

Oxford Australia Word of the Month

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Behind – *noun*. *AFL* a kick etc. that scores one point.

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Behind

The story behind the Word of the Month

To Australians brought up on Australian Rules football, the term **behind** as a noun to describe a score of 'one point' is the most natural thing in the world. A **behind** is scored when the ball goes through the area between the goal post and the **behind** post, or when it hits the goal post (a *poster*), or when it is touched on the way through the goal area. A goal is worth six points, and a **behind** is worth one point. But why is it called a **behind**? This must be very baffling for those not blessed with an Aussie Rules upbringing.

There are some clues in the early rules. Here is a version of the rules (deriving from the original 1859 rules) that was widely printed in newspapers in 1866:

1. The distance between the goals shall not be more than 200 yards; and the width of playing place, to be measured equally on each side of a line drawn through the centre of the goals, not more than 150 yards. The goal-posts shall be seven yards apart, of unlimited height.
2. The captains on each side shall toss for choice of goal; the side losing the toss, or a goal, has the kick off from the centre point between the goals. After a goal is kicked the sides shall change ends.
3. A goal must be kicked fairly between the posts without touching either of them, or any portion of the person of one of the opposite side. In case of the ball being forced (except with the hands or arms) between the goal-posts in a scrummage a goal shall be awarded.
4. Two posts, to be called the 'kick-off' posts, shall be erected at a distance of twenty yards on each side of the goal posts, and in a straight line with them.
5. In case the ball is kicked behind goal, any one of the sides behind whose goal it is kicked may bring it twenty yards in front of any portion of the space between the 'kick-off' posts, and shall kick it towards the opposite goal.

Here are all the clues we need to understand the subsequent history. A ball kicked towards the goal may well go **behind** the goal. At this stage, such a kick does not earn a score, but the ball is kicked back into play from the *kick-off post* by the defending side, in much the same way as the full back now kicks the ball in from the goal square after a **behind** has been scored.

Soon after, the *kick-off posts* came to be popularly known as the **behind posts**, and they were moved closer to the goal posts. A change to the rules is reported in this passage from the *West Australian* newspaper in 1887:

In their efforts to reach the ideal in football ... the associations of the various colonies have found it convenient to have a meeting of delegates in Melbourne about Cup time for the past two or three years, for the purpose of improving the laws of the game. Last November we had delegates from South Australia, Tasmania (North and South), and New South Wales, in addition to the Victorian representatives, and it must be said that they discussed the rules and proposed alterations very thoroughly, and I think the result of their efforts will meet with general approval. Taking the rules in rotation—In No. 2 we have the distance of the 'kick off posts' or '**behind posts**' as they are more generally called, reduced from 20 to 10 yards from the goal posts. ... The alteration leaves less room for that scrambling to rush the ball **behind** so often noticed in a team hard pressed.

A ball that went **behind** the goal rather than through it usually went between the *goal post* and the **behind post**, and the word was on its way to becoming a noun—a **behind**. In the earliest records, balls that failed to achieve a goal but went between the goal post and the **behind post**, were designated **behinds**. Initially they were not part of the official score, but eventually became so.