

Soccer Equipment Guide

Introduction

Soccer is the best sport in the world! Obviously, my bias notwithstanding, one of the things that contributes to its global popularity, is how little equipment is actually needed to get started. There are no bulky shoulder pads to buy, or state-of-the-art, futuristic alloy bat that requires you to take out a second mortgage on your home. There are only three basic pieces of equipment you need to get started on your soccer journey: cleats, guards, and a ball.

That being said, it is **VERY** important that you buy the proper equipment, with the proper fit and style. I ran a retail Soccer store for over 5 years, and am quite passionate about getting the right gear. Regardless of whether you are a first timer with a child in preschool, or a veteran looking to play in college, the right equipment makes all the difference. Getting the right equipment doesn't mean the most expensive. There are plenty of fantastic soccer equipment brands that are inexpensive. Think about it like this - Would you send your kid out to Centerfield in a Catcher's Mitt? Would you have your kid play Basketball in Dress Shoes?

Getting Started

What do I need?

- Soccer SPECIFIC Cleats
- Shin guards
- Ball
- Water bottle
- Comfortable clothes to practice in (The MJCCA will provide your team uniform)

That's it. That's all you need to get started. Now don't get me wrong there is plenty of other gear you can get along the way. But for starter's the above is all you'll need!

Due to the growth of Soccer in the United States there are actually a lot of phenomenal options. Some online, and many you can get at local locations! I would also like to make it clear, I am not saying you need to buy the most expensive type of equipment. You can find inexpensive soccer cleats everywhere!

- Dick's Sporting Goods, the MJCCA proud corporate sponsor, has all of your soccer needs. Feel free to visit one of the many Atlanta locations, or visit their website at www.dickssportinggoods.com

Cleats

If you read nothing else, I write about equipment, please read this section.

The right footwear is the most important aspect of soccer. It seems like an obvious thing to say, since the game revolves around your feet. But using none soccer specific cleats, is the most common mistakes I see.

But I'll tell you a secret:

Soccer Cleats are the most versatile type of footwear. You can use soccer cleats to play baseball, lacrosse, and even football. However, baseball, lacrosse, and football cleats DO NOT work for soccer.

I'll explain in greater detail why below. But basically if you want to save money and get the most out of the equipment you are using for your multi-sport, growing child, start with soccer cleats.

Why is it so important to use Soccer Specific cleats?

There is a huge difference in the various styles:

- Soccer Cleats do not have a toe spike. The toe spike which is common in football and baseball cleats is designed to give you grip going straight ahead, in soccer where more lateral movement is needed, this negatively impacts performance.
- Soccer cleats are almost always low cut. You will not see a high top soccer cleat outside of the top of the line model.
- Soccer cleats have shorter studs, and molded bottoms. They are designed in a way to distribute weight more evenly, and provide extra cushioning for prolonged runs.
- The exterior of soccer cleats are stitched and designed in a way to give you an even touch surface, so you can strike and touch the ball on all areas of the cleat. They are softer, and give you a feel for the ball, allowing for ease of dribbling/trapping/passing.
- Football/Baseball/Lacrosse cleats have longer, sharper studs. They are built for grip, and short bursts of movement. They do not distribute weight and will cause pain and discomfort under prolonged running.
- Football/Baseball/Lacrosse Cleats are also dangerous to other players on the field. If kids get their foot stepped on, instead of the rounded molded soccer cleat, they are being stepped on by the longer, pointer stud.
- The outsides are built with thicker material and stitched in hard lines, making it harder to feel the ball, strike the ball, or have a controlled touch. Basically, they are not meant to be kicked with. This makes it harder for children learning the game to gain proper technique, because they have far less control over where the ball is going when they are passing/trapping/dribbling.

Proper Cleat Sizing

When sizing the cleat for your athlete, it's important to do a few things. Always check the fit with the athlete standing. You won't really know their foot is filling out the shoe without them standing up. Secondly make sure their heel is all the way in the back of the shoe. Have them tap their heel on the ground a few times to be assured of this.

- Make sure there is no more than a sideways thumb length between their longest toe and the end of the shoe.
- Older Soccer players will sometimes wear their cleats really small, with their toe's pushing against the fronts of the cleat. Some players prefer this as it gives them a better feel on the ball, and helps with their control. I don't recommend this, especially with younger players. It can be rather uncomfortable, and with how fast the kids grow, you'll be going through cleats at an impressive rate. At the end of the day, trust your gut. If it's comfortable that's all that matters.

