

RACE AND TEAM TACTICS

I don't like being left in the group when a breakaway starts, and I hate getting caught. How can I leave my buds in the dust?

Jacky Durand: Long breaks are not about speed. You need power and smarts and patience.

I do 10 to 15 attacks for every one that works--I didn't get the reputation for being a diesel for nothing.

When I first started racing at 14 years old, I was already attacking all the time. Too many people wait for the sprint, but if you want to progress, you've got to attack. Sprint training is the best way to work on your breakaway, because breakaways are often the result of a series of short, frequent attacks.

4 Sneaky Strategies for Successful Attacks

1. Drift Back, Then Attack: "Before you attack, go to the back of the group, act like you're hurting," says Jacky. "Then surprise them."

2. Attack On Crests: "I'm not a climber, so I break just after the climb when guys are recuperating. Because I'm a good descender, I can quickly make up more time there."

3. Go All Out Until You Get a 3- To 4-Minute Lead: "Once I have that 3-4 minutes, I back off to 70-80 percent effort. Then I put speed on the back burner, at least until the final miles."

4. Don't Jump Too Early: "If there's a break 40 miles from the finish, it's not worth it to follow. Break closer to 12 miles from the finish."

Workouts for Stronger Breakaways by yourself or with fast groups

- Sprint at 100% for 200 yards
- Rest no more than 30 seconds
- Repeat 5-6 times

Workouts for Stronger Breakaways in slow groups

- Climb in a big gear (53x14)
- Stay seated
- Spin on flats at 90+ rpm

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How can I win if I can't sprint? On group rides, we finish with a sprint up a slight S-curve and down a flat straight-away. I climb better than these guys, but I'm just not as fast on the flats. Is there any way I can win this final sprint?

Tyler Hamilton: Attack on the hill. Give it everything you have and drop your buddies before you reach the flatter road. Hopefully, their efforts to stay with you will have them so gassed by the time they reach the flat road that you'll have time to zip up your jersey and do the victory salute--or, as some of my USPS teammates say, "post up" or "raise the roof."

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When a rider attacks, how do you decide whether to let him go or to chase him?

A. *Norm Alvis:* Half of the decision should be made before the race or ride ever starts. You should know who the strongest riders in the field are. If you are one of the five strongest riders, don't let more than two of the other four strong riders take off before you go along. If you're not--and you want to be a factor--wait for the ones who missed the break to go, then jump on their train instead of using your own energy to bridge the gap. (This counts for teams as well; if one of their riders needs to win, place or show, you should know that.)

The other half: Out on the course, know the route well enough so you can figure out if the terrain--combined with the weather--will help or hinder the break.

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What's the best way to build a gap in the field? Will I gain a better break in my saddle or drop into a harder gear and stand?

A. *Norm Alvis*: Worry less about your gear and more about timing. The number one factor in creating a gap in your attack is timing. If you slip through an open lane along the curb as the front of the pack slows down and mushrooms across the road, you'll gain a great gap immediately even if you're only pedaling with one leg. Go when everyone else must slow.

As for which technique gives you more pure acceleration: You will generate the most explosive power out of the saddle, with a solid grip on the bars, and at a cadence over 90 rpm.

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How do I pass? Are there any good techniques for getting by someone who doesn't want to let you pass?

A. *Norm Alvis*: I suggest two techniques. First, be patient. Within seconds, someone will likely try to get around on the other side and distract the blocking rider.

Second, if you don't have time to wait, start the pass with more momentum--be going fast enough to pass the lead rider before you reach him. Don't accelerate just enough to pull even with him, then try to kick again. Make it one smooth pass.

A riskier strategy: Be comfortable taking a less-than-perfect line through corners. No one can stand in your way if you are a good bike handler.

HOW TO PASS--FAST!

1. Don't try to pass when you are right on someone's wheel. Let a small gap develop--two wheel-lengths to a bike length is a good distance.

2. Accelerate toward the other rider's rear wheel and swing out. This makes your approach speed significantly faster than the lead rider's.

COMMON MISTAKE: Don't just sit in the draft and then swing out. If you do this, you're traveling at the same speed as the lead rider when you begin to pass. If his jump is stronger, you lose.

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Do I need to map the course before a race? To what extent do you mentally map out a course before you race? Everyone says it's important, but I don't have the luxury of pre-riding like the pros do. Is there some trick that might help me?

Norm Alvis: Here's a quick pre-race plan:

1. Know the most difficult parts of the course. Even if you can't ride it, if you know there's a wicked descent or brutal crosswind stretch, you can make sure you have a front row seat when you get there. Ask a local, ask the promoter, ask other riders.

2. Know the finish. Go look! Eight corners, a 200-meter wall or a U-turn in the final kilometer should never come as a surprise. Ideally, you should know where you want to be positioned in the last several corners and where your mark is for starting your sprint.

3. Always pre-ride at least one lap of a crit. Riders can always get at least one lap in. Use it to find the major obstacles, potholes or islands and where you want to start your sprint. If missing the front row on the start line is your major concern for a crit, then you need to work on cornering skills and group riding before you worry about being able to pre-ride a course. As a challenge to myself, I often started dead last in crits and tried to be the first across the line at the end of lap one.

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How can I hang in tough packs? How can I hang in tough packs? I'm timid in big group rides, so I get cut off a lot --what can I do to stay in the chase?

Marty Nothstein: The key is understanding offensive and defensive positioning. When you're the leading rider, you're on offense because you're less likely to take a spill if you make contact with a trailing rider. This is because your weight and stability are near the trailing rider's areas of instability--the handlebar and front wheel.

You can control the rider behind you by keeping your rear hub in line with or in front of the other rider's front hub. The farther ahead you are, the more control you have over the other rider's line. Basically, you can make him go where you want him to go not through contact, but through the threat of contact. (Of course, the trade-off for being in control is that the defensive rider gets to draft.)

Being aggressive doesn't mean you become a rider who takes wild chances. It just means imposing risk on others--the rider behind knows he's in a dicey position. You have to expect that they understand when you put them on defense--and that they know it's back down or fall. Vaya con Kevlar.

3 Tips For Riding In Tough Crowds

- * When your rear hub is ahead of another rider's front hub, you control the line.
- * When you're behind, surge ahead of riders with moves that go sideways and forward at once--don't slip to the side and then try to pass. That gives the leading rider time to get in front of you again.
- * If you're boxed in, position yourself shoulder to shoulder with an adjacent rider and drift over. Never drift over if your shoulder is behind his.

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