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## **SOME FACTS ABOUT SPORTS TERMINOLOGY**

**Abstract:** We can rightly say that sport is the real source of multiculturalism, as it connects different people from different countries into a world community. Everybody finds enjoyment either in participating or in watching different sports events. Sport reduces stress and is especially important in lives of children because it enhances their self-confidence and keeps them healthy and fit. The language of sport is rich and encompasses different terms and expressions which are mainly internationally known and accepted without translation in almost all the countries of the world of today. The paper deals with different categories of words and their production, as well as with the specific idioms and phrases which appear in particular sports.

**Keywords:** *sport, language, word-formation, idioms, phrases.*

### **I THE IMPORTANCE OF SPORT FOR PEOPLE'S LIVES**

Sport has always been very important for the right development of every nation, in the first place for children. Sylvia Rimm says in her essay “The Importance of Sport”: “The world of sports mirrors how one can play the game of school and life. Our society is competitive, and we should teach our children to function in competition and how to both win and lose as good sports. Children must learn that winning and losing are both temporary, and that they can’t give up or quit. Learning to become a team player is also important for children who may prefer to be the center of attention.” (Introduction, 2008).

### **II DEFINITIONS OF SPORT**

The word “*sport*” comes from the Old French “*desport*” meaning “*leisure*” with the oldest definition in English from around 1300 being “anything humans find amusing or entertaining”. Cambridge Dictionary Online defines sport as “a game, competition, or activity needing physical effort and skill that is played or done

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according to rules, for enjoyment and/or as a skill.” Collins Cobuild English Dictionary for Advanced Learners has a somewhat similar definition of sport. It says: “Sports are games such as football and basketball and other competitive leisure activities which need physical effort and skills” (2001: 1505). So, while both definitions agree about the importance of effort and skill, and both of them define sport as a kind of leisure or enjoyment, still, the first one mentions something that is extremely important for this kind of activity, and that is, that sport is, or should be played according to rules. That is something in which sport differs from mere play. Play is a spontaneous activity, free and without any constraints. “Play,” wrote the German theorist Carl Diem, “is purposeless activity, for its own sake, the opposite of work.” (in Guttmann, 2006). But when the rules are introduced in such an activity, it becomes a game. Thus, game can be defined as rule-bound or regulated play. People have been engaged in different games ever since the beginning of humankind. Ancient Greece introduced formal sports, with the first Olympic Games in 776 BC, that included sports such as human and chariot races, wrestling, jumping, disk and javelin throwing. With the first organized sporting events, the term “*competition*” came in use. Competition is another important characteristic of sport. People compete to win, and to show their qualities in different sports disciplines, and again, that is something that distinguishes sport from simple play. Then, in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century quantification became an important aspect of sports, and, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the word “*record*” (also an English one) used in the sense of an unsurpassed quantified achievement was introduced for the first time.

The singular term “*sport*” is used in most English dialects to describe the overall concept (e.g. “children taking part in sport”), with “*sports*” used to describe multiple activities (e.g. “football and rugby are the most popular sports in England”). American English uses “*sports*” for both terms. It is good to mention that the word “*sport*” has some other meanings, like in the expression “*to be a good sport*” where “*good sport*” denotes a person who plays fair, accepts both victory and defeat and remains amiable.

The fact is that most sports appeared in the English speaking countries. For example, football, cricket, horse races, boxing, rowing, athletics or track-and-field sports, golf, badminton, rugby, hockey, lawn tennis, even the game of darts originate from the territory of Great Britain, while baseball, American football, basketball, volleyball, softball, water skiing, windsurfing, snowboarding and some indoor games like billiards were first played in North America. The British Prime Minister John Major compared the contribution of the British nation to the development of various forms of sports to the importance of the industrial revolution that Great Britain was also the cradle of. He said: “We invented the majority of the world’s great sports... 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain was the cradle of a leisure revolution every bit as significant as the agricultural and industrial revolutions we launched in the century before.”

### III SPORTS TERMINOLOGY

Throughout the centuries, new forms of sport developed and the demand for the new words needed to describe newly-created events, games, rules and competitions increased. The language of sport is a huge, catch-all category that encompasses terms from many different sports disciplines, so to list all of them would be an impossible task. The language of sport changes over time. Some terms become obsolete as some of the sports disciplines disappear (chariot races, for example). The term “*sportsman*”, although still in use today, became a little old-fashioned and is almost regularly replaced by the word “*athlete*”. The same happened to the expression “*to go in for sport*” which was very much in use a few decades ago. The word “*sportist*”, the first word that some Serbian people would choose to translate the Serbian word “*sportista*” in English ( obviously because of its similarity in writing with the Serbian word) does not appear in any of the contemporary dictionaries, or, if it does, has a negative connotation. These changes are sometimes hard to follow, and can make it difficult for the common people to understand sports communication.

