mostly from Europe, as well as North America, as those places are where the best hockey players typically come from, but the tournament has also had national clubs from Asia in addition to the Australian national team. The European teams largely consist of independent eastern bloc nations that surfaced in the downfall of the Soviet Union. It is easy to tell which ones they are looking at the 1898 flag chart: while Russia had not yet become the soviet republic the world knew it as from 1922 until 1992, there are no flags pictured for the nations of Latvia, Slovenia, Finland (which separated from Russia after its revolution in 1917)³,

¹ Moor, Dave. “A Brief History of Football Kit Design.” [Historical Football Kits](http://www.historicalkits.co.uk/Articles/History.htm). <<http://www.historicalkits.co.uk/Articles/History.htm>>.

² “IIHF History.” [IIHF](http://www.iihf.com/archive/archive.htm). <<http://www.iihf.com/archive/archive.htm>>.

³ Hentilä, Seppo. “Finland’s Leap into Democracy.” [Virtual Finland](#). Nov. 2001.

Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. Not including the Russian state itself, those are six of the sixteen teams, nearly half of the tournament (the participants differ every year, but this appears to be a usual number every year).

The other thirty-four teams that comprise the IIHF are a little more varied than those in the Division I tournament, ranging from Andorra to the USA, Mongolia to Ireland, Japan to South Africa. But, what do they all have in common? They all looked to their countries' flags when coming up with the designs of their jerseys. Some are subtle mentions of the banner of that country, like simple striping or a crest, and others flat out copy the flag design directly, whether it be on the front of the jersey, the sides of the jersey, or even on the socks of the uniform. Many incorporate a symbol, crest, or coat of arms that was seen in the past on flags as far back as 1898. And, though rare, a few of the jerseys in the IIHF actually appear to be based more on the nineteenth-century incarnation of the flag than the modern day version.

The jerseys are quite different from each other, but there seems to be a basic pattern to them. Teams either have on their chest the crest or coat of arms of their country or their country's name, and in a rather large number of circumstances, they have both. From here, they also have a choice to make regarding stripes, which overwhelmingly seem to favor a "classic" look—that is, having a traditional-looking jersey with stripes at the base of the jersey around the waist, on the sleeves, across the shoulders, or a combination of the three. But, some also have what could be considered a "modern classic" look, which can be considered the basic template of a traditional jersey but with avant-garde stripe designs like diagonal and asymmetrical

<<http://virtual.finland.fi/netcomm/news/showarticle.asp?intNWSAID=25908>>.

stripes (for domestic examples, see the National Hockey League's Anaheim Ducks for the diagonal stripes or the Atlanta Thrashers' home jerseys on which "Atlanta" is written down one sleeve but not the other).

There are also the "new" jerseys, which are a completely new, scientifically-designed jersey, which the NHL is slated to introduce for all its teams in the 2007-2008 season and some of the world's national teams have adopted already, as seen in the 2006 Winter Olympics hockey tournament and the 2006 IIHF World Championship in Latvia. The new jerseys utilize different fabrics set in panels meant for better movement, better moisture control, and a more streamlined form for players⁴. Since the uniform has visible panels where the different types of fabrics are stitched in, teams have adapted to accommodate these changes by putting stripes down the sides of their jerseys from the armpit to waist, new designs around the elbows, and a less-restricting strip of fabric that runs from the front of the armpit to the collar⁵. Many teams that participate in the Division I championship tournament have opted to use this type of jersey since they have been touted (by the manufacturers as well as leagues making the switch like the NHL) to be so much better than the older, classic-looking jerseys.

Teams with this new style of jersey tend to use both the stripe pattern from their flags and their country name (usually seen in a stylized text in the country's language) in addition to their crest or coat of arms. Kazakhstan does just this, taking the seal

⁴ "RBK Edge." Reebok. <<http://www.rbkedgeuniform.com>>.

⁵ Please note that this is the Reebok version of this type of jersey. In my research, I find that most national teams wear the Nike version, which has slightly different panels and panel shapes, however I have not found exactly why this is.

(which depicts a shining sun rising above an eagle⁶) off of their flag and placing it above “Kazakhstan” written in Kazakh, the official language of the former Soviet republic⁷. The sky blue color of the field of the flag is used as the main color of the Kazakh jersey, and the striping up the side and down the arms is the same gold color as the sun and eagle and white (though it does not appear on the flag at all).⁸

It should be noted that Kazakhstan, as well as every other team competing in the IIHF tournaments, have two different colored jerseys: one of their primary color and the other of white, save for some few instances. These jerseys often have the same design as the colored jerseys, but the white (or whichever color is taking over as the primary color) is switched with a white stripe color, so the jersey is now white and the stripe a solid color when the colored jersey has a white stripe⁹. This can be seen in the Kazakh jersey.

