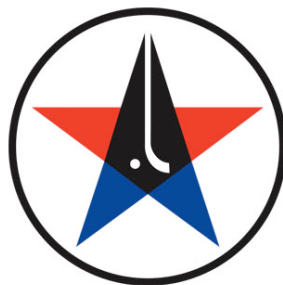


# SO YOU WANT TO START A SHINTY CLUB?

*A Club Sourcebook*

**US**CAMANACHD



*Assembled by the Northern California Camanachd Club for US Camanachd*

## ***Introduction***

This is intended as an aid to getting a Shinty Club started – a way to share our thoughts and the experiences gained with the Northern California Camanachd Club (NCCC), the first modern US Shinty Club.

Shinty is played in Scotland in both 6-a-side and 12-a-side forms (with slightly different rules and pitch/field dimensions), so the good news is you don't need an overwhelming number of players to play! We started out with the short-term goal of establishing 6-a-side teams, rather than 12-a-side teams, which is often more practical for the playing fields or pitches easily available. Soccer or American Football fields are actually too small to host 12-a-side Shinty, so we generally play with teams of six to nine players on a Soccer pitch.

During the first year we started small with about 4 to 6 players coming out on a regular basis, but we set a goal of fielding 10 to 12 players – enough to be able to work on skills, fit into a small playing area, and not require formal goals etc. Just about any park served initially as a pitch and we used park garbage cans for goals, progressing later to orange cones and then to soccer corner flags. Playing what we called “half court” and taking turns being on offense and defense served as a good way to learn. We then set up a very small pitch with two goals to give more of a “game” feel. Early on we would sometimes use soccer goals with some string and a stake to reduce the width to something like that of a Shinty goal. By our second year we were fielding 8 to 12 regular players and continued to grow from there. We made properly sized portable goals and began to set up our field more like a true Scottish Shinty pitch.

What we learned is that even with small numbers a group can create some semblance of game play, setting sides of 3 on 3 or 4 on 4, often playing without a goal keeper. Things grew from there through word of mouth, people seeing us play and asking what it was, and so forth. In our first year we got permission to stage a short demo at one of the local Highland Games, playing on the Heavy Athletics field during their lunch break. We worked our way into playing a 40 minute demo match with proper goals and uniforms and this year we will be making our sixth appearance at these annual games!

So, it may be slow going at first, but as folks get a chance to see the sport, and especially to hit the ball a few times, you will find recruits in many places – so keep at it, it's a blast!

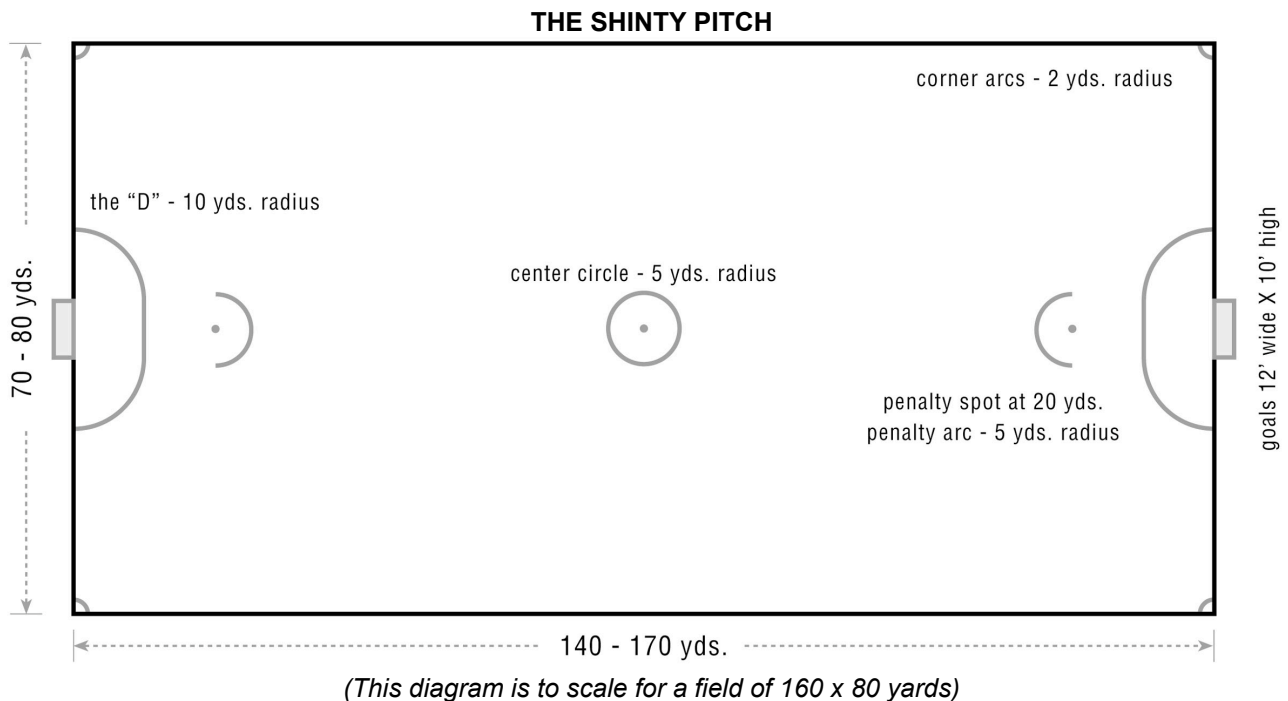
*Elheran Francis & Michael Bentley  
Northern California Camanachd Club  
US Camanachd  
1 June 2006*

