

Soccer Preparation – It's in the Bag

Article by Wayne McCarthy – December 12, 2010

First off, this article is meant to be somewhat light-hearted in addition to being informative. You can read through it or just use the suggested checklist on the right.

Coaches, try as they might, can't control what exactly a player does on the pitch. On-field mistakes can drive coaches crazy but there are things off the pitch that can be annoying for a coach too... having a player show up to a match wearing the wrong socks for example.

It may sound trivial, but when that player is told by the referee they can't play because their socks don't match the rest of the players on their side, that simple uniform infraction could leave a team a player short. It happens. During a recent game, the team got off with a warning and the player was allowed to play, but it really bothered the coach who told the players time and again about being prepared.

What exactly does it mean to be prepared? Stretching out before the game, eating right, getting good sleep, showing up early to warm up... all makes sense doesn't it? What about checking your kit bag to ensure all your gear is ready to go?

If you haven't got a clue about what I'm talking about, a kit bag is pretty much the container for your soccer life. Every player from the seasoned veteran to the micro soccer player at U5 should have a kit bag. It's kind of a one-stop shop for all that you'll need to play or practice.

I've put together a guideline of what every player's kit bag should include:

A solid sports duffel bag or soccer specific gear bag is needed to start with. Look for a quality bag with a shoulder strap, reinforced zippers, a good-sized storage compartment, additional zippered pockets or pouches, a shoe compartment, a ball compartment, and hopefully a rain cover. Unlike baseball, soccer doesn't stop when it showers. (You can use a black garbage bag if the bag doesn't have a rain cover.)

Most name brand soccer suppliers have good bags available and at different price points. Also, many local clubs have bags with the club logo available and they are usually of a decent quality. Check with your club first. Oh, first thing you do after you get your bag – put your name on it!

So, with your new bag in hand, *the one with your name on it*, you'll need items to put inside. First thing I encourage my players to put in there, since soccer is played with your feet, is a pair of gloves! Yes, gloves. The kind you put on your hands. I don't know how many times I've had players complaining about being cold or whining about their hands freezing. Get a pair of stretchy magic gloves, in fact get two pairs, and stick them in your bag. Your coach will thank you for it. You can pick up gloves in most big box clothing stores or even at the checkout counter of most grocery stores for about one dollar a pair.

Next, put your uniform in there: Your team's main jersey and alternate jersey, if available, belong in your bag at all times. Get your shorts moving! Ensure that you have your team's main coloured shorts in your bag – you'd look silly playing in your underwear. Socks next... you don't want to be sitting on the sideline because your socks don't match the rest of your team. If you can, put in a couple pairs of your team socks and change them at the half. Warm, dry feet make the game easier to play.

Put your practice gear in there too. I suggest getting a mesh laundry bag from a dollar store to keep your practice gear in, separated from your team uniform. Your practice ensemble should consist of two pairs of shorts, two training tops, and three pairs of soccer socks. Put them in the mesh bag and into your kit bag along with your team uniform and the other items listed further on in this article. Use a different colour for your practice socks. The same should apply to shorts and jerseys. Do not use your game uniform for practices!

Kit Bag Checklist (Suggested):

- ☺ Soccer specific or sports duffel bag
- ☺ Gloves x 2
- ☺ Team jersey – main & alternate
- ☺ Team shorts – main & alternate
- ☺ Team Socks – main & alternate x 2
- ☺ Practice jersey x 2
- ☺ Practice shorts x 2
- ☺ Practice socks x 3
- ☺ Long sleeved shirts (white and black)
- ☺ Cleats
- ☺ Shin guards
- ☺ Cleat brush
- ☺ Garbage bag (if bag has no rain cover)
- ☺ Sports tape
- ☺ Extra t-shirt
- ☺ Towel
- ☺ Hair ties

Now that you've got your main kit and practice outfit together, there are some other essentials that belong in a well-stocked kit bag:

- ☺ Your shin guards – don't leave home without them! It hurts getting kicked in the shins, I can attest to that.
- ☺ A long sleeved shirt – plain white and/or plain black – that can go under your main uniform for those frigid winter days when only soccer players take to the field. Look for tops made of technical material, it will dry out faster.
- ☺ Your cleats are kind of important. Get those into your bag (in the shoe compartment if it has one).
- ☺ Longhaired players – hair ties or elastics to tie your hair in a ponytail. It isn't a fashion show out there so don't worry about what your hair looks like tied back. It is far more important that you see the ball than looking good for the scouts.
- ☺ A towel – if you live in the Lower Mainland, you understand. Besides rain, a towel is good for wiping sweat off. If you're not sweating, you probably aren't working hard enough. Make sure you put that towel to good use!
- ☺ Sports tape – you may never need to use it if it is in your bag, but if it isn't in there, then you'll need some... like the time your shoelace broke and your coach had to use medical tape to keep your shoe from flying off your foot.
- ☺ Cleat brush – these are available at your local dollar store and have a wire brush with a metal pick on the end. They're perfect for cleaning the grass out of your cleats during a break.
- ☺ Extra clothes – a spare t-shirt for after the game is a very good idea. So is having a light rain jacket on hand.

Make sure everything is clean before putting it into your kit bag. If you've used something, clean it when you get home and get it back into the bag straight away. Your bag will start smelling pretty ripe if you don't clean your gear regularly and that's just nasty not to mention unhealthy. Bacterium and mould love dirty sports gear – your skin doesn't. Clean your gear! Wash your jerseys, shorts, and socks. Clean your cleats! Air out your shin guards. Doing this beats having a rash due to bacteria.

Finally, build a checklist, put it in the bag, and go over it to ensure that all the items on the list are there before you head off to the field with your kit bag slung over your shoulder. Following this advice will endear you to your coaches as they'll see that you've come prepared with the right gear and you're ready to give it your all for your team. Also, your parents will be happy not hearing, "Mom, where's my socks?"