

It's not the winning, it's the taking part. • The result sparked a riot. • It's time I got rid of some of this flab. • What's your handicap? • It's mind-numbingly boring. • It's been hailed as a great victory, but I'm not so sure. • We're not competing on a level playing field. • It's just banter. • They use so much foul language. • They're role models. • It really is a cut-throat business. • It was a salutary lesson. • He must be on something. • He blew it big time. • That's a nasty challenge. • What're the odds of that happening? • Pretty slim, I would've thought. • They didn't create any clear-cut chances. • He's past it. • He's trying to rejuvenate his career. • She doesn't pull her punches, does she? • In all likelihood, they'll win. • They only just scraped through.

19 Sport and fitness

Reading

1 Speaking

Read these statements and decide how far you agree with each. Then discuss your ideas with a partner.

- All children should participate in competitive sport.
- Sport helps to teach valuable lessons in life.
- Sporting competition creates divisions.
- There is no such thing as non-competitive sport.
- Sport distracts people from focusing on more important issues like poverty.
- International sport breeds an unhealthy kind of nationalism.
- It's not the winning, it's the taking part.
- Violent sports like boxing have no place in civilised society.

2 Before you read

You are going to read an article exploring various reasons for liking and disliking sport. Match these verbs from the text with the words they go with.

- | | | |
|------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 1. heal | <input type="checkbox"/> | a. drama and tension |
| 2. prevent | <input type="checkbox"/> | b. rifts |
| 3. boost | <input type="checkbox"/> | c. civic pride |
| 4. offer | <input type="checkbox"/> | d. people together |
| 5. bring | <input type="checkbox"/> | e. serious matters from being discussed |
| 6. fuel | <input type="checkbox"/> | f. tensions |

Now match these verbs with the words they go with.

- | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 7. spark | <input type="checkbox"/> | g. a competitive edge |
| 8. pick yourself up | <input type="checkbox"/> | h. a mind-numbing effect |
| 9. use | <input type="checkbox"/> | i. sport as a conversational crutch |
| 10. dominate | <input type="checkbox"/> | j. after a defeat |
| 11. have | <input type="checkbox"/> | k. violence |
| 12. foster | <input type="checkbox"/> | l. the media |

Which of the 12 expressions explain why people like sport and which explain why people dislike it?

Compare your ideas with a partner.

How many other reasons for liking and disliking sport can you think of?

3 While you read

As you read this article, think about these questions.

- Are any of the reasons for liking and disliking sport you thought of mentioned?
- Are any other reasons mentioned?
- Which reasons do you agree / disagree with? Why?

Keeping the sports-haters onside

PERHAPS unsurprisingly, the news that London had won its bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games was not met with universal delight. Whilst the city's mayor hailed the victory as a great moment and one which would boost civic pride, increase tourism and employment opportunities, and result in better housing, sporting and transport facilities, a significant proportion of the British population greeted the news with a mixture of cynicism and dismay. Of course, this was partly down to purely selfish reasons. Fears of a massive hike in council tax were rife and pessimists pointed to the

mountain of debt that Montreal was saddled with after it hosted the 1976 Olympics: over \$1 billion, a sum the city was still paying off more than 25 years after the Olympic flame had been extinguished!

However, the voices of dissent also had other issues apart from the drain on public resources, and many of them revolved around a general dislike of sport. It is undoubtedly true that sport has come to dominate the media in an absolutely unprecedented manner and, should you desire to do so, it would be quite possible to spend almost all of your waking hours channel-surfing from one sporting event to the next.



4 Speaking

Discuss these questions with a partner.

1. What major sporting events has your country hosted? Were they worth it? Why / why not?
2. Do you follow any local sports team? Do you ever watch any of your national teams or athletes competing?
3. Can you think of any recent news that's been greeted with ...
 - cynicism?
 - widespread joy?
 - universal outrage?
 - astonishment?
4. Did you know any of the sports idioms mentioned in the article? Can you think of any other sports idioms like this?

Whilst football rules the roost on terrestrial TV, cable and satellite bring everything from trampolining to archery to the 'world's strongest man competition' into living rooms across the land – and many fear the Olympics will just lead to complete and utter saturation coverage with wall-to-wall sport for weeks on end. Some point to the mind-numbing effect this will have on viewers: non-stop sport tends to mean other issues fail to grab the public's attention and this can prevent far more serious matters from being discussed, or even thought about.