## 1. What is shinty and why haven't I heard of it before?

At some point you are going to be asked this question, so before we get into details of starting a club here is a bit of an answer to that inquiry. If you are already familiar with the game feel free to skip ahead.

*Shinty* (also known as *Camanachd* and *Iomain* in Scots Gaelic) is a team sport of the stick and ball variety that has been played in the Scottish Highlands for many many generations. Shinty's origins date back nearly 2,000 years, and it can claim hurling as a cousin, and hockey and golf as descendants.

Though Shinty is very old, the playing season has traditionally run from Fall to Spring and so most tourists (who usually visit Scotland during the summer) have not had an opportunity to see the game being played. It is also true that Shinty is not played in all parts of Scotland. The game has close ties with the Gaelic culture and has generally flourished in the *Gaidhealtachd*. A great many teams can be found in close proximity to the Great Glen, between Inverness and Fort William, though teams also exist in other locales, including Skye and Argyll, as well as Glasgow and Edinburgh.



### A brief overview of the rules

Two teams (usually of six or twelve players a side) play on a field of similar proportions to, though usually larger than, a soccer pitch (see diagram). The players use *Camans* (hooked/curved sticks with a triangular cross section, photos follow below) to strike the shinty ball, either in the air or on the ground, with the intention of scoring goals. As in soccer or hockey, a goalkeeper guards the goal nets, which measure 12 feet across and 10 feet high. A shinty match is either 30 minutes (for six-a-side) or 90 minutes (for twelve-a-side) in length, divided into two halves with a short break between. A referee regulates play, enforcing rules and calling fouls for illegal and/or dangerous play. There are also side judges and goal judges to assist in calling side-outs, end-outs and goals.

### History and background

There are several good sources for the history of shinty (a bibliography with links is available on the US Camanachd website), so I will not go into detail here, but a little general background is an interesting jumping off point for those new to the game.

Shinty is a very old sport, with recognizable references dating back several thousand years. Undoubtedly the rules have evolved and changed through the years, but the fact that this athletic pursuit has had an important

place in Gaelic culture for a long time is significant. The playing of shinty has traditionally been associated with holiday celebrations, particularly that of New Years or Hogmanay. These games would involve entire communities and were an important part of the social fabric of Highland culture. Perhs we could draw a parallel between this and the role of baseball at a Fourth of July picnic in the United States. The game often involves all generations and could stretch on for a significant part of the day. Players come and go during the game, perhaps taking a break to eat, and the overall feeling is one of community and fun rather than rigourous competition.

In the Nineteenth Century Shinty, like so many other sports (baseball, football, soccer) developed a universal set of rules and became something recognizably like the modern sport played in Scotland today. The Camanachd Association was formed and in 1893 the first Camanachd Cup match was played in 1896.