As we have already said, most sports originate from the English speaking countries, so most sports terms are also of the English origin.

We have already mentioned the difference between the terms “*play*”, and “*game*”. The difference also exists between the terms “*game*” and “*match*”. Both of them can be translated as “*utakmica*” in Serbian, but there is a difference in the term usage between the UK and the USA. “*Match*” sports tend to be the ones that originated in the UK or other Commonwealth countries. So, we say a “*golf – match*”, a “*cricket – match*”, a “*boxing*” (*modern*) – *match*” and a “*tennis – match*”, but a “*baseball*” – “*game*”, a “*football*” (*American*) – “*game*” and a “*basketball game*”, because these sports originated from the North American continent. The exception is the sport where players kick a round ball around a field: it is a “*football match*” in the UK, but a “*soccer game*” in the US. When we talk about the terms “*competition*” and “*contest*”, we can say that there is a slight difference between the two of them but that they are fairly interchangeable. Here are some of the differences between the terms:

- a) Competition is more serious than contest and usually lasts longer.
- b) Competition implies that two or more people are competing against each other for a reward (prize, bragging rights, etc.).
- c) Competitions have set rules whereby the individuals or teams compete against each other, but a contest can be completely random. It can refer to things like the lottery or random drawings, or even to a beauty contest.

There are many different terms that denote the places where different sports are played. *An arena* or *a stadium* is the most commonly used one. It is a flat area that hosts sporting events like the Olympic Games, soccer and rugby games. It is circular in shape and surrounded by seats for fans to sit. *A court* is the rectangle area where games like tennis, basketball and badminton are played. *A course* is an area of land that is used for long running events like marathons, car racing and golf. *A field* is an area of grass that is used to play sports such as field hockey, rugby or soccer. *A gym* is the place where you can go and exercise on machines or the inside area where sports lessons are done at school. “Gym” is short for gymnasium, which is also the name for a school in Germany, Scandinavia and Central Europe that prepares pupils for University entrance. (Serbian students very often use the word “gym” wrongly when translating the word “gimnazija” into English. “Gimnazija” is a kind of school for which the right translation in English should be a “grammar school”, but never a “gym”). *A pitch* or *a sports ground* is an outdoor playing area for various sports. The term “*pitch*” is most commonly used in British English while the comparable term in American and Canadian English is *a playing field* or *a sports field*. *A rink* is a smooth expanse of ice meant for skating, roller skating or a game of curling. *A track* is a type of path or road, often in a shape of a ring specially designed and built for sports events, like racing. The term “*track- and- field*” is used in the USA for the athletic events in which people compete in running, jumping and throwing. In the UK the term “athletics” is used.

There are many terms that are used to denote people who take part in different sports events. The most general one is *a participant*, the word which is denoting a person who takes part in or becomes involved in a particular activity. *A sportsperson* is someone who plays sport regardless of gender, while *a sportsman* and *a sportswoman* are the terms used for different genders. *A sportsman* is the word that might be described as a little outdated and is sometimes specifically used for someone who mainly participates in outdoor sporting activities such as hunting, fishing, climbing and horse riding. *An athlete* is another word for a sportsman or a sportswoman used in a general sense. The Serbian translation for it should be “*sportista*”, although the Serbian students often translate it as “*atleticar*”, because of the obvious resemblance with a similar word in our language. *A player* is also a commonly used word for someone who plays certain sports, so there are “*football players*”, “*basketball players*”, and so on. *The captain* is the team leader.

*A coach* is a person who is responsible for teaching and training the athletes to improve their skills. *A trainer* is another word for a coach. The key difference between a coach and a trainer is their priority: coaches are primarily focused on a team, while a trainer focuses on an individual athlete or a small group.

*A referee* is the person who makes the decisions during a game. A referee runs up and down the field court with the players (soccer). *An umpire* makes the decisions from one position (e.g. tennis).

*A supporter* is the word used in British English to denote someone who wants a particular team to win and might show it by going to watch the team play. The US

term for a supporter is *a fan* (a short for *fanatic*). A *cheerleader* is one of the people who leads in cheering at a large public event, especially a sports event. In North America especially popular are the attractive girls who act as cheerleaders.

