

# Tackling Idiomatic Expressions in Business English Originating from Sports

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**Tackling Idiomatic Expressions in Business English Originating from  
Sports**

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## **1. Introduction**

The idiomatic area of language use reflects a human's ability to make use of numerous lexical units in a creative way. Thus, the term *idiomatic expression* refers to any lexical unit (individual lexeme, phrasal lexeme, multi-word unit) that contains some level of idiomatic (i.e. metaphorical/figurative) meaning. When the meaning of a multi-word item is totally opaque because it differs from the meanings of its constituents, the expression is referred to as *pure idiom*. Nevertheless, it is often rather difficult to point to a clear boundary between idiom and non-idiom. Rather, there is "a scale of idiomaticity" (Cowie and Mackin 1976: vol. 1, X), which should be observed when analyzing idiomatic expressions as it reflects a degree of semantic transparency or opacity of a certain expression.

It is worth noting that idiomatic expressions are frequently utilized in ordinary discourse by native speakers, capable of activating them when they feel like conveying their thoughts in a different, more colorful way. Moreover, comprehension and usage of idiomatic expressions in a particular language, in this case English, indicates a language user's mastery of the language: "Familiarity with the wide range of idiomatic expressions and the ability to use them appropriately in context are among the distinguishing marks of a native-like command of English" (Cowie and Mackin, 1976: VI).

One of the areas of life that has generated numerous metaphorical expressions in the English language is undoubtedly sport. It should come as no surprise since sport plays an important role in British and American popular cultures. Thus, numerous expressions originating from all kinds of sports have contributed to the richness and variety of the English idiomatic language. However, sports idiomatic expressions are not only used in sport context, but they permeate many fields of human activity, especially the world of business. In other words, sport and business share many characteristics, such as the notion of teamwork, competitiveness, risk-taking, achieving excellent results, etc.

### **2.1. Idiom identification**

In order to examine the complex nature of idioms, we will start with two dictionary definitions of idioms. The first one is a concise description of idiom, which summarizes its complex nature and the traditional approach to the notion of idioms:

“An idiom is a fixed group of words with a special different meaning from the meanings of the separate words. So, to spill the beans is not at all connected with beans: it means ‘to tell something that is secret’” (Longman Dictionary of English Idioms 1984: inside front cover).

In other words, it emphasizes its fixedness, that is, the lack of syntactic flexibility and the unrelatedness between its literal and metaphorical meanings. The other definition additionally points to the conventionalized usage of an idiom understood as:

‘[a]n expression, word, or phrase that has a figurative meaning that is comprehended in regard to a common use of that expression that is separate from the literal meaning of definitions of the words of which it is made’ (McArthur 1998: 495).

Therefore, from the traditional perspective, the overall meaning of these linguistic expressions is unpredictable and cannot be deduced from their component parts. This feature is frequently referred to as unanalysability or non-compositionality of idioms (since it is not possible to compose the meaning of an idiom based on the meanings of its individual elements). Furthermore, Dobrovolskij and Piirainen assert that according to the so-called classical view, idioms are viewed as frozen elements of a language and have arbitrary meanings (2005: 8). In other words, they are supposed to resist any syntactic or lexical modifications and their meanings are formed quite accidentally. The term *frozenness* was introduced by Fraser (1970: 39-41) who, within the syntax-based framework of transformational grammar, analyzed syntactic behavior of idioms in reference to his seven-level *frozenness hierarchy*. Thus, for example, *build castles in the air* belongs to level 0 of *completely frozen* idioms, which do not allow any transformations at all.

Hockett, on the other hand, (1958) claims that idiomatic status should also be given to single morphemes in particular instances. Hockett clarifies that the term “Y” can be viewed as an idiom as long as it is used for any grammatical form whose meaning is not predictable and is not “a constituent of a larger Y. [...] Thus *new* is an idiom in *She wants a new hat*, but not in *I’m going to New York* because here it is part of the larger idiom *New York*” (Hockett, 1958: 172).

Nevertheless, it is common for the traditional view to identify idioms as “a special set of the larger category of words” (Kövecses and Szabó, 1996: 328), where this special aspect of idioms refers to their idiosyncratic nature.

As noted, idioms tend to be analyzed in terms of their characteristics, with the stress on those characteristics a certain linguist perceives as the most relevant. In this respect, according

to Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994: 492-495), the features or properties that idioms might comprise refer to their conventionality (perceived as the obligatory condition for idiom status), inflexibility, figuration, proverbiality, informality and affect. Idiom conventionality demonstrates the degree to which the native speaker is capable of recovering the sense of the idiom when the informative context is lacking. As for their inflexibility, in contrast to freely composed expressions, syntactic flexibility of idioms is much more restricted. For example, the fact that a lot of idiomatic expressions do not allow passivization is illustrated by the expression *shoot the breeze*, which does not permit its internal transformation into *breeze is hard to shoot*. When it comes to figuration, the authors point to the frequent occurrence of idioms based on metaphors (*take the bull by the horns*), metonymies (*lend a hand*), hyperboles (*not worth the paper it's printed on*), etc. In fact, speakers do not necessarily perceive them as metaphorical anymore or wonder about the specific motive for the metaphor involved – why *shoot the breeze* is used to mean “chat”, for instance. Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994: 493) also explain that proverbial idioms tend to depict more abstract situations involving social interests in terms of more familiar concrete activities (*climb the walls*, *chew a fat*). Finally, idioms are associated with informal or colloquial registers and may express an affective or evaluative stance towards the things they denote. In other words, they are rarely utilized to convey emotionally indifferent situations and tend to appear in speech more than in writing. Still, not all idioms possess all the features, apart from conventionality. Provided that a fixed expression does not involve any figuration and lacks proverbial and informal aspects, i.e. *resist temptation*, it should be regarded as a collocation and not as an idiom.

In addition, Nunberg et al. (1994: 496-497) divide idioms into two groups regarding the notion of compositionality – idiomatically combining expressions and idiomatic phrases. An idiomatically combining expression is viewed as compositional since parts of the idiomatic meaning correspond to the parts of the literal meaning. For instance, in the sentence *John was able to pull strings to get the job, since he had a lot of contacts in the industry*. The expression *pull strings* will most likely be interpreted as “to exploit personal connections” due to the combination of context and the established correspondence between *pull* metaphorically referring to “exploit” and *string* to “personal connections”. However, an idiomatic phrase, such as *kick the bucket* (“die”) does not distribute its idiomatic interpretation over its components and therefore it is treated as non-compositional. Yet, an idiomatically combining expression is not automatically transparent because speakers cannot totally recover the original motivation for the figuration it involves. As a result, opacity (or transparency) of

idioms is understood as “the ease with which the motivation for the use (or some plausible motivation – it needn’t be etymologically correct) can be recovered” (Nunberg et al. 1994: 498).

In fact, the examination of semantic transparency/opacity of idioms usually involves the presentation of their scalar classification, which ranges from entirely transparent to entirely opaque, i.e. pure idioms, and reflects the difficulty in establishing a precise degree of their transparency. One such attempt of the scalar exploration of idioms is offered by Fernando and Flavell (1981: 24-28), who classify them into four categories. They are observed according to the symmetry or asymmetry between their syntax and sense, thus, reflecting the level of correspondence between their literal and idiomatic meaning. The first category refers to transparent expressions (*cut wood, rely on*), that is, collocations whose literal meaning is easily identified from the meanings of their constituents. The next two categories are both seen as metaphorical expressions. They are semi-transparent phrases (*skate on thin ice, kill two birds with one stone*) and semi-opaque phrases (*burn one’s boats, jump down someone’s throat*). Their literal meaning (the sum of the meaning of their constituents), contributes to the greater or lesser comprehension of the idiomatic meaning of the expressions, though the distinction between these two categories is not quite clear. Finally, opaque phrases (*pull someone’s leg, pass the buck*) are idioms viewed as non-transparent due to the highest level of “asymmetry between their syntax and sense” (Fernando and Flavell 1981: 24). Similarly, observing the diverse internal semantic structure of idioms, Langlotz (2006: 53) concludes: “At one pole one can find semantically unanalyzable units such as *spick and span* whereas at the other pole there are highly transparent expressions such as the proverb *people who live in glass houses should not throw stone*”. Consequently, the scalar presentation of idioms’ transparency confirms that the more discrepancy there is between the literal and idiomatic meaning of an expression, the more opaque the expression gets (Langlotz 2006: 4).

Therefore, the established assumptions about the non-compositionality and fixedness of idioms as opaque phrases, stored in the lexicon in a specifically arranged linear order, are regarded as unacceptable and too simplistic (Langacker 1987/2004: 24-25). Instead, a new interpretation of an idiom defines it as “a complex of semantic and symbolic relationships that have become conventionalized and have coalesced into an established configuration”. However, this configuration of relationships is not necessarily fixed and can be recognizable “even when its component words are split up and used in grammatical constructions such that they do not form a contiguous linear sequence” (Langacker 1987/2004: 25). In other words,

from a cognitivist point of view, idioms are seen as complex, composite word-configurations and not as lexical units (Langlotz 2006: 53).

In fact, plenty of research has pointed to the relations between the meaning of idioms and the human conceptual system that motivates them. Thus, cognitive semanticists confirm that from the traditional point of view idioms are viewed exclusively as a matter of language. However, despite the fact that there is no complete predictability, “there is a great deal of systematic conceptual motivation for the meaning of most idioms” (Kövecses and Szabó 1996: 326). In this regard, Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) work on metaphor is of utmost importance as it demonstrates that the human conceptual system is largely metaphorically structured. In their seminal book *Metaphor We Live by* (1980) the authors elaborate the assumption that metaphor is not just a linguistic phenomenon, but a property of the human conceptual system, that is, a cognitive mechanism that idioms are based on. Therefore, a conceptual metaphor allows a process of conceptualization or mapping of two conceptual domains, where the source domain that contains the literal meaning is used to illustrate a more abstract concept in the target domain. For instance, in the sentence “After the row, he was *spitting fire*”, the metaphorical expression *spit fire*, originating from the source domain of fire, is used to explain the target domain of anger, via the underlying conceptual metaphor – “anger is fire” (Kövecses and Szabó 1996: 332). The fact that the majority of idioms are not linguistic, but conceptual in nature implies that their meanings arise: “from our more general knowledge of the word (embodied in our conceptual system)” (Kövecses and Szabó 1996: 330).

The traditional view, on the other hand, fails to interpret idioms as situational metaphors, but rather see them as anomalies of interpretation (Nunberg et al. 1994: 504). Thus, the traditional identification of idioms has been challenged within the framework of cognitive linguistics, in a line of research that investigates the relation between language and mind.

