

Ankles and Arches:

Almost everyone has rolled their ankle when playing football. Some players, however, will regularly roll their ankle either because they have had a significant injury in the past or their foot structure has a natural tendency to do so. For these players it is imperative to get boots that support the ankles, place the feet in as normal a position as possible and support the feet through the twisting and turning of our game, e.g.; when you're crumbing. These movements also of course place high stress on the arch muscles and ligaments. If you have had arch strain or heel pain you need a boot that will particularly support this area and only bend at the forefoot and be stable through the midfoot into the rearfoot area.

These are the features you need to look for:

1. Well supported and stiff heel cup -- which will tend to hold the rear foot and heel vertical.
2. Heel wedge or midsole -- which will tend to hold the heel slightly higher than the forefoot in the same way your foot is held in all your other shoes e.g. runners, school shoes etc
- 3.a The sole unit should be stiff under the arch and heel. If you hold the toe and heel areas of the shoe and twist the sole should not twist easily: This is called Torsional Stability
- 3.b The sole unit should bend easily at the forefoot, just behind your big toe joint: This is called Forefoot flexibility or the Flexpoint.

NOTE: Fitting of the boot is most important to make sure the sole's flex point is just behind the bigtoe joint.

Hamstrings, calf muscle and Achilles tendons:

If you've had problems in the past or your flexibility in these areas is poor even though you've tried to improve it, then a boot with the heel wedge is imperative. Almost all of your other shoes will have the heel higher than the forefoot, however most football boots have the heel at the same level as the forefoot because that's how soccer players like them. This situation can create great strain on your hamstrings, calf muscles and Achilles tendons and with the side to side and crumbing movements of our game, combined with tripping over your opponent's foot or your foot going into a divot in the turf the stress placed on these tissues may be so great that you sustained an injury. By buying a boot with the wedge or midfoot or having an insole that incorporates a heel lift, you lessen the potential for this occurring.

Knee or hip problems:

If you've injured these areas in the past, then I recommend the Asics range of boots and some of the Puma boots because of their sole unit. The blades configuration under the forefoot has a circular pattern which came about to address the common mechanism of knee injury: which is when someone tackles you from the side with your foot planted on the ground, which rotates your body while your lower leg and foot remain held by the stops in the ground in a straight position. This places huge torsional stress at the knee and is often responsible for ligament damage.

- Asic's football boot range sole unit allows your forefoot to rotate as the top of the body rotates in this situation, significantly reducing the stress on the knee and the potential for injury.

- Some of the Puma range has been purposefully designed to have a combination of the blade alignment as well as the placement around the outside of the sole that aims to allow a similar function to that of the Asics sole.

- Also, both Adidas and Nike are also designing their modern boot soles with the blade and stop configuration to address this issue.

Football Boot Selection

The first point to note is you will need to have a pair of boots designed for hard ground football and another pair with blades or stops if the ground becomes muddy from rain.

Hard Ground Football Boot Options:

Adidas +Absolado PS TRX TF

This is a turf/ synthetic surface boot that has the upper design features of the Predator style. The Adidas Predator boot was originally designed with ripples on the front part of the shoe to enhance this ability and to actually put topspin on the soccer ball to improve accuracy when shooting for a goal. This boot has had some significant improvements since last

season. The upper has a slightly repositioned the 'Asymmetrical Lacing and improved placement of the 'Predator Ripples'; allowing a larger 'sweet spot' to make contact with the foot ball. It also has an improved midsole unit is full length EVA giving an approximate 10 mm heel wedge. The forefoot flexibility and torsional has significantly improved. The outsole with many smaller blades to spread out pressure and improve grip especially on turf type surfaces

*Asymmetrical lacing (laces to one side of the forefoot).

This is an important design feature for soccer players, as the placement of laces can affect your ability to curve the ball when you kick it. Also this system may allow players to improve the fit of the boot as it can be laced up firmer without causing pressure points. Also as the part of the foot that contacts the football is covered it offers more protection. However if you have a high arch structure this can cause fitting issues. We can often relieve this to some degree with different lacing techniques on the standard football boot, but not with a side lacing type.

