









Below is the brief January 26, 2024, response I received from The Villages High School Director of Athletics, Coach Richard Pettus, to my urgent email message I sent January 3, 2024. It took Coach Pettus nearly a month to respond. If not for a January 22, 2024, email message I sent to The Villages High School Principal, Robin Grant, and Dr. Randy McDaniel, The Villages High School Director of Education, I believe it's quite probable that I would have never received any response from anyone at The Villages High School.

Richard Pettus  January 26, 2024 at 10:38 AM 



Re: VHS 12-27-23 article

To: Mike Toledo

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Good Morning Mr. Toledo, please allow me to first and foremost apologize for my late response. I appreciate your kind words in regards to the newspaper article, we are blessed. Secondly, thank you for bringing to our attention your concerns with safety in pole vaulting. We'll continue to make sure our coaches are following the FHSAA rules in track & field. Again, thank you.

[See More from Mike Toledo](#)

Mike Toledo  January 3, 2024 at 12:42 PM 

VHS 12-27-23 article

To: Richard.Pettus@tvcs.org

Coach Richard,

I was impressed by The Daily Sun VHS (12-27-23) article, which featured your photo inside the incredible H.G. Morse Stadium. You are truly "blessed" and I wanted you to see my response to the article.

Thirty-three years ago this spring, after pointing out my concern for the safety of my own son, together with his pole vault teammates, I learned that the AD of Tulare Union High School, Tulare, California, was unaware of the avoidable hazards to which his students were being needlessly subjected. He was genuinely shocked and in his desire to assist with my quest for answers he gave me a video tape that set the trail leading to this message.

What I've experienced since that day has been extremely educational and, certainly, does not reflect positively on many of the principals I've encountered. The information below is factual, yet, because it is detrimental to the financial interests of individuals who "have a dog in the hunt," it has been covered up repeatedly by those who do not want the truth to see the light of day.

Following is the message I sent to Connor, of the Daily Sun:

Reading your December 27, 2023, "VHS athletes thrive at new facilities" article inspired me to send you this email message. The subject of my message should be of concern to members of our community who are now completely unaware of dangers to our children that exist right under our noses.

Several years ago, I stumbled across a St. Petersburg Times article: "**The deadliest sport in America**" (published March 12, 2002). The article mentions ONLY TWO preventable deaths that year, when, in fact, there is much left out of this story.

It is very important to understand, besides the TWO AVOIDABLE FATALITIES of Jesus Quesada, 16, and Kevin Dare, 19, (the individual deaths noted in this St. Petersburg Times article), there were additionally TWO MORE DEATHS along with TWO OTHER PERMANENTLY MAMING INCIDENTS resulting the same year. Thus, there were actually FOUR FATALITIES combined with TWO MORE LIFE-ALTERING AVOIDABLE CATASTROPHES of which I am aware occurred in 2002.

The deadliest sport in America

Pole vaulting has the highest death rate of any sport in the country.

By BOB PUTNAM
© St. Petersburg Times
published March 12, 2002

Whenever University of Florida pole vaulter Paul Condron steams down the 35-meter runway like a locomotive, he carries a 16-foot fiberglass pole labeled with this warning:

"Vaulting is a dangerous activity. Severe injury, paralysis and death may occur."

In the past month death has occurred more frequently.

On Feb. 23, Penn State University sophomore Kevin Dare died while competing in the Big 10 indoor championships. He was attempting to clear 15 feet, 7 inches when he tumbled backward onto the metal box, the area used to plant the pole.

Article is at this link: <https://www.tampabay.com/archive/2002/03/12/the-deadliest-sport-in-america/>

If you want to know the true cause of these lethal incidents, please, continue.

Let's Go Back To 1948

In 1948, **Bob Mathias** and his high school track coach, **Virgil Jackson**, began seeking solutions to replace bamboo and metal vaulting poles. **Bob had never pole vaulted before the summer of 1948**, when Coach Jackson persuaded the naive 17 year-old to participate in a major decathlon event at the Los Angeles Coliseum. This would not only be Bob's first-time experience competing in pole vault, it would also be his first ever decathlon.