## **2.2. “A mixed bag” of idiomatic expressions and idiomacity**

Approaching the category of idiom in a broader sense, Kövecses and Szabó (1996: 327) compare it to “a bag” full of various multi-word items: different types of idioms (metaphoric, metonymic, grammatical, idioms with *it*), pairs of words (binomials), similes (idioms of comparison), phrasal verbs, sayings, etc. The authors also provide an example for each category selected from this “bag”:



‘The category of idiom is a mixed bag. It involves metaphors (e.g. *spill the beans*), metonymies (e.g. *throw up one’s hands*), pairs of words (e.g. *cats and dogs*), idioms with *it* (e.g. *live it up*), similes (e.g. *as easy as pie*), sayings (e.g. *a bird in the hands is worth two in the bush*), phrasal verbs (e.g. *come up* as in ‘Christmas is *coming up*’), grammatical idioms (e.g. *let alone*) and others’ (Kövecses and Szabó 1996: 327).

This heterogeneity of expressions points to the complex nature of idioms, or in Langlotz’s view (2006: 1), to the fact that idioms represent very complex linguistic configurations in terms of their structural and semantic organization as well as their discursive function. In fact, as observed by Nunberg et al. (1944) there are authors who only accept idioms as non-compositional expressions. At the other end of the phraseological spectrum, however, there are dictionaries that denote the tendency of including under the cover term of *idiom* even the collocations with fully literal interpretations. Therefore, according to the common usage, the extension of the term *idiom* should embrace more than the former and less than the latter (Nunberg et al. 1994: 494). In addition, Fernando’s (1997) observation regarding the relation between idiomaticity and idiomatic expressions is worth noting as well. According to Fernando (1997: 30), while idioms undoubtedly reflect idiomaticity, all word combinations that show idiomaticity, such as habitual collocations, are not automatically idioms. In other words, whereas habitual collocations, for instance, *catch a bus*, *black coffee*, generate adjectival and nominal variants (e.g. *catch a tram*, *strong coffee*, etc.), idioms generally do not tolerate the substitution of their components so that, e.g. *smell a rat*, is not acceptable in any other variation.

Thus, idiomatic expressions differ in the degree of their idiomaticity, understood as “the degree of belonging to the class of idiomatic constructions” (Langlotz 2006: 5), which takes into consideration their conventionality, formal inflexibility and figuration. In this light, due to their complexity, it is not surprising that there is no universal definition of idioms.

It is worth noting that according to the Configuration Theory, put forward by Cacciari and Tabossi (1988), idiom comprehension is perceived as a dynamic process in which we access the idiomatic meaning by processing an idiomatic expression word by word until the key component (the recognition point) is reached. As a result, the configuration (the activation of the key component) emerges because at this point idiomatic meaning of an expression is “retrieved from semantic memory” (Cacciari and Tabossi 2018: 3). However, this is obviously more difficult to be achieved with more opaque (less compositional idioms).

One of the ways of determining the meaning of metaphorically complex idiomatic expressions, as mentioned earlier, implies the analysis of conceptual metaphors that underlie them and reflect their conceptual motivation. What may also contribute in identifying an unfamiliar idiomatic expression is context. As observed by Cacciari and Tabossi (1988: 680) regarding the peculiarity of idiomatic expressions, “if taken literally they sometimes make no sense, but nevertheless, they fit in an appropriate context”.

Observing the definition of “context”, Van Dijk (2008: 14) points to one of the dictionary definitions in reference to its two essential meanings. One defines it as linguistic, “namely verbal context” and the other as the external factors, that is, “the set of circumstances or facts that surround a particular event, situations, etc.” However, approaching the notion of context from a sociocognitive perspective, Van Dijk (2008) asserts that apart from the social component, it is also important to take into consideration a cognitive component. Therefore, contexts represent mental models, i.e., “subjective mental constructs”, referred to as “context models” (Van Dijk 2008: II). The personal elements which they reflect “make all discourse production and interpretations unique”, implying that language users are expected to reconstruct a particular context through their subjective interpretations. These different personal elements are preserved in abstract schematic structures mental models are made of, which represent common settings and participants involved in their various roles and activities (Van Dijk 2008: 60). Moreover, he points to the important role of knowledge as language users’ cognitive property and one of the properties of context which “draws on, but is not the same as knowledge of the world” (Van Dijk 2008: X). To what extent our general knowledge is activated in interpreting context depends on “readers’ knowledge, goals, interests, etc.” (2008: 64).

Regarding the nature of contextual meaning, Langacker (1987/2004: 157) asserts that it is “clearly encyclopedic in scope and cannot be determined algorithmically as a compositional function of component lexical items”. In other words, conceptual meaning provides “detailed conceptualization” that contributes to our “full understanding of the expressions in context and includes all relevant aspects of the conceived situation” (Langacker 1987/2004: 157). It should be noted that in cognitive linguistics encyclopedic knowledge (the knowledge of the world) is opposed to linguistic knowledge. In his discussion on encyclopedic knowledge, cultural models and interculturality Keckes (2013: 181) explains that “encyclopedic knowledge is viewed as a structured system of knowledge, organized as a network”. It includes cultural models understood as “cognitive frames of assumed or implicit knowledge

that assists individuals in interpreting and understanding information and events” (2013: 181). In other words, they do not only demonstrate to what extent “people impose order on their world, but also the degree to which such orders are shared by the joint participants in this world ...” (Holland and Quinn 1995: 6).

At this point, we will just refer to Malinowski who was the first to introduce the notion of “context of the situation” in his ethnographic study of meaning in primitive languages (1923). He observes that “(...) utterance and situation are bound up inextricably with each other and the context of situation is indispensable for the understanding of the words”. He also recognizes the correlation between language and culture, stating that language is “essentially rooted in the reality of the culture and (...) cannot be explained without constant reference to these broader contexts of verbal utterance” (Malinowski 1923: 305).

### **2. 3. Idiomatic expressions and culture**

Different speech communities use various idiomatic expressions which reflect their specific culturally embedded meanings as well as the influence of culture on the language of their users. As Kövecses (2010: 209) explains, a lot of research in anthropology, sociolinguistics, sociology, etc. demonstrates that languages are not monolithic but reflect divergences in human perception and experience of sociocultural reality of their communities. In other words, there is variation in the metaphorical conceptualization of different aspects of reality within different cultures. In addition, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) highlighted the importance of different physical environments that contribute to defining conceptual systems of various cultures. They also confirmed that “the social reality defined by a culture affects its conception of physical reality. What is real for an individual as a member of a culture is a product both of his social reality and of the way in which that shapes his experience or the physical world”, which appears to be mostly metaphorical (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 146-147). Nevertheless, the fact that idiomatic expressions are culturally marked does not imply that native users are normally familiar with their etymology. For example, the history behind the idiom *spill the beans*, which derives from an ancient practice of voting, is probably unknown to most English native speakers. However, they use it adequately thanks to the conventional knowledge of its usage shared by other members of their culture.

In fact, according to Dobrovolskij and Piirainen (2005: 21-22), there are five types of cultural components underlying idiomatic expressions that are identified as being relevant: the first type refers to figurative units whose underlying cultural knowledge is based on the *social interaction* and different aspects of social behavior within a speech community. The second

type is represented by figurative units that comprise image components belonging to *material culture*, including all aspects of material environment. Cultural components of the third group of figurative units reveal “textual dependence”. Their sources are certain texts and they originally refer to quotations and allusions. The cultural aspect of the fourth type is related to pre-scientific conceptions of the world (superstitions, religion, ancient beliefs), folk beliefs, etc. that is, to *fictive conceptual domains*. One such domain is connected to the ancient doctrine of four humors in the human body and their specific colors that correspond to four types of temperaments (“the humoral pathology”), which had a great influence on European languages up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The fifth type of the figurative units deals with *cultural symbols*, where only one constituent of idiomatic expressions has culturally marked symbolic meaning. The example provided by Dobrovol’skij and Piirainen (2005: 23-24) emphasizes the conceptualization of the OWL, a symbol of wisdom and knowledge, which originates from Greek cultural tradition and is reflected, among others, in the simile *as wise as an owl!* In this respect, idiomatic expressions function as transmitters of various kinds of knowledge which they have generated during their functioning in the language. Therefore, the authors’ conclusion is that when analyzing the semantic and pragmatic behavior of idioms, various concepts should be taken into consideration. Apart from the knowledge of underlining conceptual metaphors, developed by Lakoff and Johnson within the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor, “culturally based concepts, which in many cases govern the inference from literal to figurative” are undoubtedly relevant as well (Dobrovol’skij and Piirainen 2005: 31). It is important to demonstrate that conventional figurative units (idioms, metaphors, proverbs, etc.) “record and preserve relevant knowledge as part of their content plane (in the form of image traces), including, above all, reflections of the respective culture” (Dobrovol’skij and Piirainen 2006: 28). It is worth noting that Deignan (1999), as cited by Boers et al. (2004: 377), argues that a lot of idioms reflect the culture or the past rather than the present, suggesting that the connection between culture and idiomatic expressions is not usually a direct one.

#### **2. 4. The interrelation of sport and business within idiomatic language**

Idiomatic expressions derive from different experience domains and in various linguistic communities some of them appear to be more salient than the others. As Boers et al. (2004: 377) assert a particularly salient source domain in a given community is likely to produce a wide range of metaphorical expressions, which are consequently used more

frequently than the others. In this regard, one of the specific domains that constantly attracts a large number of idiomatic expressions in speech communities worldwide is sport.

According to Besnier and Brownell (2019: n. pag.), sport can be characterized as being “somewhat unique in the repertoire of human activities in that it connects the intimacy of bodies, emotions, and personal projects to a global system of capital, world politics, and mega-spectacles.” Still, not all sports are equally popular across cultures. Some domains that are historically rooted, such as sailing in England (due to its history of seafaring) reflect a wider range of idiomatic expression originating from that source domain compared to other cultures. Some of the examples provided by Boers (2004: 377) are: *running a tight ship*; *taking the wind out of someone’s sails*; *clear the decks*, etc. As for the source domains that are culture-specific, Langlotz (2006: 172) gives the examples of baseball and cricket, commenting that they are confined to an Anglo-American cultural background. In addition, Boers (2004: 377) observes that baseball appears to be more popular in the United States than in Europe, which has led to the production of more baseball-based idiomatic expressions in American English than in British English. One of the selected examples is: *I had a date with Alice last night, but I couldn’t even get to first base with her*. On the other hand, cricket is more favored by the British, so that in the British idiomatic discourse there is more cricket-based expressions such as *hit someone for six*, etc.

Doubtless, there are a large number of various sports that are utilized as source domains and activated for interpreting other, more abstract spheres of human activities. Among the target domains that were identified as the most prominent ones, Callies (2011: 62-63) mentions the field of business/economics. This is not surprising since the world of business is getting more and more sports-like. What these two worlds have in common is, first of all, the tough competitive environment. While in sports the competition is evident among different teams and individuals, in business context rivalry can be seen among different companies and business counterparts. As for the concepts of teamwork or individual performance, they both include work discipline and full commitment necessary for achieving excellent results. While a teamwork environment promotes a motivating atmosphere that encourages team members to be supportive of each other, to work harder and become more efficient, the concept of individualism emphasizes personal goals, the desire for autonomy and the value of self-realization. No wonder than that a lot of metaphorical expressions originating from the source domain of team and individual sports perfectly correspond to the target domain of the world of business.

