

How To Talk About Football in English – Video

In this lesson you can learn how to talk about football in English.

Do you play football? Do you watch football, or support a team? You can learn useful language to talk about who you support, talk about a football match (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/listening-football-match>), and more!

1. Who Do You Support?

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/football-dugout.webp>)

Marie: You're a Villa fan, right?

Martin: Villa? No! Spurs. I'm Tottenham through and through.

Marie: Oh, really? I like Spurs. They've done well recently. They've been top four for the last few seasons, right?

Martin: Yeah, they're always there or thereabouts, but it'd be nice to actually turn that into some trophies one day. We haven't won anything major for a long time. Who do you support?

Marie: Newcastle. My Dad's from there, and he took me to games when I was younger, so I've stuck with them. I'm not a fanatic, but I try to go to at least a couple of games a year, although it's not much fun at the moment.

Martin: They've got a good side though, no?

Marie: Yeah, it's not that. The owners won't invest, so they've been underperforming for the last few years. It's frustrating.

Martin: What do you think for this year? You think City will win it again?

Marie: Probably, though I think Liverpool have a shot, too. How do you think Spurs will do?

Martin: Well, I'd be happy enough with 4th, and very happy with 3rd. We need to be more consistent, though. Last year we dropped too many points in easy games. What about Newcastle?

Marie: Realistically, if we finish in the top half of the table it'll be a good season. I just hope we don't get relegated again...

Are you a football fan? Who do you support?

You could answer this by saying 'I support ...', as in 'I support Manchester United,' or 'I support Barcelona.'

Or, you could just give the club name.

In the English Premier League, club names are often shortened.

Look at five short names for Premier League (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Premier_League) clubs. Do you know which clubs they are?

Villa

Palace

City

Spurs

Wolves

Do you know? Here are the answers.

Aston Villa

Crystal Palace

Manchester City

Tottenham Hotspur

Wolverhampton Wanderers

If you say ‘City’ or ‘United’ when talking about English football, most people will understand ‘Manchester City’ and ‘Manchester United’. There are many clubs which have ‘City’ or ‘United’ in their name, but these are historically two of the biggest.

Anyway, what about your club? Look at three questions.

1. Are you a big fan?
2. Is your team good?
3. How do you think your team will do this/next season?

Think about how you could answer these questions. Before you do, let’s see some language from the dialogue which might help.

I’m Tottenham through and through.

I’m not a fanatic.

They’re always there or thereabouts.

They’ve been underperforming for the last few years.

We need to be more consistent.

I hope we don’t get relegated.

Look at the highlighted words and phrases. Do you remember how they were used? Could you explain what they mean?

‘Through and through’ means that you give 100% to your club. If you say ‘I’m Tottenham through and through’, you mean you are—and always have been—a big Tottenham fan.

A ‘fanatic’ in this context means a very enthusiastic fan. If you say ‘I’m not a fanatic’, you mean that you support your team, but maybe it’s not a big part of your life.

‘There or thereabouts’ means ‘near the top, but not the best’. If your team is there or thereabouts, you mean that they’re close to the top teams, but not one of the best in the country. Maybe you finish 3rd, 4th or 5th every year.

If your team underperforms, it gets worse results than you would expect. Maybe you have many great players, but you don’t win as often as you should.

Top teams need to be **consistent**. This means they play at a high level every week. The opposite is inconsistent. Inconsistent teams might play well one week, and badly the next.

Finally, if your team gets relegated, they finish in one of the bottom places in the league, and so they drop down to the league below. Getting relegated is one of the worst things that can happen to a team!

So now, what about your team? Look at the questions you saw before.

1. Are you a big fan?
2. Is your team good?
3. How do you think your team will do this/next season?

Think about how you could answer them. Maybe you could use some of the language you just saw. Pause the video, think about your answers, and practise saying them out loud.

OK? Could you do it? If it's difficult, remember that you can go back and watch the dialogue and explanations again.

Next, imagine that you just watched an exciting match. How could you talk about it? Let's see!

