

Catch Word #223 – Blow-by-blow

Episode description

Are you a sports fan? What is your favourite sport to watch? In this Catch Word episode, Andrew and Jeremy introduce some useful phrases and idioms that are often heard at sporting events and that can also be used in a variety of other situations.

Fun fact

Boxing was first introduced in ancient Greece. It became an event in the Olympic Games in 688 BC.

Expressions included in the study guide

- The nitty-gritty
- Down for the count
- Knock out
- To pass out
- Blow-by-blow
- Back in the day



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Hello, everyone. My name is Andrew.

Jeremy: And my name is Jeremy.

Andrew: And you are listening to Culips.

Andrew: You are listening to Catch Word, the Culips series where we teach you natural English vocabulary that will help you sound like an English native speaker and help you understand conversations that you have with English speakers. And I am joined by my cohost today, Jeremy. Jeremy, hello.

Jeremy: Hey, Andrew. Thanks for calling me today.

Andrew: It's my pleasure. And, Jeremy, we have two very useful and handy English idioms to teach to all of our listeners today that actually have their origin in boxing, the sport boxing. They are boxing idioms. Are you a boxing fan by any chance, Jeremy?

Jeremy: Not really. I'm not really a fan of boxing. However, I have seen all the Rocky movies. So I do know a bit about boxing from these movies. But with these expressions and many others, a lot of expressions in North American English come from sports.

Andrew: So many.

Jeremy: Actually, in English in general, too, but I know of many in North America that come from baseball, boxing, racing, horse racing, basketball, too.

Andrew: Yes, lots of sports-related idioms. And we're gonna talk about a couple today that come from boxing. But just before we get into **the nitty-gritty** of this episode, everyone, I do want to let you know that there is a study guide available for this episode on our website, Culips.com. So if you'd like to study along with the guide while you listen to Jeremy and I here today, then just head on over to Culips.com and you can download the study guide.

Andrew: Jeremy, would you like to introduce our first expressions today?

Jeremy: Sure. So our first expression for this episode is **down for the count, down for the count**.

Andrew: Down for the count.

Jeremy: **Down for the count.** Now, for anyone who has never seen a boxing match before, we can explain this situation. So in boxing, when two people are punching each other in the face, one of them will fall down.

Andrew: Eventually.

Jeremy: And at some point, one of them will fall down. If they fall down, the referee will start counting, 1, 2, 3. And if the boxer stays down for 8 seconds, then the match is over. The fight is finished and that fighter loses. So when we say that someone is down for the count, it means that they are out of energy or are not able to participate in normal activities.

Andrew: Yeah, you could imagine, like, a boxer that's just been hit in the head and he's kind of confused and exhausted and unable to go through life regularly, right? He's been **knocked out**. So if a person is down for the count, and it's kind of similar, maybe they're really sick or really exhausted or really tired, and because of this, they can't go about their day-to-day life in a regular way.

Jeremy: So I think if we listen to our example situations here, it will help our listeners to understand. So let's listen to our first example.

Andrew: Let's do it.

Friend 1: How was your night last night?

Friend 2: Man, as soon as I got home, I was **down for the count**. I was so tired after work.

Friend 1: Yeah, me too. I **passed out** right after dinner.

Andrew: So in this example, two friends are talking about their evening that they had last night. And both of them were really, really tired. One was **down for the count** as soon as he got home, so that means he was just completely exhausted and went to bed as soon as he got home. And the other one **passed out** right after dinner. And **passed out** can mean two things. It can mean sleeping, like sleeping very deeply. And it can also mean to lose consciousness or to faint. But in this context, it just means to fall asleep. So one friend was **down for the count**, one friend **passed out**. And I guess that means they worked really hard yesterday.

Jeremy: Just like a boxer. If a boxer is **down for the count**, they need to get back up to continue the fight. If they don't get up, then they don't have enough energy to continue. So in this example, **down for the count** means that he could not get up.

