SPORTS IDIOM IN CONTEMPORARY LANGUAGE

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Approved by:
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: The Nature, Purpose, Scope and Procedure of the Study</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I  The Problem of the Study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nature of Slang</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Occurrence of Sports Slang in Contemporary Language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II The Method of Research</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examination of Existing Literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection and Outline of the Dictionary Form</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sources for Selection of Idioms</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sources of Derivations of Idioms</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Method of Determining the Definitions in Common Usage</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Organization of the Dictionary and Implications</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III A Dictionary of Sports Terms Found in Common Slang Usage</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

A. Nature of the Study

This study is concerned with the occurrence of sports expressions as slang in contemporary language. The nature of slang and the existing literature on the subject are discussed briefly. A list of 520 sports terms is compiled into a "dictionary" which gives the sports origin and the common definitions of the terms.

B. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to show the influence of sports on American speech through the preparation of a list of words and phrases which have their origin in sports and which are found in wide common usage in contemporary language.

C. Procedure of Research

A study of the existing literature on slang led to the decision to compile the list in dictionary form and in three parts: (a) the sports idiom, (b) the origin of the term and its original meaning, (c) the definition in common usage.

The sources used in compiling the list of sports idioms were: (1) Words and phrases of sports derivation overheard in daily conversation were recorded; (2) Fellow students in graduate school in the Department of Physical Education at The Ohio State University and undergraduate men in the writer's physical education classes at Paul Smith's College, New York, were asked to contribute terms of sports slang; (3) Literature and research on the general topic of slang was examined for sports words and phrases.
The sports origin of the terms was verified, when doubtful, by reference to the few standard works on the subject.

To determine the common usage definitions of the sports expressions, mimeographed lists of the 520 idioms were distributed to the men students in the writer's physical education classes at Paul Smith's College, New York, and the students were asked to supply the definitions that occurred to them in common language. As a check against student answers, several faculty members and adults chosen at random were requested to define the terms. The definitions thus arrived at were studied for descriptiveness and accuracy and those definitions were retained which best expressed the variety of answers without repetition.

D. The Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study makes no claim to include all existing sports idioms but rather to include all idioms gathered from the above three sources which have wide common usage aside from their immediate sports connection and which are definitely derived from sports. The writer found that words and phrases continued to be suggested right up until the final draft of the paper; it would be impossible ever to be certain of having included all valid idioms; however, many of the idioms gathered from the various sources could not be used either because they proved, on closer study, to be derived from areas other than sports or because they were not found in wide common usage.

Although we have referred to the list of idioms as a "dictionary", it was not possible to adhere strictly to formal dictionary make-up because most of the terms so not lend themselves to easy grammatical classification. Within the limits of this study, however, the attempt
was made to preserve a reasonable similarity to dictionary form and conciseness and to follow dictionary practice in the organization of the definitions.
SPORTS IDIOM IN CONTEMPORARY LANGUAGE

Part I  The Problem

Students of language are familiar with the peculiar purpose served by the popular use of idiomatic expressions. Spoken and written discourse has been made vastly more colorful and expressive by the inclusion of those idiomatic words and phrases which in modern times have come to be called slang.

The English language as commonly spoken today in America is full of slang expressions which have come to be included in dictionaries as well as those which are less formally accepted. These expressions derive from many sources and one would expect to find considerable research on the subject by language students. However, this is not the case and, according to H. L. Mencken, "popular American slang has got very little sober study from the professional philologists .... Relatively little attention is paid to slang in the philological journals, but it is frequently discussed in the magazines of general circulation and in the newspapers." The most comprehensive literature on the subject either is concerned with the general nature of slang illustrated by special examples or is prepared in thesaurus form. Short articles have appeared in various professional publications recounting the slang peculiar to a specific profession and, in some instances, to a particular field of sport. However, to our knowledge, there is not a current slang dictionary concerned only with those familiar expressions derived from the world of sports. With this in mind, it was the problem of this research to compile a kind of dictionary of sports slang showing the influence of sports on our language.

1  The American Language by H. L. Mencken, 1946 ed., p. 570.
2  Ibid., p. 571.
To begin this study it was necessary to examine the literature of the field and the very nature of slang. It must be borne in mind that it did not lie within either the intention or the ability of this student to criticize the existing research; it was, rather, the intention to acquire a background knowledge of the material in order to facilitate the method of procedure and to furnish a possible source of reference in the case of remote derivations.

To clarify the nature of slang we refer to the standard definitions of the Oxford Dictionary, "language of a highly colloquial type, considered as below the level of standard educated speech, and consisting either of new words or of current words employed in some special sense." Carl Sandburg achieved a colorful definition when he described slang as "language that takes off its coat, spits on its hands, and gets to work."

George H. McKnight points out, "It must not be lost sight of that language is not created for the single individual, but is a social instrument for communication between many individuals." This statement helps to explain why the common speech includes idiomatic expressions derived from varied sources: from occupational groups such as theatrical artists, railroad men, journalists; from college students; and from the world of recreation and sports, to name only a few. The underworld gangsters of the 1920 period contributed many slang phrases (stick up, take for a ride, big shot, rod) and the soldier slang of World Wars I and II also found popular acceptance in the language (leatherneck, snafu, fouled up, dogface, yardbird). Some slang expressions have come into popular use because they serve as genuine short cuts in conversation; others man-

1 English Words and Their Background by G. H. McKnight, 1923.
ufactured by journalistic wits have caught on not so much because they were necessary as because they were clever and colorful. It is in this latter category that we find many of the terms derived from sports. "The sports writers, of course, are all assiduous makers of slang, and many of their inventions are taken into the general vocabulary." Thus, for example, writing descriptively of a boxing match, sports reporters have given currency to "prelim", "brother act", "punch-drunk". Mencken further asserts that "With the possible exception of the French, the Americans now produce more slang than any other people, and put it to heavier use in their daily affairs." It is perhaps because of this heavy infiltration of slang differing from that of the Mother Country that we now frequently hear the term, "the American language", used as the title for Mr. Mencken's book. The Americans are a sports loving people and it is probably for this reason that we find so many sports words and phrases in common usage.

Part II The Method of Research

Since we were particularly concerned with those idiomatic expressions derived from sports, we approached our problem by examining the existing literature on slang with an eye to locating specific references to sports terms. In his comprehensive study, "The American Language," H. L. Mencken devotes Chapter XI to American slang. This section was helpful in providing a key to the way in which slang words (including sports terms) have come into common usage, and each point is illustrated with numerous examples. Mencken's book also proved a

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2 Ibid., p. 567.
valuable source of other references since he includes in his footnotes extensive listings in specific fields, such as issues of the publication, "American Speech," which offered discussion of sports terminology, for example, "Golf Gab" by Anne Angel, Sept. 1926, "Baseball Terminology" by Henry J. Heck, Apr. 1930.

After study of both the dictionary and the thesaurus types of definitions, it was decided that a modified dictionary form would best serve the purpose of this research. Since we were particularly interested in showing any contrast which might lie between the original meaning of a term in sports and its present common usage, it seemed advisable to include in the definition the sports origin and meaning as well as the common usage meaning. It was decided, therefore, to compile the final draft of the "dictionary" in this order: (a) the sports word or phrase, (b) the sports origin and meaning, (c) the meaning in common usage. For example:

above board - derived from card games, probably poker, meaning to keep all cards in sight above the table.

Common usage: fair, on the level, honest.

Since the problem was to be approached by making a dictionary type list of terms, the first consideration was the method to use in compiling this list. A comprehensive list of sports terms already existed in "The American Thesaurus of Slang" by Berrey and Van den Bark but the expressions listed therein are not necessarily found in wide common usage. It was decided, therefore, that the present list should be confined to those words and phrases which have originated from sports and which have found wide common usage outside the sports field. This distinction is important because it was the basis for deciding which terms should be included and
which discarded.

To begin compiling the list of sports words and phrases, (part (a) of the definition), three sources were used: (1) Words and phrases of sports derivation overheard in daily conversation were recorded over a period of six months; (2) Fellow students in graduate school in the Department of Physical Education at The Ohio State University and undergraduate men in the writer's physical education classes at Paul Smith's College, New York, were asked to contribute terms of sports slang; (3) Literature and research on the general topic of slang was examined for sports words and phrases. When these sources were combined and totaled, it was found that the first two accounted for approximately half of the total list and the third source contributed the remaining half.

In the process of examining other literature (source #(3) above), George H. McKnight's "English Words and Their Background" was particularly helpful in compiling terms from hunting, pugilism, card playing, and the now unfamiliar sports of falconry and cock fighting. "The American Thesaurus of Slang" by Berrey and Van den Bark proved invaluable as a comprehensive source of slang terms listed according to specific sports.

It must also be noted that, on the basis of the examples furnished by the references quoted, it was decided to include terms not only from active sports but also from inactive games, such as cards, and from a few spectator sports, such as horse racing. This aspect of sports brings up the rather questionable inclusion of gambling slang but it was decided to include gambling phrases, many from poker and the race track, because in their origins they are associated with legitimate sports.

With a tentative list of 558 terms from the above three sources, the final measure of whether or not a word or phrase should be in-
cluded was: is it definitely sports connected and is it found in wide common usage in our language outside of the sports connection?

In the process of listing and partially editing these 558 terms, it was possible to secure many of the derivations (part (b) of the definition) at the source of reference. As already noted, 1 Derrey and Van den Park list scores of terms according to sports derivation; however, it was thought desirable to discover in this research not only the sport from which the term derived but also the meaning of the term at its origin, and, in many cases, it was necessary to look extensively for the original meaning. Eric Partridge's "Slang, Today and Yesterday" was a source of derivation for a number of common terms which originated in English sports. Also useful as standard references in the question of original meanings were 2 Roget's International Thesaurus and Webster's New International Dictionary.

Throughout our dictionary of slang terms, the sources of the original meanings have been acknowledged in the footnotes wherever the note was taken from the text of one of the reference books. Where a term appeared to have more than one possible derivation, this is recognized (for example, wind-up - derived (a) from baseball, referring to the movements beginning the pitch of the ball or the conclusion of the preparation to pitch; (b) from pugilism, the last round). In some instances (all out, champ) the sports connection was definite but it was difficult to trace the origin of the term to one particular sport; in others, it was necessary to qualify the origin with the word "probably". In all cases, however, a

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Lester V. Derrey and Kelvin Van den Park, 1942 ed.
3 Roget's International Thesaurus, Crowell, 1946 rev. ed.
sincere effort was made to keep the derivations exact and accurate and, if no reasonable sports connection could be proved, the term was discarded. After the final check of derivations, the completed list contained 520 slang words and phrases.

The next consideration was how to arrive at the most accurate and descriptive definitions in common usage (part (c) of the definition). Inasmuch as college students are not only the inventors but also the enthusiastic users of slang, it was decided to ask a group of college students to supply the common usage definitions for the list of sports terms. In this instance, such a group was at hand on the campus of Paul Smith's College, New York, a small school where the large number of veterans suggested the opportunity for a fair cross-section of interpretation on the basis of up-to-date opinion.

Accordingly, the sports terms (without mention of their derivations) were prepared in an alphabetical list, mimeographed, and presented to the men students in the writer's physical education classes. The men were asked to write down, in the space provided beside each word or phrase, the definition or definitions that occurred to them in common language. It was pointed out that, if the best definition seemed to involve another slang term, it would be quite acceptable.

On the whole, excellent cooperation was received. Most students defined all terms with which they were familiar in a fairly accurate manner.

As a check against the student answers, several members of the
college faculty and other adults were requested to define the terms. When all lists had been returned, the cataloguing of terms showed that the student contributed definitions, while often carelessly arrived at, were more colorful and descriptive on the whole than the faculty definitions which, by contrast, were more studied and grammatically exact. Of the 204 lists distributed, 117 were returned either fully or partially completed.

The next step in the preparation of the dictionary was the organization of the definitions thus contributed. To begin with, each term was considered separately in alphabetical order according to the definitions on the student papers. Usually not more than six or seven different definitions for any one term were found in the entire set of papers. The various definitions were noted on a master list and those occurring most frequently and seeming most descriptive were retained as the final interpretation for common usage. For example, for the word **dumb-bell**, the definitions suggested were: fool, chump, sap, booby, dunce, bungler, one who is unintelligent, a stupid fellow, a thick-headed person; of these definitions we tried to retain those which would express the variety of answers without repetition and, therefore, decided to use: one who is unintelligent, stupid, thick-headed; a fool, chump, dunce.

