

## TRANSLATING SPORTS IDIOMS FROM ENGLISH INTO RUSSIAN

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FROM LYDIA:

I classified the idioms I found in 9 months of newspaper presidential campaign articles on the basis of what area of life or experience they were drawn from. By far the largest 600 idioms (about 10% of all idioms) were drawn from the world of sports and games. I suppose this comes as no surprise to anyone—especially not interpreters and translators of English—spoken and written. English is full of idioms and metaphors drawn from sports and games and allusions to these areas. More than 10 years ago Vladimir Kovner and I started collecting English and (particularly American English Sports idioms ) for an ATA presentation. We have worked on translating them into Russian off and on for all this time and finally our dictionary is ready to be published. By the way, all the idioms we included are listed, defined and translated into Russian with examples (see below for example definitions). Our dictionary also contains a phrase and key word indexes—in our view a necessity for a dictionary of true use to translators.

I will not assert categorically that American English uses more sports idioms than any other language, although I believe it, but I can tell you this. In the English-Russian section of our dictionary we have 1010 English sports idioms of which I would venture almost any native speaker in the audience would understand the great majority of. Despite assiduous search, we only identified 112 Russian sports idioms and more than half of these are in the categories of hunting, fishing, horse racing and card playing. This imbalance makes it impossible to find common Russian set phrases or understandable metaphors drawn from sports to correspond to the majority of English ones, especially since many (probably the great majority) of those living in Russian speaking countries are unfamiliar with the rules and practices of two of the sports most popular in the US—American football and baseball as well as with golf, and some of the game idioms we have included (e.g. do not pass go, from the game of Monopoly).

Clearly, the great majority of English Sports idioms will need to be rendered in Russian by general idioms or paraphrase of the meaning the idioms convey. Perhaps in a few cases when familiarity with a sport is shared across cultures, a clear metaphor might be rendered literally, for example, : *Hit below the belt*. But, for the most part the pervasive use of sports as a metaphor for life in US newspaper writing can and need not be reflected in a Russian translation. In the second section of this paper you will find some examples of E>R entries in our dictionary that illustrate some ways English sports idioms can be translated.

Translation of English sports metaphors like all translation depends on understanding everything conveyed by the original usage (even if the translator decides certain aspects need not be rendered in the particular context). Interpretation of any given usages depends on recognition of the sport or game the metaphor comes from, since each sport is a world unto itself with its own laws and own metaphors based on the significance and function of particular actions within that world. Consider these terms found in multiple idioms from multiple sports and used frequently in general discourse.

**Swing:** *swing for the fences*: attempt to achieve the most spectacular success at the expense of diminishing chances for moderate success-baseball. *Come out swinging*: from the first moment immediately engage in hostile confrontational behavior. *Improve his swing*—better his technique or approach to a task -golf. Or a more complicated example where an additional use of the term is involved

in a sports metaphor: *{A named state} will not have to retire its jersey as a swing state. Jersey:* identifiable badge or membership in a sports team, especially football and hockey. *Retire one's jersey-* give up self- or public identification as belonging to a group. *Swing state* –a US state that does not vote consistently for one party or the other in presidential elections.

*Bar: raise the bar,* set performance standards higher, track, specifically pole vaulting and high jumping. *No holds barred*—every tactic permitted, wrestling.

*Pass:* I pass-I do not want to participate at this time, cards. *Hail Mary pass-*an attempt at saving oneself when the odds are very much against you, football; *pass the baton,* give over an important role you have occupied to another person (usually younger)-relay races.

Before Volodia discusses ways to translate sports idioms into Russian, I would like to bring up what turns out to be quite common—extended original metaphors using sports situation and frequently with one or more embedded sports idioms as a way of commenting on or describing situations that are not related to sports.

Here are some examples: 1- a couple of yards from the goal line and he takes a knee on third down. 2 -In seeing red the bull became obsessed with it while the matador stepped deftly aside. 3) It's the bottom of the ninth and one team is down by 10 points. Is that team going to say, "Okay we'll go home—game over?" 4) She is like a gymnast on a balance beam managing to stay within the legal parameters without losing footing. 5) Platform fights are like the fourth game of the pre-season, the stars don't play and the score doesn't count. 6) This was the world series of politics and the people who should be nervous were the players—I was just the umpire.

Of course, no dictionary could possibly foresee and include such particular usages, though translations of analogous ones appear in our Russian example translations. I think all the Russian native speakers who find such metaphors difficult to understand should find the nearest sports fanatic and persuade him (her?) to consult.

