

Rugby Kit Guide

When it comes to getting your kit (rugby speak for gear), pretty much everything you may know about getting athletic gear is irrelevant. The pulling and grabbing and knocking and thrashing of the game make it essential that you have clothing and protective equipment that is up to the challenge.

We're often asked what do rugby players NEED to get and what would be NICE to get. So, we've gathered our collective wisdom into this guide.

Keep this in mind though: the needs of every person are unique. Maximizing your comfort and optimizing your performance while practicing and playing SAFELY is the goal here.

We've divided this guide into three sections. First we'll talk about what gear we consider essential for your kit. Second, we look at optional gear, gear that's nice to have, but you don't have to own it. Third, we'll tell where you can buy your kit.

Essential Gear

The following is gear we consider essential for every rugger to invest in within the first few months of playing.

1. Mouth Guard

Price range: \$1 - \$20

Typical amount spent: \$5 for a good one.

This is the most essential piece of equipment you will own. Let's be frank here: you will be popped in the mouth by balls, fists, elbows, knees, cleats and God knows what else. Do you like to keep your teeth from chipping, or would you prefer to look like a hockey player? We thought so.

Mouth guards serve two purposes: (1) to protect your teeth from impact, and (2) to give you protection against a concussion. We'd say both of those are pretty good reasons to get a mouth guard. Besides, we won't let you play without one.

You can find your basic mouth guard at any sports store. We recommend that you invest in the best mouth guard you can buy, the Shock Doctor v. 3.0 (about \$20). Next best mouth guard is the Shock Doctor v. 1.5 (about \$5).

2. Jersey

Price range: \$30 - \$60

Typical amount spent: \$36-\$42

Some will question whether or not you need a rugby jersey for practice, particularly in the warmer weather when a t-shirt seems like a better alternative to a heavy jersey. That is until they've experienced their t-shirts ripped off their backs

We consider a practice jersey essential gear. Jerseys are constructed to withstand the constant ripping, pulling and tugging during practice and matches to remain intact. T-shirts are not.

However, two or three practice jerseys can run you over \$100. Also, some ruggers don't care if an old t-shirt gets ripped up, and are willing to take the chance. While we strongly suggest you get at least one practice jersey, it is not absolutely necessary that you have one.

There are three considerations to take into account when ordering a jersey. The first consideration is the material. Most jerseys are made of cotton, but you'll find quite a few out there made of synthetic materials. Synthetic materials, like Temex, tend to breathe better and are lighter. They are ideal for sevens play during the summer, when it gets hot. Blends (usually cotton and polyester) and pure cotton jerseys are good, all-purpose jerseys.

The second consideration is style. There's the classic style and there is sevens style. The classic style has a full collar and tends to be made of cotton. Sevens jerseys have a banded collar and are usually made of synthetic materials. Most the guys stick with the classic, non-sevens style for practice purposes, but it really does not matter.

The third consideration is fit. The best fit for a rugby jersey is going to depend on (1) actually measuring your chest, and (2) you own preferences for a tight vs. loose fit.

Jersey sizes are in CHEST sizes. Jerseys are usually made of 100% cotton. If you are getting a cotton shirt, the rule of thumb, it is "your suit jacket size plus 2" 100% cotton garments may shrink based on how carefully you launder them. It is best to allow for about 8% shrinkage when sizing. So if your chest size is 42, order a size 44 or 45. *This upsizing does not apply when buying jerseys made of blended or synthetic materials.*

You can also use your t-shirt size as a gauge. If you wear a large t-shirt, then your rugby jersey size is roughly between 44 and 46. However, this is not always a reliable way to size your jersey.

Here's how most manufacturers size rugby jerseys:

Chest sizes: M (40-42), L (44 - 46), XL (48), XXL (50), XXXL (52)

Ruggers divide right down the middle on how tight the jersey should be. Some subscribe to "The tighter the fit, the better the performance!" philosophy. Others like their jerseys a little loose.

For casual wear (jersey worn exclusively off the pitch), you may want to order one size larger.

The most popular brands are Canterbury (of New Zealand) and Barbarian (Canadian). The best vendor from whom to buy jerseys, hands down, is Ruggers. You can often get a great deal on a jersey from a vendor with overruns (too many jerseys made for a team) and "uglies" (jerseys made from random fabric scraps, but as well-constructed as any other jersey).

3. Shorts

Price range: \$20-\$40

Typical amount spent: \$23-\$29

Rugby players often overlook having a good pair of shorts. But if you want to play well (as well as protect your modesty), a good pair of shorts is a must. Ordinary gym or running shorts rip too easily and give opponents something to hold on to. Rugby shorts are specifically constructed to stand up the demands of the game.