Definitions which indicated a misinterpretation of meaning of the term were discarded. Where there appeared to be different but valid interpretations of meaning, both were listed; for example, **easy mark**: 1) accessible, not difficult; 2) open to exploitation, one who is easily fooled or influenced. Where the slang word could be interpreted as either noun or verb, both meanings were listed; for example, **dub**: 1) (noun) a poor amateur, one who is inept, not proficient; 2) (verb) to do poorly, to miss an opportunity. To
verify these interpretations, we referred freely to Webster's New International Dictionary and Roget's International Thesaurus.

The final step in the research was the combining of all three parts of the definition, (a) the term, (b) the origin, and (c) the common meaning, into the final form of the dictionary. It is necessary to point out that, although we have referred to the final form of the research as a "dictionary", it was not possible to adhere strictly to formal dictionary make-up for the obvious reason that we have to deal more with phrases than with single words. These phrases do not always lend themselves to easy grammatical classification. We are, therefore, making no claim to a classification according to grammatical rule for we feel that the emphasis of this research rests on the contribution of sports terms to the common idiom without regard to grammatical propriety. However, we have tried, within the limits of our study, to preserve a reasonable similarity to dictionary form and conciseness.

We are well aware that there may be many words of sports slang which we have overlooked but the present list of 520 terms which we offer represents the total of sports idioms encountered from our sources which met the qualifications of this research.

Apart from the "dictionary", this study did not lend itself to formal conclusions but, if we are to draw any implications from this research, they are that sports idioms have found wide common usage as slang in contemporary language and that many slang words and phrases, not recognized as such, have derived originally from sports expressions.
Part III

A DICTIONARY OF SPORTS TERMS FOUND IN COMMON SLANG USAGE

above board - derived from card games, probably poker, meaning to
keep all cards in sight above the table.

Common usage: fair, on the level, honest, open.

according to Hoyle - derived from the widely accepted rule book for
card games written by Hoyle.

Common usage: to play by the rules, abide by authority.

ace high - originated from card game of poker, the best card.

Common usage: the best, tops, cannot be beaten.

ace in the hole - originated from card game of stud poker, meaning
that the card turned face down is an ace or best card.

Common usage: reserve strength, hidden reserve, something to rely on.

ace up my sleeve - derived from gambling at cards, probably poker,
where a best card, or ace, is hidden to be used dishonestly as
a last resort to win.

Common usage: surprise move, furtive plan, a last resort, an
important play held back, an advantage withheld.

all in - associated with many sports where the expression is iden-
tified with fatigue; (a) in card game of poker, the phrase means
that all players have made their ante.

Common usage: fatigued, worn out, ready to drop, tired, exhausted.

all out - derived from many sports, to give all possible effort for a
cause.

Common usage: at full speed, for all one is worth, wide open,
at full blast, with unanimous effort.

all set - derived from many sports; to prepare by training, to be
ready for a contest.

1 English Words and Their Background by G. H. McKnight, 1923, p. 18.
Common usage: to be ready, fixed, prepared.
all wound up - probably derived from baseball where the movements of the pitcher's "wind-up" are synonymous with the tense moment preceding the pitch.

Common usage: tense, excited, keyed up, garrulous.

allure - derived from falconry; the use of a decoy.

Common usage: (1) (noun) charm, come-on, appeal, attraction;
(2) (verb) entice, inveigle.

also ran - originated from racing; to come in last, or far behind.

Common usage: unsuccessful person, loser, one of the field, one who makes a poor showing.

anchor man - term applied to rear player in tug-o-war; used in many sports to refer to the last or key man on a team, as in bowling.

Common usage: key man, dependable man, one expected to make a good showing, a reliable person.

angling for - derived from fishing; to go fishing or to cast one's hook or net for.

Common usage: fishing for, pursuing, maneuvering, trying for.

ante up - originated from card game of poker; the act of making the bet.

Common usage: make one's bet, get in the game, do one's share, contribute.

assist - derived (a) from the card game of euchre; a term used by the dealer's partner to order the adoption of the trump turned;
(b) from baseball; the act of a player who handles the ball in assisting to a put-out.

Common usage: aid, help, support, do a good turn.

1 English Words and Their Background by G. H. McKnight, p.46.
2 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and Van den Bark, p.627.
3 Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Merriam, 1934.
at a loss - derived from hunting with the hounds; meaning the hounds are bewildered or have lost the scent.

Common usage: in a state of uncertainty, at the end of one's rope, hard put, up against it, bewildered, going in circles.

at fault - originated from hunting with the hounds; meaning that the dogs are running on false scent.

Common usage: wrong, mistaken, in error, puzzled, in trouble, to blame.

baby up - derived from the game of marbles; to toss a shooter into the ring in order to get closer for the next shot.

Common usage: to make up to someone, to get in the good graces of, play up to, humor.

backing - derived from card playing; interchangeable with financial support.

Common usage: assistance, support of any nature esp. financial.

back on one's heels - derived from boxing; punch-drunk, unbalanced.

Common usage: down and out, without funds, up against it, off balance, on the defensive, in a tough situation.

bagged - originated from hunting; to catch game.

Common usage: to take by any means, nab, take by assault, get one's hands on.

barking up the wrong tree - derived from hunting with hounds; refers to situation where the dogs have led the hunters to the wrong tree. on a false scent.

Common usage: a false lead, mistaken judgment.

1 English Words and Their Background by G.H. McKnight, p.46
2 Ibid, p. 46
3 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and VandenBark, p.673
batting a thousand – derived from baseball; a hit every time at bat.

Common usage: doing very well, making every opportunity count, perfect score, tops, no errors.

batting average – originated from baseball; the number of hits in relation to the number of times at bat.

Common usage: (1) one's record of ability, one's score, amount of success; (2) also used in literal sense of making a record that is ordinary, normal, according to average standards.

battle royal – derived from boxing; a match with four or more boxers in the ring at once and with every man fighting for himself; when a man is knocked down, he is eliminated from the contest.

Common usage: a free for all, brawl, hard fought contest.

beat to the punch – originated from boxing; to hit first.

Common usage: to obtain the advantage, get the best of, gain the upper hand.

beat up – from boxing; to pummel, whip, batter black and blue.

Common usage: (1) to vanquish, overcome, wipe up the earth with, beat the tar out of; (2) subdued, humiliated (as in the sense of "he looks beat up").

behind the eight-ball – derived from billiards; a situation where the cue ball is behind the eight-ball and the player is unable to shoot.

Common usage: in trouble, in a tough situation, in a bad spot.

benched – derived from many team sports; the act of withdrawing a player from the contest and keeping him on the sidelines.

Common usage: out of action, unemployed, on the sidelines, out of circulation.

best bet – from gambling, especially card playing; excellent oppor-

1 The American Language by H. L. Mencken, 1946, p.191
tunity to win a wager.

Common usage: the most probable winner, sure thing, best choice, the easiest way to do something.

1 be there! - derived from dice playing; usually in the sense of an exclamation, meaning to come through in a pinch.

Common usage: an exclamation of eagerness and hope; a plea meaning "don't miss!" "don't fail!" "keep on your toes"; a cry of encouragement.

2 bias - originated from bowling; to throw the ball diagonally across the alley.

Common usage: at an angle, one-sided, a twisted tendency, partiality, prejudice.

3 big bruiser - from many contact sports; probably football; a strong, husky player.

Common usage: any large, rough character; one who is rough and rugged looking.

big league - derived from national baseball competition in which the top-ranking teams are in the major or "big" league while those with less ability and prestige are in the minor leagues.

Common usage: big time, tops, in the high brackets, best in the field, of professional caliber, important.

birdie - from golf; to play a hole in one stroke less than par.

Common usage: better than expected, almost perfect.

4 black horse - derived from racing; an unknown contender, the same as "dark horse".

Common usage: any contestant of whom little is known, a surprise

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1 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and VandenBark, p. 632.
2 English Words and Their Background by G. H. McKnight, p. 46
contestant, an unknown opponent, one whom the odds are against.

bleachers - from baseball; seats for spectators, generally cheaper than seats in the grandstand.

Common usage: (1) stands, seats, on the sidelines; (2) occasionally used in the sense of referring to players who are not doing well, as "go back to the bleachers".

blocked that one - derived from boxing; to stop a punch before it is landed.

Common usage: to hinder, interfere, prevent, obstruct, ward off.

blow-by-blow - from boxing; a description of the contest as each blow or punch took place.

Common usage: a step-by-step description or account, a detailed report, an explanation of an event according to proper sequence.

bluff - derived from card games, probably poker; to pretend to have more than is actually in one's hand.

Common usage: to put up a front, give a false impression, try to fool with smooth talk, false pretense.

body blow - from boxing; a punch landed below the neck and above the belt, on the trunk proper.

Common usage: a hard attack to a vulnerable spot, a solid hit, an injury, a damaging action, a shock.

bone crusher - from body contact sports, especially wrestling and football; a strong, husky player.

Common usage: (1) a wrestler; (2) a rough individual, one who is big and strong; (3) a heavy blow.

boner - from baseball; an abbreviation of "bonehead play" attributed

1 The American Language by H.L. Mencken, p.191.
2 English Words and Their Background by G.H. McKnight, p. 47.
3 Slang, Today and Yesterday by Eric Partridge, p. 246.
4 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and VandenBark, p. 627.
to cartoonist Tad Dorgan.

Common usage: a stupid mistake, an embarrassing incident, error.

booby - derived from card games; one who makes the lowest score.

Common usage: (1) one who does poorly at anything, a stupid person, one who is unadaptable; (2) a trap to catch one unawares.

booty prize - from card games; an award for lowest score.

Common usage: award for lowest score, something of little value, recognition for effort that did not lead to success.

bread-basket - derived from boxing; the stomach.

Common usage: the mid-section, the stomach.

break the gun - from track; to start before it is time, a false start.

Common usage: to start before the appointed time, to get the jump on others, make a false start, be over-anxious to start.

break the tape - from track; to be the first one across the finish line, thus breaking the tape stretched across the track, to win.

Common usage: to lead the field, to win, to finish first, to reach a goal.

brother act - derived from boxing; situation where the opponents appear to be taking it easy, not hitting each other hard.

Common usage: a conspiracy, not a true competition, to favor one's opponent, to work together.

brush off - from baseball; to whisk off the home plate so it can be seen by the pitcher.

Common usage: to discard, throw away, ignore, disregard, cast off.

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1 "Derivations of Slang", an article by Westbrook Pegler, appearing May 27, 1947 in his syndicated newspaper column.
2 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and VandernBark, p.638.
3 Ibid, p. 638.
4 Slang, Today and Yesterday by Eric Partridge, p. 236.
5 The American Language by H.L. Mencken, p. 562.
buck ague - derived from deer hunting; nervousness at the approach of game, the same as "buck fever".

Common usage: nervousness at a crucial moment, amateurish uncertainty, inability to meet a crisis, in a state of extreme excitement, too upset to do one's best.

buck fever - from deer hunting; nervousness at the approach of game, the same as "buck ague".

Common usage: nervousness at a crucial moment, amateurish uncertainty, inability to meet a crisis, a state of excitement.

bull-neck - from body contact sports in which a large, muscular person has an advantage, probably wrestling and football; a contestant with a neck that is large and well-muscled like a bull's.

Common usage: any person with a thick neck, a stubborn man.

bull's-eye - from the rifle range; a hit on the center of the target.

Common usage: (1) a perfect score, a hit dead center; (2) to score or do well at anything.

bunt - derived from baseball; a light tap of the ball used as unexpected strategy to advance a player already on base.

Common usage: (1) a light effort, an easy hit; (2) to surprise by a tricky movement, a smart play.

bush leaguer - from baseball; a "farm" team in a small town, a team owned by a major league ball club.

Common usage: small time, small town, of slight importance, amateurish, third rate.

bust - from card playing; an especially poor hand.

Common usage: a failure, a disappointment.

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and VandenBark, p.615.
butter-fingers — from the game of cricket; unskilled, unable to play without fumbling.

Common usage: awkward, clumsy, bumbling, lacking coordination.

cajole — derived from falconry; to deceive, probably by the use of a decoy.

Common usage: to cajole by flattery, false persuasion, to "soft soap".

call — derived from poker; the act of asking to see the other players' cards after all bets have been made.

Common usage: to challenge, ask for proof, call one's bluff.

can't hit the side of a barn — from boxing; unable to connect a punch, incompetent.

Common usage: inaccurate at throwing, unskilled, incapable.

card — from card playing; refers to the "joker", or extra card.