#### FROM VLADIMIR

Now when our *Sports Idiom Dictionary* has been completed it's easier to observe several patterns of idioms translations from one language into another. I will first and primarily address the English-Russian idioms since they make up 90% of the entries.

Let's start with **the ideal situation:** when we can find a Russian idiom that is virtually a (sports-related) analog for the English idiom (call this the first pattern). **The second pattern** occurs when we can identify a Russian idiom with a quite different literal translation that conveys the same meaning as the English one.

Below is an example that provided an opportunity to use both patterns (although the second idiom in the sentence is not from sports).

**Game is (not) worth the candle, the:** (old proverb) something is (or is not) worth the amount sacrificed to maintain it. **Игра стоит (не стоит) свеч; овчинка выделки не стоит.**

*I have been killing myself to impress my boss. When it is time to hand out bonuses, I will see if the game has been worth the candle. Я работал, как зверь, чтобы произвести впечатление на босса. Когда придёт время получать премии, посмотрим, стоила ли игра свеч.*

More examples of the **first pattern:**

**Iron man:** the strongest or most talented member of a team or group. (Original meaning is a male athlete of remarkable endurance.) **Железный человек;** человек, за/с которым чувствуешь себя, как за каменной стеной.

*We always let Rob present the closing argument. He is the iron man of our law firm. Мы всегда поручаем Роберту представить на суде наши заключительные аргументы. За ним мы, как за каменной стеной. (The same idiom in Russian and English)*

**Play cat and mouse:** to toy with someone in one's power for one's own amusement, frequently out of sadistic motives. **Играть в кошки-мышки с кем-либо;** играть кем-то, как кошка с мышкой (используя свою власть, часто из садистских побуждений).

*He began to suspect that the immigration agent was not trying to help him, but merely playing cat and mouse with him. Он начал подозревать, что иммиграционный агент вовсе и не пытается ему помочь, а просто играет с ним в кошки – мышки. (The same idiom in Russian and English)*

**Take the bull by the horns, to:** to confront some problem or difficulty head on. **Взять быка за рога.**

*It's time to take the bull by the horns, and confront our neighbor about his noisy parties. Пора взять быка за рога и сказать нашему соседу всё, что мы думаем по поводу его шумных вечеринок.*

Additional examples of the second pattern:

**First catch your rabbit, then make your stew:** be sure you have the prerequisites for achieving something before you make elaborate or public plans for the achievement. (пословицы) **Не говори "гоп", пока не перепрыгнешь; не дели шкуру неубитого медведя; цыплят по осени считают.**

*He hasn't even asked her to go steady, and she is already deciding what to name their children. Doesn't she know that first you have to catch your rabbit and only then make your stew? Он ещё не попросил её постоянно встречаться с ним, а она уже решает как называть детей. Неужели она не знает поговорку: "Не говори «гоп», пока не перепрыгнешь!"?*

**No pain, no gain:** there is no progress without suffering. (Посл.) **Без труда не вытащишь и рыбку из пруда; без труда нет плода;** не добьёшься успеха, если не тренируешься / не работаешь упорно, до боли в мускулах; только потом и кровью можно добиться успеха; (посл.) **хочешь есть калачи, не лежи на печи.**

*Yes, eating 67 hot dogs to win the prize gave me a stomachache, but no pain, no gain. Да, я съел 67 сосисок и заработал приз и боль в животе. Как говорят: "Только потом и кровью добьёшься успеха".*

**Neither hide nor hair:** no trace or evidence of something lost, missing, or absent. **Ни слуху, ни духу;** ни следа.

*We've seen neither hide nor hair of our son for three months. Уже три месяца от нашего сына – ни слуху, ни духу.*

We have quite a few examples of the **third pattern** when some idiomatic terms were taken from the English language and adopted by Russians without changing the form and pronunciation but just transliterating the word or phrase. This pattern doesn't exist in translation of Russian idioms into English for the simple reason that Americans have not borrowed any Russian sports terms. At least we couldn't find any examples.

**Time-out:** suspension of activity or participation. **Тайм-аут;** короткий перерыв; короткая остановка (игры); простой (из-за ремонта).