*Cups, trophies* shaped as people or animals, *bowls, mugs, medals* and *dishes* are the awards given to the winners in different sports.

#### IV VERBS WHICH ARE USED WHEN TALKING ABOUT SPORTS EVENTS

Numerous verbs are used to describe what people do in different sports disciplines. The most common verbs are: play, compete, pass, dribble, score, beat, shoot, throw, catch, serve, kick, pitch, train, return, run, race, sprint, jump, win, lose, and many others. The examples of the sentences in which these verbs can appear are given below.

Serbia will *play* Northern Ireland tomorrow.

The teams *competed* for the prize.

He *passed* the ball back to the goalkeeper.

He *dribbled* the ball to the goal.

He's *scored* all the goals this season.

Brazil were *beaten* 2-1.

DalGLISH *shoots*, but misses.

She *threw* the ball into the air.

Her team member *caught* the ball.

She served an ace.

He *kicked* the ball into the net.

We passed long afternoons *pitching* a baseball.

They are *training* for the new season.

He *returned* the ball to continue the rally.

He *ran* past the defender.

They both *raced* for the ball.

The runner *sprinted* to the finish line.

The goalkeeper *jumped* up to catch the ball.

We've *won* every match this season!

She *lost* in three straight sets.

Many phrasal verbs are also used to refer to the actions performed in different kinds of sports. We shall list only some of them and give the explanations of their meaning.

To "*work out*" used as a verb means "*to exercise*",

To "*warm up*" means to do light and easy exercises in order to prepare for more intense exercises,

To "*cool down*" means to relax body after physical exercise by stretching,

To "*knock out*" means to hit someone so hard to make him lose consciousness,

To "*knock down*" means to strike to the ground with a sharp blow,

To "*drop out*" means to stop participation in a game,

To "*give up*" means to stop trying, admit defeat,

To "*join in*" means to do an activity with other people,

To "*kick off*" means start playing in a football game,

To "*send off*" means to remove someone from the game for violation of the rules,

To "*take part*" means to participate in a game or an event,

To "*root for*" means to support a team,

To "*cheer on*" means the same as "*root for*", but is usually used before a team name,

To "*touch down*" in rugby means to score by putting the ball on the ground behind the other team's goal line.

## V NOUNS USED IN SPORTS TERMINOLOGY

In any discourse, the most often used verb categories are verbs and nouns. That is also the case with sports terminology. Nouns denoting sports events, actions and performers are produced in many different ways.

Most words denoting a doer of the action are produced by the process of derivation, that is by adding the suffix "*-er*" to the base. Such are the words like a *player*, *boxer*, *trainer*, *skier*, *defender*, *pitcher* and many others. Also, the ending "*-ship*" is a very productive derivational suffix, so many words like *championship*, *sportsmanship*, *gamesmanship*, and others are produced with this suffix.

Conversion is another word forming process by which the nouns are formed in sport. In conversion the word changes the category but the form stays the same. The example might be the verb “*to work out*” which was converted into the noun a “*workout*”. The difference is in that that the compound verb is written as two words, and the noun is a solid compound. Also, an “*ace*” (noun) has a converted verb form “*to ace*” as in example “*I aced that test today.*”, meaning “*I did it very well.*”

Sports terminology is very rich in producing compound words of different types. As we have already seen, phrasal verbs are very common in sports terminology, and phrasal verbs can be considered compound verbs of a sort. But compound nouns are more often for the simple reason that, as A. Carstairs-McCarthy stated in his book “*An Introduction to English Morphology*”: “It is with nouns that compounding really comes into its own as a word forming process in English. That is not surprising. Cultural and technical change produces more novel artefacts that novel activities or novel properties. These changes, therefore, generate new vocabulary needs that are more readily answered by new nouns than by new verbs or adjectives.” (2002: 61).

Lots of compound nouns appear in sports terminology. We will mention some of them, sorted by their constituent parts.

a) *Noun + Noun Compounds:*

– compound nouns in which the word “*sport*” is one of the constituent parts, such as in *sportsperson, sportsman, sportswoman, sportswear, sportscaster*.

- a lot of compounds with “*ball*”, like: *football, volleyball, basketball, handball and “baseball”*.
- compounds with “*team*” like: *teamwork, teammate*.
- compounds with “*line*” like: *sideline, touch-line, goal line, baseline*.

b) *Adjective + Noun compounds:*

– *free-kick, half-time, red card, yellow card, wild card, dead ball, false start*, and many others.

c) *Noun + Preposition or Preposition + Noun Compounds:*

- *offside, outfield, overtime, playoffs, runner-up, time-out*.