Others, however, lament the ruthless, competitive edge that the generally male-dominated world of sport helps foster in the young. Some women see sport not only as a pathetic conversational crutch which their male counterparts use to get them through day-to-day social exchanges, but also as a more malign influence. The combination of cut-throat big business muscling in on sport, athletes being portrayed as heroes and a win-at-any-costs mentality is seen as deeply unsavoury. Indeed, today's generation of young footballing superstars have been blamed for everything from foul language in schools to binge-drinking and even to an over-emphasis on consumerism.

Despite all this, sport's ever-increasing popularity is obviously not for nothing. Whether as a viewer or as an active participant, sport offers drama, tension, escapism and release for countless millions around the world and can provide salutary lessons in life: how to be a good loser, how to pick yourself up again after defeat, how to focus on a long-term goal. On top of this, whilst sport can obviously fuel tensions and spark violence, it can also

serve to bring disparate groups of people together and heal long-standing rifts. Furthermore, as anyone who's ever been abroad equipped with almost none of the local language, but with a basic knowledge of the game can tell you, perhaps even more than English, it is football that is truly the global language now. Taxi rides and train journeys from Moscow to Mozambique have been enlivened by little more than shared smiles and the words 'Pele', 'Maradona' or 'Zidane'!

However, there is a further, far less obvious reason for keeping at least one eye on the world of sport and that is the vast impact sport has had on the English language. A whole area of metaphorical and idiomatic language has moved from a sporting context into much broader usage. For instance, in the run-up to an election, the opinion polls may show two parties running neck and neck – both polling very similar high percentages. Another idiom taken from the field of horse-racing is horses for courses – meaning you need to choose the right people for particular activities because everyone has different skills. Boxing fans are more likely to understand that when you throw in the towel, you admit defeat and that if you manage to escape from an unpleasant situation at just the right moment, you're saved by the bell. Similarly, keen swimmers are far more likely to grasp that being out of your depth means things are too difficult for you, whilst swimming against the tide involves refusing to do what everyone else is doing and trying to come up with your own way of doing things instead. Surely for these reasons, if for no others, sport is worthy of our attention.

5 Idioms

Complete the idioms with the words in the box.

bait	belt	court	playing field	sights
base	course	goalposts	punches	water

1. They still subsidise their farming industry really heavily and we don't, so we don't have a level to compete on.
2. Our daughter's 16 now and she's got her set firmly on becoming a doctor. I can't believe how focused she is!
3. A turnout of around 50% at elections seems to be par for the now.
4. I'll say one thing for her. She's very direct. I mean, she says exactly what she thinks. She doesn't pull any
5. We've told them what we're willing to offer, so now the ball is in their It's up to them to decide what they want to do.
6. I met every single sales target the boss set me, but he just kept moving the and changing what he wanted me to do!
7. I don't mind him criticising me, but when he called me a moron, well, I thought that was a bit below the !
8. My landlord put my rent up last year and since then I've been struggling to keep my head above
9. Chris is over from Boston next week. It'll be good to touch It's been quite a while since I saw him last.
10. There's no point laughing at my team. I'm not going to rise to the and start arguing with you about it!

Underline the whole idiom in each sentence. Which sport do you think each idiom comes from originally?

Now discuss these questions with a partner.

- a. Have you ever felt completely out of your depth? When?
- b. Do you know anybody who doesn't pull any punches? Does it bother you that they're like that?
- c. Have you got your sights set on anything at the moment? What?
- d. Is there anyone you need to touch base with at the moment?

Conversation

1 Discussing players and teams

Discuss with a partner which of these sentences you think are positive and which are negative. Explain your decisions.

1. She just lacks a certain self-belief.
2. He's gorgeous!
3. He's all power and strength, and no touch.
4. He's the weak link in the team.
5. He's a really nasty player.
6. They have too many off days.
7. He must be on something.
8. He's an up-and-coming player. He's the new Pete Sampras.
9. He's got such drive and intensity.
10. She's quite underrated.
11. He's past it.
12. They've never quite fulfilled their potential.
13. He went off the rails.
14. He's trying to rejuvenate his career.
15. He's a gutsy player. He never gives up.
16. He can't handle it when the pressure's on.

Make a list of five sportsmen, sportswomen or teams which you could use some of these expressions to describe. Talk with a partner about the players you chose. Has your partner heard of them? What do they think of them?

2 Listening

You are going to listen to three people – Lee, Terry and Grace – talking about a game. Listen and answer these questions:

1. What was the score?
2. What is each person's view of the game?

Are you similar to either the men or the woman? In what way?