Latvia also does the same thing as Kazakhstan for their jersey. Looking at the Latvian flag, one would think that there is really no way to make a fine-looking jersey out of it with its red-white-red horizontal



stripe scheme, especially since the red is a “dark brick red” that is “not really red but almost brown.”¹⁰ So, the Latvian primary jersey is designed with the “dark brick red” color and alternating white-red-white stripes. The white jersey, on the other hand, replicates the Latvian flag with its red-white-red stripes down the sides and arms. In the center of the jersey is a modified Latvian coat of arms (the background of the rising sun is blue rather than gray)¹¹. Below this is the country’s name written in Latvian (in white on the primary jersey and in black on the white jersey).

Other countries with a similar design on a new-style jersey are Belarus, Finland, Russia Slovenia, and the Ukraine. The Russian jersey is interesting in that while they use all the colors of the current Russian national flag, they also use the state coat of arms, which has been included on the Russian presidential flag, but resembles the double-headed eagle from the Russian imperial standard use in the nineteenth and early twentieth century—the only differences between the two being that the eagle is now golden on a black background (as opposed to the other way around as in 1898), it is holding a scepter and crown, which, oddly enough, was not the case two centuries ago when it held four scrolls, and the picture of the horseman presumed to be St. George on the

⁶ “Kazakhstan.” The World Factbook.
<<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/kz.html>>.

⁷ “Country Profile.” Embassy of Kazakhstan to the United States and Canada.
<<http://www.kazakhembus.com/countryprofile.html>>.

⁸ So as to not clutter up this paper with bibliographic entries from most of the same places, the jerseys mentioned are all based on photographs or pictures from either the 2006 IIHF World Championship (any team with a new-style jersey) or the individual countries’ national ice hockey organization website, i.e. the Australian Ice Hockey Federation or USA Hockey (all other teams).

⁹ For the sake of ease, the colored jersey will henceforth be known as the “primary” jersey (because of its use of a primary color) and the white jersey will continue to be referred to as the “white” jersey. Teams without the latter will have their two referred to by the respective colors.

¹⁰ “Latvia.” Flags of the World. 11 Mar 2006.
<<http://fotw.fivestarflags.com/lv.html>>.

¹¹ “Latvia - Coat of Arms.” Flags of the World. 9 Apr 2002.
<[http://fotw.fivestarflags.com/lv\).html#coa](http://fotw.fivestarflags.com/lv).html#coa)>



eagle's shield is now facing to the left rather than the "heraldic right side."¹²

Including the Russian squad's jersey, all distinctly feature a national crest or coat of arms over the name of the country, except for Slovenia, who wears the symbol for its national hockey organization. Some countries choose to put their national hockey program's logo on the left chest of their players in the form of a small patch, but Slovenia on the other hand chooses to honor it with a central role in the nation's jersey. The United States does this to a certain extent as well, but they use only the "USA" text from the full logo that uses the words "USA Hockey," so one can consider this jersey as an example of those that use only the name of the country and no sort of crest or coat of arms. There is always an allusion to the flag of the individual nation on the uniform, but there isn't any sort of national seal or crest that accompanies it, unless one considers the kangaroo that appears on the Australian team (as well as their nickname, the Mighty Roos) with the stars that decorate the field of blue on the nation's flag¹³, the lion that appears on the Danish team, or the "s" transforming into red-and-white, waving bunting reminiscent of the American flag on the USA team national symbols. The Australian jersey is an odd exception, too, because their primary color



is yellow and their secondary color is green (one might even go so far as to say that their tertiary color is black), leaving the only indication that the team came from Australia being in the arrangement of five stars around the kangaroo, unless one looked at the base of the back of the jersey where the country name is listed.

Some fine examples of a country only being represented by its colors and name are seen in Hungary, Switzerland, Lithuania, and Liechtenstein, but again, the latter's jersey has colors that barely on the national flag. Liechtenstein, a country so small that it was not even recognized on the "Flags of Various Nations" diagram, has two horizontal stripes—the top, blue, the bottom, red—on its flag with a yellow crown in the upper left corner representing its constitutional monarchy government¹⁴. These colors can be seen in their primary jersey, a traditional-type blue sweater with red shoulder and cuff striping, and the country's name in wavy, yellow letter across the front of the jersey. Their socks, coincidentally, have the exact same color and striping scheme as the flag of Nicaragua did in 1898; this was, most likely, not an original intention of the designers.