The varying fortunes of shinty mirror those of the Scottish Highlands. Camanachd has been used as battle exercise in times when armed combat was outlawed, and in this sense intermingles with the storied history of the Scottish Regiments and military traditions. Scottish Land Reform issues have also had their impact on the sport –land ownership changes had a great impact on the patronage of the shinty, especially in certain districts. In addition shinty's place in the lives of Scottish youth has been challenged by football/soccer, with the costliness of equipment given as an excuse for removing shinty from schools throughout the Highlands. Through these and other details it is easy to see how much shinty has been a part of life in the Gaidhealtachd.

There are a number of great sources for further information on the history of shinty as well as it's place in Scottish culture. A brief book list follows here, other references are available online (see the Links and Resources sections of the US Camanachd website).

- Hugh Dan MacLennan – *Not An Orchid*
- Hugh Dan MacLennan – *Shinty!*
- Roger Hutchinson – *Camanachd! The Story of Shinty*
- Reverend Ninian J. MacDonald – *Shinty, A Short History of the Ancient Highland Game*

## 2. Equipment

Shinty is a stick and ball sport, so your equipment needs begin there.

Though camans (shinty sticks) may be a little difficult to come by, there is just no substitute for their unique shape – it is the unique form of the camans and balls that makes Shinty different from Field Hockey, Hurling and other stick and ball sports. Some folks have been tempted to use Field or Street Hockey sticks, but you won't really be learning proper technique with these sticks. When we first read about Shinty we actually made our own sticks out of curved sticks (much as they would have done it times past in the Highlands), but it should be possible to order modern camans, see the list of contacts in the appendix.

There are different camans for the different positions on the field (forward to keeper, see photos below), but there is no rule stating that you have to use a midfield for midfield only and forward for forward only. In Scotland and here it should be your style of play that determines which type of stick you use and the designations are more suggestions or guide lines for where they would be used. We began with a lot of midfield camans, which seemed a good starting point, but at this stage we would recommend getting a few forwards sticks as well.



*The shinty stick is called a caman, a Gaelic word meaning hooked or crooked, which makes sense when you see a caman (see photos). There are different camans for different positions, as you can see in the photo, the wedge being increasingly angled from forward (on the left) through midfield, defender and keeper (far right). Below: Camans and balls.*





When we made our first couple of caman orders club members pitched in so we could purchase some additional camans as loaners. We were fortunate to have the cost of shipping donated by a local supporter, which helped to help keep costs down. Occasionally we have been able to get used camans from Scotland and fix them up to be loaners, however this is not a dependable source of sticks (we will let folks know when they are available, but I would not place major hopes on getting many this way). Shinty Balls are a bit easier to purchase and they can be ordered from sources listed in the appendix.



*Above: three camans from three different makers: (from top to bottom) a Tanera forward, a Heron forward, and a Munro midfield. Note the differences in the curve and toe angle. Below: three camans fresh from a match, all forwards or mid-forwards. Note the variations in taping and the use of tennis or golf type grips. The bottom-most caman (taped in red) was used by Gary Innes playing for Fort William in the Scottish Premier League.*





*Three types of shinty balls: (left to right) a plasticized practice ball, a leather match ball, and a rare "Tighnabruaich" match ball.*

Shinty balls come in two main varieties these days, the leather match ball and the plasticized/rubberized practice ball. The two balls behave rather differently, and at some point there is no replicating or replacing a real match ball for learning skills. However, due to cost and availability it is useful to have practice balls or some other type of ball on hand. One suggestion to help clubs get started is to use 8" IncrediBalls (Youth League safety balls as made by Easton, for instance – see equipment appendix and photo below at right center). They're the same size as real shinty balls, but much cheaper and more readily available in the US. They are also a bit softer which can help in teaching blocking/stopping skills. If you do this make sure to get the 8" version (PeeWee league) as opposed to regular 9" size, though the 9" may be better than nothing and still supplies a cheap alternative to Shinty balls. Of course you will need to get real Shinty Balls as soon as practical – a real Shinty ball behaves much differently than anything else!