### **3. The study**

The preliminary phase of the current research was marked by the search for numerous idiomatic expressions originating from different sports. The simplest and the most convenient access to the world of sport was provided by different American and British sports programming networks, their articles and live streams. In this way, roughly a hundred idiomatic expressions in the form of verb phrases, noun phrases and prepositional phrases were collected from the American ABC, Fox Sports, ESPN, NBC Sports, then from the British Sky Sports and the Pan-European Eurosport. The source domains of the sports from which the idiomatic expressions were collected are as follows: American football, baseball, basketball, boxing, cricket, darts, golf, horse racing, motor racing, rugby, sailing, soccer, tennis, track and field and the category of “any sport”. In the next phase, the examples of business context for these sports-related idiomatic expressions were identified in two word-text corpora: the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the British National Corpus (BNC). As a result, a list of a total of 67 idiomatic expressions was selected based on their accessibility in the corpora.

It should be noted that the Corpus of Contemporary American English is the largest structured corpus of American English, which is regularly updated. It comprises over a billion samples of written and spoken English, selected from different sources and classified into eight genres: spoken, magazines, newspaper, academic, fiction, web (genl.), web (blog), TV/movies. Consequently, they range from very informal to very formal registers. The British National Corpus is a 100-million-word-text corpus of samples gathered from a large variety of sources. They also belong to various written and spoken genres and demonstrate a large cross-section of British English of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. In general, the richness of the corpus data is more evident in COCA as it is more recent and much larger than the BNC. However, the criterion for choosing the examples from either COCA or the BNC (when present in both corpora) was based on the more illustrative demonstration of the example sentence in the business-related context provided by one of the corpora. In case of more opaque idiomatic expressions, their meanings were checked in one of the following dictionaries: Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2015), Collins Cobuild Idioms Dictionary (2012), Webster’s New World Dictionary (1974), The Free Dictionary (an American online dictionary that gathers information from a variety of sources), Grammarist (online dictionary relying on WordPress) and Lexico (a website providing a collection of dictionaries of English and Spanish produced by Oxford University Press).

Since this paper is focused on sports-related idiomatic expressions that appear in business context, identified in COCA and the BNC, our goal is twofold. Firstly, we aim to examine to what extent context can activate speakers' cultural knowledge and help them to understand sports-related idiomatic expressions embedded in such specific context. Our assumption is that context may help to a certain extent. Secondly, as the idiomatic expressions belong to different team and individual sports and are collected from different genres in the corpora, our aim is to analyze their distribution and frequency of occurrence in business as well as their frequency across different genres. In this respect, it is worth noting that in the American sports culture American football, baseball and basketball are regarded to be the most popular sport (*Sports Show*, n. pag.), while in Great Britain these are soccer, cricket and rugby (*Sport-Travel*, n. pag.). The underlying assumption is that the popularity of a certain sport will correspond to the higher frequency of their occurrence in business English.

It should be noted that this presentation of the distribution and frequency of the idiomatic expressions will embrace all the collected samples from the corpora, while in the analysis we will focus on their limited number. The description of the remaining examples can be found in the Appendix where different sports will be arranged in the alphabetic order.

#### 4. The analysis

As stated previously, cultural knowledge is supposed to facilitate the comprehension of unfamiliar idioms. Besides, this speakers' culture-based knowledge of the "shared social cognition (their knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, grammar, norms, values)", etc. (Van Dijk 2008: 17), is activated in the interpretation of a particular context. In reference to these statements, we will present the first examples that demonstrate various socio-cultural references and contain the idioms: *hat trick*, *to pass the baton* and *to be bowled over*.

(1) First came the crushing, months-long SAG/AFTRA commercial strike in 2000. That same year, the dot-com crash commenced. Then, on Sept. 11, 2001, terrorists caused massive mayhem and ripple effects that are still being felt. On the heels of this horrid **hat trick**, businesses went bankrupt, went under, cut costs, decimated work forces. (COCA, Chicago Sun-Times; Pg. 50, 01/17/2003, n. 259 genre: newspaper)

(2) The financial crisis provided the coup de grace, punishing incumbents and **passing the baton** of energetic opposition to new parties of the left such as Syriza and Podemos.

(COCA Pearce, Nick, New Statesman, *In the valley of death*, 9/25/2015, n. 6 genre: magazine)

In example (1) the expression *hat trick* originates from soccer where it stands for “three goals or points scored by a single player in a match” (FD). It is used in a context which reveals the speaker’s assumption of the socioculturally shared knowledge with the other participants of his speech community. However, the context is partly misleading because instead of conveying the idiomatic meaning of the expression related to three successful accomplishments, it presents three disastrous events for the American society and their way of life. In other words, the irony of the account may not be fully understood by the language user and therefore it diminishes the transparency of the idiom.

Example (2) demonstrates that the idiomatic expression *to pass the baton* is perfectly applicable to the formal business context. It derives from track and field and is sufficiently transparent as it stands for what it demonstrates – passing the baton from one runner to the other in a race. The context is short but informative and the transition from the literal to idiomatic meaning of passing the responsibility (in this case from one political party to the other) is transparent. The language user’s lexical knowledge (the reference to the French expression *coup de grace*) and that from politics concerning two radical left-wing parties should additionally clarify the meaning of the context.

The following example (3.1) includes the idiomatic expression *to be bowled over*.

(3.1) The ostensibly willful destruction of the American middle class is laid bare in this villains and underdogs story from the Pulitzer Prize-winning reporting duo... for folks **bowled over** by the recent financial meltdown, Barlett and Steele's book will resonate. (COCA, *The Betrayal of the American Dream*: Donald L. Barlett, James B, <http://www.amazon.com/Betrayal-American-Dream-Donald-Barlett/dp/1586489690>, 2012, n. 44 web)

This idiomatic expression appears in the context which is a segment of a literary review, full of socio-cultural references. Its literal meaning (in its active form, *to bowl over*) implies knocking something (or somebody) down, or more precisely, “knocking all the bails of the cricket” (FD) at the cricket field. The expression appears in the passive construction and is semantically connected with a notion of a financial crisis. It could help a language user to comprehend its overall meaning connected with a sensation of being shocked and confused.



However, it is only one layer of the idiomatic meanings of the expression. As suggested by the following example (3.2), its other layer implies the state of being pleasantly surprised:

(3.2) And when she finished singing these songs, he **was so bowled over** that he knew that he found the perfect person to introduce, among others. (COCA, Fresh Air 12:00 AM EST, 06/05/2015, n. 10, context: music, genre: spoken)

What is common regarding the context in the next three examples is the reference to the ex-American President Obama. Therefore, the stress is on political and economic elements, which is not surprising due to the close relation between the two domains. They contain the expressions *full-court press*, *to move the goalposts* and *to par for the course*.

(4) President Barack Obama continued his **full-court press** to pass health care reform legislation, citing a new White House study indicating that small businesses were paying far more per employee for health insurance than big companies, a disparity the president said was "unsustainable" as well as "unacceptable." (COCA, Today in History: July 25, 2019 - cleveland.com, n. 3, genre: newspaper)

(5.1.) "President Obama **tried to move the goalposts** on costs, downplaying the skyrocketing premiums," he said. (COCA, USA TODAY, Obama: America is stronger because of Affordable Care Act, 03/23/2017, n. 1 genre: newspaper)

In both examples the elements of culturally specific knowledge are required from the language user in reference to the economic measures passed by ex-American President Obama. In (4) the expression *full-court press* literally denotes the press, that is, "an aggressive tactic in which members of a team cover their opponents throughout the court" (LOD). The example confirms how naturally this sports-related idiom fits in this political-economic context. Its idiomatic meaning is successfully illustrated by the context, suggesting (Obama's) strong and aggressive effort to achieve something. In addition, the context reflects the relevant macro socio-cultural information about the American community at the time of his presidency.

In (5.1) the expression *to move the goalposts* (also *shift the goalposts*) derives from soccer. In fact, "the term originated in sports that use goalposts (soccer, rugby, football) in the second half of the 1900s. (FD)" Although the context is short, it is possible to deduce the overall idiomatic meaning of the expression as part of the message clearly explains Obama's intention to change the rules in order to gain advantage (by downplaying the mentioned

premiums). The idiom meaning is also comprehensible from the following example (5.2) referring to somebody's change of the political orientation:

(5.2) Are you simply uninformed or being outright dishonest? # Watch you **move the goalposts**. First it was "liberals". Now it's "Democrats". That's hardly the same thing, as you should well know. (COCA, Do libertarians have a sense of humor?, 2012, <http://scienceblogs.com/pharyngula/2010/05/01/do-libertarians-have-a-sense-o/>, n. 28, context: politics, genre: blog)

The context in (6) refers to an important aspect of the American political reality – political campaigns. It utilizes the idiomatic expression *to be par for the course*:

(6) There is no better ROI on any investment in the world than a campaign donation: a ten thousand dollar donation which results in a hundred million dollar contract **is par for the course**, especially when one of the current candidates seems intent upon spending two trillion more dollars on the military. (COCA, Because the last thing we want is for Juan Peron to beat both, <http://ordinary-gentlemen.com/blog/2012/10/because-the-last-thing-we-want-is-for-juan-peron-to-beat-both-romney-and-obama/>, 2012, n. 18 genre: blog)

The expression *to be par for the course* comes from golf and in its physical context it means “the number of strokes that should take a player to get the ball into a particular hole on a golf course” (CBD: 331). In other words, it is something that is expected to occur. The context points to the world of politics and finance and offers the macro socio-cultural information related to a campaign donation. The notion of ROI (return on investment) facilitates the comprehension of the idiomatic meaning. Its implication of something that is expected to occur can be easily understood by the other members of the business community. However, for the speaker who does not share this specific business knowledge, this formal context may not be sufficiently clear.

The next two examples (7) and (8) also require business knowledge for the context to be fully understood. They contain the idiomatic expressions *to throw in the towel* and *the gloves are off*:

(7.1) When inflation and unemployment increase, they don't have **to throw in the towel** on Keynesian theory; they merely claim that the Phillips Curve has shifted outwards. (COCA, HuffPo's 11 Myths About the Fed, Refuted | Liberty Classroom,

<http://www.libertyclassroom.com/huffpos-11-myths-about-the-fed-refuted/>, 2012, n. 24  
genre: blog)

The literal meaning of the idiomatic expression *to throw in the towel* indicates that “boxers or their trainers signal defeat by throwing the towel or sponge used to wipe a contestant's face into the middle of the ring” (FD). It is strongly related to the notion of quitting or abandoning something and its comprehension is semantically supported by the lexeme *merely*. Within the sentence frame it represents the “cognitive point” after which the explanation of the idiomatic meaning of the expression is activated. However, similar to the previous example, the context requires the participants’ background knowledge related to economics (the mentioned theory and the economic concept of the Phillips Curve) to make the idiom fully comprehensible. Otherwise, it remains semi-transparent. It is, though, more transparent in the following example related to history:

(7.2) Before the massive enemy assault, allied commanders thought the Third Reich was almost ready **to throw in the towel**. (COCA, Up close to the enemy – Pfc. Maurice Forgotson was forward, <http://donmoorewartales.com/2012/10/26/maurice-forgotson/>, 2012, n. 3, context: history, genre: web)

(8) If 3 to 5 years down the line we see that the base policy of the developed world is to continue printing money, then **the gloves are off** in terms of what levels gold and silver could actually go to. (COCA, 10 Financial Experts Talk About The Effect QE3 Will Have On Gold, <http://etfdailynews.com/2012/09/20/10-financial-experts-talk-about-the-effect-qe3-will-have-on-gold-and-silver-prices-gld-slv-agq-iau-phys/>, 2012, n. 18, genre: web)

The literal meaning of the expression *the gloves are off* (8) refers to removing the gloves during a fight in a boxing match because “fighting with bare fists is more dangerous than fighting with gloves on” (FD). It is also an example of a formal “specialized” business context which requires the participant’s background knowledge of economic trends. Although the notion of causing damage is preserved in the idiomatic meaning of the expression, it may not seem transparent enough to make it completely clear. It should be noted that the two variations *the gloves are off* and *to take the gloves off* are also commonly used.

