

WORD OF THE MONTH

OXFORD AUSTRALIA: THE FUTURE OF AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH | JANUARY 2014

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captain's pick

- **noun**: 1. the selection of a political candidate directly by a party leader. 2. a decision made by the leader of a political party without consultation with their party.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

Some people will be familiar with the term **captain's pick** in relation to golf. Golf tournaments such as the Ryder Cup and the President's Cup are team events in which most golfers are selected on the basis of performance, with some selected at the team captain's discretion. These latter selections are often referred to as **captain's picks**.

In January 2013 the term appeared in Australia in a different context, that of politics, in the run-up to the 2013 federal election. Prime Minister Julia Gillard decided to support former Olympian Nova Peris for pre-selection as a Senate candidate:

Prime Minister Julia Gillard has asked Labor's national executive to endorse Australia's first indigenous Olympic gold medallist, Nova Peris, as a candidate at the next federal election. ... Ms Gillard said on Tuesday she had made a '**captain's pick**' and asked Ms Peris to join the Labor Party and run as a Northern Territory Senate candidate later this year. (*ABC News*, 22 January 2013)

Gillard's action was controversial because it resulted in Labor Senator Trish Crossin effectively losing her Senate seat, and was considered by some to be revenge for Crossin's earlier support of Kevin Rudd. It also bypassed the usual process for pre-selecting candidates. The term **captain's pick** was suddenly all over the media as the Peris selection was hotly debated.

By February there was some evidence that the term was starting to be picked up and used elsewhere in politics. A Greens politician, discussing who the party would run in the seat of Wentworth, asserted to the press that 'due process' would be followed and that there would be no **captain's pick**. (*Wentworth Courier*, 13 February 2013) In August, the term hit the headlines again when Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made his **captain's pick** of former Queensland Premier Peter Beattie to run in the seat of Forde: 'if Mr Rudd's **captain's pick** comes off, Mr Beattie could be the anti-Campbell Newman candidate in Queensland who allows the Prime Minister to travel elsewhere plugging electoral holes.' (*West Australian*, 9 August 2013)

Around this time, discussion in the media also pointed to particular policies being highlighted as **captain's picks**, in this case Tony Abbott's selection of paid parental leave as his 'signature policy': 'Abbott has resisted all arguments against the timing and generosity of his PPL scheme, insisting that this is a "**captain's pick**" policy which shows

the personal transformation he has undergone on the issue of women in the workforce.’ (*Australian Financial Review*, 31 August 2013) Abbott also used the term *captain’s call* when he decided to place the Australian Greens last on the Liberal Party’s how-to-vote cards, an action which engendered some controversy within his own party as well as criticism from other parties.

It remains to be seen if the term **captain’s pick** will continue to be used in the Australian political context. Its use through 2013 by both Labor and Liberal parties suggests, however, that there is much debate about the power of political leaders and how they exercise it within their own parties.

Captain’s pick is on our radar for possible inclusion in our Australian dictionaries and the *Australian National Dictionary*.



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