Common usage: a wit, humorist.

carrying a chip — probably originated from the traditional practice of small boys when the challenger in a quarrel places a chip of wood on his shoulder and dares another to knock it off, indicating a wish to fight it out.

Common usage: looking for trouble, holding a grudge, angry at the world, argumentative, pugnacious.

cash in — from the card game of poker; to exchange the chips won for their value in money.

1 Slang, Today and Yesterday by Eric Partridge, p.236.
2 English Words and Their Background by G.H.McKnight, p.146.
3 The American Language by H.L. Mencken, p.191.
4 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and VandenBark, p.669.
Common usage: (1) to collect what one is entitled to; (2) to take as much as possible on some "deal"; (3) to give up, quit, die.

1 catch-as-catch-can - from wrestling; without benefit of rules.

Common usage: hit-or-miss; every man for himself, in haphazard fashion.

catch on the rebound - from games which use a bouncing ball, most probably tennis; to get possession of after a bounce.

Common usage: (1) to gain possession in a last chance; (2) a second choice, a second chance, to pick up where someone else left off (as in a love affair).

caught flat-footed - probably derived from pugilism; not being on one's toes.

Common usage: taken unawares, unprepared, over-whelmed, lacking in alertness.

ciaught off base - (a) probably from baseball, where a runner can be tagged out if caught away from his base; (b) also used in the child's game of tag meaning to be tagged while away from a neutral spot.

Common usage: (1) to be caught off guard, taken unawares; (2) to be caught overstepping one's limits.

champ - from many sports, especially wrestling and boxing; an abbreviation of the word champion, one who is acknowledged as the best in his class of competition.

Common usage: the winner, one who excels at anything, one who is considered first-rate or tops.

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Ferrey and VandenBark, p.675.
2 Slang, Today and Yesterday by Eric Partridge, p.237.
chance it - derived from gambling; to try one's luck, to venture.

Common usage: to risk, speculate, rely on fortune.

Charley-horse - derivation remote; associated with many sports,
especially those in which intensive activity takes place, a
term meaning an intense piercing or stabbing pain, usually in
a leg muscle.

Common usage: severe pain in a muscle, a muscular cramp.

check - derived from chess; a move to curb the opponent's progress.

Common usage: (1) slow down, stop, retard; (2) when used with
different prepositions, the meaning varies as follows: check
against, verify, examine; check in, to arrive; check out, depart, leave; check over, look over, examine; check up, take stock of, follow a clue, trace down; check with, verify.

chip in - from card games which use chips for points or money, esp.
poker; to have one's chips in the pot.

Common usage: donate, contribute, assist, do one's share.

chips are down - from card games using chips for money; the bet has
been made.

Common usage: (1) the die is cast, the crucial moment, now or
never; (2) tough going, at a handicap.

cinch - from horseback riding; a band for securing the saddle on the
horse.

Common usage: a sure thing, a certainty, easy to do, no chance
of failure, an open and shut case.

cinder in one's eye - from track; the meaning is literal, hence a
hindrance to the runner.

Common usage: a sore spot, a source of irritation, a nuisance.

1 The American Language by H.L. Mencken, p. 198
circus-catch - from baseball; a play for the approval of the crowd.

Common usage: a grandstand play, a show off play, clowning.

cold deck - from card playing, especially poker; a deck in which
the cards are not "running" well, an unlucky deck.

Common usage: (1) unfavorable, unlucky; (2) a fixed deck.

cold feet - probably derived originally from sports meaning too un-
comfortable or frightened to participate; recognized in Amer-
ican slang during World War I.

Common usage: cowardice, fear, timidity, to lose one's nerve.

college try - from collegiate sports; an almost impossible attempt.

Common usage: a supreme effort, one's level-best.

comeback - from many sports; to return to top standing after having
fallen.

Common usage: to make good a second time, a recovery, another
trial, a fresh attempt.

come to grief - from English sports; probably the steeplechase, mean-
ning to have a spill or fall.

Common usage: encounter difficulty, and disastrously, meet with
bad luck.

conk - from boxing; a blow on the nose or head.

Common usage: (1) (noun) any part of the head above the chin;
(2) (verb) to knock out by a blow on the head.

counted out - from boxing; to have lost officially, going down for
referee's count of ten.

Common usage: eliminated, finished, disregarded, to have lost.

1 The American Language by H. L. Mencken, p.191.
2 Ibid., p. 191.
3 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and VandenBark, p.256.
5 Slang, Today and Yesterday by Eric Partridge, p. 234.
1. crestfallen - derived from cock fighting; a bird with a dispirited, unaggressive appearance.

Common usage: spiritless, melancholy, down-hearted, depressed.

2. cripple - derived (a) from baseball; meaning variously, a poorly hit ball, a second-rate player, and a 3-1 pitch; (b) from pocket billiards; a ball lying close to the pocket and, therefore, an easy shot.

Common usage: a poor player, an easy opponent, one at a disadvantage, one who doesn't engage in any activity.

3. cut a caper - from dancing; to dance, frolic, jump about.

Common usage: to dance, frolic, clown, act up.

4. cut no ice - originated from ice skating; unskilful at skating, hence, unable to skate fast enough to cut up the ice.

Common usage: unable to make an impression, to get nowhere, have no effect on, (as, "that doesn't cut any ice with me").

5. dark horse - from horse racing; an unknown contender.

Common usage: participant in any contest of whom little is known, a long chance to win, a surprise candidate in politics.

6. dead cinch - from horseback riding; "dead" used in the sense of sure or certain, the "cinch" is a band for securing the saddle of a horse.

Common usage: a sure thing, predicted to win, in the bag.

1 English Words and Their Background by G.H. Mc Knight, p. 47.
2 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and VandenBark, p. 626.
4 The American Language by H. L. Mencken, p. 232.
dead game sport - from hunting; one with great courage, one who is stouthearted and ready for anything.
Common usage: (1) one who will never quit, a hard player, an honest competitor; (2) a good loser.

dead heat - from horse racing; turf slang for a neck-and-neck race.
Common usage: an even match, a close finish, a tied score.

dead ringer - from game of horseshoes; meaning no doubt about the shoe having circled the peg.
Common usage: (1) a sure thing, can't miss; (2) a perfect likeness, resemblance, similarity.

dead wood - derived from bowling; the pins that have been knocked down.
Common usage: of little use, second rate, below standard, having no life, excess baggage.

deal from the bottom - from card games; to cheat by dealing the cards from the bottom of the deck instead of from the top, as usual.
Common usage: to cheat, to take unfair advantage, use foul play.

deal under the table - from card games; to cheat by dealing the cards from a position below table level so they cannot be seen.
Common usage: to cheat, take unfair advantage, be crooked.

decoy - derived from falconry; to lure or deceive by false methods.
Common usage: (1) (noun) an imitation, a "dummy"; (2) (verb) to lure, deceive, attract by false persuasives; (3) a "confidence man".

deliver the goods - from many sports; to play well, to score.

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and VandenBark, p. 627.
2 Ibid., p. 640.
3 English Words and Their Background by G. H. McKnight, p. 46.
Common usage: fill the bill, produce what is expected, go all out, leave no stone unturned.

Dirty player - from many sports; one who uses unfair tactics, does not play according to the rules.

Common usage: a poor sport, one who takes unfair advantage, a crooked participant.

Dirty work - from many sports; unfair practice.

Common usage: unfair practice, under-handed activity, not on the up-and-up, unsportsmanlike conduct.

Discard - from card playing; to reject useless cards from the hand.

Common usage: reject, eliminate, put aside what is undesirable.

Divvy - from card game of poker; to divide the pot or stakes.

Common usage: share, divide, allocate, apportion.

do a Casey - from baseball, referring to the incident immortalized in poetry when the famous and proud player, Casey, struck out at bat when a hit was most needed.

Common usage: to fail in an emergency, to let yourself and others down, to strike out.

dope - derived from racing; (a) a preparation or drug used either to stupefy or stimulate a horse; (b) information about the horses which may be of assistance in judging their chances to win before laying bets.

Common usage: (1) prediction, information, details; (2) a fool, an ignorant or incompetent person; (3) one who takes drugs.

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and Van Den Berg, p. 626.
2 Ibid., p. 631.
3 English Words and Their Background by G. H. Mcknight, p. 47.
4 The American Language by H. L. Mencken, p. 191.
5 Slang, Today and Yesterday by Eric Partridge, p. 239.
Double-header - from baseball; a two-game program.

Common usage: a two-event program, two similar activities in succession, two for the price of one.

Down and out - from boxing; a contestant has been knocked down and officially counted out and is, therefore, defeated.

Common usage: to have little or nothing financially, to have seen better days, to be low in morale, to be flat broke, to be destitute with no hope in sight.

Down but not out - from boxing; a contestant has been knocked down but not yet counted out.

Common usage: the odds are unfavorable but there is still a chance; having tough luck but still cause for hope; able to keep on in the face of misfortune (recalls famous slogan of the Salvation Army, "A man may be down but he's never out").

Down for the count - from boxing; one who has gone down for the referee's count of ten.

Common usage: reduced to meager circumstances, out of the picture, finished, washed up.

Down the alley - from bowling; a well placed ball.

Common usage: (1) in the groove, straight to the mark, with little deviation; (2) "right down my alley" - along one's line of ability, easy for one to do.

Down the home stretch - from horse racing; the last eighth of a mile of track.

Common usage: approaching the completion of a task, on the last lap, near the finish, almost through.

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and VandenBark, p. 631.
drop one's guard - from boxing; to relax one's defense.
Common usage: to leave oneself open to attack, to relax, to fail to exercise necessary caution.

drop the ball - derived (a) from baseball; to do poorly or make an error, since the runner cannot be put out unless the ball is caught; (b) from football; to fumble or lose control of.
Common usage: make a mistake, error, miss an opportunity, slip up.

dub - from many games, now associated chiefly with golf; an abbreviation or contraction of the word "double", originally meaning a substitute and now meaning a second-rate player.
Common usage: (1)(noun) a poor amateur, one who is not proficient; (2) (verb) to do poorly, to miss an opportunity.

duffer - from golf; a poor or unorthodox player.
Common usage: one who is not skilled, one who fumbles (hence, sometimes, an aged person).

dugout - derived from the name of a boat hollowed out of a log.
Common usage: (1) a canoe; (2) a baseball players bench; (3) a trench for soldiers.

dumbbell - originated from gymnastics; weights used to exercise.
Common usage: one who is unintelligent, stupid, thick-headed; a fool, chump, dunce.

eased that one past him - from baseball; to have pitched a strike when the batter least expected it.
Common usage: to out-maneuver another person, make a strategic

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and VandenPark, p. 626.  
2 Ibid., p. 676.  
3 English Words and Their Background by G. H. McKnight, p. 61.
move, put something over on someone, to outwit another.

easy mark - from the rifle range; an object large enough to be
easy to hit.

Common usage: (1) accessible, not difficult; (2) one who is
easily fooled or influenced, open to exploitation, one who
has no sales resistance.

elbow one's way in - derived from track; to use the elbows to make
an opening in order to get into desired position.

Common usage: force one's way, push through where there is no
room, edge through a crowd.

euchre, to - from the card game of the same name.

Common usage: to defeat by scheming, outwit.

even break - from track; refers to situation where two runners break
the finish tape at the same time.

Common usage: square deal, an equal opportunity, the same chance
for all, 50-50 possibilities.

even the score - from many games; to bring the score to a tie, to
make things even for both sides.

Common usage: (1) to tie, to equalize; (2) to settle a grudge,
get even with, get revenge, settle accounts.

extra string in one's bow - from archery; lucky shooting.

Common usage: to have something in reserve, to be lucky, to have
ready replacements.

F

fall-guy - from pugilism; one who takes the secondary or losing part.

Common usage: stooge, victim, loser.

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and VandenBark, 1947, p. 627.
fall foul - from baseball; a ball that has fallen outside of fair territory.
Common usage: out of bounds, into trouble, meet with difficulty, come face to face with.

fall short - derived (a) from archery; an arrow that has not reached the target; (b) from baseball; a ball not quite good for a home run.
Common usage: not up to the mark, not up to standard, not up to expectations, a futile attempt.

fan - from baseball; (a) an abbreviation of the word "fanatic", meaning a spectator; (b) (verb) to strike out.
Common usage: (1) (noun) an ardent supporter, a spectator; (2) (verb) to strike out, to miss completely; fan out - to spread out.

