



## **Sizing Up Shoulder Pads**

How to properly fit shoulder pads on your young players

The first day of practice can make any youth football coach anxious, yet eager, to get started. But one must not forget that safety is the most important thing to remember when coaching or simply observing a sport such as football.

The first step in ensuring a safe environment is proper equipment. And in today's environment, a coach must be proficient at more than just organizing practices and teaching skills. A coach must be able to properly fit helmets and shoulder pads on your young players. Their safety and well-being depends on it. Let's take a look at how to go about preparing youngsters for a day of football fun.

### **Shoulder Pads**

The basic function of a shoulder pad is to protect the player's shoulder, back, and chest. You will encounter more of a variety of body types and shapes when fitting shoulder pads. Most youth pads are designed as all-purpose pads.

1. Determine the proper size pad. There are several ways to do this:
  - Shoulder width — Have the player extend his arms straight out to the side at shoulder level to form a "T." Measure from the indentation where the deltoid and trapezius muscles meet on one side to the same point on the other side.
  - Chest measurement — Using a tape measure, measure around the chest line of the athlete as he takes a normal breath and holds it.
  - Weight measurement — This is the most commonly used method with youth players. Figure out his weight and convert to a chest size.
2. Check to see that laces are centered, snug and tightly tied.
3. Make sure the straps underneath the shoulder pad are snug with all the slack taken out.
4. Check to see that the caps on the outside of the shoulder pad extend one-third to halfway down the arm.
5. Look to see that the shell padding extends three-fourths to 1 inch beyond the AC joint when the arms are at the athlete's side.
6. Check to see that the area formed by the union of the sternum and the arches cover the clavicle.
7. Check to see that there is a 2- to 3-inch space between the shell padding and the neck.
8. Look to see that the arches adequately cover the pectoral area.
9. Check to see that the athlete has adequate range of motion; he should be able to raise and lower his arms without the pad riding up into the neck opening.
10. Finally, have the athlete put his helmet and jersey on and assume his stance to make sure you haven't overlooked anything.