

Are You Ready for Some Football? Every year we get questions from new and veteran families about equipment so here is a Primer that should explain what you need, might need and don't need but your kids wants. Equipment has gotten more sophisticated so there are more options than ever before. Here we go:

What the RFL Gives Me and Where Do I Get It

All registered tackle players will be issued a helmet, shoulder pads, mouth guard, game jersey and game pants. Our helmets and shoulder pads are all NOCSE Certified, have been cleaned and inspected. Your helmet will come with a face mask which you may change to your own but more on that later. All players except Blessed Sacrament will follow an equipment fitting and pick up schedule that will be posted on the web site when available. Blessed Sacrament players will get instructions from the BS Admin team regarding their equipment process. Now please read carefully as we need your help:

The RFL has to fit and distribute equipment to over 1000 players every year. We have to do it from a way to small and way too hot equipment shed on the grounds of the Rockville Civic Center Mansion. It is important that you understand that you must come during your team's appointed times or when the schedule indicates "Open". Please do not email and ask for exceptions because you are going to be on vacation. Half the world will be on vacation and that is why we schedule the make ups and open sessions throughout August. If you have two or more players they must come at the appointed times with the rest of their team or at an "Open Session". For those of you with multiple players that want to do it all at one time you can wait for one of the Open Sessions but they will not be until practice has started for most of the Pony, PW, Intermediate and MSL teams. If you do show up at a time scheduled for a different team you will most likely be told to come back at the appropriate time or an Open Session.

Registered Flag Players do not get any equipment from the shed. Your coach will have your flags and jersey. You will need either football or soccer cleats, no baseball shoes, and white shorts and/or football or baseball pants. Do not buy pants with pads built in or pads of any kind to go into football pants. Pads are taboo for Flag Players.

What Do I Need to Buy..

Most important is a good pair of football cleats. While they are a bit more expensive we suggest either replaceable cleat models (screw-ons) or synthetic molded. Rubber molded cleats will put your player at a disadvantage since we play on natural turf. Beware the hype. Every manufacturer makes all kinds of claims but that is what they are claims. The important thing is they fit properly and give the proper ankle support if that is an issue. Generally, Nike cleats are the widest and most worn at all levels. There is nothing wrong with Adidas, Reebok, Under Armor etc.

Practice Pants. This item has a lot of choices but be careful The easiest but moderately expensive way to go about this is to buy a pair of white or black traditional practice pants and a "youth" 5-Pad girdle and a set of knee pads. The RFL gives you "game pants" but not pads. We do not want game pants being worn at practice because we need to get several years use out of them. The girdle and knee pads

can be worn in both the practice pants and game pants and are easy to keep track of. Second strategy and most expensive are integrated football pants. Nike and Under Armor lead the way on these and you can find some less expensive in-house brands on web sites. The advantage is the pads are all built in, cannot get lost and no hassle to put in. The downside is color. If you are a Bear, Panther or Steeler black integrated pants are easy to find and you can wear them for practice and games. All of our other teams wear game pants that color wise are either very difficult or impossible to purchase. If you go that route you will need a set of "snap in pads" for your league issued game pants unless you play in the MSL then they must be "slotted". The least expensive option is a 7 piece set of youth snap-in pads. The downside is they are a pain to switch all of the time and tend to get lost.

That takes care of what you must provide now on to the goodies.

When making decisions on the following try to remember that your kid is playing youth football. It will not give him/her any athletic advantage to look like the tattooed, gimmicked up walking billboards parading around on Sunday afternoons.

Helmets

As stated before the helmet we will give you is more than good enough. Over the past several years it has become fashionable for some of our players to buy their own helmet. This probably started because the two major manufacturers Schutt and Riddell tried to sell the market on helmets that were twice as expensive as traditional helmets while indicating they might offer more concussion protection. After years of trying, the research teams have basically given up on that concept. There has never been any proof that DNA or Evolution helmets do a better job of protecting players than any other helmet and you will never see that claim advertised because it cannot be. If your kid wants his own helmet we have no problem with you spending the \$100 to \$200 instead of the league spending it, just make sure it is white. Same with shoulder pads.

