

## Glossary of Sports Slang and Idioms Used in Casual American Conversation

Primary Source:  
Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia,  
List of sports idioms  
<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_sports\\_idioms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_sports_idioms)>

**ace** – *Baseball*: A team's best starting pitcher. Also used as a verb, meaning "did very well." Example: "I aced that test today."

**ball is in one's (or another's) court** – *Tennis*: Responsibility now belongs to the person named; often in the sentence "The ball is in your court", meaning it is now up to you.

**bare-knuckle** – *Boxing*: Characterized by a fiercely unrelenting or implacable character, for example "bare-knuckle politics". Bare-knuckle boxing is the more savage precursor to forms of boxing that mandate gloves.

**beat (someone) to the punch** – *Boxing*: To make the first decisive move. A boxer who first strikes his opponent has beaten him to the punch.

**beezer** – *Boxing*: The nose. Example: "I got hit in the beezer."

**behind the eight-ball**. *From the game of pool*. In a very bad position, perhaps inextricably bad.

**bench; on the bench; warm/ride the bench** – To *bench* someone is to remove someone from participation; to be *on the bench* or to *warm* or *ride the bench* is to be so removed, to observe without participating, or to wait for one's chance to participate. A **bench-clearing fight** is a fight that breaks out on the playing field and draws all players from the dugout or bench.

**blitz** – *Football*. A defensive attack in football where several defensive players who normally cover running or passing routes rush the passer. In common usage, an intense campaign to get a job done, as in "I went on a housework blitz over the weekend."

**blow-by-blow** – *Boxing*: In reference to a verbal or written account, means providing great detail: for example, "a blow-by-blow description of the movie." Sometimes simplified to the nominal phrase "blow-by-blow" as in "You saw what happened, give me the blow-by-blow."

**bowl over** – *Cricket*: To astonish or overwhelm. The cricket term means to knock both of the bails off the wicket.

**bump and run** – *Football*. A technique used to slow down a player so something else can be accomplished on the field. Also, a car theft technique. One thief causes a fender bender. As the driver leaves the car to inspect the damage, an accomplice jumps in and drives off. Luxury cars are the usual target.

**bush league** – an amateur play or behavior.

**carry the ball** – *football, rugby*: To take charge, to assume responsibility. In some ball games (for example American or Canadian football, rugby, etc), the ball can be carried to advance toward a goal.

**Cheap shot** – A deliberate foul against an unsuspecting player. In conversation, an unfair or unsporting verbal attack on a vulnerable target. “That was a cheap shot, and you know it.”

**come out fighting** or **come out swinging** – *Boxing*: To go immediately on the offensive, often pre-emptively; or, to strongly defend oneself or one's beliefs

**curve ball** – *Baseball*. A pitch that veers to one side in order to trick the batter. Anything unexpected or designed to deceive. “That last question was a real curve ball,” or “What do you do when life throws you curve balls?”

**down and out** – *Boxing*: Lacking money or prospects; penniless or destitute. A boxer who is "down" has been knocked to the canvas, and one who is also "out" is unconscious or unable to resume the fight. Thus, a down-and-out person is utterly defeated.

**down for the count; out for the count** – *Boxing*: To be defeated. Refers to a boxer being knocked down; the referee will count off ten seconds, the time allotted for the boxer to regain his feet or lose the fight. *Down for the count* may imply a temporary setback, as *down* does not necessarily imply *out*.

**down to the wire** – *Horse racing*: To the very end or last minute. From the length of wire stretched across a racetrack at the finish line.

**drop the ball** – *Baseball, rugby, American football, etc*: To make an error, to miss an opportunity.

**drop back and punt**. *Football*. It means that you are running out of options and you need to go with your last resort, or cut your losses by moving away from the situation.

**drop the gloves** – *Ice hockey*: To engage in a fight, whether figurative or literal. Refers to the act of hockey players throwing off their gloves to punch with bare knuckles.

