

Squeeze the "J" from the Beginning high Jumpers

Source: www.coacheseeducation.com By Peter Brewer

One of the hardest problems to correct for beginners is the lack of pit penetration. The jumper is higher than the bar, but fails to carry enough momentum into the pit and comes down on the bar. The leading cause of this flaw is that the beginning jumper instinctively feels comfortable with an approach that brings him or her close to the bar and thus results in a narrow take-off angle (the angle between the direction the body is moving at takeoff and the cross bar). The narrower of this angle the jumper will fail to move past the bar into the pit and the jumper will dislodge the bar even though adequate height may have been achieved. What to do? The experience jumper can handle greater approach speeds, so they can utilize a wider turn, come in at an apparent narrow takeoff angle, and still have enough momentum to carry the body past the bar into the pit. The beginning jumper often has trouble converting speed into verticality, and so must have a slower approach to learn control. What is the solution?

Squeeze the "J": Since Dick Fosbury revolutionized the event in 1968 the high jump uses a curved approach. The refinement is now that the jumper takes about half the approach on a line to the bar, and then sweeps in a curve to the bar over the last half. As mentioned, the wider the curve (to handle the speed of the jumper) the more likely the narrower takeoff angle. The beginning jumper should have a narrow curve to promote a wider takeoff angle and thus have enough momentum to carry him or her over the bar into the pit.

This is how I coach beginners in high jump on their approach:

- The start of the approach is never more than 6 feet outside the span of the standards. That is, when standing at the beginning of the takeoff approach, the jumper should be within dead even with the standard, or no more than two steps outside that visual line.
- The beginning of the curve is not the last 5 steps, but the last four and sometimes the last three steps.
- The takeoff spot (the spot where the jumper actually leaves the ground) is no more than three feet inside the standard.

All of this "squeezes the J" the "J" approach is longer, with a shorter and less curved hook. The jumper learns to come in straight, worry first about jumping vertically, and not have to focus on pit penetration. Coming in straighter like this also forces the jumper to instinctively develop quicker takeoff times to get vertical before running into the bar. This also prevents the development of the unfortunate habit of leaning backwards for the arch before even leaving the ground.

Another habit that is avoided is traveling down the length of the cross bar and jumping dangerously close to the end of the pit. Focusing on a takeoff spot close to the near standard prevents this habit from developing. To literally force this approach on jumpers I create an alley (about 2 feet wide) with cones that is the "J" that I want them to use and have them take their 12-20 jumps using that approach. Once this is learned, and the jumper develops a feel for the rhythm of the jump and the conversion of horizontal to vertical momentum, then I widen the "J" to match their speed and control.