

Play Ball

"Oh, somewhere in this favored land the sun is shining bright
The band is playing somewhere, and somewhere hearts are light
And somewhere men are laughing, and the little children shout
But there is no joy in Mudville- - the might Casey has struck
out." *Ernest L. Thayer*

It's almost spring and our thoughts turn once again to one of America's favorite summer pastimes, baseball. Thayer recorded our love of baseball with his 1888 poem, "Casey at the Bat," in which 5,000 fans cheered their favorite baseball team and despaired at their loss. Not only has the game of baseball captured our hearts, it has greatly influenced our language as well. Just so you don't get *thrown a curve ball* when talking with your friends or *drop the ball* and *strike out*, *step up to the plate* and *hit a home run* with the sporty vocabulary of this cherished American pastime.

The first recorded official game of baseball occurred in 1846 in Hoboken, New Jersey and since then, baseball vocabulary has permeated American culture and language. Beginning with the ball itself, English is full of phrases have become part of our daily speech.

Here are some of the more common idioms with example sentences.

- To keep your eye on the ball means to pay attention to the task at hand, whatever it may be. *If you want to succeed in the market place, you must keep your eye on the ball.*
- To drop the ball means to make a mistake, usually costly. *We are going to have to put in some overtime because John really dropped the ball on this project.*
- To be thrown a curve ball means to have something unexpected occur and catch one unprepared. *My teacher really threw me a curve ball with today's test and I just know I failed it.*
- To play ball means to cooperate with someone to accomplish a common goal. *I can't play ball with someone who refuses to compromise.*
- To play hardball means to compete seriously for something. *The prosecution will be playing hardball in the upcoming trial.*
- To make a pitch means to offer or suggest something. *He gave a good sales pitch, but we didn't buy the car.*
- To step up to the plate means to be in the position where action is possible. *If you want that promotion, you need to step up to the plate.*

- To hit a home run means to perform a successful action or activity. *My boss really liked that idea for the new design; it was a home run.*
- To strike out means to fail at something. *There's no way he will get that job because he really struck out in the interview yesterday.*

So, as you enter the baseball season this year, enjoy the sunshine, the action, and the victories. Also marvel at the impact this game has had on our vocabulary and try out some of these baseball idioms in your everyday speech. Let's play ball.