Fancy Dan - from many sports, especially baseball; a poser, one who plays with an eye on the grandstand.
Common usage: a poser, a show-off, a grandstander.

fast pace - from horse racing; in harness racing, a horse using a pacing gait is considered more speedy.
Common usage: at full speed, as quickly as possible, at a hustle, speedy effort.

field day - from horse racing; Derby Day.
Common usage: (1) an all day track meet, a horse racing program; (2) a conclusive victory, a clean sweep, the occasion of winning decisively; (3) a holiday, a good time; (4) clean up day (Navy).

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and VandenBark, 1947, p. 627.
2 English Words and Their Background by G.H. McKnight, p. 47.
fight it out - from boxing; to attack or fight fiercely.

Common usage: (1) settle a disagreement by fighting; (2) put up a scrap, battle 'til the end, see a thing through.

fight shy - from cockfighting; fighting reluctantly.

Common usage: avoid doing something, keep one's distance, dread, fear.

finesse - from card games, especially bridge; to use a particular strategy to attempt to take a trick with a low card.

Common usage: (1) take a chance, throw off one's guard; (2) (noun) subtle technique, good form, skill, smooth perfection.

first stringer - from team sports, especially football, basketball, baseball; a superior player, one who is in the starting line-up.

Common usage: first-rate, one of the best, a "regular".

fishing for - from fishing; to cast one's hook or net.

Common usage: (1) seeking, searching for, angling for; (2) trying to gain information, hinting for.

fish story - from fishing; an exaggerated account of achievements.

Common usage: a tall tale, a yarn, elaboration upon the truth.

fleet foot - from track; fast, speedy, winged footed (from the Latin God, Mercury).

Common usage: fast moving, quick, swift.

flop - probably from fishing; to be done for as a fish out of water will flop.

Common usage: (1) (noun) a failure, a blunder; (2) to fail, to fall short of one's hopes; (3) to drop down, dead tired.

1 English Words and Their Background by G.H. McKnight, p.46.
2 Slang, Today and Yesterday by Eric Partridge, p.271.
3 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and Vandenbark, p.626.
flubbed that one - from baseball; to misplay or mishandle the ball.

Common usage: to miss a chance, to error, to do poorly, to misjudge.

fluke - from many sports, especially billiards; a chance occurrence that makes a difference in the outcome, a lucky stroke.

Common usage: an unusual incident, an accidental success or failure, a freak occurrence.

flying wedge - from football; a type of playing formation resembling the shape of a wedge.

Common usage: a mass of people moving together in solid formation, a group moving as one, and forcing others to give way.

foiled again - from fencing; to have been touched with the weapon, or "foil", a type of sword.

Common usage: defeated, frustrated, outwitted, thwarted.

follow through - from sports in which a racket or club is used, as in tennis and golf; the completion of the swing with form.

Common usage: carry to the conclusion, complete the action, keep going, finish the undertaking.

follow up - from hunting; to pursue the quarry.

Common usage: pursue, investigate, check up, hold a course.

foot in the water bucket - derivation questionable, possibly from pugilism and/or horse racing; an act of clumsiness.

Common usage: helplessly caught, clumsy, awkward, lacking ability to move quickly, second-rate.

foot it - derived from track; to run fast; also, to travel by foot.

Common usage: (1) hurry, move rapidly, take off; (2) pay the bill.

1 English Words and Their Background by G. H. McKnight, p.9.
force one's hand - from card playing, especially poker; the act of putting enough money or chips into the pot to "see" the hand of the original bettor.

Common usage: call one's bluff, bring one's intentions into the open, bring pressure to bear.

foul ball - from baseball; a ball hit outside of fair territory.

Common usage: out of bounds, unfair, undesirable, no good.

fouled - from baseball; to hit a ball outside of fair territory;
     (a) in boxing, to hit below the belt.

Common usage: (1) to have taken unfair advantage, cheated, wronged, betrayed; (2) confused, mixed up - as in current Army slang "all fouled up".

four flusher - from card game of stud poker; with four cards face up, indicating a flush, the hole card does not complete the flush, and the combination is a "four flusher".

Common usage: one who pretends to be something that he is not, a faker, a bluffer, a wise guy.

free-for-all - from pugilism; a "battle royal" with several men in the ring and each fighting for himself.

Common usage: every man for himself, a scramble, a mob scene or riot, a hard fought contest.

fresh air fiends - a term originally used to make fun of rabid physical culturists and physical fitness extremists.

Common usage: outdoor enthusiasts, nature lovers, those who like plenty of fresh air.

full cry - from hunting with the hounds; in hot pursuit with the dogs barking.

1 Slang, Today and Yesterday by Eric Partridge, p. 238.
Common usage: on the trail of, in hot pursuit, in quest of.

full house — from poker; a hand composed of three cards of one kind and two of another kind, often a winning combination.

Common usage: loaded to capacity, a good situation, an advantage, better than average.

full of fight — from cockfighting; to have plenty of spirit.

Common usage: eager, aggressive, scrappy, showing spirit.

full pitch — from falconry; to plunge or dive upon as fast as possible.

Common usage: keyed up, at full speed, an all-out effort.

fumble — from games in which a ball is caught with the hands, principally football; to drop or mishandle the ball.

Common usage: to bungle, misjudge, muff, error.

G

game leg — derived from the training room; a lame leg injured during a game.

Common usage: an injured or lame limb; a physical handicap.

gate — from exhibitions drawing large crowds; the portal at which tickets are taken and attendance checked.

Common usage: (1) the number of spectators present; (2) the total receipts, a shortening of "gate-money".

gate-money — from contests drawing large crowds, especially baseball; money received from sale of tickets.

Common usage: income from spectators, total receipts.

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and VandenBark, p.539.
2 English Words and Their Background by G. H. McKnight, p.46.
4 The American Language by H. L. Mencken, p. 191.
get along swimmingly - from aquatics; to do well.

Common usage: make steady progress, get along well, easily, prosperously.

get one's goat - originated from horse racing; refers to a custom of old-time horse trainers putting a goat in a stall as company for a nervous horse; if the goat was taken away, the horse became unmanageable and was easily beaten.

Common usage: to get the best of, to irritate, exasperate, anger.

get hot - from many sports; the act of "warming up" to the contest and doing exceedingly well.

Common usage: (1) to do well, to be favored by chance; (2) to get angry; (3) as a plea - start playing!

get inside one's guard - derived from pugilism; to slip a blow through the opponent's defense.

Common usage: take unawares, overwhelm, surprise.

get set - from track; the point at which the runners get ready to go just prior to the start.

Common usage: prepare, get ready.

get wind of - from hunting with the hounds; to pick up the scent.

Common usage: to learn of, hear about, find a clue.

give and take - from pugilism; to put up a good scrap, to interchange blows.

Common usage: be able to take as much as one deals out to others, work together fairly, be a good sport.

give 'em both barrels - probably derived originally from hunting, al-

1 The American Language by H. L. Mencken, p. 572.
2 English Words and Their Background by G.H. McIlwraith, p. 46.
though associated with theatrical slang by Berrey and Van den
Bark; to shoot with both barrels of a shotgun.

Common usage: give everything you have, go the limit, pour it
on, make the maximum effort.

glass jaw - from pugilism; especially vulnerable to a hit on the jaw.

Common usage: a vulnerable spot, an obvious weakness.

glutton for punishment - from pugilism; one who can continue to stand
up under heavy blows and come back for more.

Common usage: (1) one who takes misfortune in his stride, one
who does not flinch in the face of hardship, one who comes back
for more in the face of defeat; (2) one who is asking for trouble.

go fly a kite - from the simple pastime of getting a kite to soar into
the wind, considered rather an idle pleasure for an adult.

Common usage: (1) make yourself scarce, go away, beat it, try
something else for a change; (2) be forced to get into debt,
borrow.

go into a huddle - from sports in which the team members get into a
small circle to plan strategy, especially football.

Common usage: talk things over in a group, make plans, hold a
consultation.

go it - from track; to run like mad, go fast.

Common usage: make haste, go full speed, exert every effort.

go the limit - derived from boxing; to fight the full number of
rounds set for the match.

Common usage: exert every effort, go all the way, go as far

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang, 1947, p. 586.
2 Ibid., 1942, p. 663.
3 The American Language by H. L. Mencken, p. 562.
as one can, stay with it until the end.

golf widow - from golf; the wife of a golf fanatic who spends all
of his leisure on the golf course.

Common usage: a golfer's wife, the wife of a fanatic in any
sport.

good sport - from sports and recreation in general; (a) pleasant
activity; (b) one who plays fairly; (c) one who is a good
loser.

Common usage: (1) fine entertainment, pleasant activity; (2)
one who uses courtesy in sports; (3) a good-natured person,
one who is ready for anything; (4) a good loser.

grand slam - from the card game of bridge; to take every trick.

Common usage: a complete victory, a clean sweep of the field,

grandstander - from baseball; one who plays to gain the approval
of the spectators.

Common usage: a show-off, one who tries to get attention.

grandstand play - from baseball; a play to impress the spectators,
unnecessarily spectacular action.

Common usage: a show-off performance, an unnecessary flourish,
a spectacular play, an attempt to get attention.

handicap - from horse racing; a method of equalizing competition by
placing a fast horse in a rear starting position so that he
must run farther than the others in the same time in order to
win.

Common usage: (1) an artificial advantage or disadvantage grant-
ed in the attempt to equalize a contest; (2) a hindrance, impediment.

1 hang a haymaker - from boxing; to hit with a wild, powerful swing.

Common usage: land a heavy blow, a knockout punch, hit someone hard.

hat in the ring - from pugilism; in the early days of the sport, a challenger would throw his hat into the ring indicating willingness to enter the contest.

Common usage: make a challenge, get in the competition, make a bid, declare oneself a candidate (as in politics).

have the punch - from pugilism; to have the ability to hit hard.

Common usage: packed with power, to have "what it takes".

hazard - from gambling; to venture or take a chance.

Common usage: (1) (verb) to risk, to chance, to try; (2) (noun) a dangerous threat, a hindrance, an obstacle (as in golf).

head start - from track; to get a full head's length beyond the rest of the field.

Common usage: a good beginning, an early start.

heading home - from racing; coming to the last stretch of track before the finish.

Common usage: on the last lap, almost at the end.

heads up - from baseball; to look out for a ball about to fall near one.

Common usage: look out for one's safety, be alert, be smart.

2 hell-bent to win - from many sports; determined to win at any cost.

Common usage: out to win at any cost, determined to try hard.

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and VandenBark, p. 672.
2 Ibid., p. 636.
hightail it - from track; to run fast, to hurry.

Common usage: go fast, hurry, get going.

high feather - derived from cockfighting; with feathers ruffled
ready for a fight.

Common usage: in rare form, in fine shape, in good spirits.

high man - from card game of poker; the player holding the best hand.

Common usage: one who has the best rating, winner, one in the
top position.

high-tail it - from horse racing; to bolt the course.

Common usage: to clear out, make oneself scarce, take a short
cut, take the quickest way out.

hit a home run - from baseball; to bat a long hit that makes it
possible for the player to circle the bases and cross home
plate to score a run.

Common usage: to score, to play outstandingly, to succeed, to
gain a winning point, a popular move, a timely act.

hit and run - from baseball; a game where there is a lot of scoring.

Common usage: (1) hurried action; fast moving events; (2) not
waiting to see the consequences of action, as a hit and run
driver.

hit below the belt - from pugilism; a foul blow below the belt.

Common usage: unfair advantage, foul play, strike a vulner-
able spot.

hit in the kisser - from boxing; a hit on the mouth.

Common usage: a blow to the mouth, a painful hit on the face.

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and VandenBark, 1942, p. 681.
2 *The American Language* by H. L. Mencken, p. 46.
4 Ibid., 1942, p. 672.
hit one's stride - derived from track; to find one's best pace or running stride.

Common usage: to hit one's pace, be in one's element, get into form, make good progress.

hit the ball - from baseball; to do well, not miss the ball.

Common usage: (1) to do well, to succeed; (2) as a plea - get busy!, make an attempt!

hit the bull's-eye - from the rifle range and archery; to score by hitting the center of the target.

Common usage: make a perfect score, hit the nail on the head, put over an idea.

hit the mark - from the rifle range and archery; to do well, hit the target.

Common usage: hit the point, put an idea across, make good, score effectively.

hit the target - from the rifle range and archery; to score, to do well, not miss.

Common usage: to succeed, accomplish something, make good.

hold out - from poker; to continue playing without drawing extra cards.

Common usage: stand pat, wait for an advantage, make one's own terms.

homer - from baseball; an abbreviation of "home run", a long hit that makes it possible for the player to circle the bases, cross home plate, and score.

