

# Words & Idioms used in Football, Business, School—everyday life

Found in *Footballlogy: Elements of American Football for Non-Native Speakers of English*  
By Timothy Wahl [ESL Publishing} [www.eslpublishing.com](http://www.eslpublishing.com) or by internet search

## Featured Term:

**Hail Mary** – a prayer in the liturgy of the Roman Catholic church. Mary is the virgin mother or Jesus Christ to whom prayers are said; In football, very late in the game, only a miracle (or the sacred parayer “Hail Mary” can win the game. Thus, the qarterback of the team that’s behind in the score throws the ball long, hoping (praying) that a reciever on his team receives the ball for a score (and win). The last, and only hope.

## Other words/terms:

**Nailbiter** –[can be hyuphenated or not] think of your finger nails. When a person is nervous – before a job interview, whild watching a scary movie, or an exciting football game? He or she bites his or her fingernails. The close score what does he or she do? Bite the fingernails, of course. Thus:

*With a miniute to go and the score is 31-30, fans are on **the edge of their seats** (another idiom) with this nailbiter.*

**End around**— To make/to do an end run around: In Football, a ballcarrier on one side of the field takes the ball and runs horizontally to the other side (or end) before starting vertically to the opponents’s goal line. In real life: someone maneuvers around an obstacle or authority in order to accomplish a certain goal. This idiom means much the same as to **go over someone's head**.

*So, the director says “no,” eh? Let’s do an end around and take the issue to the regiomal director. He’ll approve, I’m sure.*

**Fourth and long**—Football is a game of downs-1<sup>st</sup> 4<sup>th</sup>. Foth down is the last down before a team must eaiter make a first down, score, or give the ball to the other team. When it’s fourth and long, it suggests a distance that is next to impossible to achieve. In life, it means your back is to the wall. It’s now or never.

**Punt**—FB—Give up the ball by kicking it to the other team; life/business—You’ve used up your options, so I will give that responsibility to another person.

*I can’t fogure this out, so I guess I’ll have to punt. .*

**Handoff**—This is similar to punt. Life: give up your own responsibility to someone else (to let someone else take over your duties). FB: the quarterback takes the ball and gives (hands) the ball to a runner. An example could be a successor to a job. This is called a handoff. *Ok, it's your turn. Are you ready for me to hand off [2 words, verb usage] to you? Are you ready for the handoff? [one word, as a noun]*

**Cannon arm**—strong arm quarterback on a football team; someone who can throw the ball a long distance. *Josh Allen's cannon arm can heave the ball 80 yards.*

**Barnburner** or **cliffhanger**—see nailbiter

**Sack**—a paper bag that you put things like your lunch in; as a verb, in British-speaking world, it's when a person is fired or loses his job.; in FB: a quarterback is tackled behind the line of scrimmage for a sack (n), or he is sacked (v)

**Scramble**—Think scrambled eggs or a word puzzle where the letters are mixed up (scrambled) for you to fit them together; FB: a quarterback who runs around every which way trying to avoid being tackled or sacked.

**Fake** -adjective: Describes something (or someone) not real. Example: Fake hair, teeth jewelry, money; verb: to deceive, pretend: He faked his illness. FB: a player tries to get an opponent to think he is going to perform a certain action when he isn't. *The quarterback faked a pass but ran with the ball instead.* [It's a “**pump fake**” when the quarterback motions (pumps) his arm to get the opponent to mistime his leap (jump), and then he passes the ball]

**Gunslinger**—Wild West (American cowboy) movies: person who loves guns and is fast with them and shoots other guys at will; in football, a quarterback who passes the ball often and passes it at sometimes recklessly, or carelessly, which causes problems.

**interference** — An act that interferes, obstructs, impedes. Football: 1) blocking: *On the screen pass, their four were leading the interference.* 2) Catching the ball: *The safety was flagged for pass interference.* Business: Often, a member of an advanced team who does the initial work for the agenda at negotiations. *“We're counting on you, Emilio, to lead the interference.”*

**Stalemate**—in anything, life, business, FB, when the score is 0-0, no one scores, no one wins or loses.

**(to hit) paydirt**. Someone scores! In business, the business person scores a lucrative deal with another company; Or(2) someone has won a big prize. FB: To score a touchdown, the biggest producer of points in a game. *The Giants hit pay dirt first.*

Also:

*That young man really hit pay dirt.*

*Why do you say that, Memo?*

*His new wife is not only a knockout (good looking), but her father is a billionaire.*

## Team positions & related

**Center**—to place in the middle: “Please center the flowers on the table.”

**Guard**—to protect. “She has those mean Dobermans guard her house.”

**Tackle**—to do some work, a project or an activity with full vigor.

- *I will tackle the homework assignment tonight;*

- *Look at him! He must be really hungry the way he is tackling that sandwich.*

**Quarterback**—leader of a team; My boss said, “*Michelinda, would you be so kind as to quarterback this new committee?*”

