

Las Vegas Pole Vault Safety Forum

UCS Inc.
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Jeff,

This is a follow-up message relating to my first efforts, in 1991, when I began seeking constructive dialogue with your company. The dialogue I sought is in regard to the safety of the UCS Spirit pole vault pole I purchased from your company and how to correctly manipulate your flexible competition UCS Spirit vaulting poles to bend according to your UCS Spirit pole manufacture specifications.

For my wife and myself, our top priority has always been the health and safety of ANYONE vaulting improperly on perilous flexible competition poles. We became fully aware that misuse of the UCS Spirit competition vaulting pole, we purchased from your company in 1991, is the most profuse cause of catastrophic pole vault injuries and deaths. We soon proved for ourselves that full-speed approach runs combined with "pressing" flexible poles forward is the deadliest most detrimental mixture we encountered in all of our pole vault experiences.

I recently discovered a 07/14/89 SUPREME COURT OF NEBRASKA case that involved the death of a high school pole vaulter in 1983 using a Pacer brand vaulting pole. It is my understanding that one "expert" witness for the original defendants in the case was Tom Tellez, "considered by many as the greatest track and field (athletics) coach in history, in particular because of his contributions to the sport in the areas of kinesiology, physiology and biomechanics." (The preceding quote is taken directly from Wikipedia).

Upon finding the record of this case, I was alarmed by the thought of the intense suffering the diseased young vaulter's father must have needlessly endured. Administrating his diseased young son's estate, this parent must have been put through sheer emotional "hell" while, as the surviving victim, he had not only suffered the loss of his son in the 1983 high school pole vault calamity, but this vulnerable trusting parent then endured six more years of pain of which only he knows the extent.

"There but for the grace of God go I"

Early 1991, a visit to Bob Mathias Stadium (Tulare, California) led me to observe in person for the first time what was actually going on during my son's high school pole vault practices. I was appalled by what I saw. Eventually, my shock relating to what I had witnessed that day brought about a personal visit to my home by world renowned 1980s pole vault coach Don Hood, later that Spring. Coach Hood, while he sat relaxed on my living room coach, candidly shared his thoughts regarding pole vault. Don Hood, himself a graduate of my son's same high school, pointed out to us, among other things, that two-time Olympic decathlon gold medalist Bob Mathias was the first athlete to use the modern fiberglass vaulting pole in 1952. Sadly, in our conversation, Coach Hood also informed us that two high school athletes had been killed during pole vault attempts in 1991.

While we discussed possible solutions to improve pole vault, Coach Hood strongly advocated helmets to be the most feasible remedy in the prevention of future pole vault catastrophes rather than examining alterations of pole vault technique as the truly most logical necessary remedy. My prospective solutions differed greatly from Coach Hood's because I was convinced that improving equipment or creating new versions of equipment was NEVER going to solve the multitude of glaring pole vault problems undermining this declining obscure perilous event at the time. My own firsthand perspectives of my son's precarious pole vault experiences had already exposed to me the most real and present pole vault dangers.

My wife and I remain forever grateful that our son avoided worse catastrophes that could have occurred while all of us were in the thralls of "traditional" pole vault ignorance and naiveté. It was alarmingly obvious to us in 1991 that primitive "traditional" pole vault TECHNIQUES and TEACHING METHODS are the most dangerous and deadly threats in pole vault, NOT vaulting EQUIPMENT.

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It was primarily negligent pole vault techniques being carelessly conveyed by athletic "Establishment" elites that unnecessarily caused our son to suffer several senseless injuries and multiple encounters with the deadly "box" as he narrowly avoided many preventable hazardous situations that could have ended much worse than they did. To this day, in 2014, my wife and I still do not have words to express our eternal gratitude that our son was one of the fortunate survivors of entrenched deadly athletic "Establishment" dereliction. I must reiterate that, in 1991, it was Coach Don Hood himself who informed us that two young men had been killed pole vaulting during my son's senior year in high school. Prior to Coach Hood providing us that information, we had no idea these deaths had occurred but we were already acutely aware of their predictable probable cause and this news only increased our determination to eliminate the deadly discrepancies we were experiencing firsthand.

June of 1992 we successfully documented our revolutionary "Air Strike" innovations demonstrating the only pole vault technique that enables vaulters to maneuver "flexed" vaulting poles into the manufacturer's specified "fully cocked" position from which inverted vaulters can now "spring" vertically skyward safely above the landing mats. "Air Strike" inherently eliminates the deadliest defects of "traditional" pole vault because vaulters ultimately do NOT propel upward while suspended over the "box." Propelling upward over the "box" has ALWAYS been the most flagrant "traditional" deadly pole vault flaw.