Face Masks, Chin Straps and Visors

Sometimes it make sense to buy your own facemask whether for better sight line or protection. If you decide to buy a mask they are helmet specific so do not buy it until you get your RFL issued helmet. You will have to install it yourself which isn't too difficult. The trick is getting it off and putting ours back on when you have to return the helmet in November or December.

Chin Straps are a personal matter. The one we give you is fine but there are lots of others that may be more comfortable and easier to clean. Once again there are several types and not all of our helmets will take what is called a "high hook up".

Visors are absolutely unnecessary unless your player is wearing glasses and then sports goggles are much better. Kids beg for visors because they see them on television. They offer no safety or real protection and can actually be a detriment when they fog during rain and steamy early season weather. The pros wear them either because they are \$1,000 corrective lens models or because they are heavily tinted to keep opponents from watching their eyes. This does not work at the youth or high school level

because visors must be 100% clear with no tint by rule. This is so refs and emergency personnel can see eyes without removing helmets if a player is injured. If your guy convinces you to buy a visor make sure it is crystal clear or they will miss game time while the refs order it removed.

Additional Protection and Gloves

There are a lot of additional protective devices available. These are personal preference and sometimes necessary. We recommend that all male players wear cups. There are girdles as mentioned above that have cups built in. Recently several manufacturers have marketed "under support" shirts and shorts. These have a bit of padding at the shoulders, rib cage and knees and thighs. While not necessary they do afford some additional protection. If you know your player is going to be a quarterback or running back a rib pad vest or shirt is not a bad idea. Arm, hand, elbow and other assorted pads are not really necessary unless they are protecting an injury or if elbows are constantly getting scraped.

Gloves have become almost a necessity for lineman and defensive players. They will help protect fingers that get stepped on and will provide an advantage to lineman who know how to hold without getting caught. They are questionable for running backs, receivers and QB's but more and more are wearing them. They certainly help when the weather gets cold.

Mouth Guards

The one we give you is perfectly fine. The reason it does not cost \$15 to \$20 dollars is because it does not have fancy packaging, does not come with a case that is usually lost the first week of practice and does not have an insurance policy included. Make sure you read the insurance policy as it may or may not offer any real protection. I do suggest if your child wears braces or other dental appliances that you look at the mouth guards that are specifically rated for braces. They are probably worthwhile. Your dentist or orthodontist will also fit your child for a mouth guard. These are usually very comfortable and effective however they cost \$40 and up and do not usually strap on to the helmet so losing them is a very real issue.

What You Don't Need But Your Kid Probably Wants

Armbands, wristbands, knee bands, most skull caps or under helmet wear (unless religious in nature), shoe spats and anything else your kid wants because the guys that play on Sundays wear them, serve no protective or athletic purpose. They do make manufacturers a lot of money and rarely a kid will gain some confidence if he is accessorized like his favorite all-pro. Because a lot of these items are associated with "gangsta" rap and used for intimidation attempts many high school state associations have enacted rules regarding where these things can be worn on the body. Taping face masks is also taboo. Our refs have been instructed to remove any player with decorative tape on a face mask until the tape is taken off.

I think that pretty much covers everything. I am sure you will let me know if I left anything out. Now where to get it. Local sporting good stores are hit or miss. Dick's at RIO and Modell's at Milestone are

probably the best at stocking football gear early enough for it to do anybody any good. Sports Authority in Rockville is a waste of time. Sports Extra in Bethesda is an old time sporting goods store with lots of expertise and limited inventory. Give them a call before you travel to make sure they have what you need. The best selection and prices are usually found in cyber space. Google: Bolt Athletics, Dixie Sports, Football America and East Bay (cleats) to name a few. You can order right on line or they have 800 numbers to call in orders. The only problem is of course is items that need fitting. The web sites have size guides for most items but shoes are a crap shoot. I would find some place that has them or similar styles and try them on so you are not ordering in total darkness. You probably will save considerable dollars ordering on line.

This guide should make your equipment purchases relatively easy. Most folks can do it starting from scratch for under \$100 or you can spend thousands depending on how much "bling" your superstar requires. Happy shopping.