Common usage: a scoring play, an exceptional accomplishment.

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and VandenBark, 1942, p. 632.
2 Ibid., p. 632.
3 The American Language by H.L. Mencken, p. 191.
hop to it - from dancing; to move by short, brisk leaps.
    Common usage: set to work, get busy, put one's shoulder to
    the wheel.
hot foot it - from track; to run fast.
    Common usage: step lively, make haste, hurry, go fast.
hot shot - from the rifle range; to shoot well.
    Common usage: (1) a good performer, a smart fellow; (2) one
    who thinks himself better than he is; a show-off.
hot tip - from race track gambling; inside information about a
    winner.
    Common usage: pre-game information, inside dope, a sure thing.
hurdling - from track; the jumping of artificial obstacles placed
    at certain intervals in the course.
    Common usage: taking things in stride, advancing over obstacles,
    making progress.
hustler - from track; one who is a fast runner.
    Common usage: a man of action, a busy person, one who is not
    afraid of hard work, one who gets things done efficiently.

in at the kill - originated from fox hunting; considered part of
    the "sport" to be present at the death of the quarry.
    Common usage: to be on hand for a triumph, to be present at
    the climax of a victory.
in deep water - from swimming; warning of dangerous depth for the

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and VandenBark,1942,p.681.
2 Ibid., p. 626.
3 Ibid., p. 633.
4 Slang, Today and Yesterday by Eric Partridge, p.237.
unskilled swimmer.
Common usage: in trouble, in a dangerous situation, to become more involved than was the original intention.

indoor sport - applied to sports and games played in a building in contrast to those carried on outdoors.
Common usage: light activity, an inside attraction; also, a person who is inactive, one who is passively interested in sports, an "armchair quarterback".

in full feather - from cockfighting; in trim, ready to fight.
Common usage: in rare form, in good condition, at one's best, in full dress.

inning - from cricket; one of the turns of a side or player at bat.
Common usage: (1) the turn of a side at bat in baseball; (2) opportunity for action, turn, period.

inside track - from horse racing; the contestant on the inside of the track, near the rail, has the shortest distance to run and the best chance of winning.
Common usage: advance information, strategic influence, favorable odds to win.

in the bag - probably derived from hunting; to have caught the game.
Common usage: to be assured of victory or success, a sure thing.

in the chips - from card playing; to win heavily.
Common usage: to do well, get ahead, be in the money.

in the groove - from bowling; the area between the headpin and the number three pin.
Common usage: (1) the usual routine, ordinary practice; (2)

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and WandenBark, 1942, p. 630.
2 Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Merriam, 1934.
doing well, on the right track, hot music (jive-talk).

**in the money** = from gambling at cards; to win heavily, the same as "in the chips".

Common usage: to do well, be on top, get ahead, make good, strike it rich.

**in the rough** = derived from golf; a hit into the rough grounds outside of the fairway.

Common usage: in trouble, in a tough situation, at a disadvantage, not doing well.

**in the saddle** = probably from horse racing; to be prepared, ready, be in control of.

Common usage: in control of the situation, be the boss of, in charge of, in the driver's seat.

**it's up to you** = from poker; the turn of a player to bet or pass.

Common usage: the decision rests in your hands, it depends on you, it's your responsibility, make up your mind.

**jack pot** = from gambling; the greatest possible stakes in a wager.

Common usage: stakes at great odds, the grand prize, the total potential winnings, a large prize for a small effort.

**jeopardy** = from the card game of primero; hazard.

Common usage: hazard, chance, risk, danger, fall of the cards.

**jockey** = (verb) derived from horse racing; to ride in a race.

Common usage: to vie for position, to contend.

**joker** = from card games; an extra card in the deck.

Common usage: (1) an extra playing card; (2) a wise guy, a humorist; (3) the oddity in a situation, the hidden menace.

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1 English Words and Their Background by G.H. McKnight, p.47.
jump the gun - from track; to start in advance of the starter's signal.

Common usage: get a head start, be over-anxious, begin before one is supposed to.

K

kayo or K.O. - from pugilism; an abbreviation of the word "knockout".

Common usage: to win decisively, to do a thing well, to defeat, to come through in the final action.

keep one's head above water - from swimming; to be able to swim.

Common usage: to do all right, to hold one's own, not get in trouble.

keep the ball rolling - derivation remote, probably from soccer, associated with many sports; to keep things active.

Common usage: keep things moving, don't slow down, pep it up.

kibitzer - from card playing; one who offers unsolicited advice.

Common usage: one who offers unsolicited advice, an onlooker who offers annoying suggestions to contestants or workers, a nuisance.

kick that around - probably derived from soccer; to give impetus with the foot.

Common usage: consider that, think it over, discuss.

kitty - from card games; a gambling pot.

Common usage: a gambling pot, a reserve fund, a collection.

knock down and drag out - from pugilism; to knock out the opponent so hard that he must be carried from the ring.

Common usage: a tough battle, a free-for-all, a heated argument.

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Ferrey and VandenFark, 1942, p. 699.
knock for a loop - from pugilism; a decisive blow or defeat.

Common usage: (1) to deal a hard blow, defeat, over-power, knock out; (2) to shock, take by surprise.

knock out - from pugilism; to knock unconscious.

Common usage: (1) to finish, destroy, render senseless, put out of commission; (2) to compose or write as in journalistic slang; (3) knockout (noun) a surprise, a sensation, a thing of beauty.

knock out of the box - from baseball; when the batting side hits so many pitched balls that the pitcher is removed from his position in favor of a substitute.

Common usage: forced to retire, unable to finish, out of the action.

knock the socks off - from pugilism; to hit a powerful blow.

Common usage: to defeat decisively, finish off, completely overshadow.

knock the wind out of one's sails - probably a combination of terms from pugilism and sailing; to deflate, to render useless.

Common usage: to slow down by force, to deflate one's ego, demoralize, take the conceit out of.

knock one's eyes out - from pugilism; to hit in the eyes causing them to close.

Common usage: make one's eyes pop, something flashy, spectacular, unusual.

knuckle down - from the game of marbles; to place one's knuckles on the ground while shooting.

Common usage: set to work, stop the foolishness, get busy.

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and Vandenbark, 1942, p.635.
lame brain - from many sports; one who is unable to think quickly.

Common usage: one who is dull witted, slow thinking, unintelligent, foolish.

laid low, out, up - from pugilism; brought down by force, dealt a powerful blow.

Common usage: (1) finished, destroyed, injured, out of the picture; (2) lay low - keep out of sight, in hiding.

last lap - from racing; the last section of the course.

Common usage: near the finish, almost home, in sight of the goal.

lay odds - from gambling; to bet more than the opponent, for example, two to one.

Common usage: make a sporting bet, take a gamble, give a handicap.

lead a merry chase - from hunting with the hounds; difficult to follow, hard to catch.

Common usage: keep ahead of, keep guessing, match wits with.

lead the field - from hunting with hounds; out in front of the pack.

Common usage: to be out in front, ahead of the others, to win.

lead with one's chin - from pugilism; to guard oneself poorly and leave an opening for a knockout.

Common usage: to walk into trouble, invite opposition.

left-handed ideas - derivation remote, associated with many sports; the inference is that left-handedness is uncommon, awkward, unusual; thus, uncommon or unusual ideas.

Common usage: concepts that are unusual, unorthodox, radical.

left in the lurch - derived from card game of cribbage; to get

1 English Words and Their Background by G. H. McKnight, p.47.
less than 90 points by the time the opponent has won.
Common usage: left behind, left holding the bag, stranded,
left waiting, jilted (as in a love affair).

*left open* - from pugilism; without one’s guard up, unprotected.
Common usage: susceptible to attack, vulnerable, unprotected.

*lefty* - from many sports, especially baseball; one who uses his
left hand better than his right.
Common usage: a nickname for any left-handed person.

*let fly at* - from pugilism; to pitch into or strike the first blow.
Common usage: attack, compete with, throw at, aim at.

*let slip* - from hunting; to be too late, to let the quarry get away.
Common usage: (1) lose an opportunity, pass up, make a mistake.
(2) disclose a secret, drop a hint.

*ligh[t]* into - from pugilism; to attack.
Common usage: attack with spirit, sail into, argue with.

*lock horns* - from hunting; refers to action where two deer have
locked horns in a fight to the death.
Common usage: (1) to attack, compete with, argue with, disagree;
(2) be at a stalemate.

*long count* - from pugilism; slow counting (to ten) by the referee
after a knockout.
Common usage: (1) a slow decision, unfair practice; (2) com-
pletely knocked out, unable to move, as "out for the long count.

*long shot* - probably originated from marksmanship, now associated
with race track gambling; a horse not favored to win.

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Ferrey and Vandenbark, 1942, p. 631.
2 Ibid., p. 631.
3 Ibid., p. 631.
Common usage: a poor bet, an unlikely prospect, an unlikely prospect, not favored to win.

**long suit** - from card playing; a long run of cards in one suit, potentially powerful combination.

Common usage: one's greatest strength, an advantage, a strong point.

**lose track of** - from hunting; unable to pick up the trail.

Common usage: lose sight of, let get away, out of communication with.

**low blow** - from pugilism; a hit landed below the belt, a foul.

Common usage: unfair practice, under-handed play, illegal advantage.

**low deal** - from card games; to deal the cards from a position unable to be seen by the opponents.

Common usage: dishonest practice, under-handed work, a dirty trick.

**low man** - from poker; the man holding the poorest hand in the game.

Common usage: low scorer, last man, the loser, one who is out of the running.

**make a hit** - from baseball; to get a fair hit on a pitched ball, advancing the players on bases.

Common usage: to succeed, make a good impression.

**make a pass at** - from pugilism; to aim a blow.

Common usage: to attack, attempt to hit, try to touch.

**make an end run** - to carry the ball around the end of the line of scrimmage.

Common usage: use the indirect approach, give the run-around.
make sport of - from all sports; to make amusement of, be entertained by, enjoy.

Common usage: to make fun of, laugh at, ridicule.

major-league - from national baseball competition; the supposedly best teams in competition.

Common usage: top-notch, of professional caliber; "major-leaguer", one who is in the big-time, an important person.

major threat - from many sports; menacing offense or challenger.

Common usage: (1) an important menace, a dangerous situation; (2) strong opposition, an outstanding challenger.

make the fur fly - probably derived from hunting; attack by the dogs.

Common usage: attack ferociously, rough it up, compete vigorously, fight hard.

match that - from gambling at cards; to equal or better a card or hand.

Common usage: equal that, do as well or better, beat that combination, produce something that will compare.

minor league - from national baseball competition; teams second in importance to the major league.

Common usage: small time, of less importance; "minor leaguer", a small timer, one not quite up to the highest standard.

muff - from baseball; unskillful handling of the ball.

Common usage: to act clumsily or carelessly, miss an opportunity, fumble, lose a chance.

mug hunter - from many sports; one who participates mainly for the prize.

Common usage: a trophy seeker, a professional, one with an ul-
Muscle man - from weight lifting; one who has developed a rugged, muscular physique.

Common usage: a wrestler, an athlete, one who is very strong, one whose muscles are well developed.

Muscle moll - associated with female sports competition; a rugged, muscular girl or woman.

Common usage: a woman athlete, a lady wrestler.

Neck and neck - from horse racing; a close race, a contest where two or more entrants are running side by side at the finish.

Common usage: evenly matched, a dead heat, a tight race.

Never got to first base - from baseball; to fail to get a hit, to do poorly.

Common usage: unable to make progress, to fail, make a poor showing, never have a chance.

New deal - from card games; the beginning of a new hand, the passing or dealing of the cards after shuffling for a new hand.

Common usage: a fresh start, another chance, another try.

Nip and tuck - from competitive sports; a phrase signifying equality in a contest.

Common usage: a close contest, not a one-sided affair, anybody's match.

Nosed out - from horse racing; to have lost only by a nose length.

Common usage: barely defeated, lost by a slight margin, just missed out in a close contest.

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1 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and VandenBark, 1942, p. 694.
2 Ibid., p. 630.
not cricket - from the English game of the same name; not according to the rules.

Common usage: unfair, not according to the rules, not "according to Hoyle".

off base - from (a) child's game of tag where the base is a safe place where one cannot be tagged; (b) baseball where the runner may be put out if caught away from his base.

Common usage: not where one belongs, taking a chance, in a bad position, out of bounds, a deviation from the truth.

offside - probably derived from horseback riding; where the "off" (or right) side of a horse is the wrong side to mount; now associated chiefly with games similar to football where one is on the offside when moving too quickly through the forward line.