It took us a relatively short period of time, after our first meeting with Coach Hood, to figure out for ourselves how to initiate safer pole vaulting results by cooperating with powerful flexible poles to guide them via the physics principles of "horizontal flexed pole rotation." We named our safer pole vault system the "Air Strike" method because ours are the first and only pole vault concepts ever developed to properly "load" flexible vaulting poles according to manufacturer specifications applying gravity and body weight immediately following the "strike" of the pole tip at the back of the slideway "box."

Whether the pole strikes the back of the "box" when the vaulter is in the air or the pole strikes while the vaulter is still on the ground, letting the bent pole "spin" puts the vaulter into proper "pull-over" position while the bending pole "loads" end-over-end (ends aligned perpendicular to the ground plane) placing the inverted vaulter over the mats during the moments the recoiling pole completes its flexed rotation process as dictated by the physics laws of "linear elastic behavior." Applying proper technique that results in decreasing the time vaulters spend dangerously above the "box" is simply the common sense logical solution to us but, unlike athletic "Establishment" elites, self-glorification and monetary profits do not soil our ultimate purpose.

Athletic "Establishment" propaganda can never change real laws of physics and historical facts. We found that the true history of the fiberglass vaulting pole's evolution validates deadly primitive "traditional" pole vault concepts began innocuously in 1952 when tubular fiberglass fishing pole pioneer Herb Jenks manufactured the first three modern fiberglass vaulting poles for Olympic decathlete Bob Mathias. The key point is that Bob Mathias requested the poles solely for their light weight. Since flexibility was not considered in the equation, whatsoever, Bob Mathias applied 1940s "rigid" pole vault methods when he implemented the new poles.

Several years later, when flexibility was mixed in, the foolish "traditional" full-speed approach run and the ill-conceived "pressing" action of the lower arm to force the flexible pole to bend forward, formed a fatal combination. This deadly mix produces what we refer to as a "tuna fish jack pole" reaction that eventually causes ALL successful "traditional" pole vaulters to inevitably become projectiles emulating hooked tuna violently slung into the air off the end of a pole. For more than sixty years obstinate athletic "Establishment" elites have continued desperately clinging to erroneous assumptions framed by 1940s fishing pole technology.

After documenting our revolutionary life-saving pole vault methods in 1992, our proven concepts were snubbed by the athletic "Establishment" elites. For more than four years after 1992, we continued to invest thousands of our own hard-earned dollars in our futile attempts to expose the deadly flaws of "traditional" pole vault methods to no avail. We were ultimately forced to exit the pole vault world leaving the athletic "Establishment" elites to their own device. Unbeknownst to us, the athletic "Establishment" elites continued down their self-indulgent path ignoring the true causes of senseless catastrophic pole vault injuries and deaths.

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Late in 2011, fate exposed us again to this "deadly" game in which our mission has always been to end avoidable tragic pole vault consequences resulting from the same perilous ignorance, vile arrogance and abject stupidity that incited the purposeful obstruction of our message throughout the years at the expense of unfortunate athletes, naive parents and numerous other innocents damaged by primitive hazardous "traditional" pole vault philosophies.

We are back and, this go-round, we intend to inform the world that there were solutions available decades ago, prior to so many more preventable senseless injuries and deaths that followed our original attempts to be heard.

January, 2014, I drove from Las Vegas to Reno to attend your UCS Spirit 2014 Pole Vault Summit where I had a conversation with Dave Johnson, a featured "expert" at your "pole vault education" event. After purchasing and reading Dave Johnson's book, "Aim High," I was deeply disturbed by this featured speaker's incredibly reckless and irresponsible perspective of how to pole vault. Quoted from "Aim High," Dave's view is: **"You begin by carrying the pole and running like a madman, which is exactly what you must be to even try this event."**

Dave Johnson's unabashed perspective is echoed by Debra Chappell as she also published (for the world to see) a blog post expressing her own "expert" conclusion that a pole vaulter is a **"Highly skilled athlete with exceptional speed..."** Debra doesn't stop there, she continues with her further confirmation that, "Halfway coordinated crazy people who come barreling down the runway out of control with **more guts than either common sense or technique** are called something else...and it isn't flattering."