**full-court press** – *Basketball*: An all-out effort to exert pressure. In basketball, *full-court press* is an aggressive defense strategy in which the defenders put pressure on the opposing team over the entire court, trying to disrupt their dribbling and passing.

**fumble** – *Football*: When any offensive player loses possession of the ball before a play is blown dead. To touch or handle nervously, as in “I am fumbling for my keys.”

**gambit** – *Boxing*: A strategy or tactic; *chess*: an opening system that involves a pawn sacrifice to gain the initiative right from the start. Often used in the expression “opening gambit.”

**get the ball rolling** – *Some ball games*: To start an endeavor. Some ball games are started by rolling a ball into play. “John, why don’t you get the ball rolling at our staff meeting this morning?”

**glass jaw** – *Boxing*: Vulnerability, especially of a public figure, to destructive criticism. In boxing, a fighter who is especially vulnerable or susceptible to a knockout is said to have a glass jaw.

**the gloves are off** – *Boxing, Hockey*: See *take off the gloves*, below.

**go the distance** – *Boxing*: Carry through a course of action to completion. A boxer goes the distance when he can fight through all the scheduled rounds.

**go to bat** – *Baseball*. Stand up and support someone, or take someone’s side, usually in a dispute. “Why won’t you go to bat for me on this one?”

**go to the mat** – *Wrestling*: to engage in an argument or dispute, especially until one side is victorious. In wrestling, it means to engage in a wrestling bout, the mat being the surface on which the contest is fought.

**move the goalposts** – *Football*: to change the rules to make it difficult for others to achieve something. Could also mean to change the rules to make it easier.

**Hail Mary** – *Football*: any very long forward pass made in desperation with only a small chance of success, especially at or near the end of a half. A biblical, catholic prayer asking for the intercession of the virgin Mary. Hence, whenever someone calls out to God in desperation. Example: “We’ll just have to say a Hail Mary in that situation.”

**hands down** – *Horse racing*: With great ease; unconditionally; often (and originally) in the phrase *to win hands down*, in which a jockey, certain of victory, drops his hands relaxes his hold on the reins.

**hang time** – *Basketball*. Amount of time a player or ball is in the air. In common usage, people “hang around” or “hang out” with each other when they don’t have scheduled events to attend.

**hat-trick** – *Cricket*: A threefold feat in an endeavor. Achievement of a positive feat three times in a row. (However, in bowling, three strikes in a row is known as a “turkey.”)

**have someone in your corner** – *Boxing*: To have the support or help of someone.

**heavy hitter** – *Boxing*: An important or influential individual or organization. Refers to a boxer who is able to hit hard.

**heavyweight** – *Boxing*: A person of great influence or importance. In boxing, it is a weight division of 175 pounds (79.5 kg) or higher, or a boxer fighting in this division.

**hit below the belt** – *Boxing*: To act unfairly or unscrupulously, in disregard of the rules. To hit an opponent below the belt is an illegal move in boxing.

**hit it out of the park** – *Baseball*. When the batter hits the ball so hard, it flies out of the baseball park. Doing something very well.

**hit a home run** – *Baseball*. When the batter hits the ball and is able to run four bases without stopping, to score a point. Also called a homer, blast, dinger, four-bagger, tater or moon shot (a very long, high home run.)

**home stretch** or **homestretch** – *Horse racing*: The final phase of an endeavor or project. On a racecourse, the *home stretch* is the final part of track on which the race finishes.

**hoops** – slang term for the game of basketball. “Want to shoot some hoops with us this afternoon?”

**huddle** – when players on the field form a group to discuss an upcoming play. Also used as a verb. “Let’s huddle to come up with a strategy for that huge project.”

**hurler on the ditch** – *Hurling*: A non-participant who criticizes from outside. Derives from a spectator (typically a man too old to play anymore) criticizing the players while observing from the stands.

**in-fighting, infighting** – *Boxing*: Close-quarter fighting. Also, conflict between members of the same organization, often concealed from outsiders.

