

Catch Word #206 – Heavy hitter

AD-FREE

Episode description

Are you a very important person? Do you deal with VIPs all the time? In this Catch Word episode, Andrew and Jeremy discuss expressions that will help you in the world of heavy hitters and big shots!

Fun fact

Baseball player Babe Ruth is the epitome of a heavy hitter. In 1920, he broke the record for most home runs in one season, with 54 home runs. He beat the previous season's record of 29 held by ... Babe Ruth!

Expressions included in the study guide

- Heavy hitter
- Big shot
- To be at the top of [one's] game
- Corporate
- To slack off
- You betcha



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript.

Andrew: Catch Word #206. Hey, Jeremy, how are you?

Jeremy: I'm all right. A little tired today, though.

Andrew: Little tired today? Are you a coffee drinker, Jeremy?

Jeremy: Yeah, I have coffee sometimes. But, I have to be honest, I'm a bit of a coffee snob. A bit of a coffee snob.

Andrew: Coffee snob, so what does that mean if you're a coffee snob?

Jeremy: Well, snob, I think, is related to a word meaning nose. And we have another expression not related to this episode at all, but to stick your nose up at something means, like, you think you are better than that thing. You are too good for that thing. So, when I say I am a coffee snob, it means I only drink high-quality coffee. I don't like regular pot coffee from a diner or a restaurant or something like that. I like to get good quality coffee from good coffee roasters.

Andrew: Very good, nothing but the best.

Jeremy: Yup. How about you, Andrew?

Andrew: I love coffee, I brewed a pot this morning and I've worked through about half of it now. So maybe I'm the opposite of you, quality isn't as important for me as the quantity.

Jeremy: So you drink a pot of coffee each day?

Andrew: Several, maybe.

Jeremy: Oh my goodness.

Andrew: Maybe two pots a day.

Jeremy: And so the Culips podcast continues thanks to pots of coffee.

Andrew: It is our fuel.

Anyways Jeremy, a couple of extra bonus expressions here to start the episode, and that is very fitting because today's episode is a part of our Catch Word series. And Catch Word is where we explain, describe, and

teach and tell all of our listeners how to use really interesting and useful English idioms and vocabulary and expressions, this kind of thing. This is the focus for Catch Word. And today we will teach how to use two English expressions that describe important people. Important people, or sometimes we say VIP—very important people.

Jeremy, let's get into it. What is our first expression for today?

Jeremy: Our first expression for today is **heavy hitter**.

Andrew: **Heavy hitter**. OK.

Jeremy: **Heavy hitter**.

Andrew: So like heavy means what? Weighing a lot, right? A large amount of weight.

Jeremy: So is this like fat people who punch others? You could guess that, maybe.

Andrew: Yeah, well, I think that's actually a good way to think of it, because, if you are a very large person, actually, if somebody is overweight or fat, one of the, kind of, polite ways to refer to that person is heavy. If my mom is talking about a fat person, she always says, oh, she's heavy.

Jeremy: Yes, it sounds better than fat.

Andrew: Right, fat is kind of rude. So if you're a little bit overweight, maybe you're heavy. But if you're heavy, we think you might have a lot of power, right? So, think about a heavyweight boxer, these guys are big. But they are also very powerful. So if they hit, it has a big impact, right? I wouldn't wanna get punched by a heavyweight boxer, my head would probably fall off.

Jeremy: Yeah, definitely dangerous.

Andrew: So a **heavy hitter**, then, is a person with a lot of power or wealth or influence. And we use it especially to talk about people in business or politics.

Jeremy: Why do we say hitter? Where does that come from? What do you think, Andrew?

Andrew: Well, I think this is actually related to baseball and, interestingly enough, there are tons of expressions in English that find their origin in baseball. And I think this is one of them. You can imagine a **heavy hitter** as being someone that can hit home runs easily, that is a really good batter in baseball. So I think the hit here, it comes from, you know, being able to hit the baseball. I know when I played baseball as a kid, if there was a really good batter that was up at bat, then my coach would yell, **heavy hitter**,

heavy hitter. And that was an instruction to move back in the field, to prepare for a long hit.

Jeremy: It could mean, like, someone with a heavy bat, because if your bat is heavier, than you'll hit the ball farther.

Andrew: Right.

Jeremy: But heavy in English is also used to mean intense, sometimes.

Andrew: Sure, yeah. Absolutely.

