

IS YOUR BOOT ON THE OTHER FOOT?

The modern boot now looks a million dollars and gives us a feeling of high tech performance and security. It's the only piece of sophisticated equipment a player uses on the field so we should therefore pay more attention to how boots can enhance performance and also protect from injury. Looks are definitely not everything!

With firmer grounds found pre or early season, players will opt for multi or bladed type boots. As the season progresses to softer grounds, better grip and therefore sprig penetration is required. Where possible there should be a transition of footwear that accompanies changes in ground hardness.

So what's needed in your boots? There are several questions that you might like to also consider in you boot selection.

- How good were your previous boots?
- Do they reveal signs of unusual wear or distortion?
- Were they comfortable? This is very important.
- Do you have (or recently had) a foot or lower limb injury?
- Do you use orthotic devices?

A grass surface means impact related lower limb injuries are usually scarce in rugby compared for example to those of running. Yes firmer grounds do increase ground reaction forces however generally boots don't require a thick running shoe type midsole. The rugby boot definitely needs to be comfortable, however cushioning is not as important as you may think.

Stability on the other hand is a requirement that the boot must possess particularly if you have a foot or lower limb injury.

Frustratingly for manufacturers, boots need to be stable in multiple directions. Landing, accelerating, decelerating and directional change mean the boot must provide stability as the foot twists or flexes to adapt to these positions. So it's a fine line for the boot to assist this movement, yet still support and protect unwanted foot motion at the same time. Too stiff a boot will feel awkward and uncomfortable. Too flexible a boot will feel comfortable yet be unsupportive.



- A - External heel counter for stability**
- B - Wedge to offload heel / calf / achilles**
- B - Midsole adds comfort and stability**
- C - Wide sprig placement stabilises foot**

Sports Clinic, 156 Bealey Ave, Christchurch,

ph (03) 3660-660, www.sportsclinic.co.nz



BOOK NOW

SPORTS CLINIC



SPORTS CLINIC ARE PROUD TO BE AN OFFICIAL PARTNER OF CANTERBURY RUGBY

For directional change the foot has to gain resistance from the upper and heel counter when its planted on the ground. The modern uppers are super light and more resistant to deformation and can help the foot gain purchase for cutting movements. For kickers, research has shown that a padded upper won't help with kicking accuracy or ball velocity hence the thin upper on most football boots.

For performance and directional change, a low centre of gravity is required so a heel wedge is therefore not standard in all boots. A heel wedge on the other hand reduces load on the calf and Achilles' tendon, so if you have these injuries, seek this boot type out. Children with heel pain will however benefit from a boot with a heel wedge. Alternately simply add an over the counter heel wedge inside "any" boot if required and bingo you've created a simple midsole.

Forefoot flexibility is another feature to assess. Too flexible a boot will cause more forefoot loading and increase sprig pressure in this area. Excessive flexibility can also predispose the foot to a "turf toe" injury. This is a commonly observed injury in rugby players. A less flexible boot can help whilst scrummaging and also help protect against turf toe. Too stiff a boot however will impact on performance and agility so there is a balance needed here that is very individual based on player position and comfort.

Sprig or cleat placement is fairly standard amongst boots. Ironically the sprigs should be placed under high weightbearing parts of the foot to gain good sprig penetration. This often means greater pressures or discomfort is felt under the foot. Look for wide positioning of the sprigs closest to the outside of the sole for more lateral stability.

Pre-season blistering under the ball of the foot is quite common particularly with use of boots with longer sprigs. Touch shoes or multis might be the go if you battle with blisters. Consider choosing a boot with more volume so it can accommodate a cushioned insole or orthotic to help protect from these pressures. This can also be a simple remedy for many other niggling foot pains.

Lighter boots are not necessarily the best however most boots are now very light. Research on running shoes has found negligible improvements in running economy with shoes weighing less than 300g. With boots weighing as little as 250g there will ultimately be a trade-off with performance and comfort. Contrary to belief a lighter boot may actually hinder performance. Whilst they might feel astonishing light to hold, a boot being 50g or 100g lighter won't see you suddenly sprint past your defenders.

Comfort is however extremely important. Make sure that your boot is comfortable right from the get go. Research has found that enhanced aerobic performance was achieved in the "comfortable boots" used for the tasks performed. There is even evidence of boot comfort being related to injury. This is a fundamental that only you can determine and no, your boots don't have to be broken in! With all the colour, glitz and glamour now distracting your boot selection, make comfort your very first choice!

As official partners with Canterbury Rugby, the Sports Clinic podiatry team can help you with any footwear or injury advice.



Screw in sprigs or multi's, what is the best option for the ground conditions or your position?

Sports Clinic, 156 Bealey Ave, Christchurch,

ph (03) 3660-660, www.sportsclinic.co.nz



BOOK NOW

SPORTS CLINIC



SPORTS CLINIC ARE PROUD TO BE AN OFFICIAL PARTNER OF CANTERBURY RUGBY