



## ***Make The Race Come To You***

Like most things, the saying 'timing is everything' applies to bike racing. Sometimes, it's a split second, and other times the crucial moments last several minutes. When the race starts, and you carry your own unique attitude into the event, one thing is certain: you're not going to win this race until it's end, and that's quite a ways off. Now, I'm referring to mass start events in road racing. These are the strategic centerpieces of the sport. For those that want success in road racing, mastering road races and criteriums is critical. We've all heard another saying, that 'the strongest doesn't always win', but that doesn't tell us enough. That's like saying 'it's usually hot in the summer'. Truth is, the strongest does win a lot, in pro racing. One of the greatest parts of amateur racing, perhaps the greatest, is that sometimes even the weakest riders are able to sneak off and win. Just like there are reasons it's usually hot in the summer, there are reasons why the strongest doesn't always win. I like exploring the subject, because not always being the strongest, I had to figure it too often while I was racing. I've watched many a goliath fall to well placed stones.

Rolling off the start, everyone (except that one fool that attacks here every week) knows, is not the time to win a race. Be aware, though, that it marks the beginning of the time that you could lose the race. If you're in a junior to Cat. 2 event, chances are very high that no team in that race has enough strength or discipline to form an organized chase for any length of time. What that means is that if even one rider escapes too far, you may not see them again until you put your bike on the roof. It's no fun racing for a few hours and not being in the hunt for the spoils. Too many amateur riders take on the nonchalant, carefree look of a Euro pro at the start of a 250k stage in the first hour of their own race. You've seen those guys on your DVD's. Hair slicked back, shorts rolled up, laughing and joking in the sun. He doesn't care that he might have to be part of a 12 man chase for the last two hours of the stage, dragging the whole field behind him. In your race, chances are there won't be anyone around who can sustain a solid chase long enough to bring it all back together.

Don't lose your race early. Pay attention, right from the start. Don't end up being part of an angry, 20 rider group fighting each other for 38th place because you let the real race slip away. Easier said than done, you say? Perhaps, but hope lies at the foot of despair. Not many riders have the strength to follow every attack. The ones that sprint after everything from the front of the pack turn into soggy noodles. Stay alert, follow solid riders, and don't let five little bunches of riders get away clean before you start to get concerned. Here's a scenario: some riders get away. You can still see them, but they're working well together, making time. You can't quite tell, but you think there are six or seven of them. It's only 15 miles into a 75 mile race, and there are some hills ahead. The pack is not too concerned, no one wants to waste anything. You hear other riders joking about how early it is. Ok, it's alarm bell time as far I'm concerned. This is a bad situation. It sucks, in fact. This is a scenario that plays out every weekend all over the world, and more often than not, one of those riders up front will win.

Just as the sun's rotation is closer to Earth in the summer months, those riders up front came to race, got organized, and they are doing something every racer needs to do as often as possible: make the race come to you. Etch those words into action. Make the race come to you. By getting out in front, you make everyone behind fret and struggle. They might not ever make it up to you. After all, they have to ride faster than you to get to you. Be calm when you're in front, secure in that knowledge. Don't get greedy, either. Take your turn in front when it's your turn. Keep the peace. Take a nice, solid turn, without going too deep. Something you know you can sustain for as long as it takes. Sometimes, the other riders do catch up, and it will be time to do it all over again. Imagine the scenario above, again, and you are in front. At mile 60, another few riders catch up to you – after the hills. They are the best climbers in the state, and they dropped everyone in those hills. You probably wouldn't have made it over the top with them, you figure. Honestly, you never have before. But, now the hills are behind you. The newcomers look tired after their long pursuit. You're tired, too. You've been out in front for 50 miles. Now there are only 15 miles left, though. You feel a strange sensation in your gut, completely foreign. It hits you: someone from your group is going to win this.

On the drive home after a day of racing out in front like that, no matter what the outcome was, you're a hero. You get to feel something like Achilles must have felt after a great battle. That is the essence of bike racing. Laying it out there. You changed the course of the race. You made them have to respond. When they got to you, you did it again. Then again. Before today they thought they knew you. Had you all figured out. Thought they owned you for the rest of your days. Now it's all changed. You're driving home with the remnants of the hardest ride of anyone in the field in your body. Even though your body will have to heal before it can do it again, your mind is racing ahead, laying the bricks of confidence.