*For comparison, here you see a shinty ball (at center) alongside some other balls: (clockwise starting at left) a sliotair (hurling), an American softball, a baseball, a PeeWee league safety ball (8" version), a handball, and a golf ball.*



There are a few other pieces of equipment that the Shinty player should have. For men the wearing of athletic cups is recommended (if not required for liability issues), especially when first learning to play. Shin Guards are worn in Scotland at all levels of play with Field Hockey shin guards being the first preference and Soccer type shin guards the next choice. Players may also want to consider wearing Lacrosse or Ice Hockey Helmets with face guards. The Camanachd Association in Scotland recently approved a helmet which is mandatory for all youth players and is optional for adults.

Beyond these items we have players that wear gloves (batting or motocross gloves, for instance), knee pads (volleyball or baseball types are easy to find and allow mobility), or even some light padding, though few players in Scotland seem to wear this particular items.

As far as shoes go, we have found that soccer or football cleats work well, though there are many other alternatives – almost any field cleats (i.e. Ultimate Frisbee, Football, etc.). The only expressly forbidden shoes would be ones with metal spikes as they are considered a danger.

The Shinty uniform consists of jersey top, shorts, and knee socks, so this traditional Scottish activity is very affordable as compared to piping, dancing or heavy athletics which require the purchase of a kilt! We used coloured t-shirts as our first uniform, and continue to use vests/bibs regularly to form teams or groups quickly, so you do not need to purchase expensive jerseys to play. Note that the goalkeeper wears a contrasting colour jersey so they can be easily distinguished from the field positions and the referee.



### **3. Recruiting**

There are a number of ways to approach recruiting.

First of all, who are the best candidates for shinty players? We have found that people that have played soccer or ice/street/field hockey have a lot of skills that are useful in shinty. In fact any sport which emphasizes hand-eye coordination is a good starting point for shinty (baseball, tennis), and of course golf, being a cousin of shinty, tends to give players a head start on hitting. So you might want to think about finding people who are already participating in these sports and are looking for a new challenge.

One avenue that seemed logical to us and has worked well is to tie-in with the local Scottish American community. This might include societies (St. Andrews Society or Caledonian Club, for instance) or other similar special interest groups. We have made presentations to these kinds of groups to help raise awareness of the sport and have found some players along way.

Along these lines we have also worked with local Scottish Highland Games. These events give us the opportunity to set up information booths as well as staging demonstration matches, both great recruiting tools. At this point in our evolution we are even organizing tournaments and Cup matches at Highland Games whose facilities support full scale field athletics. We suggest making friends with the Heavy Athletes too. You might be able to share a field (by having Shinty during their lunch break, for instance), and you will have things in common with them. And remember, if they (or any other group) feels threatened by Shinty, they can make life hard for you.

We have also used the internet to recruit and communicate. Besides managing a mailing list we have posted to [www.craigslist.org](http://www.craigslist.org) (placing free ads in the “activity partner” section), [www.tribe.net](http://www.tribe.net) and [www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com).

Other methods might include asking a local newspaper to print a human interest story about your club – this has worked well for us. Posting flyers at local colleges has helped as well. One thing we have done, which is not a common practice in Scotland (though this is changing a little), is to be play with co ed teams. It helps with numbers and also allows families to play together.

Until quite recently Shinty was a winter sport in Scotland (the season ran from September/October to March/April) so most people traveling in Scotland during the spring and summer months never saw or heard of it. Part of what you may need to do is simply educate folks as to what shinty is, why they have not heard of it, and why they should care. There are a number of resources for the history and context of shinty available via the US Camanachd website – visit the History, Links, and Resources sections for more information.

#### **4. Teaching**

In you have never played shinty, or even seen a game, how can you approach teaching? Well, there are a several resources that will be most helpful. First of all the latest Camanachd Association training manual is available in PDF form via the US Camanachd website – go to the Resource section for this and other downloads. As a supplement to this we have created a very basic introduction to shinty in the Coaching section that will give an idea of the elements of the sport with photos and diagrams. And the rules of the game are also available via the Rules section.