Pole vaulting for the first time in the early summer of 1948, **Bob used a heavy metal pole retrieved from his high school field house.** Mathias provided this firsthand information during my interview with him at his home near Fresno, California, in 1993. While describing the first vaulting pole he used as "heavy and thick," Mathias also recalled his original discussions with Virgil Jackson regarding the challenges Bob encountered attempting to apply the vaulting poles available to him in 1948.



Photo Courtesy of Bob Mathias

Bob Mathias (November 17, 1930 - September 2, 2006)

In 1949, Virgil Jackson, was responsible for the development of the "Sky Pole," a name he coined and established as the trade mark of the original fiberglass vaulting poles. The price of the first fiberglass poles was set from \$34.75 to \$38.75 for one of the three different lengths, each length graduated in six different strengths for vaulters of 130, 140, 150, 160, 170 and 180 pounds. (Two 1949 newspaper articles are attached.)



See FULL SIZE
article on later page.

While Virgil Jackson was correct in his perception of flexible pole principles, lethal "TRADITIONAL" pole vault methods continued unchanged. These old methods were void of safety and they inevitably became deadly when applied to Coach Jackson's revolutionary flexible vaulting poles. To this day, these dangerous methods are still the lethal "standard" being taught at every college and high school offering this event.

Today's Pole Vault Camps & Summits

Early 1991, in Tulare, California, **top world "elite" pole vault coach, Don Hood**, sat on my living room couch to address my concerns regarding this deadly event. That day, I learned from Don that **two (2) high school boys had already lost their lives attempting to pole vault** that same year. Naively confident in Coach Hood, I agreed to send my son to Texas for Don's next scheduled **weekend pole vault camp**. When my son returned home from Don's Texas camp, there were no vaulting improvements, whatsoever.

Thus, to see for myself what was going on, I enrolled my son for Don's next camp to be held in California, which I attended with my old VHS camcorder in hand to document the occasion. At least two Jan Johnson camps were also added to my Don Hood experiences, all achieving the same nonproductive results. Also, notably included at Johnson's camps, was his complete lack of shame in sharing his ill-considered prejudices with his captive teenage students. My early video recordings, that I began accumulating decades ago, provide my own firsthand documentation history. This vast information bears witness to the devastating teachings being negligently propagated for the purpose of systematically advancing illicitly acquired profits for USA Track & Field insiders.

My wife and I relocated from California to Florida (The Villages) this past June.

In the meantime, a former 1960s pole vaulter who resides in Inverness and coaches at a high school in Citrus County, brought a couple of his students to my warehouse, which is located only two miles from my residence. The teenagers visited several times to test equipment I created for the purpose of making it safer and easier to learn how to pole vault correctly. After seeing what I am doing, the coach suggested we affiliate with his high school where I would volunteer to coach and we could incorporate a pole vault club.

Then, I learned that, in order to volunteer in Citrus County, one must submit to fingerprinting and thorough background checks, which can take months to complete. While I am still waiting, I have been informed that a "Pole Vault Camp" business entity located in Mims, Florida, rents poles to most of the local high school vaulters for hundreds of dollars each. When I checked the website, skypolevaulter.com, I came across a promotional video that is produced by Coach Sean Michael Francis, with whom I was already very familiar.

Seeing the latest antics Coach Francis promotes with impunity on the skypolevaulter.com website raises my question: Why am I being scrutinized with such caution while "coaches" of Francis' character are left unchecked, undermining a "system" that restricts me, a concerned parent? Coach Francis, in his video promotion on the skypolevaulter.com homepage, openly mocks parents. You will see Francis criticize parents who he feels have the audacity to ask if the Mims "pole vault camp" is worth what the parents are being charged. Be warned that Francis' videos are designed to influence minor boys and girls while his antics are explicitly graphic. Please, don't just believe me, watch some Francis video highlights at this link: <https://howtopolevault.com/video003b.html>

A copy of a letter I sent to Francis in 2021 is here: <https://howtopolevault.com/PDF/shawnfrancis.pdf> (2 pages). To this day, he has not responded.