**kayo, K.O.** – *Boxing*: To put out of commission. From the boxing phrase “knockout” (knock unconscious), abbreviated “K.O.” and pronounced and often written as “kayo”.

**keep one's eye on the ball** – *Ball games*: To remain alert. In most games involving balls, it is important for players to keep track of the ball.

**keep the ball rolling** – *Some ball games*: To keep a conversation or endeavor from flagging. “I’ll rely on you to keep the ball rolling during the question and answer time.”

**kisser.** The mouth or face, as in “He got smacked right in the kisser.”

**'lead with one's chin'** – *Boxing*: To speak without caution, or to leave oneself unprotected. Refers to a boxer leaving his chin, a vulnerable point, unprotected.

**lightweight'** – *Boxing*: (A person or thing) of little importance, consequence, intelligence or ability. In boxing, it is a weight division of boxers weighing no more than 135 pounds or 60.7 kg.

**'low blow'** – *Boxing*: An unscrupulous or unfair attack, action, or insult. Refers to an illegal blow aimed at the area below another boxer's waist or belt.

**Monday morning quarterback** – *American football*: A person who criticizes or passes judgment with benefit of hindsight. *Monday morning* refers to the games played or broadcast on weekends, with criticisms leveled by a spectator the following week.

**no holds barred** – *Wrestling*: With all restrictions relaxed. The rules of wrestling *bar* or proscribe certain *holds* or grips on one's opponent.

**by a nose** – see *win by a nose*, below.

**on deck** – *Baseball*. The player who will bat next, after the one who is currently batting. Anyone whose turn is next and is preparing to take their turn.

**on the ropes** – *Boxing*: On the verge of defeat. Refers to a boxer who has been knocked against the ropes that enclose the boxing ring and kept there by the blows of his opponent.

**one-two (punch), the old one-two** – *Boxing* An attack consisting of two punches in rapid succession with alternate hands. **out for the count** – See *down for the count*, above.

**play ball (with)** – *Baseball*: To cooperate (with) or act fairly (with). Derives from a baseball umpire's call to "*Play ball!*" to start a game.

**pull one's punches** – *Boxing*: To use less force than one is capable of; to be gentle or lenient. In boxing, a boxer who holds back from using all his strength is said to pull his punches.

**punch-drunk** – *Boxing*: dazed, bewildered, or confused; or behaving in such a manner. In boxing, it refers to a disorder in boxers triggered by repeated dazing blows or punches to the head over an extended period of time.

**punchy** – *Boxing*: See *punch-drunk*, above; also, in a state of nervous tension, fatigued.

**push it over the goal line** – *Football*. Complete the activity or project, finish to job. Value of work often has little value until its completion. In American football, a team's drive to move the football down the field doesn't count until the ball crosses the goal line.

**quarterback** – *American football*: One who directs or leads; a mastermind; also used as a verb, *to quarterback*. It is also used as a term for a supporter or critic of a football team or game, and by extension, an uninvolved observer who criticizes or second-guesses.

**redshirt** – A college player who skips a year of play without losing eligibility. Can also be used in education to refer to a student who waits a year to enroll. Can also be used as a verb, as in “We could redshirt him for a year.”

**ringer** - *Horse racing*: An imposter, especially one who misrepresents his or her identity or ability in order to gain an advantage in a competition. Originally used in horse racing, when a fast horse was substituted for a slower one that it resembled, the term now applies to any athlete entered in a competition under false pretenses.

**ringside judge** – *Boxing*: A person who follows a topic or situation closely.

**ringside seat, ringside table** – *Boxing*: A place providing a good view of something. In boxing, a *ringside seat* is immediately adjacent to the ring in which the boxers fight, as is the *ringside table*.

**roll with the punches** – *Boxing*: To take adversity in stride; to adapt to difficult circumstances. A boxer who "rolls with the punches" moves his body away from the force of a blow so as to lessen their impact. “When you get into that heavy freeway traffic, you’re just going to have to roll with the punches.”