Another great tool comes in the guise of games posted on Media nan Eilean (MnE) Television's website. Watching a few of these condensed games (via streaming video, you will need a reasonably fast connection) will give you an idea how Shinty is played at the highest level in Scotland, and give you and your club some idea of how a game actually flows and how the techniques from the coaching manual are used in the run of play. Not everything will be suitable for a learner, but a glimpse into the modern game is invaluable!

Perhaps the best method for learning is finding someone who does know the game, perhaps a Scot living abroad or a player that happens to be visiting your area. We have benefited a great deal from both Scottish ex-patriots who have come out to play with us and from visiting players/coaches. Additionally, if you or any of your club members are planning a trip to Scotland try to allow time to see a match in person. The fixture schedule is posted on the Camanachd Association website ([shinty.com](http://shinty.com)) and available for download as well.

Beyond these resources and ideas, you should look over the Camanachd Association's rules for some of the details of what is and is not proper play. Form our experience you will probably need to caution players from kicking the ball (a natural reaction for people who played sports such as soccer and ice hockey) as it is not allowed, and there will probably be a few other rules that may not come naturally at first. A lot of it will come down to common sense. Most of the rules are in place for safety reasons. Things like wild swinging, playing the ball while on the ground, and the like are against the rules because they put players at risk. If you keep safety in mind you will be off to a great start and you are sure to enjoy the game.

You will be trying to acquire skills and a "stick sense" that most players in Scotland have grown up with, so we recommend you approach training with a safety first mentality. The more you play/practice the better sense you will have as to where the caman is likely to be and how to approach other players who are attempting to hit the ball, but at first many folks will probably try things that could result in injury.

There are a number of exercises suggested in the Camanachd Association training manual (available Resources section) which will help new players learn proper technique and safety, so familiarize your coaches and players with it. We will also continue to add material drawn from our experiences as well as contributions from other US Clubs. If you have questions or suggestions related to teaching/coaching, please email us directly at [info@uscamanachd.org](mailto:info@uscamanachd.org).

## **5. Organizational**

As you begin to set up a club, especially when your membership extends beyond a casual gathering of friends, you will want to take care of a couple issues right away. In the US it is important to be aware of potential liability issues and take measures to protect everyone involved. We recommend having participants sign a hold harmless waiver, and that minors have signed permission from their parents. A template for this release is available on the US Camanachd website in the Resources section. In addition it is worthwhile considering an insurance policy, especially if your group is involved in public events or playing in venues in which spectators could be considered to be in harm's way.

Other organizational advice – you might want to find some kind of non-profit organization, preferably a Scottish one, to sponsor your efforts or include you as part of their organization. Failing that you might want to form your own non-profit. Despite the work involved in the long run it simplifies everything from reserving fields, to getting money donated for equipment.

You will probably want to put together some kind of presentation for potential benefactors, to educate them about Shinty and to let them know why they should care about it. Tell them a little about yourselves and what you are doing. The same presentation can be used at other venues (such as social clubs, schools, Highland Games) to recruit, so it is well worth the effort!

## **6. Philosophy**

If you are not interested in our “philosophy of shinty clubs” then feel free to skip this chapter, but we encourage you to bear with us. We have been very fortunate in our experiences with the NCCC, and would like to think that some of it has to do with the overall approach that we have taken.

After reading some of the history of shinty and its place in Scottish culture, it struck us how much the place of sport and athletics in our society has changed in the last centuries. Shinty had a life as a folkway, a social interaction, and even a warrior’s training regime for many generations. None of these roles resembles the remove at which we hold modern “professional” athletics. Sport as a pastime and folkway is an active pursuit, not a passive one. Games of all kinds are a way for groups to bond and share an exciting experience. Sure there is winning and losing to be experienced in matches, but sport features much more than just that. Athletics at its best is a venue for self-improvement and for testing one’s limits. In this sense it is about doing the best that you can, and in the context of team sports, supporting and interacting with your teammates to help them do the best that they can. It may be a cliché, but the lessons learned in sports can be taken into other parts of life, and the history of a sport such as shinty demonstrates that.

