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March 31, 2009

HIGH SCHOOL POLE VAULT PARTICIPATION 2008

The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) tracks high school sports participation in the United States on a yearly basis. However, they only track participation by sport, they do not break it down by positions or events.

The question of how many high school athletes participate in the pole vault became relevant several years ago when researchers wanted to determine the catastrophic injury rate of pole vaulters. USA Track & Field Pole Vault Safety Chairman Jan Johnson was consulted and he estimated that 60% of the 18,000 high school track teams in the country had an average of 6 vaulters each, for a nationwide total of over 64,000. The National Center for Catastrophic Sport Injury Research (NCCSI) rejected this number and used 25,000 instead.

This number was used in conjunction with the number of reported catastrophic injuries to produce an injury rate. The NCCSI then reported that pole vault had the highest injury rate of the sports they studied. This was a flawed statement, as they compared an event within a sport to entire sports, using an estimated number versus known numbers. It would be more accurate to compare the number of catastrophic injuries suffered by pole vaulters to those suffered by linebackers in football or flyers in cheerleading. There are also issues regarding injury reporting. Some sports only report catastrophic injuries suffered in competition, while catastrophic pole vault injuries are counted in both practice and competition.

The rise of internet track and field rankings has offered some insight into the true number of pole vault participants. In 2004 athletic.net began an online database of track and field statistics in Oregon. They soon expanded throughout the US, and the vast majority of high school coaches in Washington and Oregon now input all of their yearly data into the system.

This glimpse is still only scratching the surface of true pole vault participation. When injury rates are studied for other sports such as bicycling and swimming, they do not only count competitive athletes, they count all participants. During a track season, there are many athletes who will practice the pole vault but choose not to compete.

For the purposes of this report, athletic.net was referenced for the 2008 pole vault participants in Washington and Oregon, the two states that most heavily use the site. Statewide track and field participation data was taken from the 2007-08 High School Athletics Participation Survey published by the NFHS.

The number of published pole vaulters in these two states was then calculated as a percentage of total prep track and field participation by state. Oregon had about a 1.5% higher pole vault participation rate for both genders, but this may be due to the fact that they have a higher percentage of schools reporting all of their results to athletic.net than Washington. The two

percentages were averaged and applied to the participation numbers for all 50 states and DC excluding Iowa and Alaska who do not offer the pole vault.

This resulted in an estimated 33,149 high school girls and 44,241 boys competing in the pole vault in 2008, a total of 77,390. The detailed breakdown is attached at the end of this document.

This is a very conservative estimate. For Washington and Oregon, this only counts athletes who achieved a mark in competition that was reported on athletic.net. California and Texas have the highest number of total participants in track and field and they are also states in which the pole vault enjoys tremendous popularity, it is reasonable to assume they have similar, if not higher, participation than Washington and Oregon.

This is a preliminary report that does not attempt to account for differences in participation rates between states or count non-competing participants. I hope to do an extensive survey of pole vault coaches in the future to determine on average what percentage of athletes who participate in the pole vault actually compete, and to examine how participation rates vary by state.

It is clear from this preliminary data that the number of pole vault participants nationwide is at least several times higher than 25,000. It is also important to note that the rate of catastrophic injuries has gone down dramatically since the NFHS began requiring bigger pits.

With new data indicating a much higher participation rate than previously estimated, and a significant decrease in catastrophic injuries at all levels, it is time for the NCCSI to recalculate their catastrophic injury rate for pole vaulting.

**Number of pole vaulters reported on Athletic.net as a percentage of number
of track participants recorded by the NFHS**

State	Girls PV	Girls Track	%	Avg %	Boys PV	Boys Track	%	Avg %
WA	599	8698	6.89%	7.60%	835	11180	7.47%	8.27%
OR	533	6413	8.31%		785	8652	9.07%	

**Estimated number of pole vaulters per state based on participation
numbers recorded by the NFHS multiplied by the average percentages
above**

State	Estimated Girls PV	NFHS Girls Track		Estimated Boys PV	NFHS Boys Track
AL	322	4244		507	6125
AK	0	0		0	0
AZ	466	6136		681	8228
AR	286	3767		430	5194
CA	2950	38817		4128	49911
CO	478	6287		696	8419
CT	459	6045		563	6811
DE	62	821		85	1032
DC	8	103		8	101
FL	925	12175		1237	14954
GA	680	8951		960	11609
HI	107	1408		172	2079
ID	239	3148		341	4119
IL	1312	17262		2028	24517
IN	774	10189		1027	12418
IA	0	0		0	0
KS	524	6901		777	9395
KY	347	4571		436	5276
LA	216	2840		294	3550
ME	198	2603		220	2655
MD	386	5082		512	6190
MA	869	11438		990	11970
MI	1356	17844		1948	23550
MN	1150	15136		1286	15543
MI	339	4461		630	7612
MO	902	11873		1138	13763
MT	196	2579		290	3508
NE	567	7457		734	8869
NV	184	2419		254	3066
NH	154	2033		198	2399
NJ	1110	14603		1366	16521
NM	235	3090		300	3629

NY	1623	21357		1786	21588
NC	677	8911		1034	12496
ND	140	1841		183	2210
OH	1830	24082		2255	27261
OK	302	3975		376	4550
PA	1469	19328		1593	19264
RI	121	1587		133	1603
SC	406	5337		593	7167
SD	214	2816		294	3559
TN	222	2915		604	7302
TX	5029	66182		6655	80463
UT	291	3824		360	4353
VT	61	802		61	732
VA	636	8366		891	10774
WV	209	2747		242	2920
WI	892	11744		1200	14504
WY	94	1239		129	1555
Estimated Total by Gender					
	33149			44241	
Estimated Combined Total					
	77390				