

Racing Strategy

By Chris Burnham, USA Cycling Level 1 Coach and Certified Power Based Training Coach

You trained hard, watched your diet, tapered effectively and peaked for your key event. Most cyclists would think that there is nothing left to do before the big day, but if you haven't considered your race strategy yet you could be leaving your best performance out on the road or trail.

It is important to first define these terms: Race strategies are a plan with all of the objectives for a given race. These can be quite simple or very complex. Tactics are the maneuvers employed by the riders or team to achieve an objective. Most of the time, a well thought out simple strategy works a lot better than a very complex strategy, and any strategy is better than none.

There are several features of the race you should consider in creating your strategy.

What is the profile of the course and are there any idiosyncrasies? What type of event is it, road race, circuit race, etc., and what is the distance? What does the last 500 meters look like, how close is the last corner to the line? What is the field size and quality? What is the history of the race? Is there a critical point on the course where a key selection occurs? And the most important factor, what are your strengths and weaknesses? A lot of this information can come from the race announcements, fellow teammates, or actually riding/driving the course. (This is the main reason we preride a mountain bike course).



There are 8 key principles in designing your strategy:

- 1) **Element of Surprise.** You want to make sure that your strategy is different enough that you will catch the other teams and riders by surprise. Timing is everything and you don't want to be predictable. Some tactics you can apply to take advantage of this element of surprise would be attacking into a headwind, into a corner, or anytime its unexpected.
- 2) **Energy Management.** You don't want to waste any efforts and you should always try to accomplish your goal using the least amount of effort. This may seem pretty basic, but make sure that any tactic employed directly benefits you or your team.

- 3) Complete Execution of the Tactic. Most attacks fail, but anything less than 100% will definitely fail. Lack of confidence is the main reason riders back off. Attack with confidence and with a 100% effort. When you do give up on a tactic do not let the other know you are giving up.
- 4) Adaptability to Change. When the gun goes off, all bets are off. You should always go into a race with a plan but be flexible. If you employ a tactic and it doesn't work, you have to be willing to adjust. We should all be actors in the race, not reactors.
- 5) Risk Taking. A risk is a tactic with less than a 50% chance of success. There is a difference between a risk and a stupid tactic. A risk is something that has been calculated in training. Knowing that you can maintain a specific pace or power output for a given time and employing that knowledge in your racing tactics greatly increases the chances for success. You must be willing to lose in order to win. It is also important to note that you should never race in a way that endangers other competitors or yourself. Know your skill level.
- 6) Calculating Tactics (The Principle of Consolidation). You must remember that any advantage gained must be defended when the opponent employs their tactic. You have to look at the big picture and manage your energy accordingly.
- 7) Capitalize on your Opponents Weaknesses. You have to know your competition and take them out of their comfort zone. If a rider is a good sprinter, attack them relentlessly before you get to final 200 meters. You can also look for signs of fatigue in other riders. Watch your competitors pedal strokes. Most will get very sloppy when they start to get tired. It is also important to note that we should only capitalize on another rider's weakness, not their mishaps.
- 8) Race your strengths. You have to know what you are good at and develop a strategy that plays to those strengths. Most of us know where we excel and where we suffer but we can also use other tools to further fine tune our strategies. Heart rate monitors and power meters can be very valuable tools in assessing your strengths and weakness and how to better employ them in your racing.

Planning out our strategies and employing tactics that maximize our strengths and capitalize on our opponents weaknesses will greatly increase our chances of success. We must be flexible and race aggressively. Do not be afraid to take chances.



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