Common usage: on the wrong side, out of line, taking unfair advantage.

off to a poor start - from racing or track; to lag behind from the start, to encounter a difficulty at the beginning.

Common usage: a poor beginning, a poor chance of success.

old skate - probably derived from ice skating referring either to the article worn on the feet or to an old timer on skates.

Common usage: an old timer, a veteran, a wreck of former days.

on one's heels - from pugilism; unable to remain on one's toes.

Common usage: loosing one's grip, on one's way down, having bad luck, punch drunk.

on the ball - from baseball meaning the curve, drop, or "stuff"

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Berrey and VandenBark, 1942, p. 673.
applied to the ball by the pitcher's throw.

Common usage: in the groove, sharp, alert, meaning business.

on the bench - from competitive sports; relegated to the seat for substitute players.

Common usage: not participating, not in action, held in reserve.

on the ropes - from pugilism; to be cornered, forced back, or losing.

Common usage: up against it, hanging on, fighting a losing battle, down and out.

on the team - from many team sports; to be good enough to play with the team.

Common usage: make the grade, be accepted, a regular participant.

on the track of - from hunting with the hounds; to have a clue or see the track of the quarry.

Common usage: in pursuit of, in search of, near.

on the trail of - from hunting with the hounds; similar to "on the track of"; in pursuit of the quarry.

Common usage: following the scent of, in search of, near.

on thin ice - from ice skating; to be skating on ice that may not be thick enough to hold one's weight.

Common usage: in a dangerous position, heading for trouble, in doubtful territory, having insufficient evidence.

on to his curves - from baseball; the batter is able to distinguish the pitcher's technique.

Common usage: to know one's weaknesses or tricks, to have one's number, to be able to apprehend.

on top - possibly derived from climbing, esp. mountain climbing; to
reach the summit.
Common usage: to be victorious, in the lead, leading the field, sitting pretty, high scorer.

on your toes - from pugilism; to be ready to fight by being up on one's toes.

Common usage: ready to go, alert, clear thinking, eager.

out for blood - from dueling; determined to draw blood to settle a difference.

Common usage: determined, desperate, out for revenge, playing for keeps.

out-foxed - from hunting with the hounds; a maneuver as sly and clever as the fox's.

Common usage: out-witted, out-smarted, deceived, tricked.

out of bounds - from games played within certain boundaries; outside the playing area and, therefore, illegal.

Common usage: off limits, illegal, unfair.

out of the game - from many competitive sports; to withdraw from competition.

Common usage: unable to participate, eliminated, disqualified.

out of the running - from track or racing; so far behind that there is no chance to win.

Common usage: eliminated, defeated, unable to make an impression.

outsider - from racing; one who has to take to the outside of the track to pass another; one who must overcome difficulties.

Common usage: one not within a group or clique, a stranger,

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang by Perrey and WandenBark, 1942, p. 638.
one who doesn't "belong", one who must overcome a handicap.
over one's head - probably originated from ball games; out of reach,
above the height of one's head.
Common usage: unable to grasp the meaning, cannot understand.

palooka - from pugilism; a second-rate boxer.
Common usage: a second-rate player, a big bruise, a large,
rough, unintelligent person.

parry - from fencing; to fend off or ward off a thrust.
Common usage: maneuver, block, turn aside, repel, counter-thrust.
pass - (verb) from (a) football, hockey, etc., to transfer the ball to
another player; (b) card games, to decline a bidding opportunity
or playing privilege.
Common usage: (1) to throw, to handle; (2) to let go by; (3)
noun) a free ticket.

pass the buck - from card games, especially poker; to let someone
else take the responsibility of opening the pot.
Common usage: shift responsibility, disclaim fault, put the blame on someone else.
pawn - from chess; any one of the 16 men of least value.
Common usage: (nou) a thing or person deposited as security
in a bargain; (verb) to borrow money on something of value,
to cash in, exchange.
pennant winner - from baseball; the winning team within a league.
Common usage: an exceptional team or player, the champion, the
winner of a series, the best in competition.

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and VandenBark, 1942, p. 626.
2 English Words and Their Background, G.H. Mc Knight, p. 47.
pep it up – from many sports, especially baseball; a cry of encouragement.

Common usage: speed things up, play with more spirit, get going.

photo finish – from horse racing; a race so close that the winner must be determined by referring to the official camera placed at the finish line.

Common usage: a close decision or contest, neck and neck.

piker – from card playing; a petty gambler, one who will not pay his bets.

Common usage: a poor sport, a cheap person, one who will not foot his share of the bill.

pile into – from pugilism; to attack, light into.

Common usage: hit hard, rush into, compete hotly.

pinch hitter – from baseball; a good batter who is entered as a substitute at a crucial moment.

Common usage: a substitute, one who fills in at a crucial time.

pitch into – from pugilism; to attack, fight, light into.

Common usage: attack roughly, rush into, argue or fight with vigor, start work.

pitfall – from hunting; a snare, trap, deadfall.

Common usage: a trap, obstacle, hindrance, temptation.

play ball! – from baseball; cry to start the game, or to start the pitch.

Common usage: get started, act together, cooperate.

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and VandenBark, 1942, p. 631.
2 The American Language, H. L. Mencken, p. 191.
4 English Words and Their Background, G.H. McKnight, p. 46.
play boy - from recreation, one who seeks to be entertained without regard for costs.

Common usage: sportsman, pleasure seeker, glamour boy.

play for keeps - from the child's game of marbles; to play with the intention of keeping the marbles one is able to shoot out of the ring, instead of giving them back to their original owners.

Common usage: play hard, play for the reward, determined to win, down to business.

play over one's head - from many sports; to play well.

Common usage: to do better than expected, an unusual performance, unable to be duplicated.

play possum - from hunting; to pretend to be dead as does a possum when attacked.

Common usage: pretend inactivity, use strategy, feign weakness and then show strength.

play the field - from race track gambling; to bet on any horse.

Common usage: to chance, gamble on a wide range, try everything, not confined to specifics.

play to win - from many sports; to try hard to be victorious.

Common usage: do one's best, determined to make a good showing.

played his ace - from card games; to have used one's best card, or ace.

Common usage: give one's best, put forth a final effort, make a decisive move, make an important point in a discussion.

played out - from many sports; fatigued from play activity.

Common usage: fatigued, worn out, tired, all through.

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and VandenBark, 1942, p. 613.
2 Ibid., p. 632.
3 Ibid., p. 645.
played the deuce - from card games; to have used a low and ineffective card, or deuce.

Common usage: do poorly, bungle, act ineffectively, do the wrong thing, get into trouble.

plenty of rein - from horse racing; to let the horse run as fast as he can.

Common usage: let go without restraint, give freedom, not retard. 1

plow into - from pugilism; to attack aggressively.

Common usage: pitch into, attack vigorously, press hard, compete with, collide with, hit hard.

plug-ugly - from competitive sports in which the rough, husky player has an advantage, esp. football, wrestling; a large, rough player.

Common usage: strong, husky player, a ruffian, an unattractive person.

poker face - from card game of poker; one who does not let his facial expression betray his hand.

Common usage: one whose face has little expression, one who does not reveal his emotions in his face, one who seldom smiles.

poor sport - from sports and recreation in general; (a) entertainment that may seem unfair or unpleasant to others; (b) one who plays unfairly or is a poor loser.

Common usage: (1) poor entertainment; (2) an ill-natured person; (3) one who is a poor loser or winner.

pop up - from baseball; a poorly hit ball that goes high but not far.

Common usage: surprise action, unexpected play or move.

pot - from gambling at cards, especially poker; the stakes played for.

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and VandenBark, 1942, p. 631.
2 Ibid., p. 627.
Common usage: stakes, ante, winnings, prize money.

pot chaser - from many sports; one who participates mainly for the prize.

Common usage: a professional or money player, one who competes only for the reward.

pounce upon - from falconry; surprise attack, plunge, claw.

Common usage: attack suddenly, take by surprise, plunge upon.

powerhouse - from competitive sports in which strength has an advantage, especially, football, boxing, wrestling; a strong, powerful competitor.

Common usage: full of energy, loaded with power, having great potential strength.

prelim - from sports which have contests of lesser importance prior to the main attraction; a shortening of the word preliminary.

Common usage: a similar but less important contest preceding the main event.

pull a boner - from baseball; make an absurd mistake.

Common usage: to blunder, error, make a foolish mistake.

pull one's weight - from crew or shell racing; to pull on one's oars or do one's share.

Common usage: do one's share, help out, render service, use one's authority.

punch drunk - from pugilism; one who has been hit so often and hard that he is confused and dizzy.

Common usage: one who appears dazed, groggy, out of his senses, confused, not normal.

1 English Words and Their Background, G.H. McKnight, p.46.
2 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and Vandenbark,1942,p.632.
3 Slang, Today and Yesterday, Eric Partridge, p.237.
punch line - from pugilism; the direction of a quick thrust or blow.

Common usage: (1) direction of most effective blow; (2) the climax, high point, or most effective part of a speech.

punchy - a shortening of "punch drunk"; from pugilism; one who has been hit until he is confused and dizzy.

Common usage: groggy, dazed, confused, out of one's senses.

pushover - from many competitive sports, possibly boxing originally; a weak opponent, an easy victory.

Common usage: a sure thing, a cinch, an easy victory, offering little resistance or competition.

put one across - from baseball; to throw the ball over the plate.

Common usage: throw a strike, gain a point, fool someone, a sly move, a wise play.

put one over - from baseball; to throw a strike.

Common usage: to trick, fool, make a wise maneuver, gain a point.

put on ice - from many sports; to predetermine the outcome.

Common usage: assure victory, stay well ahead of, no doubt of the favorable outcome.

put over a fast one - from baseball; to throw a fast ball over the plate.

Common usage: to deceive, fool, trick, make a sly move.

put the squeeze on - from baseball; to use the "squeeze play" - with a runner on third and not more than one out, the batter bunts and the runner starts for home as soon as the pitcher begins

1 English Words and Their Background, G. H. McKnight, p. 477.
2 The American Language, H. L. Mencken, p. 191.
3 Ibid., p. 191.
4 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and VandenBark, 1948, p. 633.
5 Ibid., p. 632.
his throw.
Common usage: exert pressure, make things tough, tighten up
the offense, force action.

1 put up a scrap - from pugilism; compete aggressively.
Common usage: make an effort, show opposition, compete vigorously.

2 put up your dukes - from pugilism; raise one's hands to fight.
Common usage: prepare to defend yourself, get ready for action.

put your cards on the table - from card games; let everyone see your
hand, or keep everything above board.
Common usage: be honest, declare your intentions, explain yourself, be fair.

quarterback, quarterbacking - from football; the first man behind the
line on defense.
Common usage: the first man behind the line of scrimmage in foot-
ball; the man who call the plays or signals; the strategist.

quick on the trigger - from hunting; one who shoots before he actually
sees the game.
Common usage: quick tempered, impatient.

quitter - derived from cock fighting; a shy, timid fighter.
Common usage: one who lacks the fortitude to carry on a task.

racket - from the French "racquette"; a type of light bat with a net-
work stretched across the open frame.
Common usage: (1) a type of bat, as in tennis; (2) an illegal

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and VandenBark, 1942, p. 631.
2 Ibid., p. 669.
business practice (gangster cant).

rain check - from games played out of doors, especially baseball;
a ticket to be used at the next contest if the present one is
rained out.

Common usage: an invitation to return at a more favorable time,
a second chance, postponement.

fazzle-dazzle - from sports in which fancy, tricky play is deceptive
and confusing to the opposition, especially football and basketball.

Common usage: play or maneuver that is flashy, tricky, fancy.

ready for the wind-up - derived (a) from baseball; awaiting the pitcher's wind-up to throw the ball; (b) from pugilism; the last round.

Common usage: (1) alert, prepared, all set to act; (2) about to finish.

reclaim - from falconry; to redeem or recover.

Common usage: redeem, recover, regain possession.

red herring across the trail - from hunting with the hounds; the red herring is used to contaminate the scent.

Common usage: deceive, lay false clues, give the slip.

red tape - from professional sports requiring a long training period
prior to a contest, especially boxing; training period.

Common usage: routine, administrative regulations, confusing details, government procedure.

rest on one's laurels - from many sports; to rely on one's past ability and achievements.

Common usage: coast on one's reputation, rely on one's past.

1 English Words and Their Background, G. H. McKnight, p.46.
2 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and VandenBark, 1942, p.674.
rest on one's oars - from rowing; to pause for breath.