**Captain**—same as quarterback. *Sara captained the team; Sara was the captain of the team.*

**Iron man/woman**—Someone who is never sick, who always shows up to work.

*“The teacher has worked here for 23 years and not missed a day.”*

*Really? He must be an iron man (or woman)*

**Zebras**—Those black and white horse-like animals in Africa; the officials of American football dress in black and white striped uniforms. “*Do you think the zebras were fair, Harold?*”

## Expressions

**Drop the ball**—Someone you trusted, now disappoints. He/She is said to “drop the ball.”

**Take the ball and run with it.** Someone give an employee or student something to do with little instruction; that person, in other words, is given the ball and directs his/her own path to a successful outcome. *I like him because he knows instinctively what to do. He takes the ball and runs with it.*

**Bend but don’t break**—in football, a defense that gives up quite a bit to the opposition but it usually does not let it score; a person who is tolerant—to a point.

**Go for it**—You set your eyes on an objective and you intend to achieve it.

**Go all out**—To put all your energy into achieving a goal. *Those two teams go all out to win;*

**Go at it**—an action that is intense, and could be emotional. The workers are going at it (working hard) on the construction site OR they are going at it (arguing, fighting). Players in football do this 1) if they play hard or 2) if they are mad at one another and start fighting.

**a goal line stand** (to make)—Your adversary (in football or business) is pushing against you.

(Someone’s) **back is against the wall** (another idiom) You must stop them. XYZ

*Company plans a hostile takeover; time for us, JB, to make a goal line stand.*

**heave-ho** (to give the)—to remove someone, unceremoniously, from a job, a game, etc. *Those fans were given the heave-ho by security for being drunk and obnoxious.*

**Over-the-top**—something that is too much that it can offend. *The comedian was over the top and many people left;* FB: the player with the ball runs and leaps over a pile of players at the goal line. *Jim Brown goes over the top for the score.* [Note adjective before the noun, use hyphen; as predicate adjective (modifier after linking verb) no hyphen]

**Squeak by**—to succeed but just barely. *The Ravens squeaked by the Giants 17-14.*

In life, someone who presented enough effort or talent – but nothing more – to achieve something. *Would you fly in an airplane, Diem, whose horizontal stabilizer was designed by an engineer who squeaked by in his studies?*

**Square off**—to face one another in competition. Companies, businesses, sports teams, etc. *In 1945 Monterrey Tech, from Mexico, squared off against an American college team in the Sun Bowl in El Paso, Texas..*

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## Part I

### British and American English

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American football and the football of the rest of the world (known as soccer or association football in the United States) have two distinct differences. First, the terminology in the game; and second, differences in spelling and grammar. Additionally, whether either sport is reported in a British English or American English newspaper results in slight differences in grammar. The chart below compares soccer and football and the way it is reported in news media.

British English (Association football)	American English (American football)
Score: 0-3—away team's score is always first	Score: 3-0—winning team's score is always first
card (red and yellow)	flag (yellow for a penalty; red for a challenge)
chip shot—ball sails over goalie into goal	chip shot—easy field goal (a short distance)
defender	defensive player (informal: “defender”)
draw	tie
equalizer (Brit spelling: “equaliser”)	tie (the score/points that “even” the game)
even	all (Ex: 7-all = both teams have 7 points)
extra time	overtime
footballer	football player (or “gridder”)
friendly	Preseason—pros; non-conference—colleges (see “additional comments” below)
goal	end zone
goal area	red zone
half-line	midfield
match	game
nil	nothing

normal time	regulation
own goal	safety
period (first or second half)	period (quarters)
pitch	field/grid iron
Pk—penalty kick (action)	Pk—place kicker (person)
Sport (section of newspaper)	Sports (section of newspaper)
shootout (method to break a draw)	shootout—high-scoring game
striker	quarterback (no exact equivalent)
sudden death	sudden death
tele [tell-ee] (The match is on the tele.)	TV (The game is on the TV).
touchline	sideline

### ***Additional Comments***

**“Friendly”** (USA style) — An American football equivalent of “friendly” does not exist. However, the NFL schedules “preseason games,” which are a chance for coaches to evaluate players and get their teams tuned-up for the regular season. Preseason games (four in all, beginning in August) do not count in the standings.

At the collegiate level, non-conference games count toward the overall record and subjective national polls (see next section) but do not influence whether a team wins its conference.

Let’s say a college team has 12 games. Three of them are with teams from other conferences. It loses all its non-conference games but wins all its conference games (9-0 conference; 9-3 overall). Another team wins all its non-conference games, loses one conference game (8-1 conference; 11-1 overall) but finishes second in the conference.