I view myself as a fortunate parent who figured out early in this high-risk "deadly" pole vault "game" that something is horribly wrong with this picture. I find that the openly disdainful attitude of athletic "Establishment" elites is continuously exposing itself. These have proven to be faces without shame veiled by braggadocio misconceptions willfully applied to conceal their true inferiority and ineptitude. I have deep sympathy for the parents who've needlessly faced the irreversible ordeal of watching their children pass from this life due to the tragic fact that they had the wool pulled over their eyes by these masters of deception while my attempted warnings intended to shed light onto so many senseless pole vault dangers went unheard.

I recently discovered the following words shared on the Internet dated November, 2013:

"It soon will be 11 years since I have seen my son, held my son, told my son that I love him or told him good luck before that awful day at the University of Minnesota. Needless to say I hate every day without him and even more, hate the upcoming holiday season that he so loved and enjoyed. With that said, my family and I made a decision a year and half ago that we are through totally with the very sport that took our sons life. We all tried to convince people that life is too precious and fragile to not take extra precautions and save the lives of those student athletes that are still pole vaulting. Very few people listened, very few people care and most importantly very few people would take action to make the sport safer for all. Now, my family and I can say we did our part, albeit not very affectedly, to try and make the sport safer. We are through. No talk about pole vault safety, no more foundation for pole vault safety, rather our foundation is now about changing the lives of students who had their lives changed via accidents or disease – if you were to visit our website www.kevindare.com, you will see no mention about pole vault safety, rather, a foundation who's logo is; Life...Back on Track. So with all of this being said, please leave me out of pole vault safety and let me and my family live the rest of our lives forgetting about the most dangerous sport in the world and working with ego maniacs who could care less about protecting precious lives. I am done. Thanks, Ed"

We, the founders of "Air Strike," substantiated in 1992, by providing tangible and visible evidence displaying that our pole vault technique advancements proved overwhelmingly, beyond any doubt, the two deadliest "traditional" pole vault teachings are the primitive foolish implementation of:

- 1. FULL-SPEED Approach Runs**
- 2. PRESSING Flexible Poles Forward**

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Since 1992, there is NO evidence that I have found to indicate that anyone else in the entire world has provided such sweeping pole vault TECHNIQUE improvements. During this same time period that our methods have been snubbed, endless "new" EQUIPMENT "innovations" have continued to be produced while somehow always remaining highly visible and abundantly available for PURCHASE.

WE, at "Air Strike," are the only PROVEN contributors that I am aware of on the planet to have introduced TECHNIQUE remedies and safety solutions that completely ERADICATE deadly "traditional" pole vault flaws. Yet, our life-saving information was not welcomed with "open arms" by the athletic "Establishment" elites who are well aware of our solutions. Why do you think that's the case?

The despicable fact is that our "solutions" can be perceived as detrimental to ever-increasing "sales" volumes being ENRICHED by the perpetual necessity for "BETTER" more expensive EQUIPMENT! It is with pure unadulterated conviction that I make this observation based on my own encounters.

The following perspectives by John Uelses were published in a 1962 Sports Illustrated issue. The article noted the experiences of the first vaulter to surpass the height of 16 feet, together with what was being discussed at the time regarding his contrary methods and how he came up with them. I discovered the SI article on Saturday, November 15, 2014. If you've already seen some of our "Air Strike" videos and/or have read our transcriptions beginning in 1992, the description by Uelses should sound familiar, as his words are nearly identical to ours:

"Much has been made of the short run Uelses takes before his vault, and critics of the fiber-glass pole maintain that this shows speed is not necessary."

"The reason he takes a shorter run is because that's all he needs to reach his maximum controllable speed," Dooley says. "If he ran any farther, he'd just be using up energy he needs in the vault itself." Vaulting on the new pole is not difficult, says Dooley. "Anybody can use the fiber-glass pole..."

"Uelses has added refinements in technique that are peculiarly his. He is the only vaulter in the world who cocks his pole in reverse. All the rest of the vaulters bend the pole toward the pit; Uelses tries to make his pole bend back toward him, away from the pit."

"I found that out by accident," Uelses said. "The pole bent backward once, and I got a good vertical lift from it. Then I experimented. I found that if the pole bends toward the pit it adds to your forward motion but takes away some of your lift. If you can bend it backward—cock it away from the pit—it tends to throw you back toward the runway. You have forward momentum from your run, and this counteracts the pole and you wind up with a good vertical lift."

