

Fair Trade Certified Sports Balls Q & A

1. What are Fair Trade Certified sports balls?

They are hand-made sports balls including stitched, glued and molded varieties which have been produced in line with the internationally agreed Fair Trade Certified standards and are supplied by independently certified producer organizations. You can buy Fair Trade Certified outdoor and indoor soccer balls, rugby balls, beach volleyballs and basketballs which come in a wide variety of sizes and qualities. Machine-stitched balls are not covered by the Fair Trade Certified sports ball standard.

2. Where can I buy Fair Trade Certified sports balls from and how much do they cost?

Fair Trade Certified soccer balls, footballs, rugby balls, indoor and beach volleyballs and basketballs from Pakistan can be purchased from Ottawa Y Focus <http://yfocus.ncf.ca/fairtrade/product.htm>

3. Where do Fair Trade Certified sports balls come from?

The Fair Trade Certified sports balls for sale in Canada come from the producer organization Talon Sports, located in the Sialkot district of Pakistan. Pakistan is the world's primary exporters of sports balls and around 40% of the Sialkot working population is dependent, directly or indirectly, on this industry for their livelihood. The region is particularly well-known for its production of hand-stitched balls and estimates suggest that as many as 60% of the world's sports balls are made in and around Sialkot.

4. Why are Fair Trade Certified sports balls needed?

Poverty is widespread in Pakistan with over 30% of the population estimated to live under the national poverty line. Sialkot is densely populated and it is estimated that around 40,000 people in the area are involved in the sports ball industry. Industry wages are often below the government's minimum and the workers and stitchers associated with the sports ball industry are amongst the most marginalized – their rights are precarious and unionization is a relatively recent and rare phenomenon. Many of those working in the industry are from landless families and so rely heavily on their wages to supplement their household income. Women often also need paid work to supplement the low family income and local stitching centres provide a particularly good source of employment for them. As they cannot go to big stitching centres in the villages because rural women are not allowed to work alongside men or too far from the family home, the Fair Trade supplier has established single-sex centres near their homes enabling them to earn a part-time income also.

5. How are the balls made?

Sport ball production is a labour-intensive and time-consuming process which takes place across several production sites. At the factory, polyurethane or poly vinyl chloride (PVC) panels are tailored and glued to the inner casing material of the ball. These are then cut into the pentagonal and hexagonal patches which make up the ball. One worker can stamp out patches for 300-400 balls per day. The patches are sent with the ball's internal bladder (made out of Forest Stewardship Council certified rubber in the case of Talon Sports) and thread to workers in stitching centres where they are stitched together by hand into the finished ball. The stitched balls are then returned to the factory to be quality checked and prepared for shipment. It has been estimated that an experienced worker can stitch around three soccer balls during an eight-hour working day.



6. What is different about Fair Trade Certified sports balls?

The Fair Trade Certified sports ball standard ensures that producers meet certain social, economic and environmental criteria (the full standard is available at http://www.fairtrade.net/fileadmin/user_upload/content/Sports_Balls_HL_Jan_06_EN.pdf). These include ensuring that all workers in the supply chain - factory workers and stitchers - receive at least the national minimum wage; that there is no child labour involved in production; that the health and safety of workers is safeguarded. They receive an additional sum of money - the Fair Trade Certified premium¹ for community and economic development projects. Through the Fair Trade Certified premium, workers and stitchers at Talon are able to improve the lives of their families and their communities' health, education and livelihood opportunities. Certification also means that all traders in the supply chain have been registered with the Fair Trade Certified system and work to these trading standards. The standards include paying the agreed Fair Trade Certified premium, providing pre-financing where requested, committing to long-term, more direct trading relationships, and independent auditing of their supply chains.

7. Who benefits if I buy Fair Trade Certified sports balls?

All of the workers involved in making certified sports balls, whether they are based in factories or stitching centres are covered by the Fair Trade Certified standard. For the stitchers in particular, the improvements since certification have been significant. Previously, they had no minimum wage, no job security and no social security. The wages that stitchers at Talon receive are substantially higher than those received by workers involved in making conventional sports balls. In fact it has been estimated they (and the factory workers) receive 50% higher wages than average stitchers for every Fair Trade Certified ball that they produce. Talon has pioneered the organization of stitching into small work units with improved working conditions such as better lighting, ventilation and access to safe drinking water. Talon also emphasizes the active recruitment of female stitchers as a means to reduce poverty as it is widely recognized that women spend more of their income on their children's health and education compared to men. The fact that recruitment of women is prioritized – indeed one in three employees of Talon is a woman – means that the family situation is improved as a result. The Fair Trade Certified premium has been used to provide basic health insurance, a first for this kind of employment which benefits the entire Talon workforce. Some of the premium has also been allocated to support a micro credit fund which the families of workers have access to so they can also set up small income-generating projects and which contributes to the strengthening of the local economy.

8. Could children have been involved in making my Fair Trade Certified ball?

No. The Fair Trade Certified standards are very clear that children are not permitted to work in the factories, stitching centres or sub-contracted units². These sites are all monitored by independent inspectors to ensure that this condition is strictly adhered to. In addition, Talon is registered with IMAC (Independent Monitoring Association for Child Labour) which monitors compliance with child labour legislation at stitching centres.

¹ The Fair Trade Certified price is defined as the free on board contract price (export price) and the Fair Trade Certified premium is set at 10% of the contract price. It is not possible to set a minimum Fair Trade Certified price for sports balls because of the variability in cost of raw materials and the difficulties in monitoring these costs.

² Sub-contracted units are stitching centres that are owned/leased and operated by independent agents who have signed a sub-contract with the sports ball company. All work carried out in these units are covered by the Fair Trade Certified standard.



9. Are the raw materials of a Fair Trade Certified ball also certified?

In the case of sports balls, Fair Trade Certified certification relates to the labour of workers involved in the manufacturing of the product rather than the raw materials. This is because the main value of a sports ball lies in the labour involved in making it rather than the component materials themselves. In the sports ball industry it is workers who are traditionally underpaid and who suffer from exploitative working conditions and so can benefit most from Fair Trade Certified certification. The rubber bladder is Forest Stewardship Council certified in the case of Talon Sports.

10. Fair Trade Certified is normally associated with commodity farmers. Why are you now certifying the manufacture of sports balls?

Fair Trade Certified certification is a tool for development and has been traditionally associated with addressing the problems faced by marginalized workers and farmers involved in the production of agricultural commodities. We recognized though that there are other vulnerable people further along supply chains that could also benefit from Fair Trade Certified and that, in the case of sports balls, certification would be a natural progression from the elimination of child labour in Sialkot, because it addresses the root cause of child labour which is poverty. This is the first program within the Fair Trade Certified system for certifying a manufactured product and we are now exploring whether and how certification could be extended to other manufacturing and processing settings.

Adapted from The Fair Trade Certified Foundation, Suite 204, 16 Baldwin's Gardens, London EC1N 7RJ. Tel: 020 7405 5942, TransFair Canada's UK equivalent. For more information on Fair Trade Certified: www.transfair.ca

