Until 1977, Dave Volz's mother could tell the seasons by the kind of ball in her son's hand.

He was—a say the least—a typical Midwestern sports fanatic, playing in the streets and parks of Bloomington, Indiana, until the last glimmer of daylight.

But as high school came around, his best friend showed him something called the pole vault, and fiberglass replaced rawhide and leather in his affections.

He forsook all other sports in order to train for the vault year-round and the results have been both consistent and impressive, as he became the American Junior Record holder as an Indiana Freshman and has twice raised the American Record in this, his sophomore year.

The best vaulter in the world in mid-summer, the 20-year-old Volz seems totally unaffected by the hoopla.

He is outwardly unphased by incidents that would have had other athletes—high-strung vaulters especially—climbing the walls. His first set of poles never made it to Europe this summer. ("My name may be German," he says, "but I know only one word—stabs [poles]. I have no stabs."") The second set became so scared-up as to be unusable.

He has never adjusted to European time, so 3:00 AM wake-ups are routine. Worst of all, he sprained his ankle the day before one of the year's biggest meets, in Zurich.

So, several days after his AR in Nice, he sat in his Zurich hotel room, his foot in plastic buckets of hot and cold water. Various salves and potions provided by medicinally minded American throwers helped the healing, but a few run-throughs before the meet convinced him, reluctantly, to withdraw.

As we talked, he wrapped his still-stiff ankle in an elastic bandage, preparing to pack up and head for the next stop on the circuit, Berlin:

T&FN: What was it like watching Olson going for a new AR when you were watching from near the pit?

Volz: Oh, it's very hard. I wasn't really afraid of the record being broken. I figure it's been broken a lot this year, and if he did break it then it would probably make me work harder to get it back.

T&FN: It looked like everyone was giving him advice today in Zurich and you advice in Nice.

Volz: Yeah, well, the vaulters—they all stick together. They just want to see someone do well.

T&FN: Were you helping Olson?

Volz: I wasn't telling him what to do, but I let him use my pole.

T&FN: Going into the year, you told me that you were planning on peaking late in the year. What was behind that decision?

Volz: I had a late start getting training for the year because with most of the classes I had, I spent most of my time studying instead of training. Then came
winter, and I wasn't in as good a shape as I
should have been in, so instead of trying to
rush everything to get into shape early in the
year, I decided that I would build up like I
had planned and I would be peaking later
in the year.

T&FN: Did you have a specific set of
goals you were going for?

Voll: Yeah, I wanted to have a very
consistent high jump, like have my top 7 or 8 jumps average 18-7 or 18-8.

T&FN: What's really behind your
consistency?

Voll: I think a lot of it has to do with
confidence. I built myself up with a fairly
good base this year, and I'm confident with
my abilities right now. It's just if I can keep
healthy.

T&FN: You've been really tough over
here in Europe. What is it?

Voll: I think it's because I'm peaking
late in the year. I've had some setbacks,
too. I've only been able to jump on my set
of poles just once. I've borrowed poles. My
first set of poles got lost in the airports and
I never did find them. I brought 4 more
over here, but the guys catching poles after
you let them go weren't very consistent at
catching them, and my poles got scarred up
and 2 of 'em broke. I've been using Brad
Purseley's poles.

T&FN: Aren't poles kind of personal
items?

Voll: Yeah, they are. But I like Brad's
poles. They've been doing well for me.

T&FN: You've gotten a lot of
publicity for at least touching the bar when
you go over—in fact, some people call it
"to Voll the bar." How'd that start?

Voll: It started with the American
Record at 18-9/2. When I came over I hit
the bar, so I tried to keep the bar balanced
up there and it stayed up there pretty well.
I seem to have a knack for it. I figure they
gave you hands for something.

T&FN: Technically, what do you
consider your strong suit?

Voll: Right now, I think I'm pretty
fast, also one of the strongest.

T&FN: What would you like to
improve on?

Voll: Technique. I've still got quite a
bit to spare there. My handhold is very low
compared to some of the other vaulters.
Some of the Frenchmen are holding it a bit
higher than I do. So I think if I can keep
the same consistency in my jumps and grip
up about a foot higher, I might be able to
jump a lot higher.

T&FN: Do you change poles quite
often?

Voll: Definitely. When you warm up,
you use the lighter poles so you can make
the pit. As the competition goes on and on,
you get a little more confident and more
sure of yourself, so you run a little faster
and plant a little harder, and the poles keep
getting bigger.

T&FN: How many vaults do you
think is the optimum for competition?

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Voll: In the United States I used to
think it was 6 or 7. But then I wasn't
jumping great over there, and I came over
here and I started jumping 10 or 15 times a
meet. Seems like a lot of my better jumps
were the later ones.

