Youth Soccer Shoes or Cleats Guide for Parents

Buying the right soccer cleats (also called soccer shoes, or soccer boots) will not only result in a better player; they will prevent foot injuries, which can all too often ruin a soccer player's enjoyment of the game.

Soccer cleats should fit closely, and it's better to buy soccer shoes that fit children at the time of purchase rather than getting a larger pair and planning that the child will "grow into them". Too-big soccer cleats, like shoes everywhere, will slip and rub, causing blisters and affecting stance and balance.

When you measure soccer cleats for teen and adult players, the wearer's toe should not press against the end of the shoe, but should come within the width of a thumb when the wearer is standing. For children's cleats, a little more room will give their feet room to grow. Let the child tell you which shoes are more comfortable.

If you're planning to buy soccer cleats and other soccer gear for your child or adolescent, start shopping in the summer, before soccer season really starts. Spending a lot of money for children's soccer cleats may not be justifiable, since they will probably be outgrown by the end of the school year. As long as they fit well, meet the team regulations, and provide support, you can get away with spending less money. Put the money you save away, though: by the time your little soccer hero gets into third or fourth grade, you may expect wrangling over the most popular--and expensive--brands.

The soles of your cleats should be rubber, and it's best to buy regulation soccer cleats, since other sports cleats are not allowed in soccer. Kids' cleats are unisex, which makes buying them easier on parents. Like shoes, girls' and womens' cleats will tend to be narrower than boys' and mens': women with wider feet may find men's cleats fit their feet better. On the other hand, (or foot), men with narrow feet may find that women's cleats fit them better without in any way diminishing their masculinity! Don't let silly marketing ploys con you into buying soccer cleats that don't fit you properly when the perfect size is the next aisle over.

When trying on soccer cleats, wear them with the socks and shin guards that will be used in practice and at games. It's important to feel the way each item matches its fit with the others.

For beginning soccer players who don't have grand notions, synthetic uppers with rubber soles will do just fine, preventing the problems other players will have with leather shoes. Leather uppers can become stiff and out of shape if they get wet and are improperly dried: synthetics tend to be more forgiving. If your cleats to get wet, stuff them with newspaper and let them dry naturally, without added heat.

If you are playing indoors, or if your child plays in a gym, you may decide to use sneakers or cross-trainers for soccer. They should be stable, without built-up soles or heels, and they should have rubber soles for adequate traction on smooth floors.

Soccer shoes that fit right enhance the enjoyment of the game as well as the skill level of the player. Take the extra time and energy to find the best soccer shoes for your feet and the conditions under which you are playing.