For the group that originally developed Shinty here in Northern California camaraderie was one of our core motivations for playing. Team sports, at their best, have that ability – bringing friends together and creating opportunities for new friendships. As the NCCC has developed and played together we have found new friends here in the Bay Area, and with our 2005 trip to Scotland I feel as if we have found new friends abroad as well. And all because of shinty. And that’s why you should form a club!

Best of luck!



## **Appendix 1 – Equipment sources and suggestions**

### **CAMANS (STICKS)**

1. **Munro Camans** M. & J. Sloggie, Achadhluachraich, Invergarry. PH35 4HR (Tel: 01809 501 248)  
Note: the Sloggies require the funds be sent in UK currency, such as an international bank draft or money order. One option is to work with a local business (such as a British Food shops or Scottish Outfitters) to see if they have a presence in the UK – if so you might be able to arrange to pay them locally in US funds and then have their UK office send the funds on in UK currency. The good news is that they will ship to the USA. As far as US customs is concerned, if these are described as Hockey Sticks there will be no duty charged. This applies to **House of Scotland** (see below) as well. As far as shipping camans from Scotland, we recommend looking into having them sent for two week delivery by the Royal Mail, which will likely be the cheapest shipping option.
2. **House of Scotland** <http://www.scotland.on.ca/shinty.shtml> – e-mail: [Jim.Millar@scotland.on.ca](mailto:Jim.Millar@scotland.on.ca)  
They have a limited number of camans but are located in Canada and will take US funds via Credit Card or Check. They are a business so have added additional cost to the camans for having imported them.
3. **Tanera Camans** Unit 9A, Blar Mhor Industrial Estate, Fort William. PH33 7PT – Tel: 01397 700 045  
Web Site: <http://www.shintymanufacturers.com> / E-mail: [info@shintymanufacturers.com](mailto:info@shintymanufacturers.com)  
Tanera does not, at this point, ship to the USA. However, we have picked up camans from them while in Scotland. It turns out that Camans fit very nicely in traveling Golf Club Bags!

### **SHINTY BALLS\***

1. **Camanachd Association**  
Shinty Balls, Practice Balls, First Shinty Equipment, Other Equipment  
Mr Alan D.Hill, Tanglin, Barcaldine, Argyll. PA37 1SG – Tel/Fax: 01631 720 559
2. **Beaully Shinty Club**  
Braeview Club House, Braeview Park, Beaully, IV4 7ED – Tel: 01463 870 560 or 01463 782 406
3. **Tanera Camans (& Balls)**  
See above under Camans listing.

\* Balls can also be purchased directly from makers in Ireland. Do make sure you specify you want Shinty balls and not Hurling Sliotars. There are two types 1) Practice, which are made of plastic and are less expensive, some clubs in Scotland used them for training; and 2) Match Balls, which are made of leather. The good news is these folks will take PayPal for payments (in Euros). Contact them at via e-mail at [corkie@connectfree.co.uk](mailto:corkie@connectfree.co.uk)

### **BALL SUBSTITUTES**

#### **1. PeeWee League (8") Safety Balls**

We have had great luck with IncrediBalls (Youth League safety balls as made by Easton, for instance – see link below). While not a perfect substitute for the real thing, in the early stages of learning to stop the ball with your body these might make the process easier. They are also more easily available and cheaper than Shinty balls, so may be of help in trying to build up an adequate number of practice balls. Two warnings: (1) these are much softer and therefore behave quite differently than a Shinty match ball, and (2) you need to find the PeeWee League versions which are 8" in circumference, as opposed to the usual 9" circumference baseballs.

- <http://baseball.eastonsports.com/youthbaseball/details.php?scid=148&d=softouch&t=Accessory>

## OTHER EQUIPMENT SUGGESTIONS

### 1. Shin Guards

**Hard shell style** *Note: Field Hockey shin guards will wrap more around the leg than soccer, especially on the inside of the leg. There are many sources here are a few we have used:*

- Brine Field Hockey Oxygen Molded Shin Guard. These can be found at <http://www.train4golf.com/sports-23/BrineOxygenMoldedFieldHockeyShinGuards-1303433.htm>  
These need to be worn with a “Shin Guard Sleeve” which is purchased separately.
- Mercian Xtreme Guard. These and other models can be found at:  
[http://www.field-hockeydirect.com/stores/fhd\\_protection.asp?groupid=4](http://www.field-hockeydirect.com/stores/fhd_protection.asp?groupid=4) or  
<http://www.trysportsdirect.com/hockprot1.html>.

