The SD High School 7’ Club

Scott Benson of Rapid City Stevens became the first SD prep to clear 7’ in the high jump.
Photo courtesy of Rapid City Journal

Like many epic barriers in track and field, the 7’ high jump ranks among the most significant achievements. In South Dakota’s storied history, six jumpers have cleared that mark. Here is where they rank on the Top Ten.

The Top Ten List

HIGH JUMP

Nick Johannsen, Miller	7'2.00"/7'0.00"	1991/1990
Scott Benson, Rapid City Stevens	7'2.00"/6'10.25"	1988/1987
Jason Sutherland, Watertown	7'1.00"	1992
Zack Anderson, Parker	7'0.00"	2016
Travis Martin, Scotland	7'0.00"	1989
Bud Hamilton, Hot Springs	7'0.00"	1991
Michael Tveidt, Pierre	6'10.5"	2006
Derek Gearman, Lennox	6'10.25"	2003
Brian Antoine, Watertown	6'10"	1997

Scott Benson was the first to clear 7 feet at a meet in Spearfish on April 23, 1988. The next weekend, he pushed the record to 7-1-1/2 in a competition. Just a week later at the Howard Wood Dakota Relays in Sioux Falls, Benson set the state record at 7-2. After his sterling prep career, Benson continued to excel at a high level, winning three Big Eight Conference championships in the high jump at Iowa State. Benson, who ranks No. 3 on the Cyclones all-time list, had a successful career as a high school coach, collecting 17 state championships. He has been inducted into the Rapid City Sports Hall of Fame and was the 2015 South Dakota Coach of the Year.

In 1991, another standout jumper, Nick Johannsen of Miller, tied Benson's mark in 1991. Johannsen excelled at Kansas University, earning All-American honors. Interestingly, his brother Marc jumped 7' 3 ¼" at Minnesota.

While Jason Sutherland was best known for his basketball abilities, he was another seven-foot-high jumper in South Dakota. Named South Dakota's Mr. Basketball in 1993, he had a standout basketball career at the University of Missouri, where he played in the NCAA Tournament. In 1992, Sutherland wowed the South Dakota State Track Meet crowd by going 7' 1" . In recognition of his wide-ranging exploits in basketball and track and field, he was named South Dakota High School Boys Athlete of the Year.

Zach Anderson of Parker cleared the magic height in 2016, becoming the first athlete to reach the seven-foot mark in 24 years. Anderson, who won three Class B titles for the Pheasants, was a standout at the University of South Dakota, where he was a multi-time Summit League champ and All-American. He had a personal best for the Coyotes of 7' 5" and qualified for the US Olympic Trials.

Photo Courtesy USD

Travis Martin of Scotland cleared 7' on May 27, 1989, at the state track and field meet. Martin, who excelled in basketball and track and field at Dakota Wesleyan University in Mitchell, still ranks second all-time in the Tiger record books in the high jump.

Another standout on South Dakota's Top-Ten high jump list is Bud Hamilton of Hot Springs. In 1991, he cleared 7' at the state meet but settled for second as Nick Johannsen edged him out. It is the only time in prep history that two high jumpers cleared seven feet at the same state meet. Hamilton was a two-event standout as he set the all-time best in the triple jump of 47' 11 ½, also in 1991. After his memorable prep career (all-state football and standout in basketball), Hamilton earned a Division I scholarship to the University of Wyoming, where he excelled in the jumps for the Cowboys. A member of the Hot Springs Hall of Fame, he set Wyoming's collegiate record in the high jump of 7-3, which stood for more than 20 years.

Photo courtesy Rapid City Journal