
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak

To be on the ball



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Rob

Hello and welcome to The English We Speak. I'm Rob and joining me today is Liz.

Li

Hi... everyone – err, Rob, my name is Li, not Liz.

Rob

I'm sorry Li, I'm not really on the ball this morning.

Li

Nice phrase though. Why don't you go for a coffee and then you will be on the ball for The English We Speak?

Rob

OK.

(A little later)

Rob

Right, lovely, OK, that's better. I've had a nice cup of coffee and I'm ready to explain the meaning for today's The English We Speak. So, here you go. When you are on the ball it means you are alert and quick to react to things.

Li

It comes from sports, doesn't it?

Rob

Yes. And there's another phrase: 'to keep your eye on the ball' which has a very similar meaning.

Li

I guess we can use it for any situation which is changing quickly so you need to be focused and sharp.

Rob

Indeed. Let's hear some examples:

Examples

The interviewer raised tough questions but Ma Yun was on the ball.

Financial management is not a job that everyone can do. You have to keep your eye on the ball at all times.

Li

And if you want to learn English well you can stay on the ball with

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Rob

Best of luck.

Li

Bye.

Rob

Bye bye.