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 PV Store
 Athletes
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Derek Miles - 2004 Olympian

New Poles

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Vauling Poles from Bell Athletics

Buying the right pole is tricky. Weight ratings relate to flex numbers, but what flex number do you need? Let us explain.

Here at Bell Athletics we take our vaulting very seriously, and with that idea in mind we also take our poles very seriously. Selecting the right pole(s) is one of the key ingredients to a successful vault, season, or career in the pole-vault.

The simple selection method of weight and length of a vaulting pole is oversimplification of a very complex problem, and often causes serious problems for vaulters of any ability level.

It is as simple as selecting the right tool for the job, you wouldn't try to run the 100meters in size 14 penny-loafers. It can be done, but if you want to run fast, and make the task easy, you would run in sprint spikes, in your size.

The first step in picking the right pole is understanding how poles are measured. In simple terms, poles are measured in two specific ways, length and stiffness. The length is very easy, just using a simple tape measure, the stiffness is a bit more complex, but still, a simple tape measure is used. To determine the stiffness of a pole it is hung from two very specific points near the ends of the pole. A weight is placed near the middle of the pole, and the amount the pole bends is measured, usually in centimeters. This measurement is referred to as the **FLEX NUMBER**.



Flex numbers are etched into the top (of poles made by gill) or bottom (poles made by essxsport), and are written on the bottom in black pen if measured here on the Bell Athletics rack. .

A flex number is the true measurement of a pole! A pole labeled at a specific weight refers directly to the flex number of the pole....not the weight of the vaulter, not how much weight the pole can hold, not the force that it is able to return....only the flex number.

Once the flex number is determined, the manufacturer then determines in what weight range the pole falls into based upon a simple chart. Here is a quick example. Let us say that we have a 14' pole, with a flex number of 19.7cm. When we refer to the chart we see.

14' 150	20.8 - 21.8
14' 155	19.7 - 20.7
14' 160	18.6 - 19.6
14' 165	17.5 - 18.5

Our pole falls into the 155lb. category, the range for this category is 19.7- 20.7, so any pole with a flex number within that range is given a weight rating of 155lbs. What is important to note, is that if our pole in this example had measured 0.1cm stiffer (flex number of 19.6) it would have been given a weight rating of 160lbs rather than 155lbs.

Buyer beware! When purchasing the next pole it is important to note exactly what pole you are purchasing. If you were to have the pole in our example, a 14' 19.7, 155lbs, and order a 160lbs pole, there is no way to tell what flex number the pole you are purchasing will be. If you are sent a 19.6 that can, and will be a major problem. You have spent you money....to purchase nearly the exact same pole you have! If you are sent an 18.6, the same problem can occur, only this time you ordered a 160lbs pole, and received nearly a 165lbs pole.

Using this flex number the manufacturer then determines in what weight range the pole will fall into.

Looking at the flex numbers of your poles now may give you some insight into some of the problems you may have switching between your current poles, and will give us the information to make sure you get the right pole to fill in a "gap" in your bag, or the correct next pole.

Poles are expensive, so make sure you get the right pole, every time.

We know this is all very confusing, but we can help, have helped others, and continue to help anyone who is in need of this information.