



# Oxford Word of the Month

## October: dog shot

*noun*: a sudden blow; a king-hit. *verb*: to hit (a person) suddenly and without warning; to king hit (a person).

### THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

In an apology sent via text message, a rugby league player defended the actions of his group when they became involved in a fight outside a night club: “... we never **dog shotted** any of the boys we were just trying to defend ourselves ...,” Lafai said in a text message obtained by Fairfax Media.’ (*SBS News online*, 26 July 2016) A comment from a reader of the *Gold Coast Bulletin* also suggests that he believes the use of violence could be a legitimate response to the low act of an unprovoked attack:

What happens when you r [sic] walking past a house and a guy comes out swinging, and you defend yourself? He then says: ‘Wait here, I’ll take you on’, and runs into his house. Should you turn your back on someone who already tried to **dog shot** you? (*Gold Coast Bulletin*, 22 February 2007)

Early evidence for **dog shot** is for the noun form, and is found in the context of rugby league football:

Cleal was yesterday suspended for five matches after pleading guilty to a grade one reckless high tackle on Gibbs ... Bryce, likening the hatred between the pair as akin to the fierce rivalry between Paul Harragon and Manly’s Mark Carroll in the 1990s, labelled Cleal’s tackle a ‘bit of a **dog shot**’ and said the pair were now all-square. (*Manly Daily*, 11 May 2005)

This refers to an illegal tackle. In other rugby league evidence, a **dog shot** often means a deliberate late tackle when the player has already disposed of the ball, with the implication that such a tackle is considered to be cowardly. This meaning is nearly synonymous with an earlier Australian term, *dog act*, ‘an action seen as treacherous, cowardly or unacceptable’, and suggests a

close link between *dog act* and **dog shot**.

In both terms, *dog* has negative connotations. This has form in Australian English, where *dog* can refer specifically to a treacherous or duplicitous person. A likely influence for the *shot* element is an originally US sense of *cheap shot*, 'an act of deliberate roughness against a defenceless opponent especially in a contact sport'.

Much of the evidence for the verb form of **dog shot** refers to giving a sudden unexpected blow. In this sense it is synonymous with the much older Australian verb *king hit*, which can be traced to the beginning of the 20th century. **Dog shot** is now found in various contexts, both on and off the playing field:

He was the no-hoper who threatened to '**dog shot**' a magistrate last year. (*Gold Coast Bulletin*, 12 July 2019)

'Sam Burgess comes in from behind and **dog shots** him when no one's looking', Pearce pleaded with referee Grant Atkins. (*Canberra Times*, 7 June 2019)

An increase in both verb and noun forms of **dog shot** indicates that the term may be here to stay. There is also some evidence of the elliptical form **dog**, which may point to a further evolution of the word:

I was clearly tackled, to come in with a swinging arm across the chin, it was a bit cheap. It's one thing to **dog-shot** someone, it's another thing to mouth off after you've done it. If you **dog** someone, you keep your mouth shut. (*Canberra Times*, 17 April 2011)

**Dog shot**, noun and verb, will be considered for inclusion in the next edition of the [Australian National Dictionary](#).

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