Rugby shorts typically come with pockets. We don't understand what exactly is the logic behind making rugby shorts with pockets. What do you need to carry in your pockets while you're on the pitch? Canterbury and KooGa both make a pocket-less short we think are equally as excellent. (You can get it from Red Rhino or Ruggers. See the "Where Can I Get Gear?" section below.) The lack of pockets makes the shorts extremely strong, and keeps the cost around \$20.

Shorts come in two styles: New Zealand and British. New Zealand-style shorts are a one-piece short that has a shorter, athletic cut, and purport to improve mobility. New Zealand-style shorts also fit tight. They are the most popular style short on the pitch. British-style shorts are usually longer and fit more loosely. They also have a fly with plastic buttons and a drawstring.

If you are a forward lifted in lineouts, you may want to invest in a pair of lineout shorts. Lineout shorts have reinforced stitching and stripes on the inside that improve lifting.

Sometimes the manufacturers will indicate small, medium, large, etc. instead of waist sizes. Here's a general guide to help you translate into waist sizes.

If you wear: **SMALL** **MEDIUM** **LARGE** **X-LARGE** **XXL**
Order size: 28", 30" 32", 34" * 34" *, 36" 38", 40" 42", 44"
**34" shorts is a tight fit for someone who normally wears a medium, and a loose fit for someone who wears a large*

4. Boots

Price Range: \$32 - \$99

Typical amount spent: \$75

Rugby boots (cleats) are the most important element of your kit. An ill-fitting pair of boots will cripple you more effectively than any hit you'd take on the pitch. Your boots are not the place to penny-pinch. **DON'T SKIMP ON YOUR BOOTS.**

The fitting process can be frustrating, considering that you will most likely order your cleats through the Internet (see "Where Can I Get Gear?" section below). This is why we suggest you go to a local vendor who sells soccer cleats and try on (but *don't* buy) soccer cleats on there to form some idea of your preferences.

Cleats should be light and flexible, and always fit properly. Uppers should be supple (no hand-me-downs, please), and there should be, and at least a finger's width should separate the tip of the big toe and the end of the shoe. Laces should be tight. When shopping for boots, it's helpful to wear the same style of socks you intend to wear in on the pitch. Shop in the afternoon, when the feet are naturally slightly swollen.

Boots come in three different cuts: high, mids and low. The following matrix explains the differences:

	High-cut	Mid-cut	Low-cut
Ankle coverage	Completely covers ankle	Covers half the ankle	Covers none of the ankle
<i>Ankle support</i>	Firm, like a straight-jacket	Good, allows for good mobility	What ankle support?
<i>Usually best for these positions</i>	prop, lock, No. 8	hooker, flanker, scrumhalf, flyhalf, center, fullback	hooker, flanker, flyhalf, center, fullback, wing
<i>Best brands</i>	Reeboks, Patrick, Nike (sometimes), Gilbert	Mizuno, Adidas, Reebok	Reeboks, Patrick, Mizuno

You may have guessed that choosing a boot is somewhat dictated by what you will be doing on the field. For this reason, it may be best to postpone getting your boots until you have a better idea of what position you will play.

Rugger's have their brand preferences. Many backs love Mizunos Warriors because it is a professional-level shoe with a tight fit. The tight fit gives the shoe great touch (feel for the ball), which is a tremendous aid in kicking. Other backs (and forwards) swear by Reebok Visigoths, especially if they have wide feet. The wide cut of the shoe gives a lot of comfort and mobility for the typical rugby foot. Similarly, Patrick Mondials are a favorite of the forwards.

You may run into dealers who differentiate between soft-ground and hard-ground boots. Soft-ground boots are made for playing on pitches that are wet, mushy or muddy (often all three). They have long metal studs. These are the kinds of boots that are most ruggers wear during the 15s season (fall, winter, spring), with most wearing them year-round. Hard-ground boots are made for playing on short grass or Astroturf pitches. They have short, molded plastic studs or rubber studs and are typically used for summer sevens play. They are very similar to soccer shoes.. Some guys play in the hard-ground boots year-round because they fit best. We recommend that you go with the soft-ground boots first, though.

Here are some general guidelines:

1. Study the offerings. There are many types and styles of cleats. Get clear about your preferences.
2. Understand fit. Cleats should fit snugly, with no more than a thumb's width of space between the toes and the front of the shoes.
3. Choose close-fitting shoes to facilitate the best touch (the feel for the ball) if your are back, or choose a shoe that gives the best traction if you are a forward..
4. Remember, leather stretches and then molds to the foot.
5. Try on cleats with rugby socks to ensure proper fit.

