

OXFORD AUSTRALIA  
**WORD  
OF THE  
MONTH**

September 2011

## *Tiggy Touchwood*

– noun: 1. a form of the children's game *tig* or *tiggy*, in which players can be caught only when they are not touching a tree, a piece of wood, etc. 2. (in a team sport) a match without much physical contact (as a result of the players not performing aggressively, the umpires penalising aggressive play, etc.).

*Forthcoming in the Australian National Dictionary*

### *The story behind the Word of the Month*

**Tig** is a children's game, defined by the Oxford English Dictionary in this way: 'A children's game, in which one of the players—usually designated **tig** or it—pursues the others until he overtakes and touches or "**tigs**" one, who in his turn becomes "**tig**.' The noun *tig* is from the verb *tig*, which meant 'to touch', and is probably the same word as *tick*. In Australia, this game is sometimes called *chasey* or *chasings*.

**Tig** has occasionally been used in Australia, but it appears more commonly in the form **tiggy**. The **tiggy** variant is especially associated with Northern England, and it is likely that **tiggy** was brought to Australia by migrants from Northern England. In Australia, it has been used mainly in Victoria and Queensland. Thus, in 2006 the Gold Coast Sun reported: 'We're really encouraged by the fact that kids want to play good old-fashioned **tiggy**, cricket and soccer instead of being in front of a TV screen.' In 2011 a writer in the Australian newspaper compared the non-rational movements of share prices on the Stock Exchange to a kids' game of **tiggy**: 'The market has become like a game of **tiggy** when the kids are tiring and it's not clear who's the chaser and the chased.'

What would you make of the following references to **tiggy touchwood**?

Remember what football was like before it became sanitised via the **tiggy touchwood** two umpire system? (Hobart Mercury, 7 December, 1994)

With the game in the balance, St Joseph's gave away two 50 metre penalties which resulted in goals, sealing the Eagles' first victory of the year 16.9 (105) to 14.10 (94). St Joseph's coach Mark Neeld attributed the poor decisions to inexperience. 'That's a learning process. Two young players gave away 50 metre penalties that were a bit **tiggy touchwood**, however technically they were there and the umpire did his job', Neeld said. (Geelong Advertiser, 26 April, 2004)

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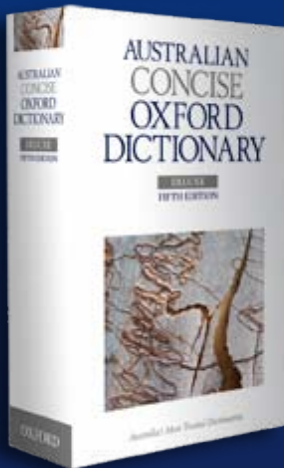


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Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary  
5th Edition



If you start giving free kicks for certain things, you've got to stay that way, even though it might be **tiggy touchwood** early. Then players know what they'll be penalised for. (Melbourne Herald-Sun, 3 September, 2005)

And as it turned out we gave away free kicks that some people thought were there and others that did not. Those **tiggy-touchwood** kicks are the ones you have to bite your tongue on, especially when the stakes are as high as they were that day. (Northern Territory News, 19 February, 2006)

**Tiggy touchwood** is a variant of the children's game **tiggy**, and in this variant the pursued person can escape capture by touching something wooden. Here is a description of the game from Yorkshire in the nineteenth century:

One of them who is called **Tiggy** stands out and each of the children takes hold or seizes a piece of wood, such as a door, rail, etc. One of the children then leaves his 'wood' and runs across the playground, and if whilst so doing **Tiggy** can touch him he must stand out or take **Tiggy's** place.

We know that this variant game and its name were brought to Australia. At a later date in Australia it was applied, in a pejorative sense, to certain aspects of team sports. For example, if a football match is being played without much physical contact it might be compared to the children's game and described as **tiggy touchwood**. If free kicks or penalties are awarded for very minor infringements, these are regarded as 'soft' free kicks and penalties, and therefore of a **tiggy touchwood** kind.