Common usage: take it easy, shirk responsibility, fail to do one's share.

retrieve - from hunting; the act of a dog who will bring in game shot down.

Common usage: recover, reclaim, make good.

ring the bell - probably derived originally from carnival game slang where to ring the bell often meant to win a prize.

Common usage: make a hit, score a success, do well.

ringer - from the game of horseshoes; to circle the peg with the horseshoe.

Common usage: (1) a likeness; (2) a substitute, an illegal player.

root - from many sports, especially baseball; to cheer for one's team.

Common usage: support, cheer for, encourage, pay tribute.

(rooter - a spectator who cheers for the team.)

rough it up - from pugilism; to hit hard.

Common usage: play rough, get tough, make trouble.

roughneck - from sports in which the strong, rough player has an advantage, especially football, soccer, rugby, etc.; a strong, husky player who uses rough tactics.

Common usage: one who is unnecessarily rough, a bully, one who does not know his own strength.

round robin - from league play in many sports; to participate against all the teams in the league.

Common usage: competition with everyone in rotation, tournament.

1 The American Language, H. L. Mencken, p. 191.
run counter - from hunting with the hounds; to run the wrong direction on the trail.

Common usage: go against, in the opposite direction, be contrary.

run for one's money - from horse racing; a good try to win the purse.

Common usage: a good showing under stiff competition, to do well, make things difficult for the opponents.

run in (to have a) - from sailing; to sail into, run as foul.

Common usage: get into trouble, quarrel, disagree.

runner-up - from racing or track; one in second place.

Common usage: second best, in second place, next to the winner.

running mate - from track and racing; one who runs with or helps, a team mate, partner, stable mate, one who works out with another.

Common usage: (1) companion, partner, team mate; (2) in politics, running together on the ticket.

rusty - from many sports; out of practice.

Common usage: out of practice, out of condition, not in shape.

sail into - from sailing; run into, run as foul.

Common usage: start action, light into, attack vigorously.

saved by the bell - from pugilism; prevented from being counted out by the intervention of the timer's bell ending the round.

Common usage: rescued from a predicament, given a second chance, a lucky break, saved by time.

scored - from many sports; to make a point for one's team or side.

1 English Words and Their Background, G. H. McKnight, p.46.
2 Ibid., p. 9.
4 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and VandenBerk, 1942, p.630.
5 Ibid., p. 631.
Common usage: to do well, gain a point, make good.

scrap – from pugilism; to attack or fight.

Common usage: attack, fight, put up an argument.

(scrapper – one who will fight, one who does not give up easily.)

screwball – from baseball; a type of curve ball that is hard to hit.

Common usage: (1) an oddly thrown ball, difficult to hit; (2) an odd person, an amusing individual.

scrimmage – from "scrimmage" in rugby football; in American football, a practice under game conditions.

Common usage: (1) to practice under game conditions; (2) a practice game; (3) a skirmish or row.

scrub – from many sports, especially football; a second rate player, one not good enough to make the first team.

Common usage: a second or third rate player, a novice, an insignificant beginner, one on the "scrub team".

see – from card game of poker; to "call" or "pay" to look at another's hand at the end of the betting, as, "I'll see you".

Common usage: make certain, investigate, challenge.

sell out – from gambling; not keep faith with, take information to the opponents for a reward.

Common usage: (1) (verb) to doublecross, inform on, play false; (2) (noun) a success marked by the sale of all tickets.

sent to the showers – from team sports, especially baseball; to have been removed from the game.

Common usage: dismissed, taken out of action, forced to quit.

set 'em up in the other alley – from bowling; an order indicating

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and VandenBark, 1942, p. 649.
4 The American Language, H. L. Mencken, p. 191.
sagerness to set up the pins in the next alley and prepare for another game.

Common usage: raring to go, leading on the opponents, a challenge for stiffer competition.

settle the score - from many competitive sports; to even the score with a competitor.

Common usage: to retaliate, get even, seek revenge for a past defeat, avenge a wrong.

set up - (noun) from many competitive sports; an easy contest.

Common usage: a sure thing, an easy victory, a pushover.

seventh inning stretch - from baseball; intermission before the seventh inning when the spectators stand up to stretch.

Common usage: a breather, a rest period, time to relax.

sewed up - from many sports; assured of the outcome.

Common usage: assured of the outcome, in the bag.

shadowboxing - from pugilism; practice boxing without an opponent.

Common usage: (1) imaginary sparring, warming up; (2) dodging the issue.

shag - from hunting with the hounds; to give chase.

Common usage: (1) to give chase; (2) to catch a ball quickly as in baseball; (3) a dance step.

shiner - from pugilism; a black eye.

Common usage: a black eye.

shoot the works - from gambling, probably at dice; to take a chance on all the money previously won.

Common usage: give all, use all resources, don't spare expense.

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1 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and VandenBark, 1942, p.636.
2 The American Language, H. L. Mencken, p. 562.
4 Ibid., p.632.
shot in the dark - from hunting or shooting; to shoot at something one cannot see; (b) from gambling; taking a long chance.

Common usage: a blind attempt, a long chance.

show down - from the card game of poker; the show of hands at the end of the betting.

Common usage: the settlement, the matching of points, the end, the final action, the climax.

show fight - from cock fighting; a cock that is scrappy, full of fight.

Common usage: be unafraid, display spirit, give plenty of opposition.

show one's hand - from card games; let other players see one's cards.

Common usage: acknowledge conditions, make known one's purpose, indicate intentions.

shut out - from baseball; used as both noun and verb, to defeat the opposing team without letting them score.

Common usage: hold scoreless, subdue completely, "whitewash!"

side step - from pugilism; to step to one side letting a blow go by.

Common usage: avoid, dodge, evade.

skate it - from ice skating; to win easily.

Common usage: win easily, accomplish without pressure, hurry.

skip out - to move by light, dancing motion; to slip away.

Common usage: evade, slip away, run out on, steal away.

slam the pill - from baseball; to hit the ball hard.

Common usage: to hit a ball hard, to slug.

1 The American Language by H. L. Mencken, p. 191.
2 English Words and Their Background by G. H. McKnight, p.46.
3 Ibid., p. 47.
slap-happy - from pugilism; one who has been hit so many times that he appears confused, not normal.

Common usage: foolish, punch drunk, dizzy, confused.

sleeper - from gambling; an open bet; in bowling - one pin directly behind another so that it can scarcely be seen.

Common usage: (1) an open bet, chance, favored odds; (2) something that can't be seen, that is not obvious.

slip one over - from baseball; to throw a strike over the plate when least expected by the batter.

Common usage: take by surprise, deceive, a shrewd act.

slow starter - from track; one who begins slowly and finished with a burst of speed.

Common usage: one who develops slowly, one who is slow but dependable.

slug fest - from pugilism; a match in which there is a heavy exchange of blows.

Common usage: (1) a brawl, plenty of action; (2) good hitting in baseball, a field day.

slugger - from pugilism; one who hits hard.

Common usage: a hard hitter (as in baseball), a tough fighter.

smooth sailing - from sail boating; encountering quiet waters.

Common usage: easy going, without trouble, everything under control, an easy time ahead.

sneak play - probably from football; an unexpected, tricky play.

Common usage: an unexpected act, a tricky maneuver, an attempt to fool the opponents.

2 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and VandenBark, 1942, p. 632.
3 Ibid., p. 626.
4 The American Language by H. L. Mencken, p. 562.
sock - from pugilism; to hit or strike a blow.

Common usage: strike a blow, hit hard, punch, slap.

sock in the mush - from pugilism; a hit in the face.

Common usage: a blow in the face or mouth.

sock in the puss - from pugilism; a hit in the face.

Common usage: a blow in the face or mouth.

softy - from many sports; one who is out of condition.

Common usage: a weakling, an easy mark, one who cannot "take it", one who gives way to emotion.

something up one's sleeve - from card playing; a dishonest trick of hiding one or more cards to be used at a strategic moment.

Common usage: (1) trickery, something held back; (2) a forthcoming surprise, an idea in reserve.

southpaw - from baseball; a left-handed player.

Common usage: a left-handed person.

spiked - from baseball; injured by the spikes on baseball shoes.

Common usage: put out of commission, injured, disabled, rendered useless, contaminated.

sport - from play and recreation in general; that which is amusing, diverting, entertaining, especially an outdoor pastime.

Common usage: (1) (noun) amusement, games, pastime; (2) a good fellow, a fair player, a gambler; (3) (verb) to play around, flaunt, show off.

sport fest - from sports journalism; a meet or field day.

Common usage: a meet or field day with many teams participat-

1 English Words and Their Background by G. H. McKnight, p. 47.
2 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and VandenBark, 1942, p. 670.
3 Ibid., p. 672.
4 Ibid., p. 627.
ing, a good time for all.

sporting chance - probably from gambling; a fair betting opportunity, even odds.

Common usage: an even break, a fair chance.

sport light - from sports journalism; a person of importance in the sports world.

Common usage: one who is figuring in the sports news, one who is in the public eye, in the lime light.

spread eagle - an English term derived from pugilism; to knock flat on one's back.

Common usage: knock flat on one's back, fall prostrate, spread out.

square off - from pugilism; to assume a boxing attitude.

Common usage: (1) get set; (2) clarify a point, settle an issue.

square shooter - probably from hunting or the rifle range; a straight shooter.

Common usage: a man of honor, a clean sportsman, a man of his word.

squeeze play - from baseball; maneuver used in situation where there is not more than one out for the side; with a man on third, the batter bunts and the runner starts for home as soon as the pitcher begins his throw.

Common usage: a forced play, a tight situation, exertion of pressure, a clever maneuver.

stable worn - from horse racing; worn out, over-practiced.

Common usage: worn out, over-trained, over-practiced.

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and VandenBark, 1942, p. 626.
2 Slang, Today and Yesterday by Eric Partridge, p. 237.
stalemate - from chess; the position of the king when, though not in check, he cannot move without being put in check and no other piece can be moved.

Common usage: at a standstill, in check, unable to progress.

stand pat - from card game of poker; not enter in the betting.

Common usage: stand one's ground, stick to one's point, be firm, resolute.

stepped into that one - from pugilism; to step into a blow, to attack and get the worst of it.

Common usage: be taken unawares, walk into trouble without looking, stick one's neck out, leave oneself open to attack.

strike out - from baseball; to take three strikes without getting a hit.

Common usage: fail to score, miss completely, be unsuccessful.

strut one's stuff - from cock fighting; a cock who walks or acts proudly.

Common usage: to walk or act proudly, show off, display one's skill.

stuff on the ball - from baseball; to pitch the ball in a manner difficult to hit, as a curve, drop, etc.

Common usage: skill, ability, talent.

stymie - from golf; position on the putting green when one ball lies between the other and the cup, or hole.

Common usage: progress impeded, checked, blocked; unable to proceed farther.

2 English Words and Their Background by G. H. McKnight, p.47.
3 The American Language by H. L. Mencken, p. 191.
4 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and VandenBark, 1942, p.632.
5 Ibid., p. 632.
sub - from team sports; an abbreviation of "substitute" player.

Common usage: one who takes another's place, second stringer.

sudden death - from basketball; in the last overtime period of a tie game, the game is ended as soon as one side scores two points and this is referred to as "sudden death".

Common usage: an overtime period, a climactic ending, a shock.

Sunday widow - from golf; the wife of one who devotes his Sundays to playing golf.

Common usage: a golf widow, the wife of any hobby enthusiast who devotes his Sundays to his recreation.

sure thing - from gambling; a certain chance of winning.

Common usage: an certainty, an easy bet, no chance of losing.

tackle that - from football, to seize and hold or stop an opponent.

Common usage: undertake, pitch into, set to work.

tagged - from the child's game of tag; to be touched or caused to be "it".

Common usage: (1) touched, caught, stopped, eliminated, named;
(2) followed closely.

tailender - from many sports; to come in last.

Common usage: one who is usually behind or "bringing up the rear", the loser.

take a breather - from baseball; to rest.

Common usage: time out, a rest period, get one's wind back, something easily accomplished.

1 Slang, Today and Yesterday by Eric Partridge, p.237.
2 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and VandenBark,1942,p.676.
3 The American Language by H. L. Mencken, p.248.
take a crack at – from pugilism; to hit or attack.

Common usage: compete with, make a try, attempt.

2 take a dive – from pugilism; to lose by prearrangement, to agree to allow the opponent to knock oneself out.

Common usage: to lose by prearrangement, accept a bribe, not do one's best, lay down on the job.

3 take a plunge – from falconry; to dive upon.