- Make sure when they move around that their heel isn't slipping up and down on the back of the cleat. This could cause a blister and be very uncomfortable.
- Make sure there is no pinching on the sides of the cleat.
- Make sure to tight the laces starting at the bottom of the foot and working your way up. This way you will ensure a proper fit.
- There are typically 3 size types of cleats:
 - Kids (pre-k, and k ages mostly)
 - Youth (Elementary School)
 - Adult (both men's and women's specific styles)
- The smallest size cleats that you will typically find are a Kids 8. This is the starting cleat size for kids 3 years old. The kid's sizes run from a Kids 8 all the way to a 13 ½. (half sizes are certainly available). This size run is for most of the Pre-k and K age groups. They should correspond roughly to what they wear in their regular shoes with one key difference:
- *Typically*, Soccer cleats at this size run one size bigger than they wear in their normal shoes. So if your athlete wear's a Kid's 9. *Typically*, you'll want a Kids 10 in Soccer cleats. It should be noted that there is no substitute for actually trying on the cleats in person and determining this for yourself.
- Youth sizes run from a Size 1 to a Size 6.
- Most youth cleats are measured in boys' sizes until they reach a size 6 1/2. At that point, they will split into boy and girl specific sizing. Simply put, all youth cleats are typically unisex until 6 ½. Very rarely will you see men's specific or women's specific shoe sizes before this.
- Both Men's and Women's sizes start at Size 6.5. *Typically*, women's sizes run one size larger than the equivalent men's size in terms of length. So a women's 8 in a soccer cleat is *typically* the equivalent of a men's 7.
- This is important because women's specific cleat *tend* to be narrower than a men's style.

Shin Guards

Shin guards are the only piece of protection soccer players wear on the field. With a sport that involves as much running and range of motion as soccer, it's simply not practical to wear things like mouth guards, cups (for boys), or any padded garments. The shin guards main job is protection of the shin bone. This bone doesn't have much natural protection in the body, and is hugely important to basic movement. It is important to understand this because a shin guard is not meant as a full leg guard, as this would negatively impact the athlete's ability to run, and trap the ball, while offering little extra protection.

- Shin guards should be worn against the player's bare skin. They should be underneath, and covered by the long soccer sock.
- There are two types of Shin guards:
 - Strapped on style
 - These typically have an elastic Velcro on the top of the guard that wraps around the leg and sometimes an additional one at the bottom of the guard that also wraps around the leg, in order to keep it in place.

- These will also typically have a padded material that covers the ankles, with a stirrup that goes under the foot.

These type of guards are best for the younger ages, and for players looking for the added protection.

- Slip-In-Style
 - These are lighter weight (although still very durable)
 - They have no Velcro straps, or straps of any kind
 - They typically come with a compression sleeve, which is worn on the bare skin, and to which the shin guard is slipped into. A sock is then put over the guard/sleeve combo. The sleeve is what holds in the guard in place
 - This type of guard is usually worn by older/more advanced players. It is more comfortable, lighter weight, and easier to get on and off. It typically does not offer any sort of ankle protection
- If your guards have stirrups that go underneath the foot, they should not be worn over the cleat.
- The rule for proper shin guard sizing is to have at a minimum 2-3 finger lengths between the top of the guard and the bottom of the knee cap.
- Most guards will have a height to size ratio on the back of the packaging to help you gauge the right size.

Soccer Balls

Soccer Ball sizes can be confusing as a lot of leagues use different definitions, and sometimes there are some age group crossovers. Below is a list of age groups and what they typically use, as well the number of players on the field that are on the field when a specific ball type is used. The latter is universal, and follows the USSF guidelines. So it is the most consistent way to determine the soccer ball size needed for your athlete.

- Size 0 or Size 1
 - This is also known as a mini ball
 - Not used for any specific league, or age group
 - These soccer balls are best for at home training or skill work. Coaches will sometimes use these in practice
 - They are great training tools, and great gifts!
- Size 2
 - Not really used much or seen. Not an official ball.
 - Sometimes used for training
- Size 3
 - Smallest official ball size
 - Typically used for the Pre-k through U-8 Age Groups
 - Used for 4 v 4 Soccer
- Size 4
 - Typically used for U-9 through U-12 Age Groups
 - Used for both 7 v 7 and 9 v 9 Soccer

- Size 5
 - The largest official ball size. It is the adult sized soccer ball
 - Typically used for U-13 Age Groups and above
 - Used for 11 v 11 soccer

Final Thoughts

If you've made it this far in my guide; Thank you for reading! I know that all of this information can be overwhelming at first, but it will help you a lot in the long run. Just know that our staff here at the MJCCA is always happy to be a resource when it comes to literally anything you may need to have an amazing season. If you have questions at any time, or unsure about the equipment you bought or are buying, we'll be more than happy to help you out. You can reach Daniel Quigley, in charge of all soccer programs at the MJCCA at Daniel.Quigley@atlantajcc.org or 678.812.3744.

Thanks for reading, and have a wonderful season!