Keep in mind that the UCS Spirit pole vault pole, to which my son applied our "horizontal flexed pole rotation" principles, was coaxed to reach a much greater bend position in its "fully cocked" state than the vaulting pole used by John Uelses in 1962. It also needs to be reiterated that UCS Spirit manufactured our vaulting pole and set the pole's specifications. Neither John Uelses or Chris Toledo manufactured their own vaulting poles. The fact is, both athletes simply figured out safer and better TECHNIQUE to more effectively apply the technology.

Herb Jenks created the first modern fiberglass competition poles for Bob Mathias in 1952, after Virgil Jackson, Bob's former high school coach, approached Herb with a vaulting problem Mathias needed solved. I am aware of the UCS narrative describing the origin of the "Spirit" pole vault pole brand.

In 1954, the image on the following page (5 of 7) was photographed just as Bob Mathias was beginning his career outside of sports. The picture of Bob, my parents, my sister and me, in front of my parents' business, was part of a early publicity promotion to help Bob jump-start his future endeavors in life. My father, although he never made it through grammar school, was very influential in Bob's hometown where my family and Bob's family lived. Bob was very gracious to me throughout my childhood and my adult life.

In the mid 1990s we video recorded Bob Mathias at his home near Fresno, California, to document the true history of fiberglass vaulting poles as he described the story surrounding his firsthand experiences and the facts relating to those first modern fiberglass competition vaulting poles produced by Herb Jenks. I mention this to assure you that pole vault information I share is verifiable and accurate in its detail.

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Billy Olson's former pole vault coach, Don Hood, coincidentally, graduated three years behind Bob Mathias from the same high school that my son, Chris, and I also graduated. In 1991 we resided around the corner from Don Hood's brother, who was also an old friend of my father. Following our first meeting with Coach Hood, my son attended multiple pole vault clinics individually supervised on-site by Don Hood and multiple clinics personally overseen on-site by Jan Johnson. I have my own video documentation of the "pole vault education" events for which I paid and also attended as a spectator.

These pricey ill-conceived events turned out to be tenuous and exasperating as the inept and dangerous processes being taught repeatedly fell far short of any constructive goals we hoped to achieve that had been promised by these acclaimed athletic "Establishment" pole vault "experts." My firsthand personal experiences of paying hard-earned dollars to "traditional" pole vault "Establishment" elites caused me to question the "true" motivation and purpose behind so many redundantly inept "clinics" being shamelessly promoted for a "price" across America and throughout the world.

It is simply unacceptable to stand by silently as athletic "Establishment" elites continue arrogantly and vigorously advancing proven deadly pole vault procedures with impunity while naïve pole vault participants invest capital only to inevitably face unnecessary hazardous consequences as the ultimate "price" paid for their ignorance.

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We eventually learned, more than two decades ago, through our own subsequent research, that nearly everything my son was taught by "pole vault experts" was completely wrong and, thus, inherently dangerous. It is my obligation to share our "pole vault" experiences for the purpose of preventing further needless pain resulting from the flagrant careless ineptitude and misconceptions that continue dominating pole vault education.

In 1991, we, the creators of Air Strike, recognized that full-speed approach runs and "pressing" flexible poles forward creates the perilous pole vaulting mixture that produces senseless injuries and deaths. In 1992 Air Strike methods demonstrated how to vastly lower the possibilities of catastrophic outcomes by replacing proven flawed "traditional" vaulting methods with our safer simple solutions supported by the laws of physics. Our proven easier to perform efficient pole vault techniques were then arrogantly snubbed by the athletic "Establishment" elites.

Continuing to surface across the Internet is clear evidence as to why athletic "Establishment" elites might never seriously prioritize the elimination of catastrophe-plagued primitive "traditional" pole vault methods. There are huge sums of dollars being pocketed today by companies and individuals profiting from the existence of ongoing profit-generating preventable pole vault hazards. Proper pole vault technique solutions threaten the existence of every "contrived" reason for "requiring" box collars, excessive padding of the uprights and the ever-expanding huge expensive foam mats extending down the sides of the runway. These are disgraceful facts I am destined and determined to expose for the purpose of taking pole vault to the levels of safety vaulters deserve.

"Air Strike Pole Vault" will be recorded in history as the most significant technical development and pole vault safety solution to be rejected by the egoistic athletic "Establishment" elites.

