

Play it safe with your cleats

In 1789, Benjamin Franklin wrote in a letter that only two things were certain in life: death and taxes. Nearly 230 years later, I will add another. If you wear cleats with flat edges, you are significantly increasing your chances of suffering an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) tear.



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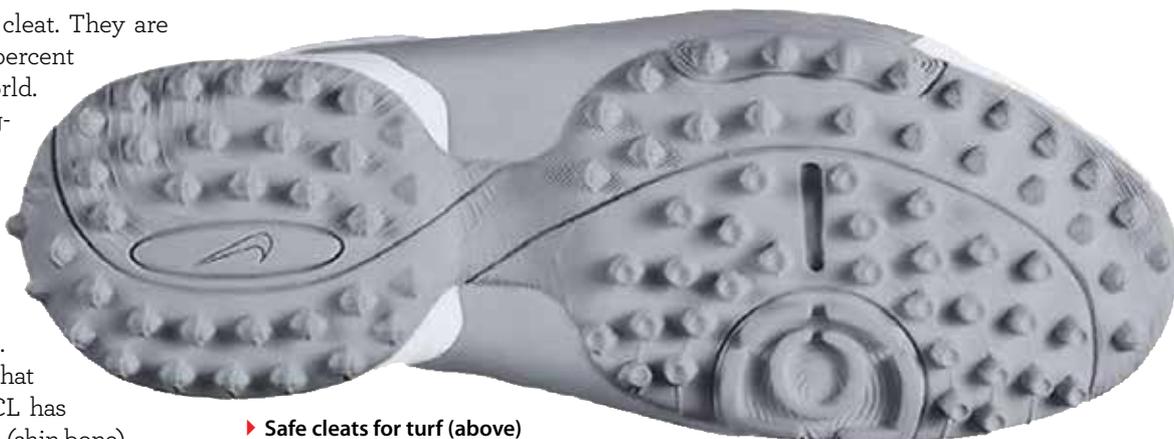
There are three footwear and playing surface combinations that research suggests will yield a greater incidence of ACL tears in high school and collegiate athletes:

1. Flat-edge studs worn on turf (any combination of flat and round)
2. Flat-edge studs worn on natural grass (any combination of flat and round)
3. Rounded studs on turf (all studs must beat round)

Take a step back and understand

the marketing of the cleat. They are worn by the top .05 percent athletes in the world. The descriptions suggest enhanced performance metrics such as enhanced cutting, change of direction, deceleration, acceleration, speed and ball control.

Now I'll break that down for you. The ACL has one job: keep your tibia (shin bone) from moving too far forward away from your femur (thigh bone). It's simple, though, right? The best way to make sure that never happens is to maximize single-leg strength, create an indestructible hamstring-to-quad relationship, and never let your foot get caught in the ground. I've worked with nearly 100 Division 1 athletes and zero percent of them were strong enough to wear a flat-edge cleat on turf. Professional athletes can perform all those metrics barefoot. They don't need the cleat. They are stronger, faster, quicker and more durable



▶ Safe cleats for turf (above) and grass (below)



than 99.5 percent of their peers. They have tremendous single-leg strength and unprecedented hamstring-to-quad relationships. Above all, they are some of the most aerobically fit athletes in the world, which minimizes loss of focus and a breakdown in kinetic awareness. This is why they are relatively safe in a round or flat edge cleat. You are not.

So what should you be wearing? You should have two pairs of cleats. They don't have to be the most expensive cleats, but they should fit the following criteria:

1. Rubber-studded turf outsole for turf surfaces.
2. Molded round-studded cleat for natural grass surfaces.

Rubber-studded turf cleats allow you to perform all the same sport-specific movements on turf fields without the increased risk of injury. The rubber soles create friction with the rubber base of the turf fields to promote traction while allowing rotation. Wearing a rubber-studded shoe on a turf field significantly reduces the chances of injury from a non-contact mechanism. Molded round-studded cleats on a grass surface will provide just

enough traction to play the sport, but because the molded cleat is typically shorter than the screw-in cleat, you are less likely to get your cleat caught in the ground during a change-of-direction play.

If you boldly elect to wear a molded cleat that has even just one or two blade or V-shaped studs, typically in the toe, you are inviting the ACL to tear. The blade-shaped stud does not allow the shoes to rotate freely in the ground, which will yield what we call the pivot-shift mechanism. This mechanism is when the shoe becomes fixed in the ground and the athlete continues on in motion, only to crumble to the ground in pain holding his or her knee. Enticing?

So, it's up to you. Wear a shoe that fits your game, strength and durability goals. Or wear a shoe that 99.5 percent of the world is not safe in. Your call. **L**

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