**round** – A single phase of an endeavor or contest: "The defense attorney went a couple of rounds with the ex-wife's lawyer."

**run interference** – *Football*: To handle problems for another person or to clear the way for another. In American football, a player who *runs interference* interferes or obstructs opponents to let the ball carrier advance.

**saved by the bell** – *Boxing*: to be saved from misfortune or unpleasantness by a timely interruption.

**sideline; on/from the sidelines** – To remove from participation. A player who is injured, benched or removed from play and forced to sit *on* or observe *from the sidelines*. Anytime a person is forced to quit active participation. “That illness sidelined him for a while.”

**slam-dunk** – *Basketball*: A forceful, dramatic move, especially against someone. In basketball, it is a forceful shot in which the player jumps to the basket and slams the ball in.

**slap-happy** – *Boxing*: Synonym for *punch-drunk*, above; also, dizzy with happiness; carefree, casual, thoughtless, irresponsible.

**sparring partner** – *Boxing*: A person with whom one routinely argues or enjoys arguing. Refers to a boxer who is hired to practise with another for training purposes.

**square off** – *Boxing*: To assume a fighting stance or attitude. In boxing, the term derives from the square shape of the ring, and the stance fighters assume immediately before the fight commences.

**subway alumni** – The followers of any college team who didn't attend or graduate from that institution.

**sucker punch** – *Boxing*: An unexpected blow. In boxing, a sucker punch is one delivered unexpectedly.

**Sunday punch** – *Boxing*: A destructive blow to an opponent as in "knocked him into next Sunday". In boxing, a Sunday punch is a knockout blow.

**take a dive** — *Boxing*: To pretend or feign, with intent to deceive. Refers to boxers who would pretend to be knocked out by a light or even non-existent punch, thus intentionally losing the fight; this was one method of losing a "fixed" fight (one with an unlawfully prearranged outcome)

**take it on the chin** – *Boxing*: To suffer misfortune or defeat. It alludes to taking a physical blow on the chin;

**take off the gloves** – *Boxing, ice hockey*: To attack earnestly, without mercy. Boxing gloves are worn for protection of the boxer's hands and to lessen the impact of the punches; bare-knuckle boxing is much more savage and dangerous. Used also in ice hockey, as two (or more) players signal their intention to [fight](#) by dropping their gloves.

**take the (full) count** – *Boxing*: To be defeated. Refers to a boxer being knocked down, the referee counting off ten seconds, the time allotted for the boxer to regain his feet or lose the fight. A boxer who takes the full count accepts defeat.

**throw in the towel** – *Boxing*: To surrender, admit defeat. Originally *throw up the sponge* or *chuck up the sponge*;

**throw one's hat into the ring** – *Boxing*: To signify one's candidacy for (political) office or election; to enter a contest. In early days of boxing, one signified a challenge by throwing one's hat into the boxing ring.

**thursday morning tippy tappys** – *Soccer*: A person who criticizes or passes judgement with benefit of hindsight. Thursday morning refers to the Champions League games played or broadcast midweek, usually on Wednesday nights.

**under the wire** – *Horse racing*: At the very last moment; in the nick of time; barely within some accepted parameters or limits. "The report was handed in just under the wire." Or, "At five-foot-five, he was under the wire for the height requirement for enlistment." From the practice of stretching a wire over the finish line at a racetrack.

**utility player** – a player who fills in at many positions. "So many people were out sick today at work, I felt like a utility player."

**win by a nose** – *Horse racing*: To succeed by a very narrow margin. "Our bid for the construction contract won by a nose." In horse racing, it describes a win so close that only the nose of the winning horse came in ahead of the other.

**wheelhouse** — *Baseball*: A person's area of expertise, or where they are most comfortable. In baseball this is the part of an individual's swinging range in which as a hitter they can make the best contact with the ball. If a pitch is right in your wheelhouse it is right where you want it, in the spot where you have the best chance of hitting it well.

**work out, work-out, workout** — To exercise or practice, especially in terms of physical training.