Andrew: Yeah, you could almost imagine the boxer as being the work day. And the work day hit these guys so hard that it **knocked them out** and they had to go to sleep to recover.

Jeremy: Exactly. They could not be get back up.

Andrew: Exactly, yes.

Jeremy: So let's look at the next example.

Andrew: Let's do it.

Friend 1: I'm going to see a movie later, wanna come?

Friend 2: I'd like to but, oh, I'm **down for the count** with a cold. I think I'm just gonna rest at home today.

Friend 1: Oh, no worries, man. Well, feel better.

Jeremy: In this example, someone said that he cannot go to see a movie because he is **down for the count** with a cold, meaning that the cold has made him so tired that he cannot get up to go outside.

Andrew: Very good. Well, let's move on to our second boxing idiom. And it is a **blow-by-blow** account, blow, B-L-O-W. Here, blow meaning punch or impact. This is another word for a punch, it doesn't mean blowing oxygen or blowing wind. It means a punch or a hit or an impact. So a punch-by-punch account or a **blow-by-blow** account.

Jeremy: So the **blow-by-blow** account, or sometimes we just say the **blow-by-blow**. I've heard both, or play-by-play. I've also heard that one before. These are sports references, and they reference TV commentators or radio commentators who give the **blow-by-blow** account with their words. For example, if you are listening to a radio commentator talk about a fight, obviously you cannot see what is going on. So the radio commentator will say, "And he hits him with a right hook and then left jab and another jab." And when the commentator is doing this, he is giving you the **blow-by-blow**, explaining each punch, essentially.

Andrew: And I think you hit the nail right on the head when you talked about radio commentators, Jeremy, because this expression developed when people would actually tune in to listen to fights on the radio. I think these days probably everybody just watches them on TV. I don't even know if you could listen to them on the radio if you wanted to. But **back in the day**, everyone had to listen to the radio if they wanted to follow a boxing match. So this is the origin of this expression, but these days we use it even outside of sports. We can use it in many different contexts to mean a very detailed description, right? A **blow-by-blow** account, you could think of it as being, like, a detail-by-detail account.

Jeremy: Or a scene-by-scene.

Andrew: Scene-by-scene. Yeah, exactly. So if anyone is telling you a story and it has so many details, and it's taking forever to explain, you could just say, like, hey, man, I don't need a **blow-by-blow** account, just get to the main point.

Jeremy: Or if I'm going to tell you a very detailed story about something, I'll say, OK, do you want the **blow-by-blow**?

Andrew: Right, exactly. Do you want the long, detailed version or do you just want the main summary? Yeah. All right.

Andrew: So, Jeremy, I think we can move on to some example conversations with this expression, **blow-by-blow** account.

Jeremy: Let's do it.

Friend 1: I can't believe you get to go to the Super Bowl.

Friend 2: I'm just lucky my brother was able to score tickets.

Friend 1: When you get back, I want a **blow-by-blow** account, OK?

Friend 2: Why don't you just watch it on TV?

Friend 1: I will, of course, but I want to know everything.

Friend 2: All right, man, I'll call you when I'm back.

Andrew: In this example, we heard about a friend who wants a **blow-by-blow** account from his buddy of the Super Bowl, because his friend will get to go to the Super Bowl and see the most important football game in the USA in real life. And so, you know, there's a difference between seeing a game in real life and watching it on TV. So when the two friends get back together, they will go over all of the details together, and he'll get that **blow-by-blow** account that he wants.

Jeremy: All right, let's move on to the second example situation for this expression.

Andrew: OK.

Friend 1: How was your date last night?

Friend 2: It was good.

Friend 1: Yeah, where'd you go?

Friend 2: We had sushi.

Friend 1: What did you do after?

Friend 2: We went bowling.

Friend 1: Nice. And what did you wear?

Friend 2: Nothing special, you know, just my regular office clothes.

