

## **Using Bike Handling Games to Improve Racing Performance**

by Stephen Thordarson  
Level 1 Coach - USA Cycling, Inc.

The purpose behind these beginning games, is to teach new or less experienced riders how to control and use their bicycle in whatever way is needed for the situation they are in. No matter how fast a rider may be capable of going, if they cannot control the bicycle they will not be able to reach their full potential. Younger riders should be encouraged to learn as much as possible about how to handle their bicycle. Teaching a rider how to safely and properly operate a bicycle is important.

Some children may decide to continue in cycling long after these games are practiced. When they get old enough to be involved in a serious training and racing program, they will already be experienced bike handlers. The beginning games are loosely arranged in order of complexity. While there is no rule about what order these games are taught, it is suggested they be taught in order. This avoids giving riders too difficult a challenge before they have learned the necessary skills. Even more experienced riders should begin with these first games, just to freshen up their skills. Because riders are always concerned about crashing, the very first game is how to fall down.

### **HOW TO FALL OVER**

Minimum number of participants: 1

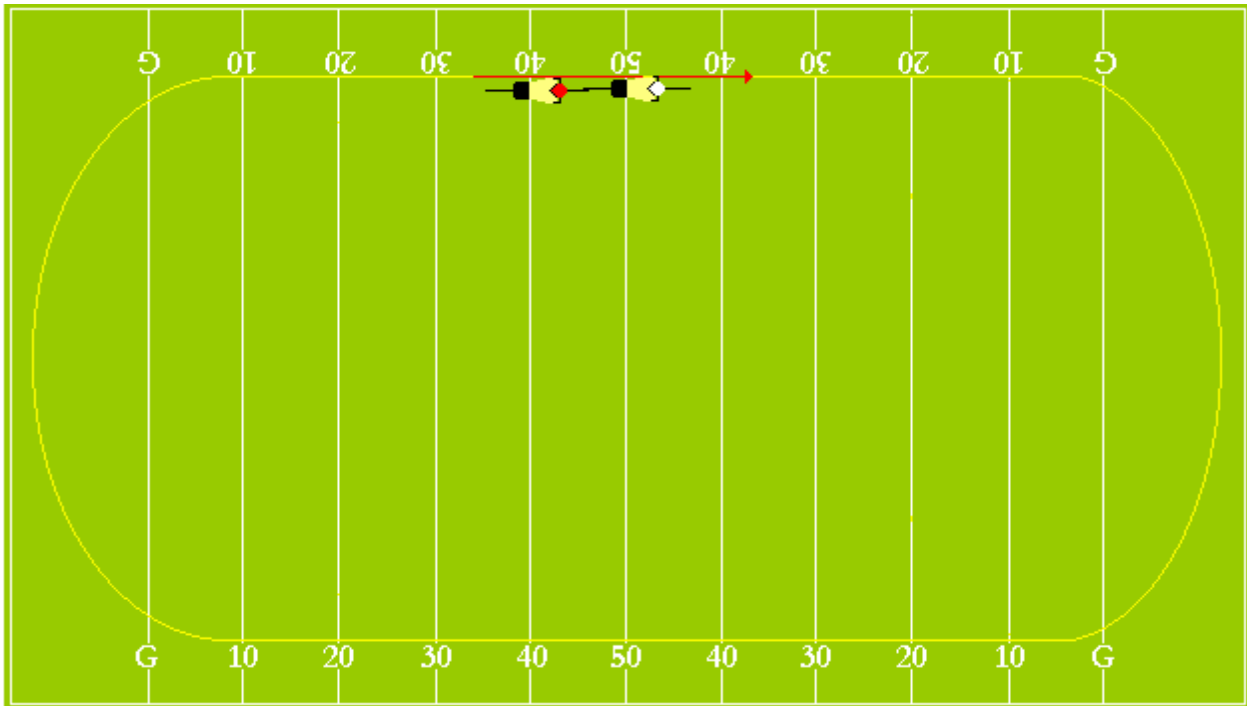
Materials needed: A flat grassy area such as a football or baseball field.

Instructions: Put the student riders in a circle around the instructor. Have the instructor sitting on their bicycle with their feet attached to the pedals and someone holding them up. Begin this drill by showing the riders what happens to you when the bicycle is no longer moving forward. Have the person holding the instructor up let go and see what happens. Demonstrate how to use your hands, shoulders, hips and other body parts to help break the fall and thus reduce the chance of injury. Show the difference between staying with the bike and separating from the bike.

When the actual drill begins have the riders separate enough to avoid hitting each other when they fall down. Try a variety of techniques that allow the riders to overcome their fear of falling.

