

'By a nose' and 'going overboard': How Sport Enriches Language

FAITH IN SPORT

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Sport, a metaphor for life, has had a profound affect on our language. Many people, ever since St Paul, see life like a game, a sport. You can look up Paul's words in Hebrews 12:1, Philippians 2:16, Galatians 2:2, and 5:7 as well as 2 Timothy 4:7

So here you have a list of sport idioms which I have, over my 84 years+ on this world breathing, come across.

Across the board - as in cards = Equal for everyone.

Ahead of the pack - in say, fox hunting = To be more successful than the competition.

At this stage in the game - any sport = At this time.

Back to square one - as in board game = To start something over again, because a previous attempt failed

Ball is in somebody's court - tennis = It is up to somebody to make the next decision or step.

Blind-sided - American football = To not see something coming.

Blow the competition away - any sport = Win easily.

By a nose or short head in horse-racing. At the 1974 General Election, the Labour Party, led by Prime Minister Harold Wilson, won with a majority of just three seats - by a nose or short head in horse-racing parlance.
Call the shots - billiards and snooker = Make the decisions.

Champion, the winner of first prize or first place in a competition = One showing superior skill or ability. Also, of course, a person who fights or speaks for another person or in favour of a cause.

Dig in your heels - in a tug of war = Refuse to compromise or change your mind.

Down to the wire (an idiom that was first seen in print in 1880. Officials ran a wire above the finish line in order to make it easier to judge which horse's nose crossed the line first, in close races. When a race

was too close for the casual observer to call, the outcome was said to have "come down to the wire". The term quickly took on a figurative meaning and passed into everyday English.) = To the last minute; to the very end.

Foul play, unfair play - in a game or sport = Criminal or violent behaviour, in particular when resulting in another's death, resulting in another's death.

Front runner - track = One of the people who is expected to win.
Game plan - as worked out by, say the manager or coach = A strategy or plan for achieving success

Get into the full swing - tennis = Be comfortable doing something after some time.

Get off the hook - fishing = Escape, have responsibility removed.

Give something or someone a fair shake - gambling = Try for a while before giving up.

Get a head start - horse racing = Start before all others

Get a second wind - sailing = Have a burst of energy after tiring.

Get out of hand - lose grip on reins when riding a horse = Lose control of things.

Give it your best shot - hunting = Try your hardest.

Give one a run for one's money - horseracing = Try one's hardest to defeat another person.

Go overboard - sailing = To do something in a way that is excessive or extreme: to do too much of something, or say more than you need to.

Have the upper hand - cards = Have a better chance of winning or succeeding.

Hit below the belt - boxing = Do or say something that is very unfair or cruel.

Hit a snag - boating = Come up against a problem.

Hit the nail on the head - mediaeval archery when targets were pinned to trees by a nail at the centre if the bull's eye = Get something spot-on, absolutely right.

Hold all the aces - cards = Expected



AP McCoy and Jason Maguire are 'neck and neck' at Bangor On Dee Race Course before McCoy won it 'by a nose'.

to win or succeed.

Hot shot (big shot) - hunting = An important or very successful person.

Keep one's eye on the ball - any ball sport = To give something one's full attention and to not lose focus.
Jump the gun - track = Start too early, unfairly.

Keep one's head above water - swimming = Try not to fall behind in work or other duties.

Knockout (also knock-out) - in boxing: "to stun by a blow for a 10-count" = In slang, an "excellent thing or person" from 1892; a "beautiful woman" by 1953.

Learn the ropes - sailing = If you learn the ropes, you learn how to do a job properly, or how things work and how to get things done.

Let her rip - sailing = Go ahead now.

Level playing field - any field sport = Everyone has an equal chance.

Long shot - hunting = A very difficult thing to accomplish.

Neck and neck - horse racing = When two people or things are neck and neck, they are so close or similar that it's impossible to tell who's better or winning. A neck and neck race is too close to call.

Low blow - boxing: An illegal punch that hits a boxer below the waist. : an action or comment that is very hurtful and unfair.

No sweat - any sport = No problem.

Not up to par - golf = Not good enough for a job or position.

Not playing with a full deck (of cards) - cards = Not having full brain capacity.

On target - darts = Doing the right thing to succeed.

Out of someone's league - team sport = Not at a level where one is as

good as someone else at something. When, as a teenager, I played chess with my Dad, I was way out of my league. Once, just once, I just managed a draw.

Own goal - in soccer, hockey, etc - something that you do because you think it will help you but that actually hurts you. "The workers scored an own goal by demanding such high wages that no one could afford to employ them."

Off side in a position in a game (such as football or hockey) on the opponent's part of the field where you are not allowed to be = In the wrong - illegal - place. It comes from a military term for a man trapped behind enemy lines, where he is said to be "off the strength of his side". Offside rules date back to codes of football developed at English public schools in the early nineteenth century.

Par for the course - golf = An expected circumstance.

Race against time - track = There is almost no time left to accomplish something.

Raise the bar - as in high jumping or pole-vaulting = To set standards or expectations higher.

So close to the finishing line - any sport = Almost there.

Step up to the plate - baseball = Do the honourable thing, take responsibility.

Step up your game = Start performing better

Safe bet - as in horse racing = A thing very likely to happen. Skate on thin ice - skating = Do something risky.

Start the ball rolling - ball sports = Begin something.

Smooth sailing = A situation where success is achieved without

difficulties.

Take the bull by the horns - bull fighting = Accept the challenge and try your hardest.

Take the wind out of one's sails - sailing = To cause someone to lose confidence or energy.

Touch base - In baseball, players must touch each of four bases in order to score a run = To contact someone.

The ball is in your court - tennis = It's your responsibility to do something now.

To take a rain check, is a term that originated in USA baseball in the 1800s. Spectators, who paid to attend games that were postponed or cancelled because of weather, could receive a check - or voucher - to attend a future game at no extra charge = Refuse an invitation politely, or say that you would like to accept it - but at a later date.

The home stretch - horse racing = Almost the end.

Throw in the towel - boxing = Give up.

Time out - any sport = To stop doing what one is doing in order to do something else for a while. usually used with 'from.' She took time out from her career to raise her children."

Three strikes and you're out - baseball = You only get three chances. A country or an organization has a policy or law, according to which people who commit three offences are punished very severely, even if the individual offences are not very serious.

Under the table - gambling = Illegally.

Win hands down - gambling = To win by a large amount or very easily.

If you can think of any others, please let me know at vladimirfelzmann@rcdow.org.uk. Thank you.