Friend 1: Oh, and what did she wear?

Friend 2: Come on, dude, can you stop prying? What do you want, a **blow-by-blow** account of the whole night or something?

Jeremy: In this example, two friends are talking about one of their dates. One friend is prying, meaning he is asking lots of detailed questions. The other friend uses the expression a **blow-by-blow** account to mean the very detailed or overly detailed version of the story. So the **blow-by-blow** account of his date is synonymous with the overly detailed version of the story. So the word account here kind of means story. It means someone's personal memory of a story.

Andrew: That's right. I think that's how we can think of this expression, a **blow-by-blow** account. It's just a detailed story with every detail included, there's nothing that has been left out at all. And so, yeah, sometimes, you know, people pry, they want a **blow-by-blow** account of personal things like a date or some other kind of personal experience. And you have to be careful in this kind of situation that you don't upset who you're talking to by, you know, asking for too many personal details.

Jeremy: With these expressions and many others, my advice is to wait until you hear someone else use these expressions before you try to use it yourself. So don't use these expressions right away. Just look out for them and try to notice other people using them.

Andrew: I think that is a great idea. And I guess that's maybe the second step in mastering these English idioms. First, you need to know they exist. So now you know that these English expressions exist and that English speakers use them and talk like this. The next step is that you want to keep your ears open, and hear them being used by English speakers in real life or on music or TV. And then after that, you can try and use them out in your own speaking. But it's important to hear them a lot first. And then the final step is to incorporate them into your own speech, because I would argue that idioms are the most difficult thing to master. They're different than other vocabulary and other words. So hearing lots of examples of them and how English speakers use them before you use them in your own English is a smart and wise decision, I think.

Jeremy: I agree. This is how it has been for me with my language learning, as well. And I'm sure the same is true for you, Andrew. So this is our advice, as fellow language learners.

Andrew: Indeed.

Andrew: All right, everyone. Well, thanks for tuning in to us today. We hope that you enjoyed this episode and that you learned a lot. Please follow us on social media if you want to stay up to date with Culips. We are on all of the major platforms, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. And once again, the study guide for this episode is available on our website and we recommend that you give it a download and check it out. So please do that. And, finally, if you enjoy Culips and if you study with us often and if you learn a lot with us, then we would really appreciate your support. You can support us by leaving us a five-star rating and a nice review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. And also, of course, signing up to become a paid Culips member on our website, Culips.com, goes a long way to support us, as well.

Andrew: That is it for us today. But we'll be back soon with another brand-new Culips episode and we'll catch you then. Bye.

Jeremy: Bye, everyone.

Detailed Explanations

The nitty-gritty

Noun

The nitty-gritty is the most important parts or details of a topic. **Nitty-gritty** is often used in the phrase **let's get down to the nitty-gritty**, which means let's really focus on the important information that we're trying to communicate. **Let's get down to the nitty-gritty** has a similar meaning to the phrase **let's get to the heart of the matter**; both phrases are talking about focusing on the core details or most important information for any given topic of conversation.

Here are a couple more examples with **the nitty-gritty**:

Wendy: OK, ladies, let's stop changing the subject and avoiding the issue at hand. If we wanna help Sylvia, then we need to **get down to the nitty-gritty**. Now, what do you suggest?

Vicky: I think we should have a bake sale to raise money to help Sylvia during her illness.

Wendy: That's an excellent idea. Any other suggestions?

Darla: We could make a spreadsheet with times to visit Sylvia while she's in the hospital.

Wendy: Another excellent suggestion. See, ladies! This is sad news for everyone, but if we focus on one problem at a time, then we can help our dear friend during her time of need.

Doug: Are you still working on that report? It's been ages since you started it.

Dwayne: Yeah, well, my boss is a perfectionist. He wants me to record everything down to the last **nitty-gritty** detail.

Doug: All I can say is that I'm glad I'm not in your shoes.

