



Football Boots Fact Sheet

Studs, moulded, blades, soft ground, firm ground, confused? The last five years have seen an explosion in grassroots football across the country. Football has now become an all year round sport, which also means climate changes and different playing surfaces. Players should always wear the most appropriate type of boot to coincide with the type of ground they will play on. Flashy, fashionable boots may look good but will they do a satisfactory job on a particular surface?

The type of outsole (bottom of the boot) will have a direct effect on the function of the foot and should be a major consideration when playing. A good boot should give you support, stability, grip and traction allowing the player to perform.

These outsoles fall into three categories: soft ground, firm ground and hard ground.

- **Soft ground boots (SG)** consist of studs or blades and are ideally suited for use on soft natural grass surfaces, mainly through the winter months. Studs can be changeable to different lengths depending on the softness of the surface. Bladed stud configurations are normally fixed directly to the outsole and the depth of blade can vary from boot to boot, with some models even having a metal tip at the end of the blade which like a stud, can be replaced with replacement tips if worn or damaged.
- **Firm ground boots (FG)** use moulded or short bladed outsoles which can be used on firm natural grass surfaces that have become too hard for a traditional stud or long blade to sink into. These boots would be used through the spring/summer months, pre-season or end of season. Again these outsoles differ in styles and length of stud depending on manufacturer. The number of studs or short blades can vary from boot to boot and will not be removable. The greater the number of studs the better the stability of the foot over a wider area. This can also reduce the pressure on the foot as the weight is distributed more evenly, especially if the studs or blades are short and are positioned right to the edge of the sole
- **Hard ground (HG)** boots are for very hard natural surfaces. These outsoles will have a multiple stud configuration which consists of short low rubber studs which are very close together and normally will cover the whole sole; these are non removable. This boot should be worn on pitches where there is very limited give in the surface unlike firm natural surfaces which still has a reasonable degree of softness to allow a stud to sink in. With the design of low profile studs, they will not fully penetrate the ground, but the playing surface is still roughly pitted and textured, so the studs find their own grip on the surface of the pitch. These Hard ground boots are also suited for Astro surfaces.

Boot Uppers

Boot uppers are made from many different materials but usually leather or man-made synthetics. In some cases the upper will consist of a mixture of the two. Leather can mould to the shape of the foot better and be very comfortable with a realistic feel to the ball. However, leather can also stretch when wet and sometimes becomes too soft to provide any protection. Synthetic boots are generally cheaper than leather but, with modern materials such as synthetics, boots now have the ability to let the foot breathe through the fabric, therefore reducing sweating, making the boot more comfortable to wear.



Laces

The position of laces can also vary greatly, from the traditional top of the foot position to running down the side of the boot. Apart from being fashionable there are two advantages with the laces moved to the side of the boot. Firstly, it gives the top of the boot a bigger, flatter area in which to control and strike the ball; this is known as the sweet spot. Secondly, it removes pressure from the top of the foot, which has a multiple of criss-crossing small nerves running over the top of the foot. It could be argued that on a child's boot, the top of boot would require more protection as their feet would still be soft and still developing solid bone structures, this would mean they would benefit from a traditional style boot, with padded tongue and laces positioned at the top of the boot.

Different surface/different boot

All surfaces are different of course. Our weather is very changeable, making the surfaces we play on very changeable too. If you are unsure which boot and outsole would be best on that particular day, try different boots before kick off or in your warm up. A little jogging with some light twisting and turning will give you some idea if your boots are good for those conditions. Ask yourself are they comfortable? Is there enough cushioning when pounding the ground? Is there enough grip and traction? Like all good footballers, be prepared; always have a second pair of boots on the touchline in case you may need to change.

Boot Maintenance

Whatever your boots, make sure they are maintained. After playing, remove all mud and wipe them clean with warm water. Always let the boots dry naturally, with newspaper stuffed inside to help absorb the water and keep the shape of the boot. Putting them on a radiator or in an airing cupboard will dry them far too quickly, cracking the leather, and making them hard and uncomfortable to wear. After the boots are dry, a light polish and buff can be added to bring them back to their best.

If changing or cleaning studs, add a slight lubricant to the stud thread to prevent any rusting if moisture gets in. Ensure the stud is tight, but not too tight to damage the thread. (Too much lubricant will reduce the friction and prevent the stud from properly tightening).

Always try to put your boots on, either in the dressing room or at ground-side. Walking across car parks or on concrete paths will damage the soles and sharpen the studs or blades which can lead to injury. It is important to check your soles on a regular basis.

To give any player a psychological boost before a game, make sure you feel comfortable in your boots to get maximum enjoyment from the game. Remember that your boots should not only look good but feel good!