2. Talking About a Football Match

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/football-match.webp>)

Martin: Wow! What a game!

Marie: Yeah, real end-to-end stuff. 5-5? How often do you see a 10-goal draw?

Martin: I thought West Brom were out of it, but they kept coming back. To be 5-2 down against a team like United, and score three... They never stopped fighting.

Marie: On the one hand, it's disappointing that we blew a three-goal lead, but it was such a great match that I can't be too unhappy.

Martin: In the end, I think a draw was the right result. Obviously I'd have loved West Brom to win, but neither team deserved to lose.

Marie: True, though your lot were so bad in the first half. I don't know what happened at half time, but you looked like a completely different side after the interval.

Martin: Yeah, I know what you mean. I think United sat back a bit too much in the second half, too. Maybe they thought they had won it in the first half.

Marie: Yeah, we didn't look as sharp in the second half.

Here's a question: what's the best football match you can remember?

At the start of the dialogue, you heard the phrase 'end-to-end stuff.' You can use this to describe a match which was fast-moving and full of action.

Look at some more phrases from the dialogue, but with some words missing. Can you remember the missing words?

1. I thought West Brom were _____ it, but they kept _____.

2. It's disappointing that we _____ a three-goal _____.
3. Your _____ were so bad in the first half.
4. I think United _____ a bit too much in the second half.
5. We didn't look as _____ in the second half.

Remember that you can go back and listen to the dialogue again if you want. Are you ready? Let's see the answers.

1. I thought West Brom were **out of** it, but they kept **coming back**.
2. It's disappointing that we **blew** a three-goal **lead**.
3. Your **lot** were so bad in the first half.
4. I think United **sat back** a bit too much in the second half.
5. We didn't look as **sharp** in the second half.

Can you explain what these phrases mean?

'Out of it' means that you don't have a chance. If a team is three goals down, normally you can say they're out of it, because most teams don't win from that position.

You can also use 'in' with the opposite meaning. For example 'They may be a goal down, but they're still in the game.'

This means that even though they're losing, they still have a chance to win.

If a team recovers from a losing position and gets a draw or a win, then they come back. 'Come back' can be a verb or a noun. Look at two examples.

They came back from two goals down to win the match.

They scored three goals in the last ten minutes to win. What a comeback!

'Blow a three-goal lead' means to lose a winning position. 'We blew a three-goal lead' means we were three goals ahead, but then the other team came back to win or draw. In general, if you say 'you blew it', it means 'you failed'. It's conversational.

'Your lot' means 'the team you support.' It's also conversational, but it's quite common among UK football fans.

If a team sits back, they don't try to attack, and maybe they don't give 100%. Sometimes, teams sit back when they're already winning, because they don't think they need more goals.

Another conversational expression which is popular recently is 'park the bus', which has a similar meaning. If a team parks the bus, they defend deep, and don't move players forwards. Saying that a team parks the bus is usually a criticism, because it describes a style of play which is often boring to watch, even if it's effective sometimes.

Finally, if your team looks sharp, they are playing well and moving fast. 'Sharp' means something like 'focused' or 'dangerous'. You want your team to look sharp, especially if they have a big match, like a cup final.

Has your team ever played in a cup final, or won any trophies? Let's see how you can talk about that next.

3. Talking About Trophies and Competitions

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/football-player-and-trophy-scaled.webp>)

Marie: Big night for you on Thursday, right?

Martin: The Europa Final? Yeah, I'm looking forward to it.

Marie: You think you'll win?

Martin: Could do. I think both teams are quite evenly matched. In a knockout competition, you've always got a chance. We'll see!

Marie: It'd be a big deal though, wouldn't it? First European trophy?

Martin: Yeah, that'd be nice. Plus, it gets us into the Champions League next year. That would be a first, too.

Marie: Didn't you win the FA cup a couple of years ago?

Martin: No, we got to the final, but then we lost in extra time. We haven't won anything in recent years except the League Cup, and even that was five years ago.

Marie: I think I remember that match. Didn't you win on penalties?