It is important to expose the ugly truth, as repulsive as it is. The primary reason these problems continue unabated, while parents remain in the dark, is that few people have the courage and tenacity to bring these disturbing issues into the light.

Sincerely,

Michael Toledo
(805) 314-1392

STYLES IN SPORTS

By MAXWELL STILES

CASEY'S IN, NOT OUT

MESTER DEAN CROMWELL, who doubles in brass between being the venerable old man of track and field coaching, and a cub reporter just out of knee pants, has just been asked a hypothetical question.

"Do you think that you, or even Dink Templeton or Boyd Comstock," I asked the Dean, "could ever develop a 400-pound pole vaulter who could hit the takeoff board at 200 miles per hour?"

"I had a miler once who could do that," replied Cromwell, first placing, as is his wont, tongue in cheek. "His name was Casey Shawhan. Why do you ask?"



VIRGIL JACKSON

Before answering I looked down the city room where Casey, our city editor, was all tangled up in six telephones and a cheese cake layout.

"I see what you mean," I finally said. "The description fits and Casey must have been following Paul Connor around the gourmet lounge. But the reason why I am looking for a 400-pound pole vaulter who can hit the takeoff board at 200 m.p.h. is because of something Virgil Jackson just said to me the other day when he stopped off to show me something on his way to the AAU meeting at San Francisco."

Virgil Jackson is the coach who was forced to resign his job at Tallahassee High School because he could not produce two Bob Mathiases and two Jim Escoffers in consecutive seasons. Had it not been for Virgil Jackson nobody would ever have heard of Bob Mathias at the 1948 Olympic Games, or, for that matter, of Tallahassee.

"Jackson is back on the sports front," I told the Dean, "with a laminated glass vaulting pole that he says will not break unless the vaulter weighs 400 pounds and hits the board at 200 m.p.h."

WATCH OUT FOR 'FLYING POLES'

"In that case," said the Cromwell, "my guess would be that instead of breaking, the pole would double up like a rubber hose and the man would be left standing there beside the bar afraid to let go of his end of the pole for fear of the 'boozzzzz' recoil that would probably tiddy-wink the pole into the press box."

Well, anyhow, Virgil Jackson is out with a new spun glass pole that Cromwell says should produce the next 13-foot vault. NCAA champion Bob Smith of San Diego is using one and so is John Montgomery of the Los Angeles Athletic Club. A special one is being made now for Mathias, who is a freshman at Stanford.

Jackson got the idea from seeing these laminated glass fishing poles. He talked a manufacturer into trying spun glass for a vaulting pole, and now the man who coached Mathias and Innes has world rights on what he calls the "Sky-pole." After seeing one of them the other evening I would hazard the guess that here may be the most significant improvement in track and field equipment since the starting block and the rubber discus.

Dean Cromwell agrees with that opinion. The most important thing in favor of the glass pole is that it is safe. Boys will not be inspired on shattered vaulting poles as they descend into the pit. The pole has been bent 180 degrees without breaking. Furthermore, it distributes the shock over the entire length of the pole where the bamboo pole produces its snap only at one end. This gives a smoother rise up to the bar and just the right amount of help at the moment of arm-pull or shove toward the bar. Flexibility or spring is not so great that it may be looked upon as an illegal mechanical aid to the vaulter—any more than the present bamboo pole is a mechanical aid over and above the ordinary wood pole used in the days when Cromwell was an athlete.

POLES MADE TO VAULTER'S WEIGHT

Jackson has the poles in three different lengths, each length graduated in six different strengths for boys of 130, 140, 150, 160, 170 and 180 pounds. Custom-made poles are available for heavier men, and I understand that at Cromwell's request Jackson is having one made for Casey Shawhan that was modeled after the Hig Loch pipeline.

Certainly enough, Jackson may be reached at Box R 147 T, Seal Beach. Check those figures against the world pole vault record and you will realize what a smart young man this Jackson is.

