



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF  
AMERICAN FOOTBALL  
EQUIPMENT AND RECONDITIONING



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OF AMERICAN FOOTBALL

# Equipment & Reconditioning

Whether you are playing flag, limited contact, or full contact football, managing and taking care of your league's equipment requires great attention to detail. Many leagues have designated a dedicated person to handle this time-consuming position. Sometimes they are given a title such as "assistant commissioner for equipment" or "equipment chairman. IFAF strongly recommends that it be made someone's sole responsibility as it needs a tremendous amount of attention.

The recommendations below follow your equipment needs through the calendar year from purchase to offseason storage.

## Purchasing

Equipment is paramount in keeping players safe and gives their parents peace of mind. Order all equipment from trusted sources.

Be sure to order your equipment to allow for plenty of time for fulfilment. The last thing you want to do is compromise an athlete's equipment due to a delivery delay.

Maintain inventory 10 to 15 percent above the level of participation. This will allow you to provide appropriate fitting equipment to all participants and allow for equipment to be replaced throughout the season as needed.

Choose substance over style. Don't compromise safety for aesthetics.

For helmets, order extra pads in all sizes (S-M-L-XL), including jaw pads and front/back sizers ( $\frac{1}{4}$ ",  $\frac{3}{4}$ ", 1  $\frac{1}{4}$ "). Get all possible combinations to make sure you are ready to fit any athlete.

Order age-appropriate helmets, not professional or high school helmets for youth athletes.

If you are unable to provide new equipment when there is damage, make sure you have enough supplies on hand to repair the equipment appropriately before allowing it to return to use.

## Sizing

Equipment must fit perfectly. Loose equipment can cause injury.

Each player should be individually fitted for his helmet on an annual basis.

Keep records of your equipment fitting efforts.

If you need a refresher on how to properly fit equipment, instruction on equipment fitting can be found on guidance material provided by credible suppliers.

## Distribution

Require parents to sign a form stating exactly what equipment has been checked out and what is expected to be returned at the end of the season. This can include size, colour, cage type, and jaw pads for helmets, etc.

If you are going to allow athletes to provide any of their own equipment, consider the use of a special waiver of liability applicable to their use of personal equipment and releasing you from liability for injuries resulting from their use of the provided items. Consult your insurer on this.

If you collect equipment deposits, you should keep the deposit but not cash them until allowed as part of your organisation's financial policies on deposits.

Make sure all equipment is numbered before practice starts to help eliminate the possibility of equipment being shared by players.

## In-season Inspections and Maintenance

In-season helmet inspection is an important part of every football programme as spotting a helmet integrity breach before the helmet is put back into use can help an athlete avoid injury due to faulty equipment.

Inspections can be completed quickly with an appropriate plan. A suggested plan is below.

Location: On the field just prior to warm-ups

When: Before each practice and game

Personnel: All coaches

1. Assign an equal number of players to each coach. They will be responsible for the same players through the entire season. By doing this, each coach will become familiar with each player's helmet and the effect that the player has on his helmet. This is based on the player's style of play and position.
2. Before warm-ups have each player line up in front of his assigned coach with helmet in hand.
3. Complete a helmet inspection for each player using the 3-step procedure below focusing on whether (1) the player has tampered or modified the liner parts, (2) the mask is bent, loose or welds are broken, and (3) whether the outer shell is cracked.

Step 1: Hold the helmet under the left arm and shake mask firmly with right hand. Check for loose face mask attachments, bends or broken welds.

Step 2: Hold the helmet so you are looking straight into the front. Put a finger into ear holes. Push in firmly looking for cracks in temporal area.

Step 3: Rotate the helmet, cradle in left arm so that you can look down inside and all liner parts are visible. It is important to determine if the pads inside have been tampered with or are loose and move around.

Note: Since an air liner's function is to provide proper fit, it is not necessary to inspect at that time.

4. After all these steps are completed, return the helmet to the player. Stress to the player that the helmet should not be altered if the player has tampered with it.

Note: Following each inspection, and at all other times throughout the season, players should be encouraged to inform their coach if the way their helmet fits begins to feel different than when it was initially fitted. In the event of such a report, the coach should take the player and his or her helmet through the full fitting process to correct any fit issues.

Have helmet repair kits on hand at all times in case of cracks or damaged pads. If a damaged item cannot be repaired and continue to be used safely then the athlete should be issued a new piece of equipment and the damaged item should be removed until it can be repaired and is safe for use again or, if beyond repair, disposed of.

Follow appropriate cleaning and sanitisation practices for equipment during the season or, if players and their parents will be responsible for cleaning and sanitisation, make sure they are educated on how to properly conduct such activities.

Use collection as an opportunity to assess any damage and conducting repairs as appropriate. If a helmet is unable to be repaired, its use should be discontinued, and it should be removed from inventory.

