Teaching the Beginning Pole Vaulter

2011 KCCTFCA Winter Coaches Clinic

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Selecting Successful Vaulters

Speed

Jumping Ability

Athletic Ability

Attitude

Speed

The pole vaulter should have good speed. He or she doesn’t need to be the fastest athlete on the team, but needs to have the ability to build runway speed. In general, the more horizontal speed the athlete can generate, the more vertical height that can be attained.

Jumping Ability

The vaulter must have the ability to drive upward at the end of the approach run. The better the jumper, the better the pole vaulter can be.

Testing potential vaulters at the long jump pit is a good selection option.

Athletic Ability

Pole vaulters should be good athletes. Vaulting success not only depends upon speed and jumping ability, but also on good coordination, balance, strength, and power.

Some of the best pole vaulters are good football players, basketball players, and anyone with a gymnastics background.

Attitude

Pole vaulters do not have to be “nuts”, as some people believe. However, to be good, a pole vaulter needs to enjoy the thrill of the event. He or she must have the “guts” to run at full speed towards the vault pit, plant the pole at maximum speed, hang upside down, and fly off the top of the pole.
Finding the right athlete to become a good pole vaulter may take several attempts, and will require coaching patience as he or she learns the phases of the event. Once a young vaulter gets a taste of success, they will normally become “hooked” on the feeling, and it is then up to the coach to help them improve their technique through all phases of the vault.

Proper Pole Grip

Have athlete stand and hold pole with top hand directly above forehead, palm facing in.

Reach up and forward with bottom hand and grasp pole, palm facing in.

This spacing between hands is usually the most comfortable for many vaulters.

Each athlete can then develop a check system to maintain this hand spacing each time they pick up the pole.

As a coach, if you feel this grip width is too close or too wide for the athlete, make the appropriate adjustment.

No two athletes are exactly the same!

Phases of the Pole Vault (Right Handed Vaulter)

Approach Run

First step should be on the foot opposite the vaulter’s take-off foot. (Right foot)

Run with an erect posture (the athlete should stay “tall” and not lean forward).

The foot should always land under the knee when striking the ground. (The athlete should lift their knees as they run.)
The ball of the foot should strike the ground and not the heal.

The pole moves up and down gently (the athlete should not “swing” the pole).

Count each time the take-off foot touches the ground.

Build rhythm and speed gradually.

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### Teaching the Approach Run

Walk with the athlete on the track, pushing the pole as you count steps into the plant position.

Walk with the athlete on the track, carrying the pole as you count steps into the plant position.

Have the athlete jog on the track, pushing the pole as they count steps into the plant position.

Have the athlete jog on the track, carrying the pole as they count steps into the plant position.

Have the athlete run on the track, pushing the pole as they count steps into the plant position.

Have the athlete run on the track, carrying the pole as they count steps into the plant position.

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### Plant

Start the plant phase on the next-to-last left step.

Make sure the upper body is back of the next-to-last left step when it lands.

Pole should be about belt high and parallel to the runway on the next-to-last left step.

Begin lifting the pole to the plant position on the next-to-last left step.

Pole and right hand should be about ear high on the last right step.

Right hand drives upward just in front of the right ear and reaches as high as possible on the last left step.

Left hand pushes pole up and forward.
Pole tip should hit plant box about 2/3 of the way down.

Hands continue push to keep top of pole moving towards vertical.

*Vaulters should practice the plant phase often.*

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**Teaching the Proper Plant**

**Walking Three-Step Plant**

Take first step on left foot.

Begin lifting pole as left foot touches ground.

Move right hand and pole to ear height as right foot touches ground.

Right hand drives upward just in front of the right ear and reaches as high as possible on the last left step.

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Left hand pushes pole up and forward against a solid object.

Athlete extends body upward to simulate take-off position (should rise on the toes).

Right knee should drive upward and bend at 90 degrees.

Right toes should flex up as much as possible.

*Athlete should not leave the ground.*

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**Take-Off**

Continue pushing right hand upward/forward.

Drive the entire body upward on top of the take-off foot.

Drive the right knee upward (the athlete should not “run-through” the take-off foot).

Flex the toes on the right foot up as much as possible.

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Spring upward in an effort to impact the back of the plant box with the pole tip as the body is rising upward. *(This should cause a high pole bend!)*

In an optimum take-off:

A) the pole tip should impact the back of the plant box just as the take-off foot leaves the ground.

B) the pole should not start to bend until the vaulter has left the ground.

C) a straight line should be formed from the top hand, through the front of the chest, to the toes of the take-off foot.

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*Vaulters need to have an aggressive take-off and use their adrenalin!*
Teaching the Proper Take-Off

Incorporate the approach run and plant.

Have the athlete run on the track, counting down to the take-off step, and jump up over the take-off foot. (A commonly accepted take-off angle is approximately 22 degrees.)

Have the athlete hold the right knee high as they leave the ground.

The athlete should attempt to flex the right toes up throughout this drill.

The athlete should continue to hold the right knee up as their body returns to the track, landing back on the take-off foot.

This drill can lead to turned ankles if not done properly. Tell your athletes to focus and be careful.

Drive-Swing

Continue erect posture in air like a long jumper.

Keep right knee up and bent at 90 degrees.

Keep left leg long and behind the vaulter.

Move chest forward/upward in front of the top hand (allow chest to follow inward bending pole).

Keep chest balanced over the hips.

Keep head in front of top arm.

The vaulter should keep the pole in front of them as long as possible.

Keep left leg long and swing it through like a pendulum.

Continue the drive-swing phase until the pole bends (rolls) to the side.

With an optimum drive-swing, the vaulter’s hips should be slightly above their shoulders as the drive-swing ends.

The drive-swing should be practiced daily from a short approach with a low hand grip on the pole.
Teaching the Drive-Swing

Short Approach Drive-Swing Drill

Run from two or three left steps with a low grip height on the pole.

Plant the pole and place the body in a good take-off position.

Keep the trail leg long and behind the body.

Keep the top arm long and straight.

Swing the trail leg through like a pendulum.

Keep right leg bent at 90 degrees and head in line with entire body.

Allow bottom elbow to bend and move inside pole.

Land on back in pit with right knee bent at 90 degrees and top hand and pole resting on inside of right thigh.

This is a drill that our pole vaulters will use on a daily basis.

As the vaulter gets better at accomplishing the technique of this drill, have them raise their grip and gradually back up to extend the approach run.

The experienced vaulter can get to a point where they hang upside down just as the pole reaches vertical, and then ride it on into the pit with a proper landing.

All phases of the vault and drills to improve each can be found at the National Pole Vault Coaches Association website.

NPVCA.com

Click on Articles

These are demonstrated by Mark Strawderman and Bill Falk.

Thank you and feel free to contact me at nonamakert@usd231.com.

I will gladly provide assistance to you or your athletes in any way that I can.