Jeremy: A heavy moment, heavy words. A heavy feeling, an important or intense feeling. So, perhaps that is part of why people use this expression to talk about powerful people.

Andrew: I was listening to a radio stream on the internet the other day. Actually, it was a radio show that one of my friends hosts back in Canada, and he was playing a song, and he introduced the song by saying, "This next song's a real **heavy hitter.**" So, this is another context where you might hear this expression. Here, I think, he was kind of blending the word hit, which means a really popular song, a hit, it's a good song, right? With this expression, kind of making a joke on this expression, saying, oh, this next song is really good, it's a **heavy hitter**, it's powerful, it's impactful.

Jeremy: It's powerful, yeah.

Andrew: It's good, and so these are some different ways we can use **heavy hitter.** But I think the core meaning of this expression **heavy hitter** is just a person that is powerful or influential or wealthy.

Jeremy: Let's use an example to show everybody how it is used.

Andrew: That sounds perfect. Let's listen to an example right now.

Coworker 1: Hey, make sure **to be on top of your game** this afternoon.

Coworker 2: Why is that?

Coworker 1: I heard some **heavy hitters** from **corporate** are coming to visit the office.

Coworker 2: OK, I'll make sure to impress them.

Coworker 1: Good stuff.

Andrew: In that example that we just heard, two coworkers talk about some **heavy hitters** that will visit their office this afternoon. OK, who are the **heavy**

hitters? Well, they are important people from the head office. So the two coworkers, they remind each other that they should **be on top of their game**. And that's actually another interesting expression right there, **to be on top of your game**. And, well, this means to perform at a high level or do the best that you can do, right? **To be on the top of your game** means that you're performing very well. So, because these **heavy hitters**, these important people from the head office, are coming to visit their office, the two coworkers want to impress these important people because, well, if the **heavy hitters** see them **slacking**, maybe they could get in trouble or get fired, something like that, right?

Jeremy: Yeah. They need to look good in front of the important people from their company headquarters, right?

Andrew: That is right. OK, let's listen to one more example using this expression, **heavy hitter**.

Friend 1: Are you going to the town hall meeting this evening?

Friend 2: Yeah, of course. I wouldn't miss it. There's always a lot of **heavy hitters** in attendance. It's a good opportunity to network, too. What about you, are you going?

Friend 1: You **betcha**. I'll be there, too.

Jeremy: In this example, two friends talk about attending a town hall meeting. A town hall meeting is a meeting between citizens and local government officials. It is a place where citizens can express their views to their elected officials. Both of the friends say they are going to attend the meeting because there are many **heavy hitters** that attend. In other words, there are many important business and political leaders who go to town hall meetings, and these two friends want to be able to talk and interact with them.

Andrew: Yeah, so if you're an advantageous person, somebody that wants to network with powerful people, with **heavy hitters**, then maybe a town hall meeting is the type of place you'd like to go.

Jeremy: Yup.

Andrew: All right, so let's move on to the second expression for today's episode that we'll teach. And, Jeremy, do you wanna introduce it? What is our second expression?

Jeremy: Our second expression is **big shot**. **Big shot**. **Big shot**.

Andrew: **Big shot**. OK, **big shot**. And what does it mean if you're a **big shot**?

Jeremy: Usually it means that you are very important, similar to **heavy hitter**. But it kind of seems to me, it sounds a little facetious, like it could be used sarcastically when someone thinks that they are important, but really they are not.

Andrew: Yes, there are two ways that we can use this expression. As you just mentioned, you can make fun of somebody, right? Like, oh, he thinks he's a real **big shot**, right? Maybe somebody in your social circle tries to pretend like they're rich, you know, maybe they have, like, a fake Rolex watch and they're always acting like they're very wealthy or influential, but in reality they're not. Then you could make fun of that person by saying, oh, that guy thinks he's a **big shot**. But we can also use it in a legitimate way to talk about a real person that is influential in business or politics, you know, they're very successful.

Jeremy: Successful in a certain field, right?

Andrew: Especially, we can use a phrase like a **big shot** somebody, right? He's a **big shot** politician, he's a **big shot** business leader.

Jeremy: Yes.

Andrew: Right, and when we use it in that set expression, it means very successful, very powerful, very influential in that field.

Jeremy: Yeah, in that specific field, right?

Andrew: Jeremy, can you guess the origin of this expression?

Jeremy: My instincts tell me that this expression came from the Wild West. When everyone was carrying a gun around with them and the one with the biggest gun was the most powerful. Something like that.