Lithuania also does something original with their national team's colors.

¹² "Russian Coat of Arms." *Flags of the World*. 11 Nov 2000.
<<http://flagspot.net/flags/ru.html>>.

¹³ "Jersey – Australian National Team (Away)." *IHA Online Merchandise*.
<<http://panhandling.com.au/ab3d/productdetails-size.asp?ProductID=120>>.

¹⁴ "Liechtenstein." *CIA – The World Factbook*. 8 Feb 2007.
<<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ls.html>>.

This time, unlike Liechtenstein, they downplay some of the colors given equal space on their flag. On their primary jersey, the color is yellow. Their shoulder and cuff striping is green with a red outline, which is interesting not only because of the uniqueness of the design but also because of what the colors of the flag mean: the yellow stands for grain, the green for forests, and the red for the blood shed by its patriots that defended it.¹⁵ With any luck, the distribution of colors on the hockey team's jersey does represent the true feelings towards each of the three things represented.

Italy has a very interesting color scheme. They have green, white, and red stripes on their side panels and arms, creating a nice allusion to their home flag, and there's also a small patch in the top left corner of the jersey, next to the collar. But, their primary jersey is a light blue. Blue hasn't been seen on an Italian standard flag



(other than the presidential flag) since 1946, the year they instituted the common green-white-red flag in use today. Before then, the ruling house was the Savoy family, and that was the color of their coat of arms, which had appeared on the Italian flag since 1861, the year they began their rule¹⁶. The Italian team—not just the hockey team, but all of

them, including the very successful soccer team—has worn it even since the family was overthrown¹⁷.

There is one other design style that teams seem to gravitate towards, and that also happens to be the most popular design amongst the IIHF member nations. Instead of just the country name scrolling across the chest of the countries' players, these nations have opted to simply put a crest, a seal, or some sort of symbol on the chests of their players. In the IIHF, these can be broken down into about four categories based on the overall theme of what is on the front of the jersey.

First, there are the IIHF teams that feature lions: Belgium and Luxembourg. The former nation has had a lion on its royal standard since 1896¹⁸, as seen in 1898, but the national flag is down to its black, yellow, and red basic vertical stripes. Regardless, the Belgian national hockey team has on its primary (red) jersey a lion. But, this lion is somewhat colorful, as it has thirds colored black, yellow, and red, in that order, just like the flag. There are stripes on the arms of this traditional jersey that resemble, oddly enough, the Belgian flag of the 1789 uprising against the Austrian Hapsburgs (three horizontal red, black, and yellow stripes).



Luxembourg, on the other hand, uses a lion colored with the red of their flag.

¹⁵ "Lithuania – the State Flag." Flags of the World. 11 Nov 2006. <<http://flagspot.net/flags/lt.html#his>>.

¹⁶ Booth, Lawrence and Georgina Turner. "Why do Italy play in blue?" Guardian Unlimited. 21 Jul 2004. <<http://football.guardian.co.uk/theknowledge/story/0,13854,1265307,00.html>>.

¹⁷ Ingle, Sean and Paul MacInnes. "Knowledge Unlimited." Guardian Unlimited. 12 Jul 2000. <http://football.guardian.co.uk/News_Story/0,1563,342538,00.html>.

¹⁸ "Belgium: Royal Standard." Flags of the World. 25 Feb 2000. <http://flagspot.net/flags/be_roy.html>.

They have a traditional jersey of red, white, and blue (in that order, top to bottom stripes) where there's a red lion, as mentioned, a thick, blue stripe down the shoulders and arms, and the pattern of the national flag on the cuffs around the waist and wrists on the white jersey.

More teams have coats of arms on the fronts of their jerseys. These include the Czech Republic, Germany, Iceland, New Zealand, and Poland. There is nothing all that remarkable about them (they all use the nations' coats of arms and main colors to illustrate their jerseys), but there are some interesting notes on Germany and New Zealand. Germany uses the crest of a black eagle that is somewhat reminiscent of the eagle on the 1898 man of war flag. They also have four places where they are adorned with the modern German flag: there is one on each arm, and even one on the top of each sock. As far as New Zealand goes, their colored jersey is simply black and their nickname, in homage and tribute to one of the great dynasties of sports, is the Ice Blacks, bringing to mind rugby's New Zealand All Blacks, so named in 1905 because of "their somber football garb."¹⁹

Other national teams use a symbol, something that the world can readily identify as being associated with that country. In blue-and-white jerseys that match their flag perfectly, Greece has a picture of the Athenian Acropolis coupled with the word "Hellas," which means Greece in the Greek language Hellinika²⁰.

