

Track and Field



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Tarzan's Cry

Pastor Bob Richards, who had been a very great pole vaulter before him and knew what he was talking about, used to say about Don Bragg: The sky is his limit. In fact, Don Bragg was limited especially by the equipment he used: a metal pole. After him, athletes began to make a name for themselves with fibreglass poles and catapulted to dizzying heights. It was almost a new event that came into being. Who knows what he could have achieved had Don Bragg, whose strength was phenomenal, had the opportunity to adapt to poles which required greater speed and suppleness? In any case, in 1960 he had said everything and, at the age of 25, he was already, for the United States, an old athlete.

Born in a small New Jersey village, as a child Don Bragg liked to imitate Tarzan. As he already had an impressive physique, his nickname was very fitting. In 1956, a few months after clearing 4.66 m (15 ft 3 1/2 in), he sustained an injury during the United States Championships. Wanting, despite everything, to try his luck, he took part in the American Olympic qualifying events. Unfortu-

nately he only took fifth place with a vault of 4.48 m (14 ft 8 1/2 in), stayed at home, and the title was won with 4.56 m (14 ft 11 1/2 in) in Melbourne. A wait of four long years began.

In 1960, his great year, he beat the world record, the last one to be set with a metal pole, by clearing, very precisely, 4.806 m (15 ft 9 1/4 in) in Palo Alto. Having a rare fighting spirit, a sure taste for risk and unrivalled strength, he could hardly be beaten—except by overdoing it at the Rome Olympic Games. He was able to avoid this pitfall and, at the end of an event which finished late in the evening, gave Tarzan's cry after his winning vault of 4.70 m (15 ft 5 in). The reign of the acrobats could begin.

DON BRAGG

Born May 3, 1935, in Penn Groves, New Jersey

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1960 OG: gold medal with 4.70 m (15 ft 5 in)

World record:

4.80 m (15 ft 9 in) on 2 July 1960 in Palo Alto

Best world indoor performance in 1959 with 4.81 m (15 ft 9 in)

Would Don Bragg have been able to adapt to fibreglass poles?