

## FOOTWEAR TECHNOLOGY: ADIDAS

Sports brand adidas believes a special stud configuration on the latest in its line of rugby boots will be of particular help to flankers and number 8 forwards.

# Star-studded rugby boot unveiled

**S**ports brand adidas announced a new rugby boot, the FF80, at the start of February, just in time for the 2013 Six Nations Championship. Describing the new boot as “ground-breaking”, adidas explained at the launch that the FF80, with a 5x2 stud configuration, is designed to cater for the “unique requirements” of specialist flankers and number eights, the forwards who position themselves at the back of the scrum.

Every aspect is designed to help increase traction in scrums, rucks and mauls, the company continued, to allow loose forwards to be faster to the breakdown and provide a solid platform for acceleration. The stud pattern is key, it said. “It’s a feature not seen on rugby boots for many decades,” the brand claimed in a statement, “and a configuration that adidas researched thoroughly over the last two years with some of the world’s best players, coaches, and biomechanical experts.”

### New levels of physicality

Its global vice-president for rugby, Simon Cartwright, added: “The modern game of rugby has brought a new level of physicality, power and agility. Through our ongoing communication with world-class rugby players and coaches it became clear that amongst loose forwards there was a perceived lack of grip and stability while scrummaging and in rucks. We set out to find out why this was the case.”

Research showed that flankers use their feet quite differently from players in other positions, spending a lot of time on the sides of their feet during scrums, on their toes during rucks, and often needing to change direction quickly to



*New Zealand flanker Sam Cane is one of the rugby athletes to have tested the FF80 boot in the build-up to its formal launch in February 2013.*

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make tackles and reach breakdowns. With this in mind adidas began investigating different stud configurations to define the optimal stud pattern for a loose forward's boot.

"We gathered a team of experts including biomechanical and material specialists, and design and footwear developers," Mr Cartwright continued. "With the blessing of [the sport's governing body] the International Rugby Board we created a prototype which was put through its paces during training by many of the world's top loose forwards. We also took advice and feedback from various top-tier coaches from New Zealand, Ireland, and the United Kingdom."

### An extra stud

Adidas discovered that a particular type of 5x2 configuration offered significant benefits over the traditional 4x2 boot. The additional stud towards the front of the FF80 is positioned exactly where a loose forward exerts pressure during a scrum, bridging during a ruck, or driving off the ground to accelerate.

Further findings from the research revealed by Mr Cartwright include the observation that, during scrums, flankers tend to rotate their feet to help them and their team-mates drive forward. This means that a loose forward wearing boots with a traditional 4x2 stud-configuration will typically have only one or two studs in contact with the ground during this passage of play. Gaining an advantage at the scrum during a key phase of a match can make the difference between scoring a try or not, between winning the match or not, so adidas has concluded that footwear that "negatively impacts traction" is a disadvantage forwards can well do without.

It is the sports brand's contention that its FF80 boot will help overcome this with the placement of the additional stud in "just the right spot", creating what it has termed a "stability triangle" of three studs positioned at the inside-front of the boot. The company says it is really pleased

with the FF80 because of the way it looks and because it believes the product can make a real difference to the rugby athletes who wear it. Players who have tested the boot so far have given favourable feedback, Mr Cartwright says.

Former Wales captain Sam Warburton is one of the prominent players to have offered a glowing review of the new boot. He has said: "I find the extra stud to be of real benefit when scrummaging and also in general play, especially when having to change direction quickly. From a stability point of view the FF80 is great. Overall, I think the performance of the outsole is better than a 4x2 boot as I find it much more stable, and the extra stud gives me much better traction."

### Rugby making headlines

The new adidas FF80 rugby boot has been available in retail outlets since the start of February, coinciding with the inaugural games in the 2013 Six Nations Championship in Europe. The company believes it will make an impression in the southern hemisphere too as the 2013 Super 15 championship, involving teams from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, gets under way.

Rugby makes fewer headlines at adidas than some rival sports, but the company has devoted considerable energy to the launch of the new boot and has pointed out that the FF80 is just one style in a range of rugby-specific boots that it has developed in recent years. Other styles include the Predator Incurza, promising playmakers high levels of kicking accuracy, the adiZero RS7, which aims to enhance the speed of backs, and the adiPower Kakari to help tight forwards play with strength and stability.

In addition, national teams that wear kit from adidas include New Zealand, France and Italy. Its club roster includes Super 15 teams The Blues, Chiefs, Hurricanes, Crusaders, Highlanders, and Stormers, while European partnerships include Munster and Stade Français. 



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