France has a depiction of their Gallic Rooster, whose body is basically a streak filled with the colors of their tricolor flag.

¹⁹ "All Blacks—The Name?" The New Zealand Rugby Museum.
<http://www.rugbymuseum.co.nz/asp/contai-ner_pages/normal_menu/rmArticle.asp?IDI D=138>.

²⁰ "Hellas = Greece." Dolphin Hellas. 8 Jun 2004.
<http://www.dolphin-hellas.gr/Greece_Hellas.htm>.

Oddly, this flag is not present on the 1898 diagram, but it was definitely around because it had been used sporadically from the French Revolution until 1880, at which point in the Third Republic it became the national flag by consensus, taking only a brief "break" during the rule of the Comte de Chambord around the time of World War I²¹.

Ireland has an emerald green jersey with gold stripes and a gold harp as its logo. The harp comes from the Irish national flag, as can be seen in the 1898 diagram, which they used from 1798 until 1918. The green represented revolution and Catholicism, which is why it was replaced with today's tricolor (green, white, and orange vertical stripes) that symbolizes unity between the Protestants and Catholics in Ireland²². The hockey team maintains the harp as a symbol of Ireland.

Sweden has perhaps one of the most popular uniform designs out of all of the IIHF teams, not only because of the success the team has had but also because of how nice the traditional jersey looks. They have a yellow and blue jersey, both with three crowns (in the opposite color, respectively) and two stripes at the bottom and cuffs of the sweater. The yellow and blue, of course, come from the Swedish flag, a yellow cross on a blue field, which can be seen in both the 2002 and 1898 diagrams (though with a minor change). The three crowns have a bit more mysterious past, however. They are derived from the Swedish coat of arms, but their meaning is still questioned. According to C. Gunnar U. Scheffer in his article "The Coat of Arms of Sweden," he proposed three

²¹ "The French Flag." Embassy of France in the United States.
<<http://www.ambafrance-us.org/atoz/flag.asp>>.

²² "Symbols in Northern Ireland – Flags Used in the Region." CAIN Web Service. 4 Jan 2007.
<<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/images/symbols/flags.htm>>.

explanations: “1. The crowns represent the three crowned gods of Uppsala, the seat of a hold place, before the introduction of Christianity. 2. The crowns represent the three areas of Uppland (the area around Uppsala) that had the right to participate in the election of the king. 3. The three crowns represent the Three Wise Men (or Holy Kings).”²³



Then are some countries that do perhaps the easiest thing of all: they place their actual flag onto the front of their players' jerseys. The Republic of South Africa and the United Kingdom both do this, and they design the rest of the jersey with the various colors associated with the flag (South Africa uses a conservative approach with waving flag on a fully green colored jersey with yellow and white stripes in the traditional places, whereas the UK goes on a more modern classic route, using thick blue and white stripes up the side and blue shoulders and sleeves with the actual Union Jack set onto a red background that covers the torso of the player).

Japan and Turkey use a similar

method, but instead of just placing a picture of the flag onto the uniform, Japan puts the red circle that adorns their flag on a white jersey, and Turkey takes the white crescent and star that ornaments their flag on a jersey of the same red as on their banner. Those are the only things on the fronts of those jerseys, aside from the Turkish sweater's three white stripes (one at each elbow and one at the waist of the player).

Every jersey used by the fifty member nations of the IIHF has at least some element taken from the flags of their respective countries, and some even hearken back to a day like 1898 for cues on what their teams should look like on the ice. No matter what element is borrowed - whether it is a stripe or color scheme, a coat of arms, or a symbol – each jersey is synonymous with the country it is representing.

²³ “Three Crowns of Sweden – History of the Charge.” [Flags of the World](http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/se-3kron.html#hist). 13 Jun 1996. <<http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/se-3kron.html#hist>>.

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Kazakh jersey (<http://live82.ihwc.net/english/teams/uniforms.ihwc?team=KAZ>)

Russian jersey (<http://live82.ihwc.net/english/teams/uniforms.ihwc?team=RUS>)

Italian jersey (<http://live82.ihwc.net/english/teams/uniforms.ihwc?team=ITA>)

Swedish jersey (<http://live82.ihwc.net/english/teams/uniforms.ihwc?team=SWE>)

[all come from the website for the 2006 IIHF World Championship (<http://www.ihwc.net>)]

Greek jersey (<http://www.icehockey.gr/index.htm>)

Australian jersey (<http://panhandling.com.au/ab3d/productdetails-size.asp?ProductID=120>)