Tips:

- Buy from a sports specialty store with knowledgeable salespeople. Red Rhino and Ruggers are particularly helpful.
- Buy cleats specifically made for rugby. You can get away with soccer cleats, but in the end, you'll find rugby boots will serve you better.
- Bring in old cleats for comparison, if you have them.
- Take care of cleats to keep them soft and long-lasting. Stuff wet or muddy cleats with newspaper to help them maintain their shape. Dry shoes naturally or by using a dehumidifier. Do not use artificial heat.

Optional Gear

The following are items you may want to invest in down the road.

1. Kit Bag

Price Range: \$20 - \$70

Typical amount spent: \$30

A duffle bag works, but a kit bag has compartments specifically for your cleats, balls, clothes and loose things.

2. Scrum Cap

Price Range: \$50 - \$90

Typical amount spent: \$60

If you're a forward in the scrum, and taping your ears doesn't quite cut it, consider getting a scrum cap. Many guys swear by them. Some backs wear them, but for what?

3. Practice Ball and Pump

Price Range: \$10 - \$70

Typical amount spent: \$30

We recommend that you get your own ball. Having your own ball to toss around your living room or to go to the park with a buddy to practice passing improves your handling skills dramatically. Ruggers makes a very good, match quality ball for about \$25—and excellent deal. Don't forget to get an air pump to keep it inflated.

4. Protective Equipment Shoulder Pads

Price Range : \$60 - \$99

Typical amount spent: \$70

Shin Guards

Price Range: \$9 - \$39

Typical amount spent: \$20

Until a few years ago, most rugby players pooh-pooled the idea of any kind of protective equipment. After all this is rugby, not football, right?

Times have changed. Although most guys still wear no protective equipment, a number of them swear by it. Protective equipment primarily comes in the form of shoulder pads and shin guards. Equipment needs to be IRB approved (if it is made by a major manufacturer like Gilbert, Canterbury, it probably is).

Shoulder pads usually come in the form of a vest that you wear under your jersey. Measure your size by measuring your chest size (use a tape ruler to measure the circumference your torso just under your armpits or across your nipples).

Shin guards are best bought at a local store that carries soccer supplies. Typically sizing is related to height. If you are under 5'8", choose a medium size shin guard (usually 8.0" - 8.5"). If you are over 5'8", choose a large size shin guard (usually 9" - 10").

If you are prone to shoulder injuries or bruised shins, you should consider shoulder pads and/or shin guards.

Where Can I Get Gear?

The Internet is the place to go to shop for rugby gear. Here's a list of recommended sites.

- **Ruggers** (www.ruggers.com) - If you needed it yesterday, this is the place to go. Rarely has anything out-of-stock. You can track your shipments on-line (via an interface with UPS) as an added bonus. Highly recommended along with Balls Out.
- **Rugby Imports** (www.rugbyimports.com) - Another reliable source for your kit. Has a great selection of books and videos.
- **Matt Godek Rugby Store** (www.rugbystore.com) - A solid store with a good selection and reasonable prices. Look here for weekly specials (that usually last well more than a week). Also, be sure to call in if you're shopping for rugby boots (cleats), as the site sometimes shows only boots on sale.
- **American Rugby Outfitters** (www.americanrugby.com) - limited selection, but a good place to get the Eagle's (US national team's) jersey at a reasonable price.
- **International Athletic** (www.internationalathletic.com) - A good place for jersey ideas, but their jersey prices aren't that great.
- **Red Rhino** (www.redrhinosports.com) - Several teams recommended Red Rhino for getting shipments here quickly and always having supplies in stock. They have a well-designed site, and great prices.
- **Canterbury of New Zealand** (www.canterburynz.co.nz) - One of the biggest brands in rugby worldwide sells its gear directly to the public. You can often get great deals if you order from them. You can set the site to automatically make the currency conversions for you. The downside, of course, is that you may have to wait weeks for your order to get here.

Other Shopping Considerations

You'd think that in a game that attracts many big and/or tall men, that there'd be more a selection for them. Alas, this is not the case. If you're a big and tall man, you're already familiar with the drill: you'll need to ask for what you want. However, Red Rhino includes a section devoted to big and tall men. There you'll find XXXL jerseys, short up to 46" waist-size and a good selection of boots up to size 16. This should be a great place to start.

Remember, again, maximizing your comfort and optimizing your performance while practicing and playing SAFELY is the goal here. If you have any question, feel free to ask a more experience player or the coach. We'd be glad to help you.

Happy shopping!