SPORTS...

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THE FIBERGLASS ERA

Every now and then the sports fan reads about a new pole vault mark. Currently, the high bar enthusiasts are clearing 17 feet.

Track has progressed beyond the point now when one asks if the pole used was fiberglass or bamboo.

They're all using fiberglass now, which partly accounts for the new heights.

The transition to fiberglass brought two revelations to Mid-Columbia track buffs this last year:

The first was that the new poles aren't cheap. They run around $65.

Second, the standards used at the Thompson Street track became outdated when senior John Altendorf cleared 13-4¼ to set a new Dalles High School record.

In the latter case, the standards were stretched as far as they would reach. Then, to increase the height, cardboard rolls were taped on the highest reaches and the crossbar was balanced on top.

After clearing this, the tape measure gave him the new record. Commented someone on the side, however: "These standards just weren't made for the fiberglass era."

The next day or so, sleeves were added to the base of the standards, giving them an additional 20 inches or so height.

Well, that takes care of the standards. But two other items are coming more under the scrutiny of responsible viewers —the pole and high school vaulter.

We've known of no serious injury to vaulters as the result of poles breaking, but when they snap it's usually when the vaulter is about one-third of the way up to the crossbar—when the weight pressure on the pole is the "heaviest."

The vaulter, then at the complete mercy of momentum and gravity, descends. If it happens to be on the jagged edge of a pole, or the front edge of the vault pit, which usually is exposed framing containing sawdust or some other substance geared to break a fall, the consequences could be serious.

When the fiberglass pole first came into play, Finland removed sawdust from the pits and substituted sponges to further assist in cushioning the vaulter's fall.

The idea caught like a wildfire and now practically all colleges in the United States are doing the same thing. The sponges, instead of lying loose in the pit, however, are bunched in polyethylene bags which lessens the chances of the sponges from popping out of the pit.

The poles have been improved to a fine degree, but if the poles are wrongly used, there still could be an injury that otherwise may have been prevented.

A study group of the American Medical Association and the State High School Athletic Association have joined to issue a caution.

They warn that vaulters, in attempting to achieve the publicized whiplike action, should not turn to lighter poles.

Each manufacturer has tested his product and knows its flexural, tensile and compressive strengths for a definite weight limit.

The manufacturers warn that the poles must not be overloaded by as much as five pounds or breakage is likely.

Most of today's collegians topping 16 feet, they advise, use a pole that is specified for a vaulter weighing five pounds more.

This way they get maximum capability of the pole and are assured the pole is as safe as it can be.

The warning points out that the athlete must share the responsibility of adhering to the recommendations of the manufacturer and adds that conscientious care must be taken to avoid needless breakage of the pole.