The context in (9) simultaneously provides micro and macro socio-cultural information that should help a well-informed language user to understand the context. The expression is *to take the wind out of one’s sails*:

(9) Rumors of a price war are unlikely **to take the wind out of the sails** of a tour operator that has not just weathered the recession and the downturn in travel caused by the Gulf war, but increased market share as well. (BNC, Accountancy. 1992, pp. ?? 4027 s-units., n. 6 genre: web)

The expression originates from sailing with the obvious literal meaning of “sailing to windward of another ship, thereby robbing it of wind for its sails” (FD). This time the language user’s knowledge of the world is expected to be activated in reference to the socio-political consequences of the Gulf War. The idiomatic meaning of intentionally reducing someone’s effectiveness is transparent and effectively conveyed by the context.

The next example (10) contains the expression *below the belt* that originates from boxing:

(10) The poor people of Louisiana have been struck another blow **below the belt** by our so-called compassionate president. He has suspended the Davis-Bacon Act, which guarantees fair, competitive wages for workers of companies under contract with the federal government. (COCA, Denver Post, THE OPEN FORUM - Letters to the editor, DENVER & THE WEST; 09/20/2005, n. 175 genre: newspaper)

The expression literally refers to a well-known rule “that forbids boxers from hitting each other below the waist” (FD) and corresponds to its idiomatic meaning of an unfair action. The context is highly informative and requires the language user’s knowledge of the particular socio-cultural context. It conveys the speaker’s subjective account of a broader socio-political situation in the USA. Furthermore, it provides an explanation of one of the American legislative measures, revealing an important aspect of their culture. At the same time, the ironic allusion to the President may prevent the language user from fully understanding the idiom.

Our next examples refer to the more informal context of situations, which contain the idiomatic expressions: *to give one a run for one’s money*, *rain check*, *jump the gun* and *quarterback*.

(11) I need you to deliver a win for Britain, Simon. I'm doing it for the charity. Okay, you're doing it for the charity. Well, Simon, we've had a bid of \$20,000 from, I have to say, an American member of the audience, and I think you should **give** him a little **run for his money**. What if we went to \$50,000? (COCA, The Apprentice Country: USA, Under the Hammer (2008), n. 80 genre: TV)

In (11) the expression *to give one a run for one's money* comes from horse racing. It appears in the context which is an example of a communicative situation (related to a bid auction). It is represented as a dynamic construct, based on the interaction among three participants (an auctioneer and two bidders). The emphasis is on their subjective interpretations of the ongoing situation. The expression is used and explained by the auctioneer who encourages Simon Cowell (one of the bidders) to challenge the competitor and make it more difficult for him to win, which is exactly the idiomatic meaning of the expression. Therefore, the context contributes in making the idiomatic expressions comprehensible. What is more, it seems to be irrelevant if the language user does not know who Simon Cowell is. Regarding the origin of the term, it refers to horse racing, “where one may get considerable pleasure from watching the race even if one does not win much” (FD).

(12) Whether it's how an online store mangled a Christmas order, or how rude and unhelpful a Best Buy manager was when a couple of my colleagues had the gall to ask for a **rain check** on an advertised deal, we're constantly shaking our heads at how often even the simplest tenets of customer service seem beyond the grasp of so many.

(COCA, Think customers: The 1to1 Blog: 2008 Archives,  
<http://www.1to1media.com/weblog/2008/>, 2012, genre: web)

The idiom *rain check* comes from baseball. The origin of the term is connected with “the practice to offer paying spectators a rain check entitling them to future admission for a game that was postponed or ended early owing to bad weather”. (FD) The expression is contextualized in the cultural frame of utilizing customer service, where the participant has a role of an unsatisfied customer and the language user is supposed to share the same knowledge with him. The idiomatic meaning of the expression, referring to a ticket that can be used later, becomes transparent as the customer continues to complain about the service.

Regarding sports culture in general, it should be stressed that the concept of player trades plays an important role in all sports. In this respect, the following example refers to the idiom *to jump the gun*.

(13) I agree that this is typical in Dayton **to jump the gun** on spend money before the market has had a chance to play out, but a decision had to be made on Santana (and Dan Haren) by Friday, so I think this is a bit more understandable. (COCA, Santana

Roundtable - Royals Review,

<http://www.royalsreview.com/2012/11/1/3585662/santana-roundtable>, n. 51, genre: blog)

In (13) the expression *to jump the gun* derives from track and field races where, as the expression suggests, the gun is fired to signal the beginning of the race. The context refers to an important aspect of sports culture, which includes trading famous athletes (Santana and Dan Haren), and where the established procedure is expected to be followed. In this case it was ignored. What follows is a participant's subjective interpretation of the actual situation. What proves to be useful in the articulation of the semantic components of the context are two temporal indicators (before and after) which efficiently clarify the notion of starting the activity too soon. In other words, the speaker who does not follow American football and may not have heard of these famous baseball players is likely to understand the idiomatic meaning of the expression.

The example of the next context contains the idiom *to quarterback* which, without the contextualization would remain opaque to the speakers who do not follow American football.

(14.1) eBay was so concerned about losing in China that Meg Whitman, its buttoned-down, Harvard MBA CEO, had decamped to an apartment in a luxury hotel in central Shanghai **to quarterback** eBay's strategy. (COCA, Newsweek Global, 9/19/2014, POWELL, BILL, genre: magazine)

*To quarterback* is one of the basic concepts in American football, meaning "to direct an offense of a team" (FD). The dynamic and informative context demonstrates the business jargon. The notion of leading and organizing something is reflected in Meg Whitman's new activity and is sufficiently transparent. In other words, the presence of context contributes to understanding this opaque idiom, even to the speakers who are not familiar with this specific sport.

The following example reflects military jargon, where the idiom meaning of leading somebody is successfully activated:

(14.2) [Neil] You've been in the corps twice as long as [Herrick]... and some girl's **quarterbacking** your team. [Nathan] She's 10 times the marine [Herrick]'ll ever be! (COCA, Space: Above and Beyond, Country: USA, Toy Soldiers (1996) n. 198, context: military, genre: TV)

Our last example (15) refers to the idiom *to level the playing field*, which is related to various sports:

(15) If the role of the private sector is to compete, there is an equally important role for the government, which is **to level the playing field** and set the "rules of the game" that allow business to compete. (COCA, Collaborating to Compete: The Need for Public-Private Dialogue, <http://bhutanchronicles.com/2012/11/05/collaborating-to-compete-public-private-dialogue/>, 2012, n. 1, genre: blog)

The expression literally refers to all kinds of field sports, which should be played on a level field as "a slope would clearly be an advantage for one side" (FD). The example is interesting because the context itself clearly explains the idiomatic meaning of the expression as the situation of fair competition, concerning the unfair position of all those involved in the private sector. Again, relevant socio-cultural references are provided within a particular context of culture, implying that its participants share the same conventional knowledge of the world.

As seen so far, the analyzed business contexts contain idiomatic expressions from different team and individual sports. Furthermore, it is also evident that the business contexts differ in the degree of their formality. Therefore, our next goal was to examine all our selected idiomatic expressions and to observe their distribution and frequency in terms of the sports they originate from, the contrast between team and individual sports, as well as different genres their business contexts come from. Our findings will be discussed in the next section.

## **5. Results and Discussion**

The sports-related idiomatic expressions in business context selected for our analysis demonstrate their heterogeneous syntactic and lexical diversity. Our intention, however, was not to decompose them and observe the internal correlation of their individual components that may contribute to the understanding of their overall meaning. Rather, we approached them as lexical chunks and tried to examine to what extent context supported by speaker's cultural knowledge can activate their comprehension.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding the analyzed contexts, what soon became evident was the predominance of, logically, business (economic) topics and next, those with the elements from politics. Besides, what is also noticeable is the lack of communicative situations in most of them. However, this is not the case with the example (11) in which the participants are involved in an ongoing conversation. In this "context model", i.e., "mental model" (Van Dijk 2008: IX) the idiomatic

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that for a deep insight into idiom comprehension a number of speakers needs to be involved and tested. However, for the purpose of this paper, the activated comprehension is entirely mine as the main focus of the paper is on the distribution and context of the selected idiomatic expressions.

expression *to give one a run for one's money* is successfully clarified by one of the participants while adjusting his subjective interpretation to the actual situation. This is also the case with the idiom *rain check* in the example (12), used in the subjective complaint of a customer in reference to a particular cultural frame.

In some cases the speaker's specific knowledge of some less general concepts is essential for the interpretation of the contexts with more obscure idiomatic expressions. In such situations context can prove to be considerably supportive or not precise enough for that purpose. In example (13), the speaker's knowledge of the particular sport was necessary for understanding the aforementioned concept and consequently the idiomatic expression within the context. In this case, the context was proved to be supportive. The participant's background knowledge about the specific topic-related issues in the domain of economics contributed to the understanding of the context and made it possible for the idiomatic expressions to be understood (examples (3), (9), (14) and (15)). However, this was not the case with the examples (6), (7) and (8) where the context was not exhaustive enough to be more helpful. As already mentioned, the elements from the political discourse often combine with those from business or in a broader sense from economics. In this respect, examples (2), (4) and (5) demonstrate that the participants' understanding of socio-political situations within a given socio-cultural context helps them comprehend politically themed context and the idiomatic expressions that they contain. However, in some cases (examples (1) and (3)) the context appears to be somewhat misleading if the speaker does not understand the implied irony of the context.

To conclude, the analysis confirmed that the view that participants' cultural knowledge facilitates the comprehension of the context and the idiomatic expressions that they contain only to a certain degree.

The results of the analysis of our 67 selected idiomatic expressions were not as quite as we expected. In fact, the results that were obtained unexpectedly reveal that the number of idiomatic expressions in business English originating from sports do not always correspond to the popularity of a particular sport in the United States or Great Britain. In this regard, Table 1 below shows that the source domain of American football does not provide the most idiomatic expressions for business, although it is perceived as the most popular sport in the USA. As for the idiomatic expressions from the next two most popular American sports, baseball and basketball, they appear to be better represented in the world of business than those from American football. The discrepancy between the popularity of the sport and its production of



idiomatic expressions applicable to the business domain is also evident in soccer, cricket and rugby, the three most popular sports in Great Britain. As a matter of fact, rugby is indicated as the least fertile domain of sporting idioms in business context and is supported with only one example.