Common usage: (1) dive upon, make an attack; (2) put money into, speculate, gamble.

take a shot at – probably derived from marksmanship originally; to try to hit.

Common usage: make a try, make a stab at, an attempt; make a guess.

4 take it – from pugilism; able to endure rough treatment.

Common usage: endure punishment, stand up under adverse conditions, have resistance.

5 take on – from pugilism; to compete with.

Common usage: compete with, play against, challenge, tackle.

take out(or off) – probably from track or running; to hasten on one's way.

Common usage: depart, get away quickly, start, light cut.

take over the hurdles – from track; to lead over the obstacles in a hurdle race.

Common usage: defeat, give trouble, lead a merry chase.

7 take the count – from pugilism; to be knocked down and unable to

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and VandenBark, 1942, p. 631.
2 Ibid., p. 633.
3 English Words and Their Background by G. H. McKnight, p. 9.
5 Ibid., p. 631.
6 Ibid., p. 635.
rise before the count of ten.
Common usage: to be defeated, washed up, through, knocked down.

1 take the sap out - from pugilism; to beat up.
Common usage: take the pep out of, take the starch out of, deflate, win decisively.

tally ho - from hunting with the hounds; a huntsman's halloo.
Common usage: yoicks, halloo; a greeting or call when sight- ing friends.

2 team work - from many team sports (possibly associated originally with driving a team of horses); working together.
Common usage: cooperation, coordination, working toward the same end.

tear into - from pugilism; to compete with, attack vigorously.
Common usage: rough it up, go after with all one's might, attack vigorously, battle or argue.

3 tee off - from golf; the act of starting the play at each hole.
Common usage: get a good start, begin, get going.

ten strike - from ten pins or bowling; to knock down all the pins with the first attempt.
Common usage: to do well, score a perfect hit, make a clean sweep, a fine job.

4 the deuce you say - from card games; refers to the deuce or lowest, most insignificant card.
Common usage: you don't really mean it, you're kidding, no fooling, of questionable importance.

the die is cast - from the game of dice; the dice have been thrown.

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and VandenBark, 1942, p. 673.
2 Ibid., p. 631.
3 English Words and Their Background by G. H. McKnight, p. 47.
4 Ibid., p. 47.
Common usage: the course has been decided, no turning back, too late to change, the decisive step has been taken.

1 the old one-two - from pugilism; to hit with one hand and follow up with the other.

Common usage: the old routine, the "works", rough action, move in for a quick finish.

2 the real McCoy - from pugilism; attributed to a legend concerning Kid McCoy, welterweight champion of the world, 1898-1900.

Common usage: the real thing, genuine, undisputed, authentic.

three of a kind - from poker; three cards of the same value, as three deuces, three Jacks, etc.

Common usage: of a similar nature, alike, birds of a feather, no appreciable difference, resembling each other.

three strikes and out - from baseball; an unsuccessful turn at bat, to have three strikes called without getting a hit.

Common usage: to fail, miss one's chances, be finished, out of action.

three-two count - from baseball; three balls and two strikes called against the batter, the next throw will be the last chance to score.

Common usage: in a tight spot, a critical situation, the last chance coming up, now or never.

throw a curve - from baseball; to throw a ball which curves in flight, one difficult to hit.

Common usage: pull a fast or tricky maneuver, a surprise play, take unawares, make things difficult.

throw in the towel - from pugilism; the act of a boxer's seconds

1 The American Language by H. L. Mencken, p. 562.
2 Ibid., p. 580.
when they decide he is unable to continue the match.

Common usage: give up, acknowledge defeat, concede the issue.

\textit{throw off the scent} - from hunting with the hounds; to give the

slip, elude.

Common usage: elude, deceive, lead astray, throw off the track.

\textit{thrust} - from fencing; to lunge at.

Common usage: lunge at, jab, force upon.

\textit{thumbs up, thumbs down} - traced to the days of Roman gladiators

when approval was indicated by "thumbs up" and disapproval by

"thumbs down"; used today in a common child's game.

Common usage: for and against, approval or disapproval.

\textit{title holder} - from pugilism; the champion.

Common usage: champion, the winner, the best in one's class.

\textit{toe the mark} - from track; the act of placing the toe on the start-

ing mark or line.

Common usage: follow instructions, keep up to standard, conform to strict rule, be on good behavior.

\textit{toe-to-toe} - from pugilism; when two boxers stand their ground and exchange blows.

Common usage: evenly matched, at close quarters, give and take.

\textit{take the bit in one's teeth} - probably derived from horsemanship;

a horse insensitive to the bit is not easily halted.

Common usage: be determined, forge ahead against opposition,

tackle the situation, take things in hand.

\textit{top, to} - from golf; to strike the ball above the center giving it

1 English Words and Their Background by G. H. McKnight, p.9.
2 Ibid., p. 46.
3 The American Language by H. L. Mencken, p. 562.
4 The American Thesaurua of Slang, Barrey and VandenKark,1942,p.669.
5 Ibid., p. 630.
a forward spin.
Common usage: to hit imperfectly, above center.

tops - from many sports; the best in the field, well-trained.
Common usage: in good condition, the very best in competition, none better.

toss in the sponge - from pugilism; similar to "throw in the towel";
the act of throwing a sponge from the water bucket into the ring to indicate a boxer’s inability to continue the match.
Common usage: give up, call quits, surrender, acknowledge defeat.

toss up - from gambling; the flipping or tossing of a coin to determine a point.
Common usage: an even chance, a 50-50 proposition, one is as good as the other.

touche - derived from fencing; from the French word meaning "touch", a cry to indicate body contact with the foil.
Common usage: (1) on guard, prepare; (2) to score a point, outwit another in conversation.

tough customer - from pugilism; a rough contender.
Common usage: a formidable opponent, a rough character, one hard to deal with, one difficult to convince.

tough hurdle - from track; a difficult obstacle in a hurdle race.
Common usage: a problem, something difficult to overcome, stiff opposition, a hardship.

tough luck - from gambling; the result of chance not in one’s favor.
Common usage: ill fortune, a bad break, not working out as expected, not in one’s favor.

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and Vandenberg, 1942, p. 636.
2 Ibid., p. 627.
1 touted - from the race track; a prediction on a horse, favored to win.
   Common usage: favored to win, publicized, highly rated, pre-contest dope.

2 triple-header - from professional sports competition; a three event program.
   Common usage: three events for the price of one, three like events in succession.

tripped up - from track; to catch one's toe.
   Common usage: (1) to have bungled, erred, failed, be caught accidentally; (2) be caught in an untruth.

true to form - from many sports; the correct form prescribed for participation; in gambling, according to prediction.
   Common usage: as usual, without error, according to prediction.

trump - from card games in which a card is turned face up after dealing, indicating "trump" or the suit of most value; also from games in which trump is declared by the bidding.
   Common usage: (1) (noun) thing of greatest value, master strategy; (2) (verb) use one's best strategy, maneuver skillfully, go one better than the opponents.

trump card - from card games in which the suit of most value is determined by bidding or by turning a card face up after the dealing.
   Common usage: key card, master stroke, strong point, reserve strength.

try - (noun) derived from rugby football; a score of three points made by grounding the ball on or behind the opponents' goal.

1 English Words and Their Background by G. H. McKnight, p.47.
2 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and VandenBark, 1942, p.631.
Common usage: an attempt, experiment, subject to trial.

turn the trick - from card games; to turn up trumps after dealing.
Common usage: score a success, win a point, accomplish one's purpose.

turn up trumps - from card games; the act of indicating the suit of most value by turning a card face up after dealing.
Common usage: take an advantage, make the most of the situation, be in control of things.

two strikes - from baseball; two strikes have been called and only one chance remains for the batter to get a hit.
Common usage: in a tight spot, at a disadvantage, theoretically only one more chance.

underdog - from many sports, especially wrestling; the person underneath in a contest, the one who is at a disadvantage and is unlikely to win.
Common usage: not favored to win, at a disadvantage.

under-handed - (a) from gambling; an act of trickery in play; (b) from baseball, cricket, etc.; a method of throwing the ball with the palm upward and the arm below the shoulder.
Common usage: cunning, crooked, crafty, unfair.

under par - from golf; to play better than the standard score set for a course, or better than average.
Common usage: (1) to do well; (2) in relation to health - to feel below average.

unkink - from many sports, especially track; to exercise the mus-

2 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and VandenBark, 1942, p. 630.
cless.
Common usage: limber up, warm up, loosen up.

up and at 'em — probably derived from boxing; get going.
Common usage: get going, give all you have, show your ability.

up the ante — from poker; to raise the stakes.
Common usage: bet higher, raise the stakes, increase the bid.

up to snuff — probably derived originally from the ability to take
snuff; now associated with sports in the sense of being in
condition.
Common usage: in good condition, competent, up to par, up to
standard.

upset the dope — from gambling and horse racing; a term referring
to an unexpected victory which refutes the pre-race betting
information on the probable winner.

vie with — from card playing; to contend with, to wager.
Common usage: compete with, contend against.

wade into — originally from swimming or wading, now associated with
pugilism; to move or step into the opponent vigorously.
Common usage: proceed vigorously, act without hesitation, give
all.

walk away — from horse racing; the winning of a race by a horse
that easily out-distances the others.

1 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and VandenBark, 1942, p. 630.
2 Ibid., p. 633.
3 English Words and Their Background, G. H. McKnight, p. 47
Common usage: an easy win, a complete victory, little competition.

walk it - derived (a) from track; refers to situation where the winner of a running race is so far ahead of the others that he could walk to victory; (b) from baseball; to be walked to first base on pitched balls.

Common usage: (1) win easily; (2) take it easy.

walk-over - from horse racing; the going over a course by a horse that is the only starter.

Common usage: easy victory, little or no competition.

warm up, to - from many sports; the period of unlimbering or exercising before entering a contest.

Common usage: act of getting ready, to limber up, prepare for, become interested in.

weak sister - from pugilism; one who appears to be a weakling or push-over; sometimes one who appears effeminate, a weak contestant.

Common usage: a weakling, one not having determination, one who will not uphold certain principles, a poor player, one who can't keep up the pace.

well-heeled - from cock fighting; a cock that has good potential for the fight.

Common usage: well equipped, having plenty of money.

welsh - from racing; the action of a bookmaker who absconds without paying off bets.

1 Slang, Today and Yesterday by Eric Partridge, p. 242.
2 Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 14th ed., Merriam.
3 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Perrey and VandenBark, p. 626.
4 English Words and Their Background by G. H. McKnight, p. 47.
5 Ibid., p. 47.
Common usage: to cheat by avoiding payment, not to come through as expected, to back out.

whizbang - associated originally with the name of a type of fireworks; in sports, a player with speed and agility.

Common usage: a good player, one who is alert and capable, flashy, highly skilled.

wind-up - derived (a) from baseball, the movements beginning the pitch of the ball or the conclusion of the preparation to pitch; (b) from pugilism, the last round.

Common usage: (1) ready to deliver, tense, poised for action; (2) the end, the finish.

win, place, or show - from horse racing; the three finish positions which pay off in the betting.

Common usage: to finish competition in the money, in the lead, recognition for effort put forth.

within an ace of - from card playing; to come near winning, to lack an ace of holding a winning hand.

Common usage: come near, come close to, within one point of.

win by a healthy margin - from many sports; to be comfortably far ahead of the loser so that no extra effort need be exerted.

Common usage: to win easily, by a large lead, a walkaway.

win by a nose - from horse racing; a close race where the winner finishes only a nose length ahead of the horse in second place.

Common usage: a close contest, a close decision, to barely win.

win by an eyelash - from racing; a contest so close that there would

2 The American Thesaurus of Slang, Berrey and VandenBark, p.626.
3 The American Language by H. L. Mencken, p. 248.
4 English Words and Their Background by G. H. McKnight, p.47
be no more than a hair's difference in the finish.
Common usage: a close contest, a photo-finish.

Workout - from many sports; a period of exercise and/or practice.
Common usage: period of practice, exercise, training.

Yellow streak - from cock fighting; referring to a breed of cocks showing a yellow streak in the feathers.
Common usage: cowardly, no intestinal fortitude, no courage.

Yoicks! - from fox hunting; a cry of the chase to encourage the hounds.
Common usage: an exclamation of excitement, an expression of surprise.

Zero in - from marksmanship; the act of setting one's rifle sights accurately.
Common usage: to be sure of, aim accurately, sight in, get the range, get on the target.

1 English Words and Their Background by G. H. McKnight, p. 47.
2 Slang, Today and Tomorrow by Eric Partridge, p. 237.
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