

by Tom Jordan

# DAVE VOLZ

**U**ntil 1977, Dave Volz's mother could tell the seasons by the kind of ball in her son's hands.

He was—to 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 frosh 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 scarred-up as to be unusable.

He has never adjusted to European time, so 3:00 AM wakeups 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



Jeff Johnson

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?*

**Volz:** 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?*

**Volz:** 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?*

**Volz:** 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 Pursley's poles.

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

**Volz:** 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 Volz the bar." How'd that start?*

**Volz:** It started with the American Record at 18-9½. 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 your hands for something.

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

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

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

**Volz:** 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?*

**Volz:** 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?*

*The Bible of the Sport*

**Volz:** 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 resurging a little bit.*

**Volz:** 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 slacked 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?*

**Volz:** 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.*

**Volz:** 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?*

**Volz:** 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?*

**Volz:** 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.*

**Volz:** 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?*

**Volz:** 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?*

**Volz:** 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?*

**Volz:** 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?*

**Volz:** 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?*

**Volz:** 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?*

**Volz:** 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 Volz was born May 2, 1962, in Long Beach, California, and is 5-11/175. Graduated from Bloomington South High (Indiana) in 1980, where he was coached by Marshall Goss. Now coached by Sam Bell at Indiana. Altered American Junior Record 3 times, topped by 18-3¼ (No. 2 all-time world). Is now No. 6 on the all-time world list. His progression:

Year	Age	Affil	Class	PV	Rank	Major Meets
1978	16	In	HS	So	15-8	
1979	17	"	Jr	16-9		3t)TAC Jr
1980	18	"	Sr	17-0		4t)TAC Jr
1981	19	In	Fr	18-3¼	(x, 4)	6t)TAC 1)NCAA
1982	20	"	So	18-10¼	(?, 7)	3)TAC 3)NCAA