Table 1 also demonstrates a greater amount of expressions in business English from sports with a long tradition, such as boxing, horse racing and track and field (whose origins date back to Ancient Greece), compared to the more popular sports aforementioned.

SPORT	NUMBER OF IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS
American football	4
Baseball	7
Basketball	5
Boxing	12
Cricket	2
Darts	2
Golf	4
Horse racing	7
Motorsports	2
Rugby	1
Sailing	2
Soccer	3
Tennis	2
Track and Field	8
Any sport	6

*Table 1: Distribution of idiomatic expressions in business context from each sport*

Actually, the largest amount of idiomatic expressions derived from the domain of boxing (12) since it is largely recognized in the world of business for being dynamic, competitive and aggressive. The exception to this pattern is sailing. We have already mentioned its long tradition and the fact that it abounds in idiomatic expressions related to the

activities of sailing. However, it turned out that many of them are not adequate for the business environment.

Also, more expressions were expected to be found originating from golf and tennis. The fact that they are less used in business context could be attributed to their nature. They are both gentlemen’s, non-contact sports and do not demonstrate enough vigor and competitiveness, typical of a business environment. The results also show that idiomatic expressions from darts and motorsports correspond poorly to the world of business. Concerning darts, this may be due to its origin. In fact, it was originally a popular British bar game which, in the course of time, gradually developed into a professional sport. Since darts is generally meant to be played for fun and relaxation, it lacks the necessary fighting spirit and competitiveness needed in business. As for motorsports, they draw a considerable number of idiomatic expressions from horse racing. As a result, it has caused the occasional overlapping of their meanings since they basically refer to the same discipline – racing. For example, *down to the wire* and *neck and neck* are used in both sports in the same meaning. The last category of Any Sport is made up of idiomatic expressions which contain more general meaning. They are present in numerous sports and can be applied to the world of business as they reflect the basic aspect of competitiveness, typical of both domains.

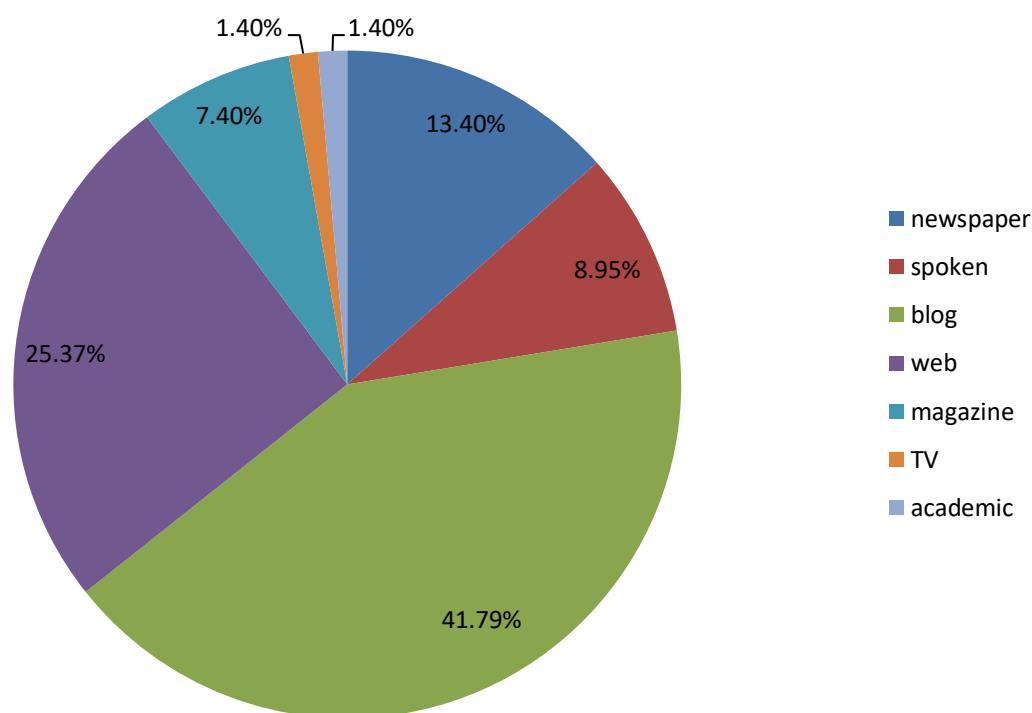
Our next Table 2 below shows the frequency of the occurrences of business idiomatic expressions derived from sports. These overall results refer to the expressions collected from two types of sports – team sports and individual sports. For that reason Any Sport category is excluded from the table. One of its examples is the idiomatic expression *in a league of one’s own*, which is a part of each sport or discipline as every competition needs rankings to determine the winner.

Types of sports	Number of idiomatic expressions in business	Percentage
Team sports	24	39.3%
Individual Sports	37	60.6%

*Table 2: Number and frequency of idiomatic expressions from team and individual sports in business context*

As illustrated in Table 2, 3 each type of sport includes seven sports. Thus, the team sports exploited for our task are: American football, baseball, basketball, cricket, rugby, sailing and soccer, while the individual sports are: boxing, darts, golf, horse racing, motorsports, tennis and track and field. The table reflects the predominance of business idiomatic expressions from individual sports over those from team sports. In other words, nearly two thirds of the expressions (37 occurrences, 60.6%) that were found are related to individual sports, while a bit over one third (24 occurrences, 39.3%) to team sports. A higher percentage of idiomatic expressions from individual sports confirms the fact that in both cultures the sports that have gained less popularity can still be richer source domains for idiomatic expressions in business-related context. It is particularly true of the sports which are less popular in Anglo-American cultures, but reflect international popularity worldwide, like boxing or track and field.

In our research idiomatic expressions originating from sports were contextualized in the business-related to different genres. As already noted, the genres provided by both corpora include written and spoken sources. In this regard, Diagram 1 demonstrates the frequency of the idiomatic expressions in each genre, thus allowing the comparison of the genres as well.



*Diagram 1: Frequency of sports-related idiomatic expressions in business context according to genres*

As shown in the diagram, the results point to the blog having the highest overall frequency of the required idiomatic expressions (41.7%) as opposed to the academic and TV genre containing the least of them (1.4%). These should come as no surprise since idiomatic expressions are associated with the informal and colloquial register, which is characteristic of informal blogs. However, it was surprising regarding the TV where we expected to find more occurrences. It is worth pointing out that the majority of the blogs where idiomatic expressions appeared offered the analysis and the comments on some business topics relevant at the time of their publication. On the other hand, the academic genre is considered to be the most formal one, as proved by the article the example was extracted from (*ABA Journal*), and reveals the lack of idiomatic expressions.

The web proves to be the second most frequent genre (25.3%), though a bit more formal in register. It consists of the articles published by the websites that deal with business topics (e.g. *Baseline Scenario* and *Yahoo*) and the news articles that analyze various business trends (e.g. *ETF Daily News* and *LA Times*).

As for newspaper and magazines, they are regarded to be somewhere in between formal and informal genres. Therefore, we expected to find a similar percentage of the frequency distribution of idiomatic expressions in these two genres. However, the magazines (*Fortune*, *Engadget*, *New Statesman* and *Business Insider*) show less frequent results (7.4%) compared to the newspaper (e.g. *New York Times*, *The Daily Mirror*) which reflect 13.4% of all the examples. This could be explained by the fact that magazines are designed to have articles with more specific topics, which are consequently written in somewhat less idiomatic language.

When it comes to the TV, the diagram shows that it is the least frequent genre together with the academic genre (1.4%). The examples were found in the subtitles of the American reality show *The Apprentice*. Its low frequency leads to the assumption that the scripts written for shows and series, aimed at entertainment, tend to be based on simple utterances, often free of complex idiomatic expressions.

Finally, the spoken genre reveals the realization of 8.9% of all idiomatic expressions, which were taken out from the transcripts of unscripted conversation from different TV and radio programs, such as *CNN International: Quest Means Business* or *Talk of the Nation*. As a matter of fact, more idiomatic expressions were assumed to be present in the spoken genre, as it represents their “natural environment”. Still, as the specific usage of sports-related idiomatic expressions was explored, the result appears to be quite solid.

## 6. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was first to investigate the applicability of the selected idiomatic expressions originating from sports to the context of business English, assuming that sport and business have a lot in common. Then we conducted an analysis of a number of idiomatic expressions in business context to establish to what extent language learners' cultural knowledge can help in comprehending their meaning. It was demonstrated that cultural knowledge supports the understanding of business context and consequently idiomatic expressions imbedded in such context only to a certain extent. However, in order to conduct the analysis, it was necessary to explore the notion of idioms, which were viewed both in a narrow sense and in a broader sense. Their complex nature as well as different approaches to idiomatic language was contrasted from the traditional and cognitive linguistic views. Besides, we also observe the cultural aspect of idiomatic expressions and the notion of context from the sociocognitive perspective. Furthermore, to establish certain similarities between the domains of sport and business, a parallel was drawn between them, particularly in terms of competitiveness, teamwork and individual performance. In this regard, our corpus was made up of 67 idiomatic expressions, derived from the selected team and individual sports that are popular in the Anglo-American sports cultures. The example sentences were provided from different genres comprised in COCA and the BNC.

It is worth stressing that each of these sports has generated a lot of idiomatic expressions closely connected with their activities, which are largely familiarized in everyday speech. However, after having examined their transfer into the specific business environment, the results of the analysis were not quite as we expected. Our prediction was that the largest number of idiomatic expressions integrated in business English would originate from the source domains of the most popular sports in the USA or Great Britain. The analysis revealed, though, that a higher production of such expressions in the business domain is related to somewhat less popular sports with long-established traditions (such as boxing, track and field and horse racing). Also, the research showed that the distribution and the corresponding frequency of idiomatic expressions in business English are evidenced to be higher when coming from individual sports than from team sports. The obtained results demonstrated that the percentage of the expressions collected from the individual sports is about 21% higher. Lastly, we observed the overall amount and the frequency of sports-related idiomatic expressions across different genres. The results indicated their correlation with the type of genres in which they appeared. In other words, it was shown that the more formal and

traditional genre is, the less idiomatic language it contains. In this regard, the academic and, surprisingly the TV genre, appeared to be the least frequent (1.4%) and the blog the most frequent (41.7%), followed by the web (25.3%) and the newspaper (13.4%). The blog was confirmed to be the most adequate genre because even when discussing specific business issues, it is informal enough to borrow idiomatic expressions originating from sports.

To conclude, our research has confirmed the assumption that sport and business share a lot in common and that the sports-based source domains have provided a considerable amount of idiomatic expressions which are well-suited in the domain of business. Our investigation into the distribution and frequency of the collected idiomatic expressions in business discourse demonstrated that the idiomatic expressions have generally more to do with the tradition and the nature of the sports they come from than with their current popularity.

