

TOP STAR OF THE WEEK

Prep Vaulters Always Dreamed of Heights

Not too many people would have called Nathaniel Jackson Durham a precocious child at the age of 10, but the Corbin (Ky.) native already knew what he wanted out of life.

Durham dreamed of jumping 15 feet with a pole. No universal cure for disease. No galaxies to reach, or worlds to conquer. Just a modest desire—and the backbone to fulfill it.

Nat celebrated his 18th birthday on April 27. Three weeks later he celebrated the reality of his fondest dream. The Farmington High senior soared 15 feet to take the pole vault at the state track championships at Flint and became the first prep to achieve that standard in Michigan scholastic history.

For his efforts, Durham has been named the Free Press Prep Star of the Week.

THE 6-FOOT-3, 160-pound Falcon leaper had tradition going for him at the state trials—Ron Shortt, Michigan's first 14-foot vaulter in 1966, also called Farmington High alma mater.

More important, Nat had a working knowledge of the

rules. And associates to defend his rights.

"I let out a big yell after I jumped out of the pit," Durham remarked, hardly able to contain the delight of his record deed. "I was really screaming."

"I picked up my pole and slammed it to the ground, then started shaking everyone's hand. I was in another world. Not for long. The judge motioned me over. He told me my jump was illegal. Illegal!"

Durham's pole had been caught by a meet employe in front of the bar, allegedly in violation of a rule which states the pole may not break the plane of the jump, rest on the cross bar or hit the standards.

The intensity of Nat's anger could have melted steel.

"I got hot under the collar arguing with the judge," Durham sighed. "But the pole was

caught! It didn't touch anything," I hollared.

"WHAT A waste of breath. The coach pushed me away and took up the argument. The frustration. I began to cry. I haven't done that since I was 12. This has to be the greatest disappointment in my life."

A formal protest was made. A committee was chosen to adjudicate and agreed the rule was hazy. Decision: In Nat's favor after a 20-minute delay.

"You think the wait was bad," Durham rapped. "Barry Benton of Flint still has jumps coming . . . and just missed on his first. I nearly had a heart attack. I was so drained I couldn't go on. Let the record stand."

For the state meet, perhaps. But Nat now has a reputation. The sky was the limit for last Friday's Oakland County meet. Oh, yes. Benton hit 15 feet, 3/4 inch in a local meet during the week.

"Three-quarters of an inch? Small stuff," Durham blurted. "If he had done two inches, now . . . What really counts is head-to-head competition."

"I TRIED a new 16-foot pole in practice. Bad News. Straight up and down. I switched back to my 15-footer and got a hard burn."

"I made 12.9 on my first jump. Then passed to 13.9. Black! A bug flew in my eye on the first try. I hit the bar with my chest on the second. I bombed on the last . . . and finished third. Goes to prove I'm only human."

Homo Sapiens, but with a pinch of quality added. During the winter Durham made All-State in gymnastics with a third-place medal in the side horse.

A week between seasons wasn't enough time to prepare for the vault in the Huron Re-

Durham confided. "I went up in my first plane last weekend—a Cessna Cardinal four seater. It was great. I just might join the Air Force and be a jet pilot.

Another impossible dream? Not with Durham's drive. Where there's a will, there's a sonic boom.



Nat Durham

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