Down for the count

Idiom

The phrase **down for the count** originated as a boxing term. It describes when boxers are defeated in a match by being knocked down by their opponent and unable to get back up before the referee reaches the end of his count.

Nowadays, the phrase **down for the count** is also used to talk about someone or something that is unable to do something, usually due to defeat or exhaustion. In the first example dialogue of this episode, there are two friends who both say that last night they were **down for the count** after work. In other words, they were so exhausted after work that all they could do was go home and go to sleep. A company that is about to file for bankruptcy would also be considered **down for the count**, because it is very unlikely that the company would be able to get out of debt and overcome financial defeat.

Here's one more example with **down for the count**:

Alfonso: Coach, can I still play? Please?

Coach: No way, Alfonso, you sprained your ankle.

Alfonso: But this is the final match!

Coach: I'm sorry, buddy, but you're **down for the count**. You don't wanna make that injury any worse.

Alfonso: Ugh. I have to miss out on all the fun.

Knock out

Phrasal verb

The two most common definitions of **knock out** are to: 1. make someone go unconscious and 2. defeat a player or team. If one person hits, kicks, or drugs a man into a state of unconsciousness, then it is said that the person **knocked him out**. Therefore, to be **knocked out** is to be made unconscious by someone or something.

It is also possible to **knock out** a team or player. For example, in a chess tournament, players that are not **knocked out**—are not defeated—in the semifinals will move on to the final match of the tournament.

KO is the abbreviation of **knock out**. This abbreviation is often seen or heard in conversations about boxing, fighting, or video games related to boxing and fighting.

Here are a couple more examples with **knock out**:

Ricky: Dude, did you hear?

Frank: What?

Ricky: Tony and Damien got into a fight and Tony **knocked him out** cold.

Frank: What? Little Tony **knocked out** big Damien? How is that even possible?

Ricky: It was incredible! Damien went to lunge for Tony right when Tony bent down. Damien flipped over Tony's back and knocked his head on the pavement on the way down. **Knocked him** right out!

Frank: Dude. He's gonna kill Tony whenever he's done healing or whatever.

Ricky: Yeah, I don't envy Tony right now. He's probably scared out of his mind.

Rachel: Who do you want to win in the finals?

Alice: Ah, I don't really care. The team I was hoping to win got **knocked out** in the quarterfinals. Now I'm just watching because I don't have anything else to do.

Rachel: Well, I want Roger's team to win. He is such a cutie.

Alice: Of course. The only important thing is that your crush's team wins.

To pass out

Phrasal verb

To pass out means to become unconscious through sickness, injury, or drug and alcohol abuse, for example. A man who gets hit by a car and loses consciousness due to the pain from his injuries is said to have **passed out**.

Another meaning of **to pass out** is to fall into a deep sleep from being overly tired, but it doesn't sound as serious as the **passed out** mentioned in the first paragraph. For example, if someone says they **passed out** on the couch after work, they are not saying that they became unconscious due to serious sickness or injury; they simply fell asleep quickly and deeply after a long day of work.

Here are a couple more examples with **to pass out**:

Derrick: Is Kendall OK?

Gregor: I think so. Why? She's just **passed out** on the couch, isn't she?

Derrick: Yeah, but she's got permanent marker drawings all over her face.

Gregor: What? Oh no, who did that? She's gonna murder us all when she wakes up.

Derrick: You've gotta admit, though, it's pretty hilarious.

Gregor: Kendall always gets revenge 10 times worse than whatever made her angry in the first place. You should sleep with one eye open from now on.

Sarah: Reagan, come help me—quick! Daksha just **passed out** on the sidewalk.

Reagan: What? Did she give any warning? Was she feeling sick or anything?

Sarah: I'm not sure. I mean, we were just eating some candy and the next thing I knew she was on the ground.

Reagan: What candy? You know you're not supposed to share candy with Daksha. Does it have peanuts in it?

Sarah: Um, maybe. Yeah, I think so.