Andrew: Yeah.

Jeremy: Is that true?

Andrew: Yeah, you are very close.

Jeremy: OK.

Andrew: You got the situation right, but the setting is wrong. It's not cowboys and the Wild West, it's Prohibition-era gangsters.

Jeremy: Oh, interesting.

Andrew: And a **big shot** was a gangster who had a very accurate shot when shooting a gun.

Jeremy: I see.

Andrew: OK, so you can imagine that if your business is going around shooting people, and you are a very accurate shot, then you are going to be successful in that business. So that is where this expression originated, but now we use it just to talk about anybody in any field that is important or influential.

Jeremy: And for those who are curious, the Prohibition era was a time in US history, United States history, when alcohol was illegal. Prohibition, or to prohibit, means to make something illegal or to not allow people to do something. So this era is when alcohol was illegal, basically.

Andrew: And, because of that, there were a lot of gangsters who would illegally sell alcohol and import alcohol and distill alcohol. So during this time you saw a lot of gang activity, too, which is all related to this expression, **big shot**. It's really interesting, the history of these expressions, when you dig deeper into them, it's it?

Jeremy: Yeah, very interesting. Language is like a living record of history.

Andrew: It's really, really fascinating. Well, Jeremy, I think we should listen to some examples using this expression, **big shot**. So let's do that right now.

Friend 1: Remember Jack from high school?

Friend 2: Yeah, we were in the same math class. Why?

Friend 1: I ran into him randomly the other day. Turns out he's a **big shot** scientist at NASA now.

Friend 2: Wow, really? That's incredible. Good for him.

Andrew: In this example, a couple of high school buddies talk about one of their old classmates, Jack. And Jack went on, after graduating school, he became a **big shot** scientist at NASA. OK? He became a **big shot** scientist. And NASA is the American space agency, right? So he didn't become just any regular old scientist, no, but a **big shot** scientist. So that means that he's very respected in his field and he does important work. **Big shot** scientist.

Jeremy: Yeah, he is important and good at what he does, right?

Andrew: Exactly. All right, let's listen to the last example for today's episode.

Friend 1: Did you see your neighbour's new car?

Friend 2: Yeah, man, a brand-new Porsche. Impressive.

Friend 1: He sure must feel like a **big shot** driving around town.

Friend 2: Totally, I would too. Wouldn't you?

Jeremy: In this example, two roommates discuss their next-door neighbour's new car. The neighbour just bought an expensive sports car, a brand-new Porsche. The two roommates think that the neighbour must feel like an important person, or like a **big shot**, while driving around in such an expensive and flashy car. This is a very common usage, I think, as well. You know, oh, look at Mr. **Big Shot** with his red Porsche, or something like that, right? Mr. **Big Shot**.

Andrew: Yeah, I think when you're jealous of somebody, you might use this expression. Oh, he thinks he's such a **big shot**, look at Mr. **Big Shot**. You know, really, you're expressing your own jealousy because you want the Porsche too, right? You want the fast and flashy sports car, so I think this is one way that people can idiomatically express a feeling of jealousy, maybe even subconsciously express jealousy.

Jeremy: Yeah, if you hear someone's saying this, they might be jealous.

Andrew: Indeed.

That brings us to the end of this lesson. Talk to you next time.

Detailed Explanations

Heavy hitter

Noun

A **heavy hitter** is a powerful, influential, or important person.

Here's one more example with **heavy hitter**:

| | |
|--------|---|
| Phil: | Do you see those guys over there? |
| Carly: | The ones in the striped suits? |
| Phil: | Yes. They're a bunch of heavy hitters in the recording industry. You've always wanted to be a singer. Now's your chance to make some contacts. |
| Carly: | I'm really not good at networking. I'm too shy. How about you come along and be my manager? |

Big shot

Noun

A **big shot** is someone of importance. **Big shot** can also be used as an adjective, such as a **big shot** scientist. **Big shot** is also commonly used sarcastically.

Here's one more example with **big shot**:

| | |
|----------|--|
| Heather: | Hey, I just bumped into John. He seems a little different. |
| Cynthia: | Like he's full of himself? |
| Heather: | Yeah. |
| Cynthia: | Ever since he got a promotion, he thinks he's such a big shot . |
| Heather: | Oh, that's why. |

To be at the top of [one's] game

Idiom

To be at the top of [one's] game is to be at your personal best. If you are playing a soccer game, you are playing it as best as you possibly can. If someone asks you **to be at the top of your game**, they want you to perform to the best of your abilities.

