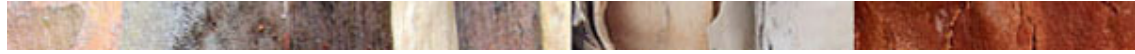


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Oxford Word of the Month – February: Black Caviar odds

noun: very short odds; strong favouritism.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

Black Caviar odds first appears in print in 2011 referring to a possible Reserve Bank cut in the official interest rate on Melbourne Cup Day:

*We are now headed for a Cup Day official interest rate cut and the banks will pass it on in full and quickly to borrowers. Both these predictions are at **Black Caviar odds** and just as certain.* (Melbourne *Herald Sun*, 7 October)

The term refers to the champion racehorse Black Caviar, undefeated in 25 races between 2008 and 2013. Betting on Black Caviar entailed very short odds. This first evidence clearly links the transfer of the literal odds on a horse to anything that is likely to be strongly favoured, and hence not likely to bring in a good return on a bet.

In 2013 the Coalition was seen as the likely winner of the Australian federal election, with the *Gold Coast Bulletin* reporting that the Coalition was ‘getting into Black Caviar odds of \$1.16 to take government in September’. (19 February) Although the term appears here in reference to an election—many Australians are keen to bet on the outcome of any contest—it is more often found in the sporting and horse racing worlds, as in the following examples.

In 2015, Australia faced Afghanistan in a World Cup cricket match and were strongly favoured to win:

*Australia will start at **Black Caviar odds** but have been impressed by Afghanistan’s performances this tournament, most notably pace duo Hamid Hassan and Shapoor Zadran.* (Canberra *Times*, 4 March)

And in 2016 we see it in a horse racing context:

*[Trainer Stephen] Lee would be **Black Caviar odds** to lead in at least one winner from his five starters at his home meeting with every chance the triumph will come early.* (Sydney *Daily Telegraph* 30 April)

Black Caviar odds is a variation of an older Australian English term with the same meaning, *Phar Lap odds*: ‘Whichever is successful will carry the proverbial ton of money and start at “Phar Lap” odds.’ (*Cessnock Eagle*, 23 November 1933). Phar Lap is Australia’s most famous racehorse. He won numerous races including the Melbourne Cup, and his success captured Australia’s imagination during the Great Depression. We will have to wait and see if the term **Black Caviar odds** has the staying power of Phar Lap.

Black Caviar odds will be considered for inclusion in the next edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*.

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