Reagan: She's deathly allergic to peanuts! She's having an allergic reaction. Grab her bag, there's an EpiPen in there. I'll call 911.

Blow-by-blow

Adjective

Blow-by-blow is an adjective that means to describe everything in detail in the order in which it occurred. Giving a **blow-by-blow** account is very popular in sports when announcers report and explain each play that a player or team makes as they are making it.

Play-by-play is used in a similar fashion. If announcers give a **play-by-play** account of events in a game, it is the same as giving a **blow-by-blow** account. Both **play-by-play** and **blow-by-blow** mean to give detailed commentary in the order in which events occur or occurred.

Here's one more example with **blow-by-blow**:

Mike: Did you see the game last night? It was incredible! Probably the best game of the year.

Niko: Ugh, don't tell me that! I had to help my dad at the office yesterday and he wouldn't let me leave for anything. I missed the whole thing.

Mike: Well, lucky for you I have a photographic memory and I can now provide you with a **blow-by-blow** commentary of the entire thing.

Niko: I mean, it's not as exciting as watching it. You can just tell me the best parts and I'll look for clips on YouTube or something.

Mike: Oh, no, no, no, my friend. I am going to tell you everything in painstaking detail.

Niko: Well, in that case let's go grab a beer and some fries before you get started. That will keep me interested even when your story gets old.

Back in the day

Phrase

Back in the day is used to talk about events that happened in the past and that are usually fond memories. **Back in the day** is also often used to compare things from the past and how they have changed in the present, not necessarily for the better. For example, a grandparent might complain about her grandchildren always playing on their cell phones by saying, “**Back in the day**, people actually talked to each other face-to-face rather than staring at those tiny gadgets.” In this example, the grandmother implies that it was better in the past before cell phones were made, because people were more sociable with each other.

Here are a couple more examples with **back in the day**:

Alexis: Dad, can I have \$20 to go to the movies with my friends?

Dad: You know, **back in the day** we had to work for our money, even as kids.

Alexis: Well, luckily you worked hard to be able to provide such a nice life for me, so now I don't have to work for it.

Dad: You're too smart for your own good. You know that?

Alexis: Yup. Now can I have \$20?

Tyler: This place is boring. Why can't we go to the beach or Disney for vacation like all the other kids?

Dad: This place looks a little boring now, but **back in the day** it was far from boring. They used to dig for gold around here.

Tyler: What, really? Do you think we could find some?

Dad: It's probably mostly gone by now, but feel free to look during our tour of the mines tomorrow.

Tyler: OK! I'm gonna find all that gold and become super rich!

Quiz

1. Which of the following is an example of getting down to the nitty-gritty?

- a) daydreaming about an upcoming trip
- b) going for a walk in the woods
- c) reviewing the important details of the presentation you will be giving
- d) making a sandcastle at the beach

2. Why might someone pass out?

- a) they are really happy
- b) they are extremely angry
- c) they have a lot of things to do
- d) they are very tired

3. The phrase _____ in the day is used when talking about the past. What word goes in the blank?

- a) late
- b) back
- c) before
- d) once

4. Which of the following is an example of being down for the count?

- a) there are 30 minutes left in the game and your team is losing by 2 points
- b) you can't find your other sock
- c) you break your arm during the match and can no longer play
- d) you are running late for a meeting

5. What is KO an abbreviation for?

- a) knock out
- b) knowledge owl
- c) knight order
- d) kinetic overbalance

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. What is your favourite sport to watch? Do you like listening to the blow-by-blow accounts of your favourite sporting events?
2. Have you ever passed out? How did it happen?
3. What is something that you miss from back in the day?
4. Have you ever been in a fight? Did you get knocked out or did you knock someone out?
5. Have you ever felt like you were down for the count, but somehow managed to get back up and succeed? What happened?

Quiz Answers

1.c 2.d 3.b 4.c 5.a

Episode credits

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