As the English language is constantly evolving, new idiomatic expressions originating from various American and British sports are likely to appear in business English to contribute to the linkage between two important spheres of life – sport and business.

### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to examine to what extent speakers' cultural knowledge can contribute to understanding sports-related idiomatic expressions in business context. The paper first seeks to identify the notion of *idiom* and idiomatic expressions in a broader view, approaching the identification of idioms from the traditional and cognitivist standpoints. It then explores the influence of culture on idiomatic language in a speech community and the notion of context from sociocognitive perspective. As the underlying assumption in this paper is that sport and business share a lot of concepts together, some of them were examined regarding their roles in both domains.

The corpus contains 67 idiomatic expressions, which are derived from seven American and British sports and the additional category of Any Sport. They are exemplified in the business context from different genres, provided by COCA and the BNC. The results of the analysis of the distribution and frequency of the sports-related idiomatic expressions in business English, regarding a single sport they come from, the team sports vs. individual sports division and the kind of genres they are found in. The findings show that the largest figures of such expressions in business context do not correspond to the degree or the popularity of the analyzed American or British sports. Rather, they mostly belong to the

sports with long traditions, such as boxing, horse racing and track and field. Also, the higher frequency of these expressions in business English is related to individual sports. Finally, the most frequent genre that provides business contents with sporting idiomatic expressions is the blog. It has proved to offer more specific business topics, compared to the newspaper, the spoken genre and the TV. Yet, they are dealt with in a less formal register, close to idiomatic language, than demonstrated on the web, in the magazine and in the most formal academic genre.

The research shows that the source domain of sports corresponds to the target domain of business in many ways. However, due to the specific nature of the business English discourse, the occurrence of sports-related idiomatic expressions in it is not as large as expected.

Keywords: idiom, idiomatic expressions, culture, sports, business, genres, context

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- The British National Corpus*, <https://www.english-corpora.org/bnc/>

## 8. List of Abbreviations

- CBD – Collins COBUILD Dictionary of English Idioms
- FD – The Free Dictionary (an American online dictionary that gathers information from a variety of sources)
- Gram – Grammarist (online dictionary relying on WordPress)
- LOD – Lexico (a website providing a collection of dictionaries of English and Spanish produced by Oxford University Press)
- OALD – Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary
- WNWD – Webster’s New World Dictionary

## The Description of Sports-Related Idiomatic Expressions in Business Context

Each entry includes:

- a) the description of the idiomatic expression in sport
- b) the explanation of its idiomatic meaning in business context
- c) the idiomatic expression in a sample sentence
- d) source and genre of the sample sentence

### 9. Appendix

#### AMERICAN FOOTBALL

##### 1) **Hail Mary pass**

- a) A long, typically unsuccessful pass made in a desperate attempt to score late in the game; from Hail Mary, a prayer for intercession, from Latin Ave Maria, plus pass (“moving the ball from one player to another”). Became common in the 1970s in the context of American football. (FD)
- b) A plan or project with little chance of success. (FD)
- c) But ultimately, Mr. Minor says, the history of the most successful media tycoons is filled with bet-the-ranch deals and **Hail Mary passes**, not by fastidious attention to quarterly earnings. (COCA)
- d) New York Times, 06/15/1998, n. 690 (newspaper)

##### 2) **to carry the ball**

- a) To literally hold the ball (and protect it in order to maintain possession) while attempting to advance it on the field, ultimately in pursuit of a touchdown; to be the player who is relied on to gain yardage. By the early 1900s it was being transferred to other endeavors. (FD)
- b) To have a leading role in the completion or execution of a task or project; to be in charge; to be considered reliable enough to make sure that a job gets done. (FD)

- c) Baby boomers here are ending their consuming years and focusing on retirement savings. "We were hoping for yuppies in Asia **to carry the ball** in the global consumption game," says Yardeni. (COCA)
- d) U.S. News & World Report, Bye-bye inflation., Vol. 123 Issue 22, p74, 12/08/1997, Smith, Anne Kates, Brindley, David (magazine)

### 3) **to kick off**

- a) To kick the ball to the opposing team, as happens at the beginning of each half and after any scoring drive. (FD)
- b) To begin or mark the start of something, such as an event, a series, or a period of time. (FD)
- c) But their main objective is **to kick off** a new industry. (COCA)
- d) Unusual Business Ideas That Work: This is not a bike,  
<http://uncommonbusiness.blogspot.com/2010/07/this-is-not-bike.html>, 2012, n. 25  
(blog)

## BASEBALL

### 1) **curve ball**

- a) A ball that moves in a curve when it is thrown to the batter. (OALD: 377)
- b) An unexpected occurrence or thing that causes confusion or uncertainty. (FD)
- c) The **curve ball** is that the wife wants to quit work in about 2 years when we start a family, so the onus will be on me to find a way to replace her income over the next 2-3 years so that we can continue on the same path toward our goals. (COCA)
- d) What Income Level Is Considered Rich? | Financial Samurai,  
<http://www.financialsamurai.com/2012/01/27/how-much-income-do-you-consider-to-be-rich/>, 2012, n. 65 (blog)

### 2) **ballpark figure**

- a) Baseballs that are seldom hit out of the ballpark, still land anywhere within a large area. (FD)
- b) An educated guess or estimation within acceptable bounds. (FD)

- c) Here's no official word on the cost of construction, but Palace Sports & Entertainment vice chairman Arn Tellem gave a **ballpark figure** to the Free Press late last year. (COCA)
- d) Detroit Free Press, New Center appears to be site of Pistons' new practice facility, 02/23/2017, n. 1 (newspaper)

3) **to be off base**

- a) If a player is caught off base, a member of the opposite team gets them out while they are between bases. (CBD: 25)
- b) Incorrect; mistaken or misinformed; not aligned with reality. (FD)
- c) Even experienced marketers and salespeople can be way **off base** in their assumptions about what makes a good lead. (COCA)
- d) The Steps You Need to Define the Stages of Your Sales & Marketing, <http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/33711/The-Steps-You-Need-to-Define-the-Stages-of-Your-Sales-Marketing-Funnel.aspx>, 2012, n. 32 (blog)

4) **to play hardball**

- a) It is used to distinguish the normal ball from the somewhat larger and softer ball used in softball. It began to be used figuratively in the 1970s. (FD)
- b) To be ruthless, aggressive, or harsh in order to achieve a certain result, especially compared to previous, less aggressive tactics. (FD)
- c) At the same time, some title companies are starting **to play hardball** with borrowers who have recently undertaken home improvement projects. (COCA)
- d) Lenders, title insurers find new ways to delay or kill mortgages – Los, <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/nov/11/business/la-fi-lew-20121111>, 2012, n. 27 (web)

5) **right off the bat**

- a) In a trajectory caused by being hit by a bat. (FD)
- b) Immediately; at once; without delay; at the very beginning of a process. (FD)
- c) I do not expect to start making a ton of money **right off the bat**. (COCA)
- d) Site Build It! - Is It a Scam?, <http://blog.2createawebsite.com/2008/01/25/site-build-it-is-a-scam/>, 2012, n. 1 (blog)

6) **to step up to the plate**

- a) To move near home plate in preparation for striking the ball when it is pitched. (FD)
- b) Take action in response to an opportunity or crisis. (LOD)
- c) My only complaint is that the big money makers like Microsoft and Apple, need **to step up to the plate** and put a little more money and effort in to it, and stop using us as guinea pigs to test their patch cycle. (COCA)
- d) In a Zero-Day World, It's Active Attacks that Matter — Krebs on Security, 2012, <http://krebsonsecurity.com/2012/10/in-a-zero-day-world-its-active-attacks-that-matter/>, n. 19 (blog)

BASKETBALL

1) **slam dunk**

- a) A shot in which a player thrusts the ball down through the basket. (LOD)
- b) Something that is easy to accomplish or certain to occur; a task so easy that success in it is deemed a certainty. (FD)
- c) The drop in energy gain would have made seemingly **slam dunk** investment ideas (of every sort) suddenly seem more difficult. (COCA)
- d) The Oil Drum: Europe | Should EROEI be the most important, <http://europe.theoil drum.com/node/4428>, 2012, n. 46 (blog)

2) **back door**

- a) An offensive movement made by players by going behind the defender's back in order to get free and score. (FD)
- b) A means of entry to a job, position, etc., that is secret, underhand, or obtained through influence; a secret, furtive, illicit, or indirect method or means. A code (a series of characters or digits) that must be entered in some way (typed or dialed or spoken) to get the use of something (a telephone line or a computer or a local area network etc.). (FD)
- c) Chip Chain invented a **back door** to get you to buy it for \$1.99 while still pretending to be a dollar or less. (COCA)
- d) There's No Such Thing as a Free-to-Play Game, <http://kotaku.com/5961384/theres-no-such-thing-as-a-free-to-play-game>, 2012, n. 2 (blog)

### 3) **on the rebound**

- a) A recovery of possession of a missed shot. (FD)
- b) Regaining strength or otherwise recovering well from something. This metaphoric term, alluding to the bouncing back of a ball, has been used in the present sense since the mid-1800s. (FD)
- c) As for causing some stock market dips, those guys can make money from that too, and some poor fools who take the show seriously will lose **on the rebound**. (COCA)
- d) Is The “Volcker Rule” More Than A Marketing Slogan?  
<http://baselinescenario.com/2010/01/24/is-the-volcker-rule-more-than-a-marketing-slogan/>, 2012, n. 18 (web)

### 4) **home court advantage**

- a) The advantage of playing on your home court in front of fans that are rooting for you. (FD)
- b) The quality of having a superior or more favorable position or situation. (FD)
- c) Now that we're seeing investment coming in, we want to be able to take advantage of those investments, right? We see it as we want a **home court advantage**. (COCA)
- d) NPR: Weekend Edition – Sunday, 'There Isn't A Just Housing Choice': How We've Enabled The Pains Of Gentrification, 01/28/2018, n. 2 (spoken)

## BOXING

### 1) **to beat someone to the punch**

- a) The winner has beaten his opponent in delivering the knockout punch or the decisive punch. (Gram)
- b) To do or obtain something before someone else does. Move more quickly than someone to accomplish something. (Gram)
- c) Having been initially overjoyed that the C-suite was finally paying attention to design, designers suddenly became terrified that they were actually **being beaten to the punch** by business wolves in designer clothing. (COCA)
- d) ^Design Thinking^ Isn't a Miracle Cure, but Here's How It Helps | Co,  
<http://www.fastcodesign.com/1663480/design-thinking-isnt-a-miracle-cure-but-heres-how-it-helps>, 2012, n. 10 (web)

2) **down but not out**

- a) When a boxer has been incapacitated by an opponent but not yet knocked out. (FD)
- b) Experiencing difficulties, but not ones that are completely overwhelming or hopeless. (FD)
- c) But the only prices that are too high here so far are real estate ROSE voice-over Rest assured, they're **down but not out** West DONALDSON Thank you Judd. (COCA)
- d) ABC\_PrimeTime, Harding and Eckhardt Discuss the Kerrigan Assault, 01/20/1994, n. 25 (spoken)

