

Why Don't Vaulters Wear Helmets?

By Devon Maitozo

Many people wonder initially why vaulters are not required or encouraged to wear helmets. The answer is simple. Helmets do not aid in the safety of a vaulter, but rather increase the risk of injury when used in our particular sport. The consensus is clear across the board amongst all vaulting experts worldwide, coaches, competitors, medical professionals well versed in vaulting, and any people experienced with the demands of equestrian vaulting.

Firstly, vaulting has the best safety record by far of any equestrian discipline. This is primarily due to the fact that the safety of falling and dismounting from the horse is a fundamental part of vaulting training from the very beginning. Vaulters learn to fall away from the horse, and the footing we land on is typically soft, easily offering more protection than a helmet could provide.

Helmets are considered to be hazardous for vaulting since they are simply not designed for our sport, nor could such a helmet be developed. Helmets currently on the market are too thick to safely allow a forward or backward roll on proper footing, preventing vaulters from safely implementing this proven safety maneuver upon "bailout" dismounts. They could get jammed and cause severe neck injury. Since helmets are meant to prevent concussion by slowing down the head upon sudden impact, making them thinner would eliminate their effectiveness even if our soft footing didn't already do a better job of protecting our heads by dampening impact.

Straps cause a serious safety hazard with their potential of getting caught on our vaulting equipment or other vaulters. As vaulters often are together with others on the horse at the same time, not only does the extra size get in the way, but others hands or feet can also catch the straps. Helmet straps are not meant to break loose. It goes without saying how disastrous it could be if a vaulter's helmet was caught on anything during a fall.

In a practical sense, helmets would prevent vaulters from performing most of the exercises and transitions that are fundamental to our sport. Often a vaulter's head is up against the horse and rolling from side to side, upside down or otherwise. Helmets limit the scope of vision even when fitted perfectly and additionally could never be tight enough to stay completely still, easily blocking a vaulter's eyes when visual orientation is so crucial. Judging distance on the horse as well as when performing dismounts would be greatly compromised. Lastly, despite being relatively light, helmets do throw off the balance of a vaulter when performing any dynamic exercises, and especially anything involving rotational momentum such as a flip or spin of any kind.

In closing, helmets, although certainly an important and much needed safety aid for horseback riding in general, are inappropriate for the use in both recreational as well as competitive vaulting at any age and do the opposite of increasing a vaulter's safety.

I, _____, have read and understand the safety about vaulting, where it comes from and understand that wearing helmets is not safe in this sport of vaulting. I also understand that precautions will take place in any instance where a head injury could take place.

Signature: _____ Date: _____