

Web Sites Will Help Collecting Pursuits



One of the fascinating aspects of writing this column in *Tuff Stuff* over the past 15 years has been the vast change that has occurred in the acquisition of information about our hobby.

When I first started penning a monthly column, my research consisted of spending hours on the phone with various dealers and collectors' ascertaining what was new and different in sports action figures each month.

That was supplemented as the hobby took off by attending two or three conventions annually to assess the hobby first hand.

But those two options now seemed downright archaic as I sit down at my computer monthly and compile information in this new millennium.

I still end up "talking" to collectors and dealers each month, but it is now through the mediums of e-mail and sports action figure bulletin boards.

In fact, from my ancient viewpoint, it is hard to imagine how we were able to share so much information in the "good old" days when most of us didn't have computers and Internet access until the mid-1990s.

I distinctly remember the first time an editor with *Tuff Stuff* asked me to write about the use of the Internet to enhance collecting, and I remember how little there was available at that time – a few fan sites that had a photo or two of someone's particular collection and little else.

And then a collector by the name of Dave Liming created a superb site for the sports action figure fan called "The Oasis" and everything changed.

All of a sudden we could post messages, rants and raves about the hobby or about a particular series – or even about a particularly good or bad dealer, and we could get almost instantaneous feedback on our comments.

I learned early on how quickly information could be transmitted across the globe, and I also learned that people often failed to use common courtesy when discussions got heated on a subject. That hasn't changed to date.

Although The Oasis went the way of so many sites and ceased to exist, the Internet

was here to stay and sites sprouted up in multiple locations to fill the void. The two largest sites today are two that have grown nicely over the years, and are familiar to almost any collector who has been in the hobby for more than a few months – www.slu.net and www.spawn.com (primarily for McFarlane Toys branded sports action figures).

This month I would like to introduce you to three other sites that I've found helpful for hobby news, insight and updates.

They are labors of love by their creators and they all are worth marking as a "favorite" on your web browser so that you can visit them on a regular basis.

Sports Lizard (www.sportslizard.com) is a fine site from prolific writer and site creator Adam McFarland who does many things well. In fact, it recently won an award from Microsoft in its "Start Something Amazing" awards, and it is easy to see why the site was chosen.

Although not devoted solely to sports action figures, McFarland does a superb job of keeping up with our end of the hobby with frequent new release updates and many articles that deal with our hobby and its issues.

McFarland, of Connecticut, devotes dozens of hours weekly to his site and has recently added the ability to search other sites (including eBay) from his site.

One of the interesting subsections of his site is the custom area where a person can actually learn how to create a customized sports action figure – let's say yourself in a football or baseball uniform – that resembles a Starting Lineup or McFarlane figure.

McFarland has crafted a detailed 20-step process (including a materials needed list) that is absolutely first class in its descriptions of the steps necessary to transform a figure. You'll have to supply the talent, however.

McFarland also has a monthly section on new collectible sites that he has personally discovered on the web and I've found it invaluable at directing me to many sites, including the next two featured here.

The www.sportspicksfigures.com site is not affiliated with the official McFarlane website, but seems to be gathering a good bit of steam as "the" place to find updated McFarlane news as soon as it breaks. It recently had information on new figures and releases that was posted earlier here than on

any other site on the web, and its inside information has proven to be quite accurate in the last several months.

One of the best things this site does is to tell collectors when new "chase" figures are found, and where – so that collectors can be alerted as soon as anyone has spotted a new McFarlane release at a retail location.

This can be very helpful to a collector trying to beat the competition to their local stores but who also want to avoid hitting a lot of stores before McFarlane product actually shows up at retail.

The site is also a treasure trove of photos of new and old releases from McFarlane and from my perspective is a "must" visit for anyone with the slightest interest in McFarlane Sports Picks figures.

The www.customsbyjomo.com site is probably one of the most frequented sports action figure hobby sites on the Internet – garnering almost a million hits monthly.

Talented artist Joe Ingrassia of Chicago started repainting and customizing McFarlane figures back in 2000 and his site features the visual results of his artistry for all to see. It is easy to spend quite a bit of time wandering his photo gallery – a virtual online museum to the art of customization – and to see the care and attention to detail that exemplifies his artwork.

I particularly like the section on figures for high school athletes that he has created – really a fascinating viewpoint that any sports action figure collector should enjoy.

And if you've decided to give figure customizing a try, the Jomo site also has plenty of articles on the intricate detail work necessary to make a figure look like it just came off a factory line – including logos, decals and what types of paint work best on plastics.

I hope you'll find each of these stops on a future Internet journey to be informative, helpful or just plain fun the next time you fire up your web browser. If you've personally found a good site for sports action figures that you think other collectors should know about, please drop me an e-mail and perhaps we'll be able to profile the site in a future *Tuff Stuff* column. ♦

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