Here are a couple more examples with **to be at the top of [one's] game**:

Carl: How was the hockey game last night?

Vance: Great. We won 5-0.

Carl: Wow. Who was playing goalie?

Vance: Patrick. He **was at the top of his game**. They couldn't get anything past him.

Carl: Let's hope he keeps that up.

Ingrid: Tomorrow is the big concert. Are you ready?

Betty: I'm ready.

Ingrid: Good. You need **to be at the top of your game** because the city orchestra is looking to hire two more violinists. They will be looking at you.

Betty: That's extra motivation for me. I'll be on point—don't worry.

Corporate

Noun

Imagine you are working at a branch of a large company. People who work at the headquarters and are responsible for overlooking the entire company are from **corporate**. This is a common way of talking about your company's management that work outside your own office or branch.

Here are a couple more examples with **corporate**:

| | |
|---------|---|
| Nathan: | The boss specifically asked us to clean the kitchen area before the company visit. |
| Vicky: | Why the kitchen? |
| Nathan: | She says that the heavy hitters from corporate can't stand a messy kitchen when they do their inspections. |
| Vicky: | OK, then. Let's get cleaning. |

| | |
|----------|---|
| Harriet: | I'm going to be out of the office tomorrow, all right? |
| Dave: | OK. Taking the day off? |
| Harriet: | No, just the opposite! I'm heading to corporate for a meeting with the new management. They want to hear about how we do things over here. |
| Dave: | Oh boy, it's a big day for you. Good luck! |

To slack off

Phrasal verb

In this episode, Andrew says how it would be bad **to slack off** in front of heavy hitters. **To slack off** is to not put in a good effort or to be lazy. A person who **slacks off** is called a slacker.

Here are a couple more examples with **to slack off**:

Boss: Who are we going to get to crunch the numbers on the sale of the property?
How about Patrick?

Felicia: Sir? Maybe not him.

Boss: Why not?

Felicia: He **slacks off** a lot. He'll take his time. Then at the last minute, someone else will have to help him finish the task.

Boss: Then you can do it.

Felicia: Oh?

Marion: The application deadline for universities is coming up. Did you send anything out?

Trevor: I haven't. My grades aren't good enough to get accepted.

Marion: Really? That surprises me. You're so smart.

Trevor: But in high school, I **slacked off** the whole time. My grades were atrocious.

Marion: So what are you going to do?

Trevor: I'm thinking of going to a trade school. There's a high demand for electricians in my city.

You betcha

Phrase, informal

You betcha is an informal way of saying yes or absolutely. It is strongly affirming what the other person is suggesting. Betcha alone is the contraction of bet you, as in betting or wagering. **You betcha** takes on a different meaning.

Here are a couple more examples with **you betcha**:

Harry: I was wondering if you could check our mail while we're away on vacation.

Fred: Do you usually get a lot of mail?

Harry: Just a little. But it's good to have it collected. I don't want thieves to think no one's home.

Fred: Right. That's a good idea.

Harry: So, can you?

Fred: **You betcha.** No problem.

Indy: For the barbecue tomorrow, I was thinking of cooking chorizo with veggies on the side. You can eat spicy, right?

Felipe: **You betcha!** I love chorizo sausage. Do you want me to bring anything?

Indy: No, that's all right. I have a lot of beer. But if you want something else, like wine, you can bring that.

Felipe: Sounds good. I'll do that.

Quiz

1. To slack off is:

- a) To do a good job
- b) To be inactive when you should be working
- c) To do something other than what was asked
- d) To take a short vacation

2. Which of the following does not fit with the others?

- a) heavy hitter
- b) big shot
- c) VIP
- d) headquarters

3. In this episode, is the term big shot always positive?

- a) yes
- b) no

4. Which of the following is the best equivalent for the phrase you betcha?

- a) OK
- b) maybe
- c) if I can
- d) not right now

5. If you played a sport at the top of your game, you:

- a) tried your best
- b) played your best

Writing or Discussions Questions

1. **Would others describe you as a heavy hitter in your field of expertise? Why or not why?**
2. **When do you feel like acting like a big shot?**
3. **Is networking important in your line of work? Explain.**
4. **At what age were you at the top of your game physically?**
5. **At what age were you at the top of your game mentally?**
6. **When do you like taking time for yourself and just slacking off?**

Quiz Answers

1.b 2.d 3.b 4.a 5.b

Episode credits

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