

POLES GET OLDER - LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE

This subjects matters a lot to me. Not only because of my profession (lawyer) - keywords: liability and responsibility.

The birthday-year of a pole can be seen at the top of your poles, next to the length, weight-index and flex. At older poles (and still on ucs/spirit poles) it is scratched into your poles and on newer ones (and on Pacer-Poles) it is written on a sticker.

The ignorance or the lack of awareness about "old poles" is one of the things I want to change. The issue with "old poles" can be described as follows:

If you look at your 15 years old ski helmet, do you ask yourself if you should better replace it? Such a helmet is made of Styrofoam and plastic. A ski-helmet will not be bent like a pole several times all the years long.

The same question for bicycle-helmets.

Do you do skiing with ski that are more than 15 years old? Ski are used a few days every year and not bent as much as poles.

Everything made of fibre is aging and gets fragile. A vaulting pole is made of fibreglas or carbon or a mixture and resin.

Now you look at your vaulting poles, you hang yourself upside down in a height of 4 or 5 metres, you are bending it to a 90° arc. A mixture of fibre-tissue and resin. Your vaulting pole that is 15 years old has been bent for 15 years several hundret times, has fallen a thousand times at the runway after your jumps, it was used 15 years.


Is it clever to wait till the day it bursts in your hand? Would you do that with your ski under your feet until they crack during a downhill? Would you do that with your bicycle helmet?

The performance of poles diminishes as they age. The elasticity of a pole is always the best when poles are "young". There is no material in the world that gets more dynamic while aging. The elasticity of the resin cannot improve over years, that is physically impossible. That is why the pro's get new poles after only a few years of use. Pro skier do not use their ski for 10 years. Maybe they use it for 2 or 3 years if they had a really good feeling with a certain ski.

Now you may think: "but poles are expensive. We cannot replace all of our poles that are 15 years or older."

What does that mean if you think about it consequently? Every pole has to be used until it bursts? I will rather kill myself than save money and buy new ones?

Every athlete that thinks that way I cannot help. Every track club that thinks like that (or doesn't think about replacing poles before someone get's hurt) should seriously think about his liability. Consequently we are talking about bodily injury caused by negligence if you let athletes use a pole until it bursts. This way of thinking, that you buy a new pole only after the old one busted, is just grotesque.



A corrective is, if poles get checked every now and then by an experienced coach or athlete and if you define a maximum age. Of course a not so often used pole can be kept some years longer. But you would also replace a bicycle helmet after 20 years, even though it was not often used. No one would risk using more than 20 year old ski for a tour (and again a helmet or ski do not get bent like a pole so poles should be replaced more often replaced than helmets and ski!)

Habit is your enemy. Except for the professional athletes nobody really seems to care about the issue of poles aging. Nobody cares that consequently they will burst one day. Hardly anybody knows that their performance is not getting better as they get older, nobody can do 1:1 comparison between an old a new pole. Of course for maybe 2 or 4 centimeters more it's quite an expensive hobby to buy new poles regularly. And because of this high costs poles are not replaced regularly.

But my point is not centimetres but accidents.

The costs should be put in comparison to the worth of the human beings hanging on these (old) poles. This ends discussions quite fast.

A pole costs about 40 dollars a year if you charge off over 15 years. The accounting department of a track club owing 30 poles has to replace 2 poles every year (in his books only if there is nothing to replace a certain year). 30 poles that's quite a stately sized set.

That is how we do in my track club - since I told them to do so. That's also how you avoid the day you have to tell your track club that you have to replace 10 poles that year and tell them you are sorry but that's 7000 dollars at once.

The alternative to my thoughts and explanations is, that one day an old pole bursts and then it is your liability because writing this article I told you how it should be done....

... (I let this take effect)

Sometimes I step up to an athlete and ask him: look, this pole here, it is older than you, what do you think about that?

I look into astonished faces then - but somewhere in the back of their brain something begins to dawn on that fact being maybe weird. As I tell them the story you just read, they start to think differently about it.

If a pole burst you get from only a shock to serious wounds and fractures, mostly at your hands because of the vibration a bursting pole sends off. If that is the result of a too old pole, the accident could have been avoided.

Look after your material. Check the age of your poles. Stand up against using old poles. It can be very dangerous.