Clipping is another way of producing nouns used in sports terminology. The most commonly used clippings surely are *a fan* (short from *fanatic*) and *a ref* (short from *referee*). Also there is *a gym* which is a clipping from *gymnasium*.

Initialisms and acronyms are also very much used in sports terminology. The examples are *FIFA* (Federation Internationale de Football Association, or in English-International Federation of Association Football), *FIDE* (Federation Internationale des Echecs, or in English- International Chess Federation), *NFL*

(National Football League), *UEFA* (Union of European Football Associations), *ATP* (Association of Tennis Professionals), *NBA* (National Basketball Association), *IOC* (International Olympic Committee), *MMA* (Mixed Martial Arts, kickboxing), and others. One of the most famous acronyms today is *G.O.A.T.*, the meaning of which is (the) Greatest of All Time, which refers to exceptional people in various fields, first of all in sport. Our tennis player Novak Djokovic who is the best player in the world, ate grass at Wimbledon, and the joke was that he did it because he was a Goat – the best player, but also because only GOATS (the animals) ate grass.

Different idioms and phrases also give colour to sports terminology. Most of the idioms describe a familiar sports situation, but they also have a metaphorical meaning which can be applied in everyday situations. Here are some of the examples:

*a) Idioms made of a verb and a noun:*

Set a record – to achieve the best result in a sport competition,

Warm the bench – to be so removed, to observe without participating, or to wait for one's chance to participate,

Carry the ball – to take charge, to assume responsibility,

Drop the ball – to make an error, to miss an opportunity,

Take gloves off – to begin to behave in a more hostile or tenacious way,

Move the goalposts – to change the criterion of a competition while it is still in progress,

Hit below the belt – to act unfairly or unscrupulously,

Hail Mary – a last-resort tactic for salvaging a situation or project.

*b) Idioms consisting of an adjective and a noun:*

Cheap shot – scoring a hit on someone when their back is turned,

Curve ball – anything unexpected or designed to deceive,

Low blow – a comment or tactics regarded as unfair or unkind,

Redshirt – a delay or suspension of an athlete's participation to lengthen their period of eligibility.

*c) Idioms consisting of two word categories and a conjunction:*

Blow-by-blow – providing great detail,

Play-by-play – to give a detailed description,



Bump and run – an amateur play or behavior,

Down and out – lacking money or prospects; penniless or destitute,

Sink or swim – to fail or succeed by one`s own effort.

d) *Real phrases in a form of a clause or a sentence:*

– Have someone in your corner – to have someone who supports, defends or assists you,

– Keep one's eye on the ball – to keep oneself very focused on something,

– A win is a win – when the result satisfies all parties,

– Get the ball rolling – to set something, often a process, in motion; to begin,

– Take one for the team – to do some boring or difficult work to make your teammates' job easier,

– Get off to a flying start – to have a very successful beginning,

– Make it to the first base – take the first step successfully,

– Not in the same league – not at the same level or quality,

– Paddle one`s own canoe – to do something alone,

– Saved by the bell – rescued from a bad situation at the last minute,

– Step up to the plate – to accept a challenge,

– Take the wind out of one`s sails – to become discouraged.

## CONCLUSION

As much as we are all to some extent familiar with sports terminology, at least in the global sense, there is still a need to go through some of the most broadly used terms that a student of sport will certainly meet with in his studies. Sports terminology is a huge category, in which the words, idioms and phrases are produced in different ways, and in which, like in any aspect of language, the need for constant new entries appears every day. We can not know all the words in all sports, but we can try to learn the most commonly used ones in order to enjoy the events and to be able to talk about them in English.

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### НЕКЕ ЧИЊЕНИЦЕ О СПОРТСКОЈ ТЕРМИНОЛОГИЈИ

#### Резиме

Са правом можемо рећи да је спорт прави извор мултикултурализма, зато што повезује људе из различитих земаља у једну светску заједницу. Свако проналази задовољство било у учествовању било у посматрању различитих спортских дешавања. Спорт смањује стрес и нарочито је важан за развој деце, зато што повећава њихово самопоуздање и чини их здравим и способним. Језик спорта је богат и обухвата различите термине и изразе који су интернационално познати и прихваћени без превода, на исти начин, у скоро свим земљама света. Рад се бави различитим категоријама речи спортске терминологије и начинима њиховог стварања и примене, као и посебном терминологијом специфичном за одређене спортове.

**Кључне речи:** *спорт, језик, формирање речи, идиоми, фразе.*