

Sports idioms

A great number of idioms that we use in everyday life have a connection with sport. Many are common in specific areas of life, for example in the business world. These idioms are derived from terms used in a variety of sports and games. Knowing the sport, the game and the rules might help you to understand the idiomatic expressions derived from these games, however some idioms have evolved usages and meaning independent of sports and they are often used by those with little knowledge of these games and sport in general.

A. In the left-hand column you will find some sports idioms. Match them with their definitions in the right-hand column.

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| 1. to carry the ball | a. to expect to win or succeed |
| 2. to hold all the aces | b. to do something risky |
| 3. to get a head start | c. ready and able |
| 4. the ball is in your court | d. a break |
| 5. under the table | e. to start before all others |
| 6. to skate on thin ice | f. to surrender or give up |
| 7. to throw in the towel | g. it is your decision or responsibility |
| 8. time out | h. to assume responsibility |
| 9. to learn the ropes | i. to understand new things |
| 10. on the ball | j. illegally |

Key: 1h, 2a, 3e, 4g, 5j, 6b, 7f, 8d, 9i, 10c

B. In the following exercise choose the sports idiom which best completes each sentence.

- No one makes better cars than BMW. I think they are ____.
 - out of their league
 - a two horse race
 - in a league of their own
- That was a great speech, James. You really ____.
 - hit it out of the park
 - hit a snag
 - approached the finishing line
- It is a _____ between Microsoft and Mac in the computer world.
 - kick-off
 - two horse race
 - par for the course
- Apple ____ by always thinking of new exciting products.
 - are plain sailing
 - stay ahead of the game
 - score an own goal
- I am happy to say that we are ____ to meet our budget this year.
 - on target
 - off base
 - across the board
- I'd only ask you not to ____ and begin to prepare the budget until all the figures are available.
 - jump the gun

- b. blow the whistle
 - c. get off the hook
7. The government have ____ by introducing the new regulation, making it fairer for all businesses.
- a. stayed ahead of the game
 - b. levelled the playing field
 - c. dropped the ball
8. The bank ____ by introducing unpopular charges. They lost a lot of customers.
- a. was on the ropes
 - b. was on the ball
 - c. scored an own goal
9. I think I'm ____ after working here for a month.
- a. getting into the full swing of things
 - b. no great shakes
 - c. under the wire
10. She's finally going to ask for a salary increase, and if the boss says no, I'm going to ____ for her.
- a. hold all the aces
 - b. jump the gun
 - c. go to bat

Key: 1c, 2a, 3b, 4b, 5a, 6a, 7b, 8c, 9a, 10c

C. Complete the sentences with one of the following sports idioms: *got off the hook*, *win hands down*, *a head start*, *make the cut*, *not up to par*, *call the shots*, *under the table*, *take the bull by the horns*, *in your court*, *a fair shake*.

1. Why don't you give him _____ before you decide he isn't good enough for the job?
2. I am sorry, but your work experience is _____ for this position in our company.
3. The thief _____ because the security camera was broken.
4. If you get _____, you'll beat the morning traffic.
5. While our supervisor is on holiday, Mr Smith will _____.
6. Although the new job means relocating, I think you should _____ for once.
7. Our competitors will _____ because they have lower prices than we do.
8. Now that you have all the data, the ball is _____ - you need to decide what to do next.
9. I don't have a work visa, so they have to pay me _____.
10. She didn't get a second interview, so she probably won't _____.

Key: 1. a fair shake, 2. not up to par, 3. got off the hook, 4. a head start, 5. call the shots, 6. take the bull by the horns, 7. win hands down, 8. in your court, 9. under the table, 10. make the cut