

WORD OF THE MONTH

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SOCCER

- **verb:** in Australian Rules, Rugby League, and Rugby Union: to kick (a ball) as in a game of soccer, esp. along the ground; to kick a ball without handling it.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

The word *soccer* as the name of the popular ball game derives from *Assoc.*, the abbreviation for *Association football*, the formal name for the game in Britain, where it developed. In Australia, *soccer* has been the standard name for this ball game. While most of the English-speaking world calls the game *football*, Australians reserve the term *football* for either Australian Rules or for forms of rugby. In recent years, with a national restructure of the game and an ambition to make a mark on the soccer world stage, there has been a 'push' in Australia to banish the term *soccer* and replace it with the international term *football*.

One interesting development in the history of the word *soccer* in Australian English is its use as a verb in the other football codes we play. Most of the uses of the verb **to soccer** are found in the context of Australian Rules, as in these examples over the last hundred years:

North '**soccered**' the sphere out of the danger zone. (*Adelaide Daily Herald*, 29 July 1912)

Now he tore 60 yards across the ground towards the Richmond goal, hurled himself past the five players disputing the ball, played it on ahead of him, lost control, regained it, emerged from a tackle and **soccered** the ball between the posts as the St Kilda backmen smashed him flat on the turf. (*Canberra Times*, 12 September 1966)

Warrnambool trailed by 27 points at the final change but got its nose in front after James Keane **soccered** a goal. (*Melbourne Weekly Times*, 28 May 2014)

To soccer is also used, although less often, in rugby:

An interesting feature of the game was near the finish, when Rigby '**soccered**' the ball from half-way, over South's line, and in a race between Storey and he, Storey dived on the sphere first. (*Cumberland Argus*, 12 May 1923)

O'Connor extinguished thoughts of a Broncos' comeback when he twice **soccered** the ball and dived on it after Carne's blunder. (*Sydney Morning Herald*,

6 August 1990)

What has prompted the development of the Australian verb **to soccer**? There are two significant features that distinguish the game of soccer from Australian Rules and rugby that help to explain it. First, in soccer the ball may not be handled during play except by the goalkeepers, whereas in Australian Rules and rugby the ball is handled by all players, and typically kicked after being handled. It is unusual for the ball to be kicked *without* being handled in these games, and this is one of the features of a **soccered** ball. Second, whereas in soccer the ball is often kicked along the ground, this is rare in the other games, so a ball that is kicked without handling, and kicked so that it travels along the ground, is a ball that is **soccered** in Australia.

Soccer has been included in a number of our Oxford dictionaries and is being considered for inclusion in the second edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*.



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