

## Helmets

One of the primary questions that people new to vaulting ask about is why don't we use helmets in vaulting? The answer in a nutshell is that all of the experts, world wide, confer that not only do helmets not improve the safety of a vaulter; they can actually increase the risk of injury. Before going into much detail, it should be known that several countries, most notably the U.K., did decide a few years ago to force vaulters to use helmets but quickly reversed the decision after it was put into practice. Another key point is that although the number of vaulters in Europe (particularly in Germany) is large, the statistics of vaulting indicate that it is the safest equestrian sport. This along with its popularity has made it the most common introduction to equestrian sport in Germany.

The reason helmets are not considered to improve the safety of a vaulter is that in a proper vaulting lesson or competition there is nothing hard for the vaulters to hit their head on. In vaulting, the horse is on a circle, which causes falls to travel away from the horse and keeps the vaulter away from walls or other hard objects. Vaulting requires soft footing that easily offers more protection than what a helmet could provide. A proper vaulting coach/trainer always introduces vaulters to key safety skills starting in the first lesson. There are proper and common methods of approaching a vaulting horse, dismounting a vaulting horse, and safe ways to "bailout" when balance is lost.

The first reason helmets are considered to be a safety hazard in vaulting is that they are not designed for use with vaulting, nor could one be developed. Existing helmets on the market are too thick to safely allow a forward or backwards roll in soft footing; the helmet itself could get "jammed" and cause a severe neck injury during a bailout roll. Making the helmet less thick would eliminate the purpose of the helmet in the first place, since a helmet works by slowing down the head over a larger distance than if direct contact was made with a hard object. Further, as above, vaulting must be done on soft footing where the footing itself will offer as much absorption as the helmet would. The second reason helmets are not considered to be safe for vaulting is that the straps could get caught up on the vaulting equipment, or on other vaulters (more than one vaulter may be on the horse at the same time.) In the interest of keeping the helmet on the head, helmets are not designed for these straps to let go. Needless to say, the result of a helmet getting caught during a fall would be disastrous.

The final thing to consider, safety aside, is that much of the sport is simply not possible while wearing a helmet. Many exercises and skills require the head to be close to the horses' side for balance, or to be rolled over in a variety of ways. Further, at the higher levels, any sort of dynamic exercise that requires a flip, spin and/or flight will be thrown off by the extra weight of the helmet on the head. Although the weight of the helmet is very slight, it does affect the perceptual senses of the vaulter during a flip or spin. The decreased scope of vision is also a problem, as a vaulter often relies on this vision when judging distance and location of landing dismounts.

In order to help others understand these issues further, and to add weight to the position outlined above, you can download some or all of the files in our collection of [letters of support](#). These letters of support are written by vaulters, coaches, judges, and organizations from all around the world. This collection is continuously growing; we will keep it posted here indefinitely for the benefit of others who need such resources. If you have resources that you would like to add to this collection, we would gratefully accept them.

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