Asics Gel Lethal Ultimate IGS 4

Asics have redesigned this boot especially for the soccer market reducing its bulk and weight in particular and adding kangaroo leather in the toe area. The sole and midfoot configuration design is largely unchanged, however Asics notes it has changed the lacing to mildly 'Asymmetrical' as it aims to improve comfort. Along the same idea this boot is now available in a wider width version called 2E. It still provides a full-length polyurethane midsole to provide cushioning, with a 10mm heel wedge. The flex point of the forefoot is the best in this group and torsional stability is excellent.

Puma King Exec TT

This is another boots that have been improved with design changes from last year, mainly from customer feedback commissioned by the Australian office of Puma. It has rubber blades with a full length EVA midsole which, with the CELL unit in the heel, provides very good cushioning and an approximately 6mm heel wedge. The arch area has been reinforced to provide excellent torsional stability and support. The forefoot flex point is also much improved to provide optimum function.

It is fair to say that boots in this category has seen substantial improvement in their features. This is probably in recognition that more and more player around the world are playing soccer and football in drier conditions and are demanding the same features seen in the more traditional boots.

Soft / Muddy Ground Football Boot Options:

Almost all the boots in this range have not changed markedly from last season, there is a NEW boot from Asics. There have been colour changes and some improvement in areas that were shown to be problematic. These areas are improved upper material, torsional stability and durability of the sole unit: (the midsole and outer sole).

Adidas:

1. The + Predator Powerserve TRX and Absolion. Designed with soccer in mind, the main design feature of the predator in the past has been the strips of rubber on the inside top of the forefoot, designed to spin and curve the soccer ball into the goal. The Powerserve boot has done away with the exchangeable different weighted Powerpulse insoles. Instead Adidas has redesigned the insole to use a chamber under the forefoot area filled with Tungsten powder. Adidas notes this technology shift the weight toward to the point of impact, 'allowing more powerful shots and increased flexibility'.

2. The + F50 Tunit. This range of boots continues the development of this revolutionary approach of customizing the boot to the player. You can choose from several interchangeable uppers, chassis and stud sets: for Soft, Firm and Hard Ground! Is it a fantastic new development that will allow players to tailor the best combination or just a gimmick? To address durability problems that occurred during last season, there have been updated materials, however I am not sure how this innovative boot would stand up to wearing it for training and games throughout the full season.

3. The ADI PURE TRX . Adidas has in this category returned to the 'PURE' traditional lines with the upper made from soft leather and the sole unit and blade placement: the traditional Adidas configuration is still available in the Copa Mundial boots. Mick T's favotie. This unit provides good torsional stability, however because of the reinforced forefoot blade plate characteristics, the forefoot flexpoint is poor.

Asics:

The Asics football boots are my favorite because they have design features from consultation with sports medicine health professionals. This has made the boot highly safe, but as far as pure aesthetics is concerned, it is perhaps not quite as attractive as the other brands. Over the past few years Asics has tried to address this to make their boots look more trendy while keeping the basics of the sports medicine principles intact. Asics AFL boots have a 10mm heel raise to offload the Achilles and hamstrings.

1. The Gel lethal 10. This boot has been built up from the original design of about 7 years ago that had a midsole, probably the best moulded cleat design in the competition and has many characteristics of runners. There has been some changes in the sole unit to reduce its bulk and weight by the midsole having a lower profile and, to offset any loss of torsional stability, having the thermoplastic midfoot support increased. There has been some improvement in the toe area stitching to lessen the impact on the foot when kicking.

2. The Gel lethal Hybrid. The main feature of this boot is the combination of blades and screw-in stops for improved traction on muddy grounds. The midsole design has been stiffened using their Solyte material which has reduced 50 grams of the boot's weight. It also comes with 2 choices of removal stops, standard rubber stops and new rubber studs (for harder grounds) to provide some options for different ground conditions.

