

Vaulters reach rarefied air

By Scott Simonson
Oregon Daily Emerald

Sergey Bubka isn't a pole vaulter. He's a launching pad with arms. He's a slingshot without rubber bands.

Hand Sergey Bubka a pole and he does terrific impression of a catapult. Bubka is the best pole vaulter in the history of track and field. He holds the world record of 20 feet, 1.25 inches.

Bubka, the Ukrainian and Nike International athlete, is the best in the world, but for a while Saturday night, fellow Nike athlete and American Kory Tarpenning was close.

When the bar went to 19 feet, 2.25 inches, they were the only ones left. Tarpenning went over. Bubka passed.

At 19 feet, 4.25 inches, Tarpenning passed. Bubka missed, then missed again. Instead of risking a third foul at the height, Bubka passed.

Bubka said later he passed to force Tarpenning to jump and give himself a chance to rest. The bar went up by two inches. Tarpenning hit the bar going over. It shook, shuddered, and bounced into the air,

but it didn't come down.

"I put my hand on it and held it from coming off," Tarpenning said. "That's the only way I can explain it."

Tarpenning hit the pads, bounced to his feet and thrust his arms in the air. He had just broken his meet record.

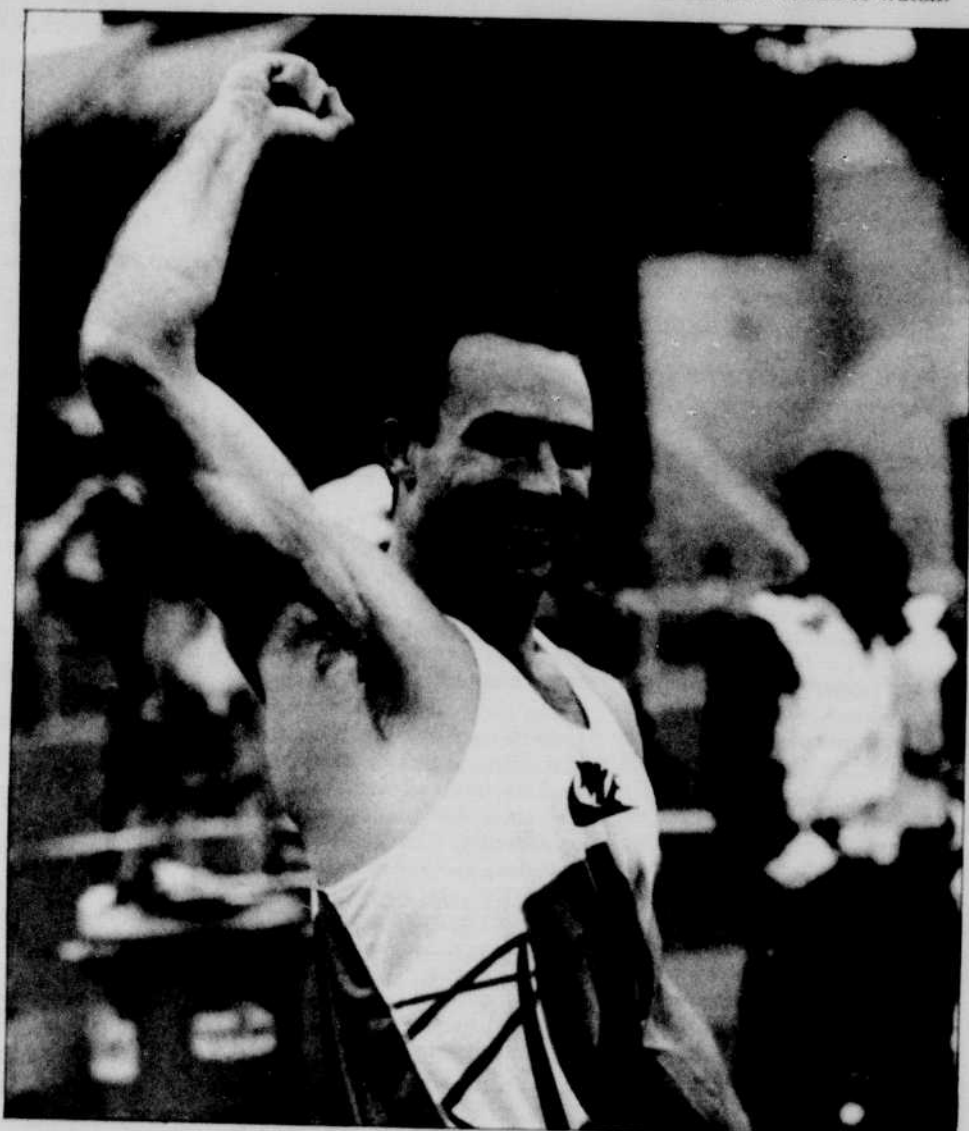
Bubka cleared the height and went higher. Tarpenning didn't.

