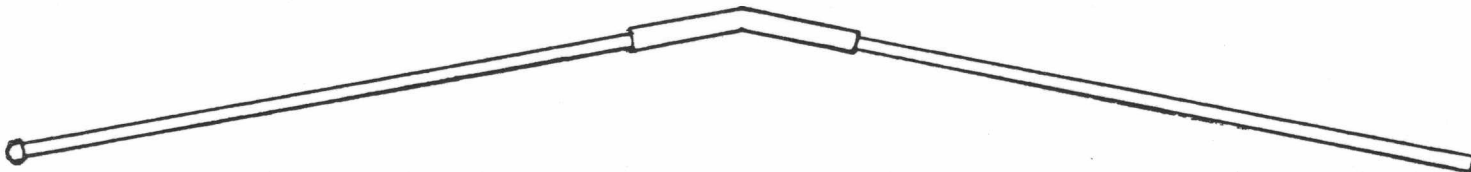


Legality of the Crooked Pole

This is an argument favoring the legality of the crooked vaulting pole. The necessity of clarifying this matter arises as a result of its being declared illegal at the World Veterans Games in Rome in June of 1985. I (Jim Vernon) have been using a crooked pole since 1976 in masters competition, including four World Championship meets starting in 1977, and the pole has never been challenged except in this one meet. I have no desire to obtain an advantage over other vaulters. In fact, if others would use it, I would be pleased. So far all but one vaulter who have tried one have not liked it and have elected not to use it.

Before presenting arguments about the legality, let me describe the type of pole under discussion. It is formed from two pieces of straight pole which are misaligned so that the resulting pole appears as shown in the sketch. It would be better if the pole could be smoothly curved, but such a pole cannot be manufactured with a large curvature, and the effect of a large curvature can be simulated by a pole formed from straight parts. I have experimented with crooked poles of various designs having more than one joint, but one joint is sufficient for the effect, and that is the kind of pole which was declared illegal. There are both advantages and disadvantages for this kind of pole. I believe the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, but nearly everyone else thinks otherwise, as mentioned earlier. This kind of pole cannot be bought, because there are no manufacturers of such a pole. It must be "home made", and to make sure that other vaulters could make one if they so desired, I published an article in Track Technique, March, 1977, describing how to make one. It does not require unusual skill, as attested to by the fact that I taught myself how to do it.



The article referred to above described how to make a pole in which the straight portions are permanently joined. A subsequent outgrowth was to make a pole in which the two parts can be separated for easier portability. In my case they can be transported in a ski bag, thereby avoiding hassles with airlines, buses, taxis, etc. However, this design results in a considerably heavier pole, and is no improvement in its vaulting aspects over the pole with permanently joined parts. It would not be practical for a novice to try to make a segmented pole which can be disassembled. The pole which was declared illegal was a segmented pole, but that was not the reason given for the illegality.

Several reasons have been advanced as to why such a pole ought to be illegal. One is that it is not straight, "like a pole should be". This was settled several years ago when there was a controversy over whether "prebent" poles were legal. As is well known, that was settled in favor of the prebent pole. This pole is simply a pole with more prebend than usual. Another reason is that a new pole should be available to other vaulters for a period of a year. This idea applies to commercial poles, but it is hard to see how it could apply to a homemade pole. If someone wanted to whittle a pole out of a hickory tree, he should be able to do it. At any rate, the article referred to above has been available to the public since 1977, so that the

means to obtain such a pole has been in existence for more than a year. The reason which was cited for the pole's disqualification in Rome will now be discussed.

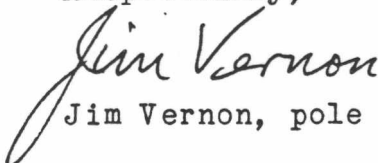
The rule has to do with the construction of the pole, and is now quoted. "Construction--The pole may be of any material or combination of materials and of any length or diameter, but the basic surface of the metal, where metal is used, must be smooth. The pole may, however, have a binding of not more than two (2) layers of adhesive tape of uniform thickness. The restriction to tape does not apply to binding the bottom end of the pole with protective layers of tape, for a distance of 1 foot (30 centimeters)." There can be no doubt that the crooked pole described does not meet the requirement that the surface must be smooth, since there is a buildup at the joint, to reinforce that spot in the permanently joined pole or to provide the sleeve for the segmented pole. However, all vaulters know the reason for the rule and for the restriction of two layers of tape. It is so that a "handle" or knob of built up tape or other material cannot be formed to aid in gripping the pole. Of course, the crooked pole would not be gripped anywhere near the joint, and where I gripped it near the top of the pole there were only two layers of tape, as prescribed. The pole disqualification was based on this technicality, which surely could not have been the intention of the rule.

I do not question the literal interpretation of this rule, but I think a clarification is in order. (Notice that the bottom end of the pole is exempted from the requirement.) Ideally the rule should be changed to more accurately state the intention. Maybe the statement could be something like "The pole may be of any material or combination of materials and of any length or shape, but the basic surface of the material must be smooth and without discontinuities in the portion of the pole which is gripped by the athlete and within one foot of either handhold. The pole may, however, have a binding--" (etc., the rest of the rule).

If the IAAF rule cannot be changed, then it should be possible for the WAVA rules to be different for veteran athletes. Other requirements are different from those prescribed by the IAAF--for instance hurdle heights and distances and weights for throwing events. It has been thought that WAVA would be in control of its own destiny in the matter of rules.

Finally, if the WAVA rule cannot be changed, I would appreciate a waiver for my own specific pole and any similar poles that others might use in case other vaulters should become interested in trying the design. Innovation should not be unintentionally squelched by rules which were meant to apply to something else.

Respectfully,



Jim Vernon, pole vaulter