

## **Football Helmet Buying Guide**

NOCSAE: (National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment) established performance standards for football helmets, as well as prescribed verbiage to go on the helmet itself.

### **GETTING THE PROPER FIT:**

The helmet on the edge should be approximately one inch above the eyebrows. You want a "snug" fit which is neither too tight nor too loose. Try and rotate the helmet it should not "slip". If your helmet has an inflatable air suspension adjustment system use it the first time you try it on. If your helmet does not have an air suspension system. Then look for helmet inserts, which are usually available separately in several sizes and are designed to provide the best fit possible. Severe changes in hair length will often require a new fit.

### **FOOTBALL HELMET AIR SYSTEMS:**

This system allows for more cushioning of the head to absorb more of the impact from the helmet being hit, and it puts more distance between the helmet shell and the head allowing for additional absorption of the impact. The inflatable air system also helps promote a more snug fit.

### **FOOTBALL HELMET PADDING:**

Helmet padding is usually designed in multiple pieces. There is the back, neck and sides of the helmet while another is for the crown. These pads usually come standard with any helmet you buy, and they are generally designed for a specific helmet. Manufacturers offer these pads in different thicknesses. All helmet manufacturer's sell replacement pads. Make certain you replace you're worn out pads with new pads designed for your helmet and be sure the new pads meet the NOCSAE requirements.

### **FOOTBALL HELMET CHIN STRAPS:**

Football helmet chin straps are designed to keep the helmet securely anchored to your head as well as protecting your chin. To help ensure proper helmet fit and get the maximum safety benefits designed into your helmet its important you keep the chin strap centered on your chin with no slack. All football helmets come with a standard chin strap. Should you not like the original chin strap, manufacturers offer a wide variety of chin straps in either 4-pt or 6-pt hookups (the number of snap-ons the chinstrap has), a variety of materials, several sizes, and a rainbow of colors.

## **FACEMASKS:**

Simply put there is no such thing as a "standard" face mask. Generally speaking face masks are designed for specific helmet models and for specific positions, i.e. a quarterback would not wear a face mask designed for an interior lineman and vice versa. There are two types of face masks, the open cage and the closed cage. The open cage usually is preferred by quarterbacks, running backs, wide receivers and defensive backfield players because it has two or three horizontal bars and no vertical bar above the nose allowing for better visibility. The closed cage usually is the choice of linemen because it has a vertical bar running the length of the mask over the nose with two, three, or four horizontal bars which helps to keep other players' fingers and hands out of their eyes. The player's needs are usually based on the position played. Keep in mind how the face guard affects the player's field of vision. Today's facemasks are made of Titanium, Stainless Steel or Carbon Steel and are generally coated with a rust proof coating in a color of your choice.

The following abbreviations are used by the helmet makers and give you the information needed to determine the type of protection you need.

OPO: Oral Protection Only

NOPO: Nose and Oral Protection Only

EGJOP: Eye Glass, Jaw and Oral Protection

EGOP: Eye Glass and Oral Protection

JOP: Jaw and Oral Protection

NJOP: Nose, Jaw, and Oral Protection

ROPO: Reinforced Oral Protection Only

RJOP: Reinforced Jaw and Oral Protection

You will also see the following abbreviations for face mask styles

DW: Double Wire Configuration

SW: Single Wire Configuration

R: Reinforced

UB: U-Bar Attached

K: Kicker / Punter

### **HELMET SHELL MATERIALS:**

Adult, college and high school football helmet's outer shell is made of GE Lexan molded polycarbonate alloy, the same plastic material used in astronaut helmets. These are the "high end" helmets from several helmet makers. Others use a non-branded molded polycarbonate for their shell. The molded polycarbonate alloy has proved to be the best property to date for football helmet shell use because it spreads the force of impact over a greater area of the head thereby reducing trauma to the cranium and is very durable. Youth football helmets outer shell is typically made of ABS plastic manufactured by several companies. ABS plastic is a common thermoplastic used to make light, rigid, molded products and is used in football helmet shells for its excellent shock absorbent properties.

### **HELMET PRICING:**

The low end youth football helmet is usually priced in the \$45.00 to \$65.00 range. Mid range pricing levels are in the \$70.00 to \$90.00 range with the higher end helmets for both youth and adults ranging from \$110.00 to \$160.00. As we've stated previously, fit and NOCSAE approval are the key elements to making the appropriate purchase.