

Improving Pole Vault Safety and Affordability

Greetings coaches. Despite great gains in the heights of Washington vaulters and the growing number of well-coached programs sharing spots on state medal podiums, safety and affordability remain issues to improve upon, and I write to share a couple of ideas I have to support you further. **Safety first.**

1. **Facility safety:** Safety is compromised by unsafe facilities with inadequate ground coverage needed to cover short and crooked landings and poorly marked take-off zones. This year certification clinicians will show pictures of unsafe and illegal standard base and plant box exposure and remind coaches it is their job to insist upon better at meets they attend. Also, coaches will be reminded to be sure every facility has clearly painted take-off marks for kids and coaches to see, with 18" long lines at 11' and 9' and 6" lines at 10' and 8' at least.

2. **Coach mentoring:** Safety is compromised by inexperienced coaching. This is the thrust of our certification program, but I hope to extend the influence of coach mentoring this year. A brand new coach is both illuminated and overwhelmed by our 4 hour safety clinics. This past year three asked me for follow-up support after their certification, and it was transformative. This year I will offer my Friday afternoons all season for team consultations. Schools can either bring their entire vault crew and coach to my gym or I will go to their site (within reasonable commuting distance). In either location, I'll watch their kids, show the coach what I see with each on the iPad, customize their drill routine and practice plans. At their location I can also remark about their facility, pole inventory and ideas for improving all of it. My fee will fund scholarships for local athletes with high talent but who cannot afford to train with me. Other mentors ready to help are Reg Hulbert in Spokane (reghulbert@yahoo.com), Billy Baker in Longview (columbiastriders@yahoo.com), Rich Crigler in the Tri-Cities (rrcrig@gmail.com) and Rod Kammenga (rkammenga@comcast.net) in Bellingham. Contact mentors directly for fees and availability. If anyone has a different idea for how we could support your young coach and program, please let me know.

3. **Affordability:** Thanks to a new partnership with Richey Athletics, Washington state schools will have access to absolute top quality landing pits **at dealer cost through me**. I totally understand the pressure schools are under to purchase the cheapest legal solution bid to them, but schools who buy 20' long, 18" thick pits from discount catalogues get dangerously small pits that will not last. Edmonds-Woodway has their new small one sitting in their end zone, unused. I researched Richey thoroughly and entrusted them to supply my club pit. Their materials are bulletproof, their fastening designs are simple, and their warranty is the best. This will come with some headaches for me, but I hope they are fewer than they are with unsafe venues and schools that can't afford the event.

A final note on mission: If all of my semi-retired work with this event did nothing but extend expert coaching to the most privileged students in my area, I'll have failed. We all know this event favors schools with money and most of the top vaulters are affording club coaching beyond the 3 months of track. If you have a highly capable athlete who is financially challenged in the Seattle area, whether he/she has vaulted before or not, who you know could be a clear college pole vault candidate with the right training, I invite you to connect us. If they turn out right for this, I'll support them year round as they are available. I've begun recruiting both athletes and sponsors to subsidize their training. If they have the body type and the work ethic at practice and in school, we can all change lives together.

Thanks, coaches, for all you do for kids.

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