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**Safety Tip**

**Footwear Selection**

The start of the football season often means new boots.

Finding the right boot is important for both comfort and injury prevention.

The following tips will help you decide on the boot that is best for you.

Features to look for when buying a boot:

**Upper**

A lot of research has gone into developing the optimal combination of materials for use in the upper, the outside of the boot. For example, there are uppers which are designed to enable the player to add spin to the ball and there are uppers that incorporate chemical coatings to provide additional grip. The upper needs to be strong enough to support your foot during rapid changes in direction and when kicking.

Although generally more expensive, a leather upper will mould to the shape of your feet and is very durable meaning it will age well. The soft nature of leather means it is very comfortable. Although it is water repellent, it can still often stretch in wet conditions. Basic cow leather is a good choice for a sturdy, durable recreational boot. More costly is kangaroo leather which is becoming particularly popular due to its strength and ability to mould well to the foot, whilst remaining very light.

Synthetic uppers vary in quality at either end of the price scale. High quality synthetic upper is found on many modern football boots as it is strong, light and waterproof and are now made with advanced materials that rival the qualities of leather. However, some cheaper synthetic uppers may have a poor feel and will rip and tear easily under strain and tend to be found on boots at the lower end of the market. Combination leather and synthetic uppers are the strongest particularly when reinforced with ample stitching.

**Heel counter**

The heel counter or heel cup needs to be very rigid to support your rear foot during swerving & stepping. A sturdy deep heel cup can prevent injuries especially in young footballers.

**Midsole**

There are boots on the market that have midsoles or wedges under the heel providing some cushioning and support which is desirable for injury prevention. These are particularly good for young footballers that suffer from heel pain or [**‘Sever’s disease’**](http://jubileesportsphysio.com.au/dealing-injuries/dealing-with-severs-disease) or any player that suffers from lower limb injuries such as shin splints, [**Achilles tendonopathy**](http://jubileesportsphysio.com.au/dealing-injuries/dealing-with-achilles-tendonitis) and chronic knee pain. The extra bulk in this type of boot is the only downside.

**Outsole**

The outsole must be rigid and match the width of the foot. A narrow outsole will cause the foot to hang over the edge of the sole and place more pressure on the upper, which decreases the stability of the boot and is more likely to tear the boot. The outsole should only flex at the forefoot in the position that the toes bend under the ball of the foot, all other movement in the outsole should be minimal.

**Molded Vs Screw-In Studs**

The type of pitches that you will be playing on make a significant difference to the type of boot that you should consider buying.

Ground conditions are normally classified as either soft or hard. Soft grounds require better grip so use of screw-in studs is suitable for use on soft, wet and muddy pitches. The studs are usually made from hard rubber although metal studs are available. Anyone who has had a knee reconstruction or suffers from instability in the knee joint should be careful not to use an aggressive stud design as the increased grip may cause the foot to remain stuck in the turf potentially leading to excessive twisting and injury. Use of screw-in studs on hard grounds is not comfortable as the footballer can feel like they are running on pebbles.

Moulded stud boots are better suited to harder grounds. They are designed for surfaces where there is limited give. Moulded boots are also usually used on artificial and synthetic pitches as they tend to not get stuck in the turf like studs do reducing the likelihood of twisting knee injuries.

It is important to make sure no stud or moulded cleats are positioned directly under the big toe joint which will cause discomfort and do not stop the boot flexing where it is supposed to – under the ball of the foot.

The ideal situation for the serious football player is to own a pair of boots for every condition. However, this can be pricey so the general player should buy a single pair of boots that that will suit the surface he or she most often plays on. Football in the Sutherland Shire is generally played on hard surfaces, therefore, a moulded boot is far more suitable and a lot safer.

Fit

A correctly fitted boot is an important factor in prevention and treatment of foot injuries. There should always be a thumb nail width from the longest toe to the end of the boot. There should also be adequate depth to ensure your foot sits securely in the boot.

Badly fitting boots are a recipe for poor performance and injury. A boot that is too big will allow the foot to move within it, ruining any chance of fine ball control, quick acceleration or manoeuvrability. A boot that is too small will be uncomfortable to play in and may result in foot damage.

Ideally, a football boot should fit the foot more snugly than a normal shoe, while still maintaining a high degree of comfort. If you are buying leather boots remember that the leather will stretch a little and then mould to your foot.

Comfort

Perhaps most important is the comfort and feel of a boot. If a player does not feel comfortable, relaxed and at ease with the boot that he or she is wearing, then their performance will be directly affected.

Different manufacturers create boots with different foot shapes. Try on a selection of brands and models to find the one that best fits your foot.

Remember, suit the boot to the surface you most play on, look for an upper made from quality materials and, perhaps most importantly, spend as much time as you need to find a pair of football boots that fit perfectly.

Looking after your boots

Once you have bought your nice new boots it is important to look after them, if you want them to last as long as possible.

* Undo your laces before removing your boots. It’s a bad habit to take boots off with the laces left done up. This stretches the boot and can cause it to split.
* After playing, make sure you remove any mud that has stuck to the boots.
* Clean them with a damp cloth to remove any dirt.
* Put old newspaper inside the boot. This will soak up any moisture in the boot and help to maintain the boot’s shape.
* Always store the boots in the boot bag, and never leave them in a plastic bag where they will not be able to dry out and can become moldy and rot.

This information is provided to Sutherland Shire Football Association by Jubilee Sports Physiotherapy as part of its commitment to Shire football and the SSFA.

For further information, please Email us at safety@GUFC.com.au