

# Track and Field



*John Pennel*



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### Two 'Come-backs'

Although he was never Olympic champion, John Pennel was one of the most brilliant and consistent American pole-vaulters. Having begun at 15, he was in fact, fourteen years later, to beat the world record for the ninth time in his career.

At 29, he had retained enough suppleness and speed to shine in a sport in which the young usually have the advantage. It was all the more exceptional because this athlete, albeit well-muscled, was only of average height. Having cleared 4.58 m (15 ft) with a metal pole, he had adapted himself perfectly from 1961 onwards to fiberglass poles. He had mastered the new technique so well that he would doubtless have collected more titles if it had not been for health problems which ruined his hopes from then on.

Thus, already world record-holder from the beginning of 1963, he could only finish eleventh in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics because of back pain. Having retired from competition along with the Olympic champion Fred Hansen, he made a first 'come-back' in 1965 to win the title of United States champion at San Diego.

World record-holder again in 1966, he gave up competition a second time for the whole of the year 1967.

It was thought that he would not be seen again, but he made a second 'come-back' in the American trials for the Mexico Olympics. He had just completed a new course of treatment and, fighting hard, he cleared in the Mexican capital the same height as the three first vaulters: 5.40 m (17 ft 8½ in).

Unfortunately, his pole went underneath the bar, which at the time was still forbidden under the rules. He established his last world record in the following year, in 1969.

#### JOHN PENNEL

Born July 25, 1940, in Memphis, Tennessee.

#### AWARDS AND RECORDS

1964 OG: 11 th with 4.70 m (15 ft 5½ in)

1968 OG: 5th with 5.35 m (17 ft 6½ in)

Nine times world record-holder, the first time on 22 March, 1963, with 4,95 m (16 ft 2 in), at Memphis (Tennessee), the last time on 21 June, 1969, with 5.44 m (17 ft 10 in), at Sacramento (California).