3. The Lethal Tigreor ST/IT. This is Asics new boot to compete with the 'Performance and Speed' boots of Nike and Puma. It is built on a racing last with external heel counter. However it is designed with a 10 mm heel lift, which provides protection by reducing the pressure and impact forces on the feet, legs and lower body, but also allows the foot to come into action far sooner than traditional flat boots

Nike:

1. The Air Zoom Total 90 Shift & Supreme. This is Nike's premier boot range. It has a wide forefoot and has a New built-in thermoplastic S.P.P.technology for improved ball control and shooting accuracy,

(a similar idea to Adidas Predator boots for soccer players).This also incorporates Nike's E-vent technology to keep the foot dry. Nike has also gone back to the moulded stop design rather than blades, believing it has improved the comfort and reduced the pressure under the foot in doing so. It has a marked Asymmetrical lacing system design from its soccer heritage. Finally, the boot has a thermoplastic heel counter and support frame, which is claimed to reduce the risk of rolling your ankle.

2. The Mercurial Vapor Aero. These shoes are a highly technologically designed shoe, with the outsole design being based on the Super Fly sprint spike used at the Sydney Olympics. It is claimed to improve and enhance acceleration. The synthetic upper of this boot is designed to act as a second supportive skin that is lightweight, providing comfort. This boot has had improvements in the forefoot flexibility and a carbon fibre reinforcement linking the heel cup and sole giving better torsional stability from last season. Laces are completely hidden by a cover for improved ball handling, however lacing the boot each time it is worn may become a headache!

3. The Tiempo Ronaldinho and Air Legend II. The Ronaldinho is a noted by Nike as 'an unique fusion of strength, durability and touch' being made somewhat more robustly than the Air Legend II. Its cushioning system comes from the insole shock absorption material. The Air Legend II is similar in design with perhaps somewhat more protective features. This is seen in the substantial flexgroove in the forefoot, the glass fibre shank under the midfoot and the Zoom-Air heel unit giving good shock absorption and comfort. Both are also deep wide boots and have a removable insole that makes it a good choice for fitting an orthotic if required. Neither of the boots however have any heel wedging or lift

Puma:

1. The v1.08 This has always been an amazing football boot, but for season 2008 it has been substantially redesigned to make it more robust and functional. It is however probably limited in our TAC Cup competition! Its design statement issued by puma is that this boot has but one aim and that is 'to get you to the ball faster' and is designed for the game day's play only, not for training! The first thing that strikes you is the material used for the upper, this is too make it feel like a sock around the foot. The Carbon fiber composite sole has been changed to separate them into 2 units with the sole having forefoot and rearfoot blade zones and the carbon fibre incorporated into a midsole. The external heel counter unit is still present but is more integrated in a 'wrap-around' design. Lastly components are stitched together so not to use glue, which is an environmental push through all Puma's product range. The materials throughout the whole boot have been improved to make it a far more useable boot with better function. However, the person who wears this boot should preferably have almost ideal biomechanics and little or no history of injuries.

2. The v-Konstruk II Technology. This boot has had several areas upgraded to improve functionally and address problems. Last season's boot had real issues, as the external heel 'cradle' was far stiffer than the sole unit allowing the sole to flex through the midfoot. This has been addressed by making the sole unit stiffer and the external heel cradle more flexible. While this has improved this problem, it still exists on some of the range and if you are interested in wearing this boot, please speak to me before buying, so I can assess your compatibility. These have the Puma shock absorption system in the heel called duoCELL to reduce the shock at heel impact and now does provide some small amount of heel wedging.

3. The King. This boot has returned to a more familiar style leaving the technological advances to be in the above boots. This boot now has a better fitting last shape which may well be more comfortable for the average person, especially those with a more square foot shape, than any previous King boots. The leather upper is designed for comfort and is traditional in shape, however has the Asymmetrical lacing design. The sole has been markedly improved in torsion, but especially forefoot flexibility.