**British versus American usage:** British English refers to a team, or its city name, by count. "Arsenal **sign** new player. **They are** a football club in England." (Plural verb and pronoun reference "they.") By contrast, "Chicago **signs** a draft choice. **They are** expected to be improved." Note the irregularity between the noun and verb (singular noun and the subsequent plural pronoun). But, if the nickname is included it's plural: "The Chicago Bears sign a draft choice."

**Sport/Sports** — As a plural noun, "sport" (Br) signifies all sports and takes a plural verb complement (*Sport are played on all days*). "Sports" is the equivalent in the USA and can be both count and non-count, which can cause confusion. Sports are popular in the USA, each singular one adding up to a plural. Therefore, "A popular sport is football" (one of many). Since "sports" is a count noun, the singular in American English requires an article. However, British English, where "sport" is non-count, has no article: "Do you play sport?" By contrast (USA), "Do you play **a sport?**" / "Do you play sports?"

**"Sport" as a person** — Both British and American English recognize that "sport" references an athlete's mental attitude or ability to play fairly. ("She's a good [or bad] sport.")

### Spelling Comparisons

British	American	British	American
--our (colour)	--or (color)	--re (theatre)	--er (theater)
--se (realise, analyse)	--ze (realize, analyze)	--l (enrolment) but "jewelry"	--ll (enrollment) But "jewelry"
--ence (defence)	--ense (defense)	--que (banque) money: (cheque)	--k (bank) check
--gramme (programme)	--gram (program)	--ge (ageing)	--g (aging)



## ***British vs. American Mechanics***

### ***Quotation Marks***

The **American** style places commas and periods inside the quotation marks, **British** style places unquoted periods and commas outside the quotation marks. Note: **American English** uses double quotation marks (") whereas **British English** uses singles. (')

*Example:*

**American:** "I wish," said the coach, "we were able to run the ball better."

**British:** 'I wish', said the coach, 'we were able to run the ball better'.

### ***Titles***

**American English** — Mr., Mrs., Ms., Dr., etc. use a period; **British**, no period.

### ***Time & Date***

**American English** expresses the time with a colon (10:30) and divides a 24-hour day: AM (morning—12 o'clock midnight to 11:59) and PM afternoon/evening (12 noon to 11:59)

*Example:* 7:15 AM for morning; 7:15 PM for afternoon/evening.

**British English** uses a period (10.30) and uses both the American preferred method and the 24-hour clock (10.30 PM / 22:30); rail and air timetables use the 24-hour clock.

The **American** method for dates is: Month-Day-Year (October 14, 2020; 10/14/20). In digital form, this is usually expressed with a four-digit year (10/14/2020).

**British** method: Day-month-year (14 October 2020; note the absence of a comma in this method) or 14-10-20.

“Evening” may be considered to begin at a point near sunset. “Night” can be any time it is dark outside.

**Names** (such as found on applications or asked for on the phone):

**American:** last name is listed first on a document.

**British:** replaces “last name” with “surname” on a document

***Finally, when is football played?***



**I. Match the statements below to the right newspaper, British or American ( X on line)**

- |  | British | American |
|--|---------|----------|
| 1. I saw the article in the sports section.    | _____   | _____    |
| 2. Arizona have played six games.              | _____   | _____    |
| 3. If Los Angeles wins, I'll not be surprised. | _____   | _____    |
| 4. San Francisco has been playing rookies.     | _____   | _____    |
| 5. I love all sport.                           | _____   | _____    |
| 6. Croatia has many good players.              | _____   | _____    |



- |                                    |       |       |
|------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| 7. The visiting Lobos lost 13-17.  | _____ | _____ |
| 8. The crowd were on their feet.   | _____ | _____ |
| 9. What did you do on the weekend? | _____ | _____ |
| 10. He is a good at all sports.    | _____ | _____ |

**Which sport is it, soccer or football?**

- |   | Soccer | Football |
|---|--------|----------|
| 11. The game was tied at the end of regulation. | _____  | _____    |
| 12. It was the end of regular time.             | _____  | _____    |
| 13. The captains met at midfield.               | _____  | _____    |
| 14. It was a perfect day for a match.           | _____  | _____    |
| 15. A red flag was thrown.                      | _____  | _____    |
| 16. The team was in the red zone.               | _____  | _____    |
| 17. I see many good footballers.                | _____  | _____    |
| 18. The pitch was wet.                          | _____  | _____    |
| 19. The chip shot was made by the PK.           | _____  | _____    |
| 20. How long is overtime?                       | _____  | _____    |

**21-24 Multiple Choice**

21. The Falcons want to try a field goal. Who does it send onto the field for this?
- |              |             |
|--------------|-------------|
| a. chip shot | b. PK       |
| c. gridder   | d. defender |