

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English: What is the meaning and origin of 'throw in the sponge'?

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What is the meaning and origin of 'throw in the sponge'?

(V. Sunderam, Vellore)

When you 'throw in the sponge', you admit defeat and decide to give up what you have been doing. You realise that you will not succeed in what you are attempting to do. It is also possible to say, 'throw in the towel'.

*The odds are stacked against us, but I'm not ready to throw in the sponge as yet.

*I have a feeling that two of the candidates are ready to throw in the sponge.

This idiom, which is mostly used in informal contexts, comes from the world of boxing. In the past, trainers and managers used a sponge to wipe the sweat off a boxer's face and body. If during a bout, a manager found that his boxer was taking too much of a beating, he ended the fight by throwing the sponge into the ring. This act was a signal to the referee that the manager was conceding.

What is the difference between 'gamesmanship' and 'sportsmanship'?

(J. Nitya, Kurnool)

Both refer to the way someone plays a game. Of the two, 'gamesmanship' has a negative connotation. For some people, winning is all that matters; they don't really care about the methods they use to beat an opponent. They may not break the existing rules of the game, but they are willing to bend them in order to achieve their goal. When you accuse someone of gamesmanship, you are saying that he has used questionable methods to win a game.

In basketball, in order to draw a foul, some players intentionally fall down even though they haven't been touched by anyone from the opposing team. In cricket, fielders sledge in order to get inside a batsman's head, and a tennis player, in order keep his opponent waiting, fakes an injury at a critical moment in a match – all these are examples of gamesmanship. Players employ these tactics to gain a psychological advantage. The term 'gamesmanship' comes from the title of Stephen Potter's book 'The Theory and Practice of Gamesmanship (or the Art of

Winning Games Without Actually Cheating). 'Sportsmanship', on the other hand, has a positive connotation. In this case, you show respect to your opponent, and play the game by the rules; though winning is important, you do not bend the rules to beat your opponent. The attempt here is to win fair and square. There is very little 'sportsmanship' in today's sports.

*During the recent Australian Open, Nadal was accused of gamesmanship.

*Edberg was admired for his sportsmanship.

How is the word 'roly-poly' pronounced?

(Mukesh, Kanpur)

The 'rol' and 'pol' sound like the words 'roll' and 'poll'; the following 'y' in both words sounds like the 'i' in 'bit', 'kit' and 'sit'. The word is pronounced 'roll-i POLL-I' with the stress on the first syllable of 'poly'. It is mostly used in informal contexts to refer to a person who is rather short and plump. The use of the word suggests that the person is 'round' in appearance.

*The roly-poly toddler fell a few times before reaching his mother.

*Uma is married to a roly-poly man with little or no intelligence.

"When you are as great as I am, it is hard to be humble." – **Muhammad Ali**

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