*When my grandson misbehaves, he must take a time-out in his room. Когда мой внук плохо себя ведёт, ему приходится в наказание сделать перерыв в игре, и пересидеть какое-то время в своей комнате.*

**Hit:** success. **Хит;** что-то/кто-то, производящее/-ий впечатление; то, что / тот, кто имеет успех.

*My first boyfriend was not a hit with my parents. Мой первый ухажёр не произвёл большого впечатления на моих родителей.*

**Hat trick:** three wins in a row. (Comes originally from cricket.) Три выигрыша подряд; **хет-трик.**

There are more examples of this kind of pattern, e.g. Photo finish – фотофиниш; Marathon - марафон ; Sprint – спринт; Killer instinct - инстинкт киллера; False start – фальстарт.

We have one funny example of an English word permeating the Russian language but in the process changing its meaning.

**Всё хоккей!** (Вариация фразы "Все ОК!"): все в ажуре, все в порядке, все хорошо и т.п.

**Everything is hunky-dory!**

*Наш сын пришёл из школы с подбитым глазом и на мой немой вопрос бойко сказал: "Всё"*

*хоккей!" Our son came home from school with a black eye and when I looked at him questioningly, simply said, "Everything is hunky-dory!"*

Finally the most wide-spread pattern we have used for translation occurs when we cannot find any Russian idiom with the same meaning as the English one. In such case instead of direct translation, we try to convey in Russian the meaning of the English as closely as possible in a form consistent with the example sentence. This happens quite often when a sports term or a the sport that gave rise to it virtually is unknown in Russia , e.g. baseball, American football, golf.

**Sudden death:** a procedure for settling a tie. In a sudden death overtime, the first team to score wins the whole game, and the other, of course, loses. **Выигрыш ничейной игры игрой до первого очка, гола; решить что-либо (спор) одним подбрасыванием монеты.**

*In case of a tie in the spelling bee, the winner will be decided by "sudden death" overtime. Если в первом раунде конкурса на знание орфографии не выявится победитель, состязующимся задают дополнительный вопрос, и тот, кто правильно ответит первым, побеждает.*

**In the ballpark:** approximately. **Приблизительно; примерно.**

*The car cost in the ballpark of \$40K. Этот автомобиль стоит примерно 40,000 долларов.*

**Play hardball, to:** to behave aggressively and ruthlessly. **Вести себя агрессивно; быть безжалостным; (погов.) идти по трупам.**

*He seems like a sweet guy when you first get to know him, but if you ever cross him, you find that he has no problem playing hardball. На первый взгляд он кажется приятным парнем, но стоит сделать что-то против его интересов, то немедленно обнаружишь, как он без всяких колебаний становится страшно агрессивным.*

Naturally, translating idioms from Russian into English involves the same patterns of translation, e.g.

The first pattern:

**Почивать на лаврах:** быть удовлетворённым своими прошлыми достижениями и успокоиться на этом. **Rest on one's laurels.**

*Почивать на лаврах нам нельзя. Впереди - слишком много нерешённых проблем. We cannot allow ourselves to rest on our laurels. There are too many unsolved problems ahead.*

**Как красная тряпка для/на быка:** кто-то/ что-то, что выводит кого-либо из равновесия / страшно раздражает. **Like a red rag to a bull.**

*Её появление всегда действовало на меня как красная тряпка на быка. For me her presence was always like a red rag to a bull.*

The second pattern:

**Отбросить коньки** (жарг.): умереть; (жарг.) отбросить копыта, отдать концы; сыграть в ящик. To die; **kick the bucket; to cash in one's chips.**

*(Из Интернета) Медицина в нашем провинциальном городке была на уровне каменного века. Не мудрено, что он отбросил коньки сразу после операции. In our provincial town, medicine was at a Stone Age level. No wonder, he kicked the bucket right after the operation.*

**Рыбак рыбака видит издалека** (посл.): единомышленники / люди, одинаковые по происхождению / по духу / по интересам тянутся друг к другу. Эта пословица часто употребляется в отрицательном смысле. **Birds of a feather flock together; it takes one to know one.**

*Куда бы ни поехал мой брат, он мгновенно знакомится с какими-то подозрительными личностями. Рыбак рыбака видит издалека. Wherever my brother went, he immediately met up with suspicious characters just like him. Birds of a feather flock together.*

The fourth pattern:

**Ход конём:** умное, хитрое действие. **Shrewd move.**

*Наш босс сделал ход конём, сделав своей помощницей женщину, которая вечно с ним спорила. План удался: с такой же страстью она стала защищать его интересы. Our boss made a shrewd move when he appointed as his assistant the woman who was always arguing with him. His plan succeeded: she put the same passion into protecting his interests.*