

Pole Vault Games – by Marty Dahlman, Track Coach, Retired

In track and field, pole vaulting is a serious event. There are a lot of technical concepts for the athletes to grasp, and perfect practice to make perfect performance. But, like any athletes, pole vaulters want to have fun. So in the seriousness of getting pole vault right, what can a coach do to make “perfect practice” fun?

So the first thing a coach can do is to break the full vault into discrete pieces that can be practiced individually. This not only lets the athlete focus on a section rather than the entire (19 step) process, but it also allows a coach to find ways to make it exciting and fun for the athlete.

So here’s a framework for “Pole Vault Games”, based on the mythical “North American Pole Vault Bungee Association” (NAPVBA) Rules. This was made up over a decade of pole vault camps in the heydays of Mark Hannay’s Slippery Rock Pole Vault camps. The “association” was the coaches at the camp, and we all put our bits into the “rules”.

Bungee competitions can be done with full vaults, short approach vaults, or three step vaults. They can be done with bending poles, straight poles, or even with one-arm competitions where the vaulters can only use their top hand. Bungee competitions can also be “handicapped” by vaulter ability, using a scoring system based on the vaulter’s personal best, adding or subtracting points for based on their bungee clearances. That way, the 6’ PR vaulter can compete against the 12’ PR vaulter.

“Bungee” Rules are attached, but there is a difference between serious bungee practices and the “game”. For a vaulter to claim they have “cleared a bungee” at a given height, they need to clear it “without any contact” at all. So “I cleared a 14’ bungee” should mean that the vaulter went over a 14’ bungee without touching it. Under the NAPVBA rules though, a clearance is based on the getting your body over the bungee, then off of the bungee before the vaulter contacts the pit.

A clear: the vaulter goes over the bungee, pulls it down, but is not in contact with the bungee and the pit at the same time. A miss: the vaulter goes under the bungee, or goes over then sags the bungee to the pit, and is in contact with both at the same time.

So on that day when the coach wants to get vaulters off the ground, and say, drill takeoff and swing up: it’s one arm swing and turn drills in a bungee competition, or two armed straight-pole vaults (see rules for determining bend).

Or on a short approach practice day, where everyone is using a short (five) takeoff step approach, it’s just a PR +/- scoring day, with everyone trying to NAPVBA “clear” starting a PR – 6”, the at PR, then at PR +6”, etc.

The person who clears the highest over their PV NAPVBA style – gets a prize!!

Below are the NAPVBA rules as compiled by Coach Rob Wahl of Altoona HS, PA.

NORTH AMERICAN POLE VAULT BUNGEE ASSOCIATION (NAPVBA)

The following equipment is required:

- ➔ Standards anchored so as not to fall on any vaulter
- ➔ Pole made of any composition
- ➔ Pit/mat suitable to decelerate the vaulter safely
- ➔ Bungee / elastic crossbar

The NAPVBA rules and modifications are as follows:

1. It shall be considered a good vault should the vaulter's body cross above the bungee without being in contact with the vaulter's body upon contact with the pit.
2. Standards shall be set at 80 cm / 31.5 inches throughout the competition.
3. It shall be considered a miss if the vaulter is in contact with any part of the bungee and the pit at the same time.
Modification: Bungee PR's REQUIRE the bungee not be contacted at anytime.
4. It shall be considered a "no vault" should the bungee break, the standards fall, or other equipment failure should occur.
Modification: By unanimous consent of the competitors, a vault may be deemed good.
5. In a straight/rigid pole competition, it shall be considered a miss should the pole bend during anytime during the vault.
Modification: While bending in unacceptable, flexing may be unavoidable; Unanimous consent of all competitors will determine a bend or a flex.
6. In short approach competitions, all vaulters are required to use at least 4 strides less than their full approach.
Modification: In mixed "handicapped" competition, some vaulters may be allowed to use a full approach while others are required to use a sort approach.

On the reverse side is the scoring system for team competitions and is based on a vaulter's competition personal record. Note that a team/vaulter is allowed an unlimited number of attempts. A recommended team's timed competition is 30 minutes. After 30 minutes, the team chooses 3 "hot" vaulters to take one more final attempt.

The 19 Parts of Pole Vault

- Pickup (the pole)
- Carry (how to hold the pole)
- Drive Off (first steps in run)
- Lift (keep knees, hips, chest up in run)
- Count (to keep rhythm and step)
- Drop (allow pole to free drop to box)
- Plant (execute on time plant of pole in box)
- Takeoff (it's a jumping event)
- Drag (allow hands and takeoff leg to get behind center of gravity)
- Drive (chest and lead knee forward)
- Swing (invert to vertical)
- Close Off (close angle of pole to body)
- Flex in (get as close to the pole as possible)
- Pull (pull body vertically along the line of the pole)
- Turn (rotate body to hips down towards the bar)
- Extend (extend body over top hand)
- Pike (bend at waist over the crossbar)
- Cup (concave torso to create space from crossbar)
- Smile (on the way down - for a great vault!!!)

Stupid Pole Vault Drills

1. Pit Hops – you've got a pit, and everybody wants to jump up and down on it
 - a. Have vaulters find their "space" standing on the pit
 - b. Have vaulter jump up and down in the pit for time - for example:
 - i. 30 secs (30 rest) 45 secs (45 rest) 60 secs (60 rest) – repeat
 - ii. Beware – these are a form of plyometrics and have
 - iii. A great deal more impact on the athlete's legs than you would anticipate – under do it rather than over do it.
2. Scavenger Races
 - a. Vaulters stand together near the pit. Coach asks them a question that they have to go find the answer to and return.
 - i. For Example: The distance coach is standing 200m away at the finish line – what was his best time in the 1600 in HS?
 - ii. All vaulters run to the coach – and all runners return as well
 - iii. It becomes a good short/sprint workout with some fun in mind
3. Pit Drills
 - a. Short approach jumps into the pit
 - i. Jump onto the front buns rather than try to clear the box
 - ii. Takeoff on the correct foot, drag the top of that foot on the edge of the pit – land on the drive foot

- b. Fall on Your Face Drills (you'd be surprised how happy this makes vaulters)
 - i. Run the same takeoff pit drill as above – but leave the takeoff leg down so that it catches and the vaulter falls on their face in the pit
- c. To either of these drills – add a “stubby” and full arm plant actions