T&FN: You're doing great, Olson is
starting to come back and Ripley, before
he got hepatitis, was doing really well. It
seems like the Americans are resurfacing
a little bit.

Voll: I think they are. I think part of
the problem was that we did get boycotted
in '80 and some of the people did take a
couple of years off and we slackied down.
Then the French and the Russians took off,
and I think now the Americans are wanting
it back. They're tired of taking the back
seats.

T&FN: Is there anyone else around
your age that you think really has good
potential?

Voll: Yeah, in college this year
vaulters really picked up a lot. At TAC this
year, there were 3 or 4 vaulters that
jumped at 18-1½. Most of the vaulters in
the United States are really working harder
now.

T&FN: At Nice there was some
controversy about the end of the cross-
bar.

Voll: The thing is that all of the
French Records, the World Records by the
French and all their records, have been set
with a bar with ends softer than the ones
we use. We argue back and forth—we've
been arguing for a while—about whose bars
are legal and whose aren't. Really, I don't
know which one is the legal one. They may
both be legal, for all I know. Last night in
Zurich, they used the exact same bar, only
they also had little bits of tape on the pegs
and things like that, and they were saying it
was legal and we weren't. I don't know.

T&FN: Do you feel that your Nice
mark is tainted?

Voll: No, I don't. I cleared it and I'm
pretty sure I could do it again, and that's
all that really matters to me.

T&FN: By whatever standards, what
do you think has been your best jump this
year?

Voll: Probably my jump in Lausanne
at 18-8¼.

T&FN: That's the one I had to leave
and I was worried you were going to set the
World Record. They had people there lined
up all along the runway.

Voll: Yeah, I had to have the police
move some of the people back so I could
move my pole to the side.

T&FN: Is competing over here really
different?

Voll: Oh, yeah, the crowds over here
are really great. It's like a football game
over in the United States. I love it. I'd
much rather compete over here.

T&FN: When you train, do you do
a lot of gymnastics-type stuff or weight
training?

Voll: Early in the year—I'm sure
everybody's is different—but my work
consists of a lot of weight training and long—I should say "medium"—distance to
get in shape. In February I stop lifting
weights so my timing will come on. I start
shortening my run to sprints, but I do a lot
of them.

T&FN: You've gone a long way in
a hurry. You've been at Indiana two years
and now you're the American Record
holder. Do you think it's gone kind of fast
for you?

Voll: It doesn't seem like it's come
really quickly for me. I feel I'm getting
what I've been working for. I'm very
pleased with that. When I came to Indiana I
was maybe a consistent 17-foot jumper.
There was another vaulter there named
Brian Kimball.

We sat down together and talked some
things out, and I decided that in my
freshman year if I couldn't vault and be up
there with the best of the college
competitors the first year that I wouldn't
compete any more. I did a lot of film
analysis, worked on technique. In 2 weeks,
my best shot up a foot—from 17 to 18.

I studied a lot on it, and I tried to put
the best of it together. I also did some
studying on how to balance the bar at the
top once you did hit it—once you did make
the vital mistake. I really think that
self-knowledge is something you've gotta
have.

T&FN: Seems like you're a student of
the event. Are you a pretty serious student
in school, too?

Voll: I have not liked school since
the first day of first grade. It's a long time
to stick in it, but I am taking it seriously.

T&FN: Are pole vaulters different
than normal people?

Voll: I don't know if I'd refer to it as
"normal people" when I don't know what a
normal person is. But they all have their
strange quirks and things. Most people who
get into the vault know about the risk
factor; that's probably one of the main
reasons they get into it.

T&FN: Is there ever any fear?

Voll: There's fear. Especially early in
the year, a lot of fear comes into my mind;
first time you're up on a pole for the year,
and you don't know whether you're going
to land in the pit or on your back on the
ground. If you're going to be good, you've
gotta get over that.

David Alan Voll was born May 2, 1962, in Long Beach, California, and is 5-11/165. Graduated from Bloomington
South High School (Indiana) in 1980, where he was coached by Michael Goss. Now coached by Sam Bell at Indiana.

Alterted American Junior Record 3 times, topped by 18-3½ (No. 2 all-time world). Is now No. 6 on the
all-time world list. His progression:

Year Age Affil. Class Rank Major Meets
1978 16 HS So 5-16½
1979 17 Jr 16-9 3TAC Jr
1980 18 Sr 17-0 4TAC Jr
1981 19 Fr 18-3 4TAC 1NCAA
1982 20 So 18-10¼ (7,7) 3TAC 3NCAA

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