Martin: Yeah, it was a long shootout. It went to 10-9 or 9-8 or something crazy.

Marie: Well, a win's a win!

Generally, football teams take part in two kinds of competition: leagues, like the Premier League, La Liga or Serie A, and cup competitions. Cup competitions (<https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/leagues-cups>) can be domestic or international.

English football has two cup competitions: the League Cup and the FA Cup. The FA Cup is generally considered more prestigious. Other European leagues mostly have one domestic cup, but a few countries have two.

Then, you have international cups. In Europe, the most famous is the Champions League. The Europa League is the second-tier cup.

Cups are knockout competitions, meaning that in most cases, if you lose one match, you're out. Some cups have a league phase, like the group stage of the Champions League, or the World Cup.

In a knockout match, what happens if it's a draw? The match might go to extra time. If that doesn't produce a result, then you have a penalty shootout.

Look at two sentences:

They won in extra time.

They won on penalties.

Notice that you win or lose **in** extra time, but **on** penalties.

Now, let's practise! Look at three questions.

1. What's the biggest football competition in your country or region?
2. Has your team ever got to a cup final? What happened?
3. If a big match, like a cup final, ends in a draw, is it better to have a penalty shootout, or have a replay?
Why?

Can you answer these questions? Like before, pause the video and make your answers. Read them out loud, write them down, or do both!

Let's look at one more thing: talking about players and transfers as we continue learning how to talk about football in English.

4. Talking About Players and Transfers

(https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Football_iu_1996.webp)

Martin: You looking forward to the new season?

Marie: Yeah, of course, though I'm less optimistic than I could have been. We didn't have much luck in the transfer window.

Martin: You still have a good team, though.

Marie: Sure, but we've lost some players. Kanté's gone, Schwarzer's gone, and I don't think Riyad Mahrez will stay for long. Plus, with injuries, we needed at least one centre back, a holding midfielder, a winger, and probably more.

Martin: But you still have Vardy. He's still a top striker.

Marie: Yeah, no doubt. He's getting on, though. He might have one or two more good seasons in him, but we need to think about replacing him, too.

Martin: Well, count your blessings. We have a transfer ban, and our keeper's injured, so we might not even have a recognised goalie for our first match.

Marie: You have so much depth in your squad, though. I think you'll be OK.

Here's a question: how many football positions can you name in English?

How many did you get?

In general, you have a goalkeeper, defenders, midfielders and forwards.

In each group, you have more specific words. For example, defenders can be centre-backs, left-backs, or right-backs, and there are other positions, too.

Midfielders can be classified by both where they play and their role. A 'role' can be defensive or attacking. For example, a holding midfielder is a defensive midfielder who plays in the centre. A winger is usually an attacking midfielder who plays on the left or right side. There are many other possible midfield positions, depending on the team's tactics.

Forwards can be strikers, whose job is to score. Some teams might play a second forward behind the main striker, or wide forwards, who play on either side of the main striker.

What about your team? Who's the best defender, midfielder and forward? Which players would you like to see in your team?

Let's see some more phrases from the dialogue you can use to talk about players and transfers.

He's a top striker.

He's getting on.

We have a transfer ban.

You have so much depth in your squad.

Can you explain what these mean?

'Top' means 'one of the best'.

'Getting on' means 'getting older'. It's conversational. Of course, getting older is relative here; footballers, especially forwards, often start getting slower after 30, and few are still playing at a high level after 35.

A transfer ban is when a club is not allowed to buy new players. If a club breaks the rules around transfers, they might get a transfer ban for a few months. Recently in the Premier League, Chelsea were given a 12-month transfer ban for breaking the rules on approaching players aged under 18.

Finally, sentence four means that the club has more than 11 good players. If your club has a deep squad, it means that injuries or losing one or two players won't be a problem, because there are other good players to take over.

What about you? Who do you support, and who are your favourite players right now? Share your opinions in the comments!

Thanks for watching!

Keep learning football vocabulary with a listening lesson from Oxford Online English on Five-a-Side Football (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/playing-football>).