An elementary factual comparison is that Cornelius Warmerdam pole vaulted above heights greater than 15 feet 43 times in the 1940s. He accomplished 42 of those vaults using a previously discarded stick of bamboo. Every Warmerdam vault was achieved without landing mats. Yet, today, the insatiable appetites of the fattened athletic "Establishment" elites for ever-expanding gigantic foam padding "requirements" has NOT remedied the fact that most vaulters suffer serious injury and death attempting heights **far below** Warmerdam's nearly 16 foot peaks.

On the Internet, video examples, by the hundreds, will be posted in the coming months displaying the so-called "fails" of pole vault. The "fail" videos add to the enormous sum of existing videos confirming "coaches" are on the scene encouraging the application of hazardous primitive "traditional" pole vault methods. As the "failures" occur repeatedly, "coaches" laugh while encouraging and perpetuating this deadly "traditional" pole vault destruction.

Internet pole vault videos recorded today, demonstrate the exact inane methods being applied 23 years ago when I video recorded my son attempting the same inept destructive and ill-conceived tactics. Fortunately, for us, we did NOT comply with the insanity that was being irresponsibly promoted and "sold" to us that we bought into because we, like thousands of others, did not know better. In a short while, we decided to figure out our own common sense solutions to the pole vault problems we encountered. Our proven solutions turned out to be completely contrary to dangerous primitive "traditional" pole vault concepts that are dead wrong.

It quickly became obvious to us in 1991 that one of the most senseless glaring flaws in deadly "traditional" pole vault philosophy is the insane obsession with HEIGHT over form. Deadly problems begin when the HEIGHT obsession is mixed with the "traditional" pole vault misconception that the "fastest" athletes possess the HIGHEST pole vault potential. This ignorant view dangerously misleads anyone gullible enough to buy into it by promoting the false premise that the full-speed approach run is a good thing. Now, if your desire is to make matters even worse, mix into the toxic equation "pressing" the flexible pole forward to guarantee the greatest probabilities of achieving catastrophic injuries and deaths.

For more than two decades we have asserted that achieving proper pole vault FORM is the ONLY logical means of safely and efficiently mastering potential pole vault heights. We have asserted our additional conclusion that:

THE DOWNWARD FORCE OF GRAVITY CREATED BY THE VAULTER'S BODY WEIGHT COMBINED WITH THE VAULTER'S CONTROLLED HORIZONTAL VELOCITY PRODUCES THE SAFEST METHOD OF PROPERLY LOADING FLEXIBLE VAULTING POLES ACCORDING TO MANUFACTURER SPECIFICATIONS, NOT SPEED.

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In 1991, I wrote a very prophetic message to UCS Spirit for the sake of the safety and well-being of pole vaulters being subjected to hazards that exist born from sheer carelessness and ineptitude. My message of concern was mailed to Lane Maestretti. I described to him my pole vault observations and encounters at the time. I included my heartfelt suggestion that there are two immediate solutions of which one or the other could be applied to prevent needless pole vault risks that I repeatedly witnessed at every practice and pole vault competition:

1. ***Make the sport safer for all participants, not just a few, by implementing a mandatory certification program enforced by each school's athletic department.***
2. ***Eliminate the opportunity to vault at the high school level entirely.***

I agree with Ed Dare that pole vault **"is the most dangerous sport in the world"** – the difference for me is that I contend pole vault remains so very deadly and hazardous primarily because of the malicious careless "ego maniacs" who've burrowed deeply into the athletic "Establishment" hierarchy while arrogantly refusing to accept or acknowledge the existence of legitimate life-saving safety improvements and major technique advances.

Looking back now, after more than two decades have passed, it has been a very exasperating journey that is the result of my original decision to endeavor to make pole vault safer. If closed minds do not open soon, this will be the turning point and the time to reconsider where my efforts can be better invested for the purpose of preventing the misuse of flexible pole vault poles. This would leave only the following primary remedy:

"Eliminate the opportunity to vault at the high school level entirely."

These additional words were penned by Ed Dare, father of diseased pole vaulter, Kevin. The words make clear Ed Dare's voice of experience and point of view after the family's senseless tragedy: **"very few people care and most importantly very few people would take action to make the sport safer for all."**

Coincidentally, I penned some of Ed's exact words in 1991, eleven years before his son died after his tragic pole vaulting catastrophe. Regrettably, twenty-three years ago, UCS Spirit, manufacturer of the vaulting pole that I purchased for my son, had already begun ignoring my requests for their help to **"Make the sport safer for all..."**

Sincerely,

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