

Calvinball

Etymology

Summary

From a proper name, combined with an English element.

Etymons: proper name *Calvin*, **ball** *n.*¹

< *Calvin*, the name of a comic strip character (see note) + **ball** *n.*¹

Notes

In the newspaper comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes* (1985–95) by U.S. cartoonist Bill Watterson, *Calvinball* refers to a game played by the characters in which the rules are made up by the players and changed in an ad hoc manner during play; compare the following:

1990 [Hobbes:] No sport is less organized than Calvinball! [Calvin:] New Rule!
B. Watterson, *Calvin & Hobbes* (comic strip) in *Macor*(Georgia) *Tel. & News* 5 May 8a/2

The title characters of the comic strip are humorously named after John *Calvin* (see **Calvinism** *n.*) and Thomas *Hobbes* (see **Hobbesian** *n.*).

Meaning & use

Chiefly North American.

Activity reminiscent of the imaginary game of Calvinball (see etymology), in not following any discernible rules, or in which individuals act in a self-servingly inconsistent manner. Also (and in earliest use) as a modifier. **1994–**

[1990 Soviet politics seems to be a form of Bill Watterson's Calvinball, where the only rule is that the same rules are never used twice.
Current History October 309/1]

1994 There'll be a team championship and an individual champion

2023 They're literally turning the election into Calvinball.

@usefultwidiot 22 December intwitter.com (accessed 23 Jan. 2024)

North American English

Pronunciation

BRITISH ENGLISH

/ˈkɑːlvɪnbɔːl/

KAL-vin-bawl



U.S. ENGLISH

/ˈkælv(ə)nˌbɔl/

KAL-vuhn-bawl



/ˈkælv(ə)nˌbɑl/

KAL-vuhn-bahl



Pronunciation keys

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