

Equipment & Kit

Head Protection

Helmets are usually made from light plastic materials which can take strong tackles, often used by front row forwards to prevent blows to the head and damage to their ears.

The most important thing to remember if you want to wear head protection is to make sure it is comfortable - otherwise it will cause yourself unwanted pain and injury.

If you are a front row forward, make sure the cap will not cause you any problems in the scrum. If you can, scrum down with a friend when you are trying on different models.

Gum Shield

The gum shield not only protects your teeth and gums during physical contact, it can reduce damage around the jaw and concussion. As every mouth is different, so every gum shield should be moulded to fit perfectly around the top half of a player's mouth. The best way of doing this is to go and see your dentist, who will ensure the shield is right for your mouth.

The other type of gum shield widely available is the "boil in the bag" variety which is moulded using hot water. Put the warm shield in your mouth and suck on it for about three minutes until it has moulded to the shape of your upper teeth.

Shirt

Rugby shirts need to be able to take lots of heavy tugging and pulling. They also need to be lightweight, comfortable and strong - all at the same time.

Traditionally, jerseys were made from cotton, which would often get very heavy if it was raining. But technology has seen lots of new lightweight water-resistant, synthetic fibres in modern jerseys.

Although your rugby team/school will provide your jerseys for competitive matches, it is worth buying one for training. Make sure you get the right fit - too small and it will rip, too big and it will affect your performance.

Shorts

Rugby shorts are usually made from cotton, designed to take the rigours of rugby league. Again, shorts should be comfortable - tight shorts are not only embarrassing, but also increase the chances of picking up a serious injury.

Ball

A good quality rugby ball will help you improve your handling and kicking skills on and off the field.

In the olden days, rugby balls were made of hand-stitched leather. But it would often get very heavy when it was raining, making it very difficult to handle in slippery conditions. Technology has seen new waterproof materials which make the ball easier to handle in wet and muddy conditions.

Ensure your ball is properly pumped full of air before you start practicing your passing, catching and kicking on your own or with a team-mate. You can pay anything from £10 to £40 for a ball, but they will all be the same size and shape.

Boots

Traditional rugby boots are very similar to football boots, but the thing that makes them different is a high cut designed to give extra support to the ankle. However, more and more players prefer to use football style boots, especially backs, who favour the low cut for extra mobility. So it's important to understand what position you're playing before choosing what kind of rugby boot you want.

Choosing a pair of boots

Be more concerned with finding boots that fit you than those which look the flashiest. A player will stand out because of their ability rather than the boots they're wearing. It's important to understand the shape of your feet and your running style. Find out whether you're flat-footed or have a high arch. Ideally rugby boots will fit snugly, although if your feet are still growing it's advisable to allow a little bit of room.

Also, different players prefer different fits. As forwards rely on lower body strength for power in

scrums, they need extra support around the ankle to help prevent foot injuries. Kickers prefer a tight-fitting boot because it gives them a better feel for the ball, while props like a high ankle cut for extra support in scrums. It's worth wearing the same types of socks you would wear on the pitch when you try on a boot for size.

Uppers

Leather and synthetic boots are both available and there are advantages with each. Leather moulds itself to the shape of your feet but can stretch out of shape in wet conditions. Synthetic boots are often lighter and less expensive. Try and find soft uppers, this will prevent potential injuries - you may even find that a boot that's a mix of leather and synthetics is best for you.

Screw-in studs

This type of boot tends to be popular because players can adjust their studs depending on the conditions. If the pitch is muddy then it's worth using a longer set of studs, changing to shorter studs on a drier day. When changing or tightening studs it's a good idea to put a bit of grease on the thread to prevent them from rusting.

Studs

As rugby is a full contact sport, wearing the wrong kind of studs can do you - or a member of the opposition - a lot of harm. Referees will check whether your boots have any sharp edges or ridges, but it's also your duty to make sure your boots and studs are in good order.

Studs

The areas vulnerable to injury are the shoulders and the chest, which often take much of the impact in tackles, so it's important these areas are well protected.

Modern upper body protection is made from very strong and lightweight material. Again comfort is the most important factor when considering chest protection. Make sure it fits you well, otherwise it will be extremely uncomfortable on the field, as well as increasing your chance of picking up an injury.

But remember, wearing body protection doesn't mean you are invincible and can do things others rugby players can't - you'll do yourself more damage if you think like that.