Dink Templeton

Mathias' former high school coach gets patent on spun glass pole that may revolutionize vaulting

A dozen years ago Bill Hayward, the grand old man who coached and trained Oregon for 40 years, was telling me about a laminated vaulting pole he was going to patent which would end once and for all the worries of vaulters about their poles breaking or softening and throwing them off just when they wanted to be at their best. The year before his boy, George Varoff, had failed to qualify for the Olympic team just a week after breaking the world's record in the National Championships, and Bill, who never mentioned it publicly, knew the failure was due to softening of the pole so that it did not spring back after bending on the way up. He'd perfected a laminated fishing rod which he said was far and away superior to any of the bamboo rods, and the vaulting pole would be just as superior.

But Bill died a few years ago, and the war had come along before he got the pole going and for years it's sounded like just one of the pipe dreams all coaches have.

But last night Virgil Jackson, Bob Mathias' coach who made him the world's greatest all around athlete, dropped by to show me the new pole he is just about to put on the market.

It is of laminated spun glass. It is light and so strong it can't break, and gives so softly there is little jerk when it hits the bar and so resilient it always comes back at just the right time. So Virg told me, and he has already tried it out on Bob Smith in San Diego, the NCAA champ, and USC's John Montgomery. He says they're crazy about it, and tomorrow afternoon Bob Mathias is going to try it out, although the pole Jackson has with him is meant for a man 20 pounds lighter.

During the past couple of years the toothpick size Swedish steel pole has been all the rage, but it isn't much good when you get up high. Besides Galen Smith tells me he saw one break and the edges were razor sharp and would disembowel any vaulter unlucky enough to land on it. You couldn't get him to try it for any dough, and I've been shuddering everytime I've watched a guy use one since he told me, but it crystallized and break.

So I was most interested in this new pole, which Jackson was on his way from the South to show the AAU delegates at their San Francisco convention, although I fear the delegates are going to be far more interested in politics and elections and committees which might land 'em a trip to the Helsinki Olympics than in vaulting poles.

Too bad Edmonds didn't get chance to use pole

But laminated spun glass, my, my. That's the kind of world of the future everyone was talking about during the war, but this seems to me to be about the first manifestation of it. Certainly wartime science has made huge change in our sports world. But five plastic engineers who spent their wartime for Consolidated Aircraft have a factory down at Costa Mesa where they've been manufacturing fishing rods and sailing masts, and now they're manufacturing spun glass vaulting poles. If only they'd been around 21 years ago when Ward Edmonds broke his pole just before the Olympic tryouts and there wasn't a bamboo pole in the East that would hold him over 13-6.

Virg says they determined to break a pole and the only way they could do it was to wedge it between a jeep and a concrete wall. They backed the jeep up until the darn thing bent to nearly 180 degrees before it finally snapped, and then it went in four separate breaks all at once, so perfectly was the stress distributed.

Now I take it that they are just at the beginning, and that they will learn to get more and more bend, and more and more snapback. The snapback of a good bamboo pole is what gives you that extra six inches if you've timed your vault perfectly. But suppose these new poles start turning into regular slings that shoot you up 10 feet, and then 20 feet, and pretty soon the vaulter has to take a parachute along to get himself down. The British always did say the pole vault was not an athletic event but just a gymnastic performance, but what will they say when the vaulter starts to become nothing but the missile shot from this modern new catapult?

I find my fears running away with me, and I guess I better go out and see it tried out. If that thing can be bent to 180 degrees, the spring of the kickback would be so terrific it would send a vaulter flying through space. The whole idea of the event would change. The vaulter would just stand at the bar and practice bending the pole like an archer does his bow, gaining more and more strength until he got it back so far he could just let it go, hanging on as it started to ping.

Virg's first thought was to have Corrie Warnerstead try them out, and then on his way through LA he found that Corrie had just signed a contract with a bamboo pole company whereby all of their product would be personally tested by Warnerstead. But Corrie is also a coach and if the new pole is the sky filler it has been named, Corrie would be the last one to force his own vaulters to use the old bamboo.