With the bar raised to a world record height, Bubka cleared the bar on his second attempt before brushing it with his body on the way down and knocking the bar to the ground.

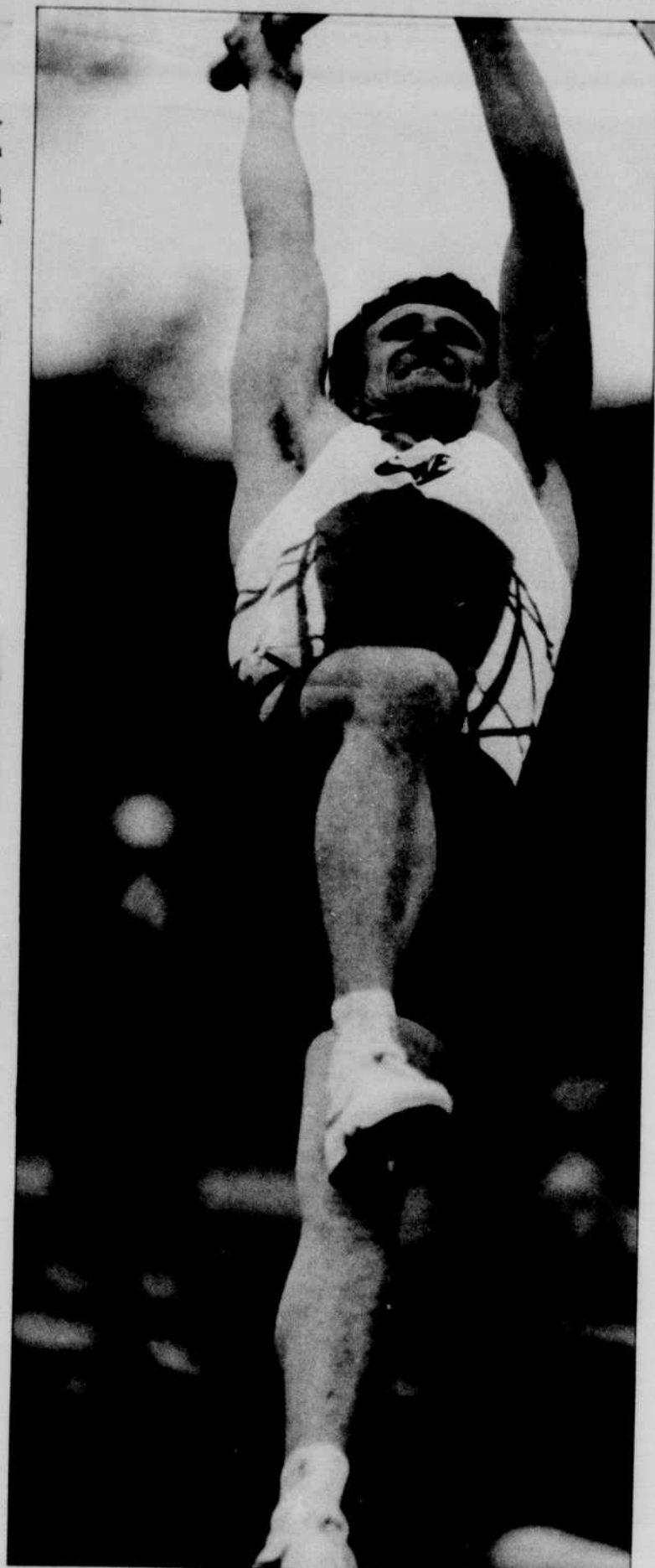
His third attempt wasn't close, and the world record went unbroken. "It was good. I was very satisfied with my results," Bubka said.

A "few small details" kept him from the record, he said. One of those was the conditions. "It was a little bit dark. I like to jump at night, but with good light."

In the dark, the crowd looked into the night sky and saw men trying to throw themselves 20 feet into the air. Absurd or brilliant, it was fun to watch.



Sergey Bubka (far right) won the pole vault competition at Saturday's Prefontaine Classic, but had to withstand a strong challenge from Kory Tarpenning (right) to do so.



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