**Soft shell style** *Note: or those who would like a shin guard that does not wrap around as much, but can be pushed down when you are not playing and would not require the wear of knee socks. There are many sources here are a few we have used:*

- Cranberry Deluxe Field Hockey style Shin Guards, part# 971515.  
<http://www.thesportsauthority.com>.
- STX Contoured Field Hockey Shin Guards, item # 683415.  
<http://www.modells.com/product/index.jsp?productId=683415&cp=1181001.694162&parentPage=family>.
- STX OSi Field Hockey Shin Guards, item# 99587  
<http://www.modells.com/product/index.jsp?productId=99587&cp=1181001.694162>
- Brine Field Hockey Shin Guards Item#: 1102602  
<http://www.dunhamssports.com/>

### 2. Gloves

**Field Hockey gloves** *Note: Field Hockey shin guards will wrap more around the leg than soccer, especially on the inside of the leg. There are many sources here are a few we have used:*

- Brine Gel Field Hockey Gloves – These run a little small size wise. They can be found at <http://www.dickssportinggoods.com/sm-brine-gel-field-hockey-gloves-pair--pi-1303434.html>  
These need to be worn with a “Shin Guard Sleeve” which is purchased separately.
- STX Specialized Field Hockey Gloves, item# 1103615. They can be found at:  
<http://www.modells.com/product/index.jsp?productId=1103615>
- Grays Anatomic Glove item# 1133 and Grays Pro Glove item# 1135 can be found at:  
<http://www.cranberry.com/cbfieldhockey/store.htm>

#### **Alternatives:**

For players with large hands field hockey gloves will often be too small. There are some other alternatives that provide varying degrees of protection as well as a better grip. Cycle Cross/Mountain Bike gloves (which can be found at bicycle shops that cater to Cycle Cross/BMX riders) are one possibility that often have padding and/or carbon shields on the back of the hand. One particular brand/model we have experience with is called the “Fortress” glove and is made by Specialized (<http://www.specialized.com>). Another option is the TRX Glove, which is not as protective, but is less expensive.

Other gloves which could be used include baseball batting gloves and even golf gloves, though these would be more for grip and less for protection.

### 3. Helmets

If you wish to wear a helmet, you should consider Lacrosse and Ice Hockey helmets as possibilities. Additionally there are now some Baseball Batting helmets with protective cages. We have found the face cage to work better than a face shield as the shields tend to fog up, but both are options. Make sure the face cage has a small enough spacing to keep the ball out! We especially recommend helmets with cages for goal keepers and youth players – in fact we require helmets for anyone under 18.

Irish Hurling Helmets (which feature the all levels face cage) will work as well, just confirm that it has the smaller spacing for the Junior or Camogie Sliotar (ball). The Camanachd Association in Scotland has an approved helmet (as of 6 February 2006), made by Mycro Sports in Ireland (<http://www.mycrosport.com>). They also make Irish Hurley Helmets, so double check that you are looking at the correct helmets. The main difference is the face cage, regular Hurling balls (or Sliotars) are larger than Shinty balls so an adult Hurling face cage has larger openings which could allow a smaller shinty ball in. There are Hurling Face cages that will work, just make sure you get the correct one, better yet just get the approved Shinty face cage!

#### **Alternatives:**

There are other options for protective eyewear, including Lacrosse cage goggles (<http://www.slingitlax.com/> or <http://www.bacharach.com/catalog/9>).

#### **4. Shoes**

There are many options in athletic shoes these days, and a great deal will depend on the playing surface. Soccer cleats, Field cleats (such as Ultimate Frisbee shoes), or Turf shoes work well, though some folks prefer cross training or running shoes. The main thing to remember is that NO METAL studs are allowed, so traditional baseball spikes or golf shoes are definitely out!