3) **low blow**

- a) An unlawful blow that lands below an opponent's waist. (LOD)
- b) An attack or insult on someone that is considered particularly unscrupulous, unfair, or underhanded. (FD)
- c) Labeling a superior competitor in the arena of libertarian "think-tanks" trolling for cash contributions a racist is a **low blow**. (COCA)
- d) Up from Slavery - Reason.com, <http://reason.com/archives/2010/04/06/up-from-slavery>, 2012, n. 63 (blog)

4) **to roll with the punches**

- a) In martial arts (especially boxing), to maneuver one's body away from a blow so as to lessen the force of the impact. This term alludes to the boxer's ability to deflect the full force of an opponent's blow by adroitly moving his body. (FD)
- b) Cope with and withstand adversity, especially by being flexible. To adapt to setbacks, difficulties, or adversity so as to better manage or cope with their impact on one's life. (FD)
- c) I really think that these larger media groups need **to roll with the punches** and trust that people out there will still pay for content even when it's available elsewhere. (COCA)
- d) Could Free Comics Work The Same Way? - PinkKryptonite.com, <http://www.pinkkryptonite.com/2009/01/could-free-comics-work-the-same.html>, 2012, n. 39 (blog)



5) **sucker punch**

- a) A punch dealt when the other person isn't looking or prepared. (FD)
- b) Any defeat or setback that was particularly unexpected and damaging. This expression comes from boxing, where it is used for a punch delivered unexpectedly. (FD)
- c) There was even talk that someday, Ford might pass General Motors to become America's biggest carmaker. Instead, Ford was hit by **a sucker punch**. (COCA)
- d) Auto Industry Bailout News - The New York Times,  
[http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/c/credit\\_crisis/auto\\_industry/index.html](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/c/credit_crisis/auto_industry/index.html), 2012, n. 26 (web)

6) **to come out swinging**

- a) To begin a boxing match by immediately throwing punches in an unrestrained manner. (FD)
- b) To compete or defend someone or something passionately or aggressively. (FD)
- c) He added that he was disappointed that members of Congress from New York, especially Senator Charles E. Schumer and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, had not **come out swinging** for an industry that donates heavily to their campaigns. (COCA)
- d) synapse collapse · He added that he was disappointed that,  
<http://john.hoffoss.com/post/11479801260>, 2012, n. 63 (blog)

7) **down and out**

- a) When a boxer is knocked down and unable to get up before the referee counts to ten, and therefore has lost the contest. (CBD: 124)
- b) Without money, a job, or a place to live; destitute. (FD)
- c) Those who suffer most are the **down and out** without a home. (COCA)
- d) Bill Boyarsky: Who Wants to Go Back to the '50s? - Bill Boyarsky's,  
[http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/who\\_wants\\_to\\_go\\_back\\_to\\_the\\_50s\\_20110804/](http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/who_wants_to_go_back_to_the_50s_20110804/), 2012, n. 7 (web)

8) **to go the distance**

- a) Complete a fight without being knocked out. (LOD)
- b) To persist with some activity or goal until its completion. Carry through a course of action to completion. Complete a difficult task or endure an ordeal. (FD)

- c) Few companies make it past five years and even fewer **go the distance** of lasting decades. (COCA)
- d) How to Build a Company that Outlasts a City | Dan Cristo,  
<http://dancristo.com/2012/07/16/how-build-company-outlasts-city/>, 2012, n. 41 (blog)

9) **on the ropes**

- a) The term comes from boxing, where a fighter who is on the ropes surrounding the ring is in a defenseless position, often leaning against them to keep from falling. (FD)
- b) In state of near collapse or defeat. It began to be transferred to other catastrophic situations about 1960. (FD)
- c) RIMM's CEO, for one, has become increasingly visible and combative as he fights to dispel the perception that his company is on the ropes. (COCA)
- d) Research in Motion Sets The Date | InvestorPlace,  
<http://investorplace.com/2012/11/research-in-motion-sets-the-date/>, 2012, n. 14 (web)

CRICKET

1) **sticky wicket**

- a) A cricket pitch that is rapidly being dried by the sun after rain and is particularly conducive to spin. (FD)
- b) A difficult or awkward situation. (FD)
- c) However, the program to revive the operation of the banks through purchase of the toxic assets faces a **sticky wicket**. (COCA)
- d) biosink: We Need to Recapitalize the Banks - WSJ.com - Sent Using,  
<http://biosink.blogspot.com/2008/10/we-need-to-recapitalize-banks-wsjcom.html>,  
2012, n. 25 (blog)

DARTS

1. **bulls eye**

- a. The circular center mark of a target. A shot that hits the target. (WNWD: 187)
- b. Any statement or act that is precisely to the point or achieves a desired result directly. Something that achieves exactly the intended effect. (FD)

- c. How did we ever let the one percenters take the **bulls eye** off of their own deserving backs and shift the focus of anger onto poor people? (COCA)
- d. Texas GOp: People Too Lazy To Work, Plus Not Enough Jobs,  
<http://crooksandliars.com/susie-madrak/texas-goper-people-too-lazy-work-plus>, 2012,  
n. 13 (web)

## 2. **on target**

- a. Very accurate; precise. (FD)
- b. As predicted, expected, or planned; totally accurate or precise. The colloquial use of target for a goal one wishes to achieve dates from about 1940. (FD)
- c. This month, with the campaign **on target** to reach \$360 million of its \$500 million goal, we asked Sickels to reflect on the Campanile Foundation's accomplishments and his own commitment to SDSU. (COCA)
- d. Leading the Way to \$500 Million,  
[http://newscenter.sdsu.edu/sdsu\\_newscenter/news.aspx?s=73945](http://newscenter.sdsu.edu/sdsu_newscenter/news.aspx?s=73945) , 2012, n. 10 (blog)

## GOLF

### 1) **to tee up**

- a) To play a game on a large open course with 9 or 18 holes; the objective is to use as few strokes as possible in playing all the holes. (FD)
- b) Plan, organize, and carry out (an event). (FD)
- c) To get to politics of this, it does **tee up** nicely for the Republicans a series of important hearing on reforming Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac which are essentially insolvent if it weren't for the \$150 bailout and they have \$5 trillion of mortgages on their books.
- d) FOX SPECIAL REPORT WITH BRET BAIER 6:40 PM EST, 10/13/2011, n. 40  
(spoken)

### 2) **below par**

- a) Less than par for the hole or course (which in golf, means better than par). (FD)
- b) Not of as high a standard or level it should be. (CBD: 331)
- c) We believe Apple has come too late to the game and its offerings, by and large do not differ much or are **below par** to offerings from competition, the Rambourg said.  
(COCA)

- d) Fortune, Apple's Stock Price Has a Growing Problem: Analysts, 07/09/2011, n. 1 (magazine)

### 3) **to make the cut**

- a) In golf, equal or better a particular score in order to avoid elimination from the last two rounds of a four-round tournament. (LOD)
- b) To meet the requirements necessary for an application to be successful or to be selected from a group of candidates. Come up to a required standard. (FD)
- c) When Forbes first compiled the list, in 1982, required net worth **to make the cut** was a mere \$75 million. (COCA)
- d) Forbes: The 400 Wealthiest People in the U.S. | Taylor Marsh, <http://www.taylormarsh.com/blog/2012/09/forbes-the-400-wealthiest-people-in-the-u-s/>, 2012, n. 32 (blog)

## HORSE RACING

### 1) **hands down**

- a) When a horse jockey is nearing the finish line far ahead of the competition, "with victory certain", he could drop his hands, relaxing his hold on the reins, and "still win the race". (FD)
- b) Easily and decisively. By the late 19th century the phrase was being used in non-racing contexts to mean 'with no trouble at all'. (FD)
- c) These new autoless cities will have the lowest infrastructure taxes and could beat any present American city at cost of living and taxes, **hands down**. (COCA)
- d) Prison Planet.com » Alex Details His Battle Plan to Restore The Republic, <http://www.prisonplanet.com/alex-details-his-battle-plan-to-restore-the-republic.html>, 2012, n. 15 (blog)

### 2) **heavy going**

- a) Conditions that are wet and muddy (difficult to gallop on). (FD)
- b) Difficult, especially due to being tedious, boring, or unpleasant. Difficult to do, understand, or make progress with. (FD)

- c) The economics can get a bit **heavy going**, but it is not difficult to follow the thread of the argument. (COCA)
- d) Avoiding the Apocalypse: The Future of the Two Koreas: Marcus,  
<http://www.amazon.com/Avoiding-Apocalypse-The-Future-Koreas/dp/0881322784>,  
2012, n. 4 (web)

### 3) **neck and neck**

- a) Level with someone in a race or a competition. (OALD: 1034) This phrase originally developed with reference to horse racing. A neck is the length of the head and neck of a horse as a measure of its lead in a race. (FD)
- b) Extremely close together; at or near an equal level. (FD)
- c) At bars and restaurants, bikers and transit users were **neck and neck** on spending, in both cases ahead of car drivers.
- d) There IS a Bicycle Economy, Two Cities Find: TreeHugger,  
<http://www.treehugger.com/bikes/there-bicycle-economy-two-cities-find.html>, 2012,  
n. 37 (web)

### 4) **down to the wire**

- a) To the very end, as in a race or contest. (FD)
- b) Waiting until the very last moment; right up to the deadline. This term comes from horseracing, where it was long the practice to stretch a wire across and above the track at the finish line. (FD) Used to denote a situation whose outcome is not decided until the very last minute. (LOD) It was extended to figurative use about 1900. (FD)
- c) And in addition to sequestration, every year -- sometimes 2 & 3 times a year depending on how badly the government behaves -- we face uncertainty as Congress dicks around with the budget or goes **down to the wire on** "continuing resolutions to fund government", because without one or the other passing, my husband faces an unpaid furlough of uncertain duration... (COCA)
- d) Post-Election Notes For the GOP (Not That They've Asked For Them,  
<http://whatever.scalzi.com/2012/11/07/post-election-notes-for-the-gop-not-that-theyve-asked-for-them/>, 2012, n. 32 (blog)

### 5) **to have the inside track**

- a) On a racing track, the inside track is the shortest, and so the competitors want to use it in order to take advantage of this fact. (FD)
- b) To have an advantage such as special knowledge about something because of their position in an organization or their relationship with someone in an organization. (CBD: 459)
- c) It is very likely that another company will purchase the Twinkie brand and continue to produce them. In fact, it is already being rumored that a Mexican company **may have the inside track**. (COCA)
- d) Minority opinion: The Twinkie That Broke The Economy's Back, <http://www.minority-opinion.com/2012/11/the-twinkie-that-broke-economys-back.html>, 2012, n. 19 (blog)

#### 6) **to get a head start**

- a) The expression comes from racing, where it was used for a horse being given an advantage of several lengths over the others. Its extension to other areas dates from the early 1900s. (FD)
- b) To get an advantage granted or gained at the beginning of something. (LOD)
- c) If you're a consultant working with a medium or large brand and you're hoping **to get a head start** on AuthorRank, you may have a tough road ahead. (COCA)
- d) How to Prepare for AuthorRank and Get the Jump on Google, <http://www.seomoz.org/blog/how-to-prepare-for-authorrank-and-get-the-jump-on-google>, 2012, n. 24 (web)

