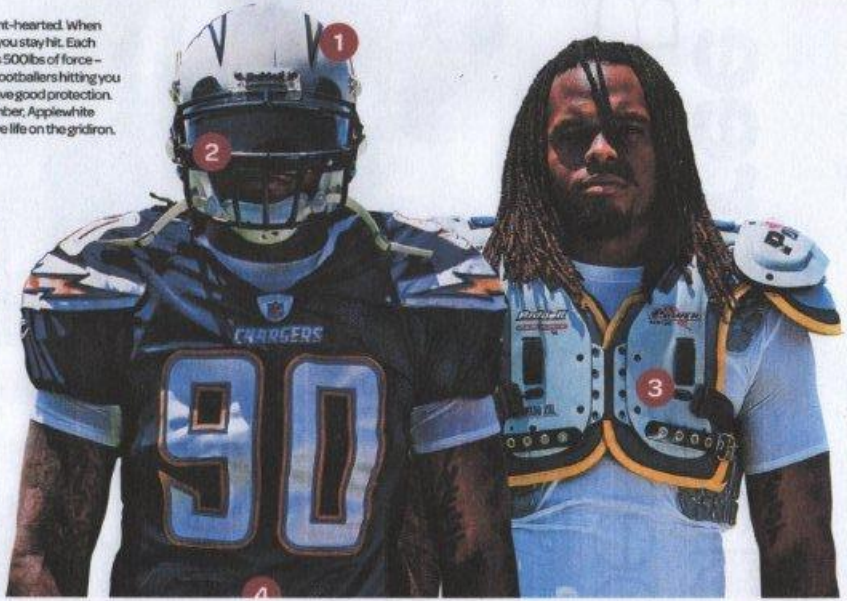
The NFL player and his kit

San Diego Chargers' Antwan Applewhite on the gear that protects him during a season of physical combat in the NFL...

American football is not a game for the faint-hearted. When linebacker Antwan Applewhite hits you, you stay hit. Each tackle delivered by a defender generates 500lbs of force – the equivalent of three Premier League footballers hitting you at the same time. Obviously that means it's vital to have good protection. Ahead of the new NFL season, which starts in September, Applewhite talks to us about the equipment that helps him survive life on the gridiron.



1 Helmet

Concussions are a big deal now so they're always designing new helmets to protect our heads. We take so many serious hits to our heads that our helmet has to provide protection so that's why the inside is all padding and cushions. The helmet is the one piece of equipment I wouldn't step onto the field without. I've watched guys play rugby with very little padding and I take my hat off to them. I know the rules are different but I don't think I could play it.

2 Visor

I've worn a visor my entire playing life. At my position, a lineman's hand can easily slip and poke you in the eye. The visor also protects your eyes from the glare of the sunlight or the floodlights.

3 Pads

The actual process of putting my pads on only takes about 15 minutes. The moment I put on my pads is like when a superhero puts on his costume – when Clark Kent becomes Superman. You're ready to go into battle with your team-mates. The padding – which covers our shoulders, ribs

4 It's amazing to pull on an NFL shirt – it's what you've worked towards your whole life and it's what you dreamt about when playing as a little kid. Every player likes their jersey to be a tight fit because the other guys who are not playing by the book like to hold your shirt and pull you back while you run. It's a pretty snug fit once you get it over your pads.

5 Gloves

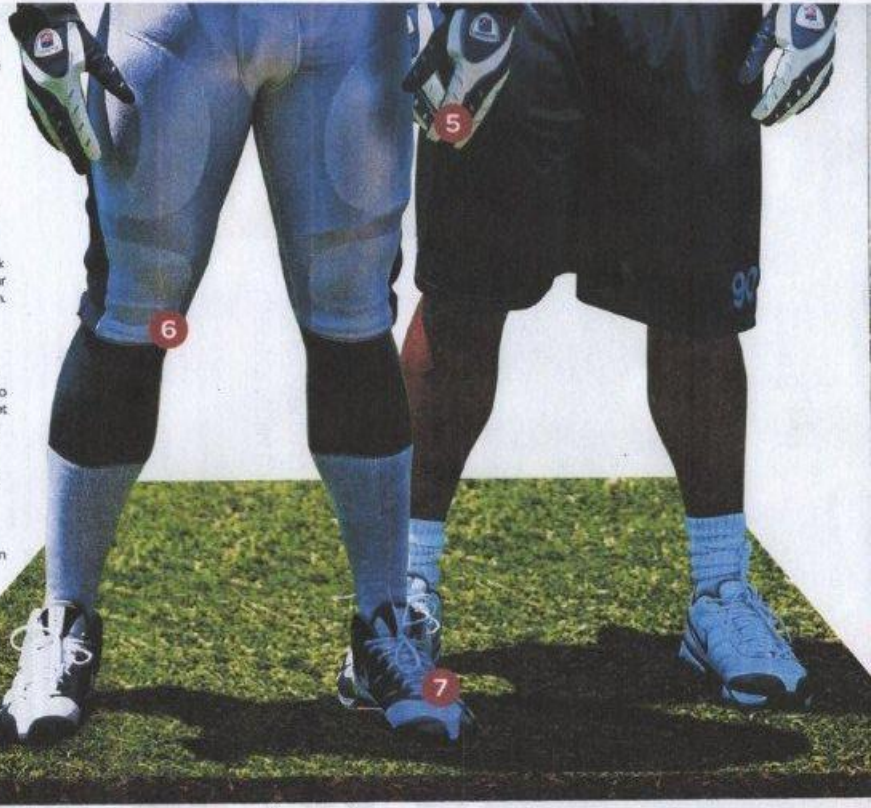
The gloves give you a little extra grip when you're holding or trying to catch the football. The underneath of the glove is tacky and sticky and that helps because those balls are hard and they're coming fast! The bigger guys on the offensive and defensive lines wear gloves with padding on the back because there is always a lot of contact. Players wear different types of gloves depending on their position.

6 Tape

I get most of my joints taped – my wrists, fingers, knees and especially my ankles. Taping your ankles is important because you change direction so many times, which puts a lot of pressure on your feet and ankles. It's the same with your wrists – you have to tape them because you use your hands at every position on the field. It can take quite a while to get taped up as there are only so many trainers and 53 guys who want to get ready for the game.

7 Shoes

I wear different types of shoes depending on the surface we are playing on, and I go through a pair every three weeks. We do so much running in the shoes – every day in practice and then in games. Shoes are as important as shoulder pads or gloves for a skill position player. I have to be able to react quickly and change direction on a dime – if you're slipping and sliding all over the place, you won't be able to do that.



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