3 Listen again

Discuss which person said the following and what they were talking about.

1. It was miles offside.
2. Talk about a waste of money!
3. All they do is boot it up the field.
4. Can he keep it up for a whole season?
5. The likelihood is you'll get relegated.
6. It's just a bit of friendly banter.
7. That old chestnut!
8. It's so tribal.
9. That lot are not exactly models of good behaviour.
10. That's got to be the most feeble argument I've ever heard!

Listen again and check your answers.

Now look at the tapescript and underline five useful collocations or expressions you would like to remember.

Real English: That old chestnut

An old chestnut is a story, joke, argument or excuse which has been repeated so many times that you are bored of it, or – in the case of arguments or excuses – you just don't believe anymore.

A: Sorry, I haven't got my homework. My dog ate it!

B: Oh, not that old chestnut again! Do I look stupid?

4 Speaking

Discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Do you know any teams who have been in financial difficulties? What happened?
2. Have there been any problems with hooliganism recently?
3. Do you think there is much racism in sport?
4. Do you agree that football supporters are different to other kinds of sports fans? Why / why not?
5. Does 'bad behaviour' by sports people bother you?



5 Expressing degrees of certainty

Choose the two correct forms in each sentence.

- A: I *bet / guess / hope* they do better than they did last year.
B: *Fat / No / Impossible* chance!
- A: The British guy doesn't have *a chance / an opportunity / a hope* of winning.
B: I don't know. I think he's got *a similar / an even / a reasonable* chance.
- There's a *definite / really / distinct* possibility that they'll call an election some time this year and the *likelihood / possibility / probability* is that the Conservatives will win.
- The chances of Leeds ever winning the title are *pretty slender / slim / skinny*.
- The *odds / chances / possibilities* are I won't get into Cambridge University, but it's worth a try.
- You shouldn't worry about it so much. I mean, what are the odds of any of us actually getting killed in an aeroplane? *Pretty low / little / slim*, I would've thought.
- I'll do my best to finish the report by Friday, but in all *likelihood / chance / probability*, it won't be ready till Monday.

Real English: The odds

When you make a bet in a bookmaker's (or 'bookies'), you look at the odds – the chances of something happening, expressed as a number (10 to 1, for example). In spoken English, we often use the odds to mean the probability of something happening – or not happening.

- A: *What're the odds of Iceland actually winning?*
B: *About a million to one, I would've said.*

Now complete these sentences with your own ideas.

- The chances of me getting married in the next few years are
- There's chance will win the league this year.
- If there was an election this year, the likelihood is
- There's a possibility I
- What are the odds of ?

Discuss what you have written with a partner.

For more information on expressing degrees of certainty, see G21.

6 Talking about sports and keeping fit

Complete the texts with the words in the box.

challenging	dribbled	hacked
off-piste	charging	drown
kickabout	undertow	dragged under
flipped	obsessive	virgin

- I guess I'm a bit (1) about it. I go most weekends to a resort near our town, but the runs aren't that (2) and there isn't much in the way of (3) stuff. I went to Colorado last year, where there was loads of (4) snow. It was incredibly exhilarating.
- We were just having a (1) in the park really, but this one guy was taking it all really seriously, (2) around like a lunatic and screaming at his team-mates if they didn't pass. Anyway, at one point I (3) past him and he tackled me – or rather (4) me down – and he managed to break my leg!
- It was quite frightening actually, because one wave (1) me over and I could feel there was a really strong (2), and I had to kick really hard to stop myself being (3) I did think for a moment I might even (4)

Now complete these texts with the words in the box.

beat	calls	fade	paced
blasted	collapsed	fell apart	play-off
blew	dropped	get	whacking

- It was great. I think I (1) my personal best by about 10 minutes! I felt so strong all the way round and I didn't (2) towards the end like I normally do. I think I (3) myself a bit better – didn't set off so fast. Last time, I really hit the wall and nearly (4) in exhaustion.
- She was playing really well, but then she had a couple of bad line (1) at crucial moments, and I think she let it (2) to her and her whole game just (3) She just kept (4) it out of the court or netting it. It was just embarrassing!
- He completely (1) it. I think he (2) five shots over the last three holes. He could've still got into a sudden-death (3) right at the end, but he (4) it right over the green and took three to get down from there.

Which sports are being discussed in each of the six texts? Do you ever watch – or take part in – any of these sports?

Have you ever seen any of the things described happen – or have they ever happened to you?