## MOTORSPORTS

### 1) **to be blind-sided**

- a) An area that is not able to be seen, either due to its location outside of the field of vision, or due to some physical obstruction or a defect in one's vision. (FD)
- b) An aspect of one's life or a certain situation that one is ignorant of or that one does not understand fully. (FD)
- c) When it came to the president threatening a 5 percent tariff on all goods imported from Mexico, investors were really **blind-sided** by that. (COCA)
- d) Donald Trump's Mexican Tariffs Sparks Mayhem On The Markets, CNN International: Quest Means Business, 05/31/2019, n. 1 (spoken)

## 2) **pole position**

- a) The most favorable position at the start of a motor race. (LOD)
- b) An advantageous starting position. A leading or dominant position. (FD)
- c) But in the race to dominate the auto industry of the twenty-first century, it is China vying for the **pole position**. (COCA)
- d) CBS News: 60 Minutes, 02/24/2019, n. 1 (spoken)

## RUGBY

### 1) **safe pair of hands**

- a) The earliest references to the phrase link it to the public school sport of rugby. The ability to catch and keep hold of the ball. (FD)
- b) A trustworthy and competent person, good at their job and can be relied on not to make any serious mistakes. (FD)
- c) Now we have 'progressed' to the stage where parties don't even pretend to campaign on the basis of representing the working class, but say they are more "trustworthy", or are a **safe pair of hands** "to control the economy." (COCA)
- d) WS51: If voting changed anything it would be illegal,  
<http://www.spunk.org/texts/pubs/ws/ws51/sp001680/vote.html> , 2012, n. 2 (web)

## SAILING

### 1) **plain sailing**

- a) Sailing in a body of water that is unobstructed; clear sailing. (FD)
- b) Smooth or easy progress in a process or activity. (LOD)
- c) Further evidence that it is not all **plain sailing** for individuals seeking to make their mark in this recession is provided by the experience of Graham Chapman, latterly finance director of fashion retailer Kookai. (BNC)
- d) Accountancy. London: Institute of Chartered Accountants, 1993, pp. ?? 3548 s-units., n. 41 (web)

### 2) **to take the wind out of one's sails\***

- a) This expression alludes to sailing to windward of another ship, thereby robbing it of wind for its sails. (FD)
- b) To deprive one of an advantage; to make a situation unfavorable or detrimental for one. To put a barrier in someone's path; to reduce the effectiveness of someone. (FD)
- c) Rumors of a price war are unlikely to **take the wind out of the sails** of a tour operator that has not just weathered the recession and the downturn in travel caused by the Gulf war, but increased market share as well. (BNC)
- d) Accountancy. 1992, pp. ??, 4027 s-units., n. 6 (web)

## SOCCER

The sport known as “soccer” in the United States is called football in Great Britain, while “football” in the USA is primarily referred to as American football.

### 1) **red card**

- a) A red-colored card shown by a referee to a player, especially in soccer, to indicate that the player is being sent off the field. (LOD)
- b) Any official instructions to vacate an area. (FD)
- c) THE man who masterminded Derby County's escape from bankruptcy was yesterday shown the **red card** by the club. (BNC)
- d) The Daily Mirror. 7680 s-units, (1985-1994), n. 8 (newspaper)

## TENNIS

### 1) **the ball is in one's court**

- a) The ball is in your court means that the responsibility has passed to you, that the decision in a given situation is up to you, that it is up to you to make the next move. When the ball is in your court, nothing else can happen in a given situation until you take action or make a decision. (Gram)
- b) One has the responsibility for further action, especially after someone else previously held responsibility.
- c) And what he basically said is we'll go dollar for dollar with you guys. You know, you want a \$300 billion increase in the debt limit? We want \$300 billion in spending cuts somewhere. So the ball is in your court. (COCA)
- d) Fox\_Sunday, 05/11/2015 n. 30 (spoken)



## 2) **break point**

- a) A situation in tennis in which one more point is needed to break the opponent's serve.
- b) A place or time at which an interruption or change is made.
- c) Regardless of how all this all shakes out, next month in Las Vegas may very well be the make or **break point** for the company.
- d) Engadget, Faraday Future could be out of business by February, 12/22/2016, n. 16 (magazine)

## TRACK & FIELD

### 1) **marathon**

- a) A cross-country footrace of 26 miles, 385 yards (42.195 kilometers). Late 19th century from Marathōn in Greece, the scene of a victory over the Persians in 490 BC; the modern race is based on the tradition that a messenger ran from Marathon to Athens (22 miles) with the news. The original account by Herodotus told of the messenger Pheidippides running 150 miles from Athens to Sparta before the battle, seeking help.
- b) An event or activity that requires prolonged effort, endurance, or attention.
- c) The fact that you realise that CrankyAds is a **marathon** goes to show that you are in it for the long haul and dedicated so you have certainly given every angle a lot of thought which is good, an investor can start to ask for changes to be made or want to go down directions you wouldn't like and possibly risk alienating your customers so in the long run no investors could be the best decision. (COCA)
- d) What To Do When You Run Out Of Money And Time?, <http://www.entrepreneurs-journey.com/11291/what-to-do-when-you-run-out-of-money-and-time/>, 2012, n. 123 (blog)

### 2) **to pass the torch**

- a) This metaphoric expression alludes to the ancient Greek torch race, in which a lighted torch was passed from one runner to the next. A translation from both Greek and Latin, the English version dates from the late 1800s.
- b) To transfer or bestow one's role, position, responsibilities, etc., to someone else.
- c) In that way, mom and dad **can pass the torch** without giving up the controls until it is appropriate and at the same time reduce their taxable estates. (COCA)

- d) Braunstein, Samuel L., Burger, Carol F., ABA Journal, *Tax Relief at Every Milestone*, November 2001, Vol. 87 Issue 11, p38, 7p, n. 88 (academic)

**3) to be quick off the mark**

- a) This expression comes from various kinds of races, where mark indicates the starting point. It was being used figuratively from the mid-1900s on.
- b) Be fast in responding to a situation or understanding something. Very quick to react or take action.
- c) On the odd occasion when a superstar does apply you're competing with every other blue chip and hot new start up so if **you're not quick off the mark** and show them the money, it's not going to happen. (COCA)
- d) Why Jobs Remain Unfilled Even Though Unemployment is High, <http://mashable.com/2012/09/10/job-openings-unemployment/>, 2012, n. 10 (blog)

**4) to raise the bar**

- a) The idiom raise the bar came into use around 1900 and comes from the sport of track and field. The high jump event and the pole vault event both involve raising a crossbar incrementally to see how high the participants can jump or pole vault. (FD)
- b) Raise the standards which need to be met in order to qualify for something. (LOD)
- c) This legal regime has not prevented museums from buying suspect objects, but it has been an invaluable deterrent to the open sale of loot and helped **raise the bar** on acquisition standards in recent years. (COCA)
- d) CHASING APHRODITE, <http://chasingaphrodite.com/>, 2012 n. 24 (web)

**5) track record**

- a) This term probably comes from track and field, where it signifies the best time someone has ever achieved at a particular track or over a particular distance. (FD)
- b) Someone's reputation, based on what they have done or how good they have been in the past. (CBD: 460)
- c) Based on our **track record**, we don't normally spend money unwisely and we don't normally take exuberant risk. (COCA)
- d) Dish Network Management Discusses Q3 2012 Results – Earnings, <http://seekingalpha.com/article/984541-dish-network-management-discusses-q3-2012-results-earnings-call-transcript>, 2012, n. 10 (blog)

6) **to be/get off to a running start**

- a) A start, as in the triple jump or the long jump, in which a contestant begins moving before reaching the starting or take-off point. (FD)
- b) An initial advantage in undertaking something. (FD)
- c) Not surprisingly, Huang was quick to follow up his critique with an upbeat assessment of upcoming products, pointing out that this is only the first crop of Android tablets and not all product categories get **off to a running start**. (COCA)
- d) Nvidia CEO: Why Android tablets aren't selling, [http://news.cnet.com/8301-13924\\_3-20062940-64.html](http://news.cnet.com/8301-13924_3-20062940-64.html), 2012, n. 5 (blog)

ANY SPORT

1) **to drop the ball**

- a) To let the ball get away or fall out of one's grasp. (FD)
- b) To forget about or neglect someone or something. To make a blunder; to fail in some way. (FD) Make a mistake, mishandle things. (LOD)
- c) That means existing homes and businesses can stay, but a new development can proceed only if it's similar to what was on the site before... "If we **drop the ball**, the citizens shouldn't be the ones who pay the price", Vice Mayor Angelia Williams Graves said before the February vote. (COCA)
- d) Virginian-Pilot, With taxpayer help, Norfolk business will move out of Navy flight path, 05/09/2016, n. 104 (newspaper)

2) **game plan**

- a) The strategy planned before a game. (WNWD: 573)
- b) The things that someone intends to do in order to achieve a particular aim. (FD)
- c) And once WTO gets the authority to regulate currency rates that will be the end of China's **game plan**. (COCA)
- d) Daily Kos: Owners of the world, unite, <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2011/05/22/976743/-Owners-of-the-world-unite>, 2012, n. 1 (blog)

3) **in a league of one's own**

- a) Far excelling even the closest contender; not having any worthy competition. (FD)
- b) Much better than others. (OALD: 855)
- c) "Apple and Google **are in a league of their own** because of their relations with developers and consumers," says Forrester analyst Sarah Rotman Epps. (COCA)
- d) USA Today, Scott Martin, @scottysmartin, USA TODAY, Is the world really ready for this?; Wearable computing devices raise privacy issues, to say nothing of etiquette, 04/09/2013, n. 6 (newspaper)

#### 4) **long shot**

- a) A risky bet or attempt. (FD)
- b) An attempt or guess that has only the slightest chance of succeeding or being accurate. (LOD)
- c) This colt owes me some funds and I have no alternative but to use him as a **long shot** in my exotics wagers. (COCA)
- d) Derby Betting: Plenty of Parity at the Top - BloodHorse.com, <http://cs.bloodhorse.com/blogs/triplecrownstalk/archive/2012/04/10/derby-betting-plenty-of-parity-at-the-top.aspx>, 2012, n. 34 (blog)

#### 5) **game changer**

- a) The term made its debut in 1982, in the sports sections of newspapers, referring to decisive plays in particular games, not to changes in the rules or methods of play. The term made its metaphorical way into business jargon during the nineties and came to rest in politics after the turn of the century. (FD)
- b) A person, an idea or an event that completely changes the way a situation develops (OALD: 643)
- c) The **game changer** is what I've been writing about: higher energy prices. This alone makes it economically viable to go after what the industry calls "tight" oil, which is trapped in shale deposits, as well as tar sands. (COCA)
- d) Don't gush over prospect of US as oil king | Peak Oil News, <http://peakoil.com/generalideas/dont-gush-over-prospect-of-us-as-oil-king/>, 2012, n. 12 (blog)