## Offseason Maintenance and Storage

Much of the information below has been provided by the National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOCSAE) and the National Athletic Equipment Reconditioners Association (NAERA).

### Helmets

NOCSAE, NAERA and helmet manufacturers recommend reconditioning and recertification annually. If that is not possible, then reconditioning and recertification should occur at least every other year at a minimum. (NOCSAE/NAERA)

Regardless of the reconditioning and recertification frequency adopted by a team, club or league, there should be a written program developed to implement and guide the reconditioning and recertification of helmets with the goal of maximizing player safety through helmet maintenance, inspection and reconditioning/recertification. (NOCSAE/NAERA)

For those clubs and organizations that decide to follow a two-year reconditioning and recertification program, it is strongly urged that at least half of the helmets be reconditioned and recertified each year. All helmets should be inspected at the end of each season to identify those that, because of their condition, need to be reconditioned and recertified, even though they may not be due that year under the written program. (NOCSAE/NAERA)

The written inspection and reconditioning program also should include a method for uniquely identifying each helmet, tracking when it has been sent for reconditioning and recording the name and contact information of the company that performed the last reconditioning and

recertification. The program should also include a protocol or checklist to be followed during the inspection of all helmets. (NOCSAE/NAERA)

A list of potential findings that might indicate the immediate need for reconditioning would include, but not be limited to, missing or damaged pads, damaged or leaking bladders, signs of cracks or other shell damage, signs that the shell or padding has been altered in any way, and the overall condition of the helmet. If you believe your league lacks the personnel or experience to conduct such an inspection, then a reconditioning company licensed by NOCSAE to recertify football helmets should be contacted for assistance in performing such an inspection or in training staff in such inspection. (NOCSAE/NAERA)

For use in the traditional Autumn season, the reconditioning process should occur between January and April. If your season begins at a non-traditional start-date make sure you provide sufficient lead time to have the reconditioning process completed.

There may be expert, licensed reconditioners located in your country, and one may work with the local rep from whom you purchased the equipment.

Your licensed reconditioner has the proper paint for your helmets, and that paint isn't available at your local hardware store. Let the reconditioner take care of any paint issues as use of the wrong paint may compromise the helmet's integrity.

For the helmet maintenance that your organisation handles on its own:

- Get a reconditioning kit – one will work on approximately 200 helmets.
- Check for stress cracks as well as for broken parts.
- Even if you don't believe you will find damaged helmets, be prepared to replace 10% of your league's helmet inventory every year.
- Take out all pads and use sticker remover on the shell.
- Clean pads with bleach and warm water and allow them to dry thoroughly.
- Be careful not to compromise the integrity of a helmet as that may void the warranty. Warranties are different for each manufacturer, so know the details before working on your organisation's helmets in the offseason.

## Shoulder Pads

- Shoulder pads should be sanitized and then washed and cleaned with a mild detergent and allowed to dry completely prior to storage.
- Ensure that the clips, strings and straps on the shoulder pads are in proper working order and replace them if they are not.
- Ensure that all plastic parts of the shoulder pads are free from cracks or defects.
- NAERA recommends that shoulder pads be reconditioned annually. If that is not possible for your league, it should be done every other year for both safety and sanitary reasons.
- Employ proper storage guidelines, including shoulder pad trees when possible.

## Other Pads

- Sanitise and then clean personal pads such as hip pads, thigh pads, etc., and let them dry thoroughly. The cleaning of these pads can be done for a large number of pads in an industrial washing machine. Such an approach will help prevent mildew from forming and keep skin infections such as MRSA at bay. Make sure everything is clean and dry before storing in weatherproof boxes.
- Sanitise and then clean blocking pads such as hand shields, half-rounds, tackle rings, etc., and let them dry thoroughly before following proper storage guidelines.

## Cloth Items

Jerseys and pants should be sanitized, washed, and dried prior to proper storage.

## Footballs

When storing footballs after sanitization and cleaning, insert needle and deflate to outside air pressure. Once deflated, employ proper storage guidelines.

## Other Equipment

When dealing with any other equipment, be sure to refer to the manufacturers' recommendations for maintenance, cleaning, and storage.

## General Storage Guidelines

- Proper storage of football equipment – such as footballs, blocking pads, helmets, shoulder pads, cloth items and protective pads for thighs, knees and hips – should be in a clean, cool, dry enclosed environment safe from insects and rodents. A climate-controlled environment is ideal.
- Proper sanitisation and cleaning products should be compatible with the plastics and materials of equipment so as not to have negative effects. NAERA members have information concerning all reconditioning and recertification questions and knowledge of NOCSAE standards.
- Make sure all items are dry when stored.
- Maintain a very detailed equipment inventory.

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