When the riders feel confident falling down from a standstill, demonstrate how to fall down when moving slowly. Repeat your demonstration until each rider feels comfortable doing it themselves.

Object of this drill: To teach the riders to overcome their fear of crashing as well as teach them what to do if they do become involved in a crash.



## **BUMPING WHEELS IN THE GRASS**

Minimum number of participants: 2

Materials needed: A flat grassy area such as a football or baseball field where the riders can practice for at least 50 yards at a time. Riding in either a long oval or very large circle works best.

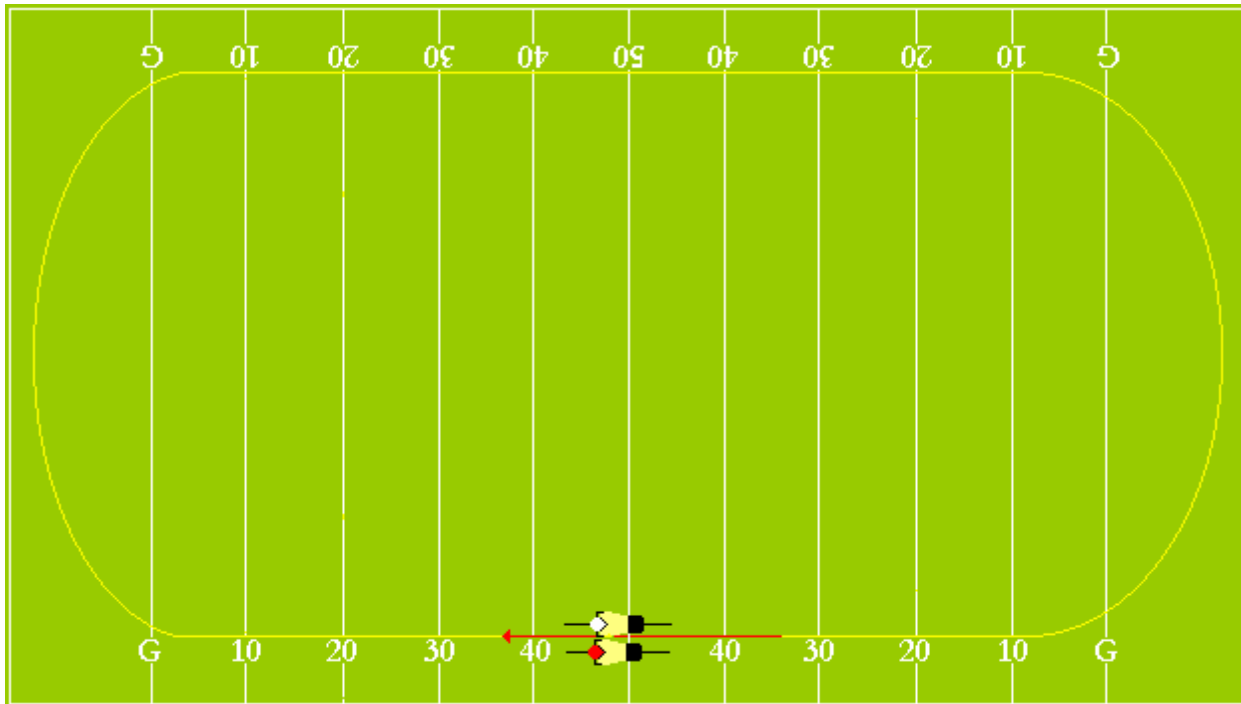
Instructions: Begin this drill by having the riders walk through it holding their bikes. When the actual drill begins have the rider use the small chainring and a cog in the middle of the freewheel. No shifting allowed.

One rider takes the lead position and rides as straight as possible across the grass. The trailing rider follows behind and attempts to overlap their wheel with the lead position rider. The front wheel of the trailing position rider should not get as far as the rear derailleur of the lead rider.

Once the wheels are overlapped the trailing rider attempts to make contact between the wheels. The object is to make contact without crashing or losing control.

The first few attempts will probably result in the rider tipping over into the grass or at least having to stop momentarily. The drill is repeated until the trailing rider can make long term contact without tipping over or losing control. Then the riders exchange places and start over.

Object of this drill: To teach the riders to overcome their fear of crashing into the rider ahead of them in a paceline or pack.



## **BUMPING SHOULDERS IN THE GRASS**

Minimum number of participants: 3

Materials needed: A flat grassy area such as a football or baseball field where the riders can practice for at least 50 yards at a time. Riding in either a long oval or very large circle works best.

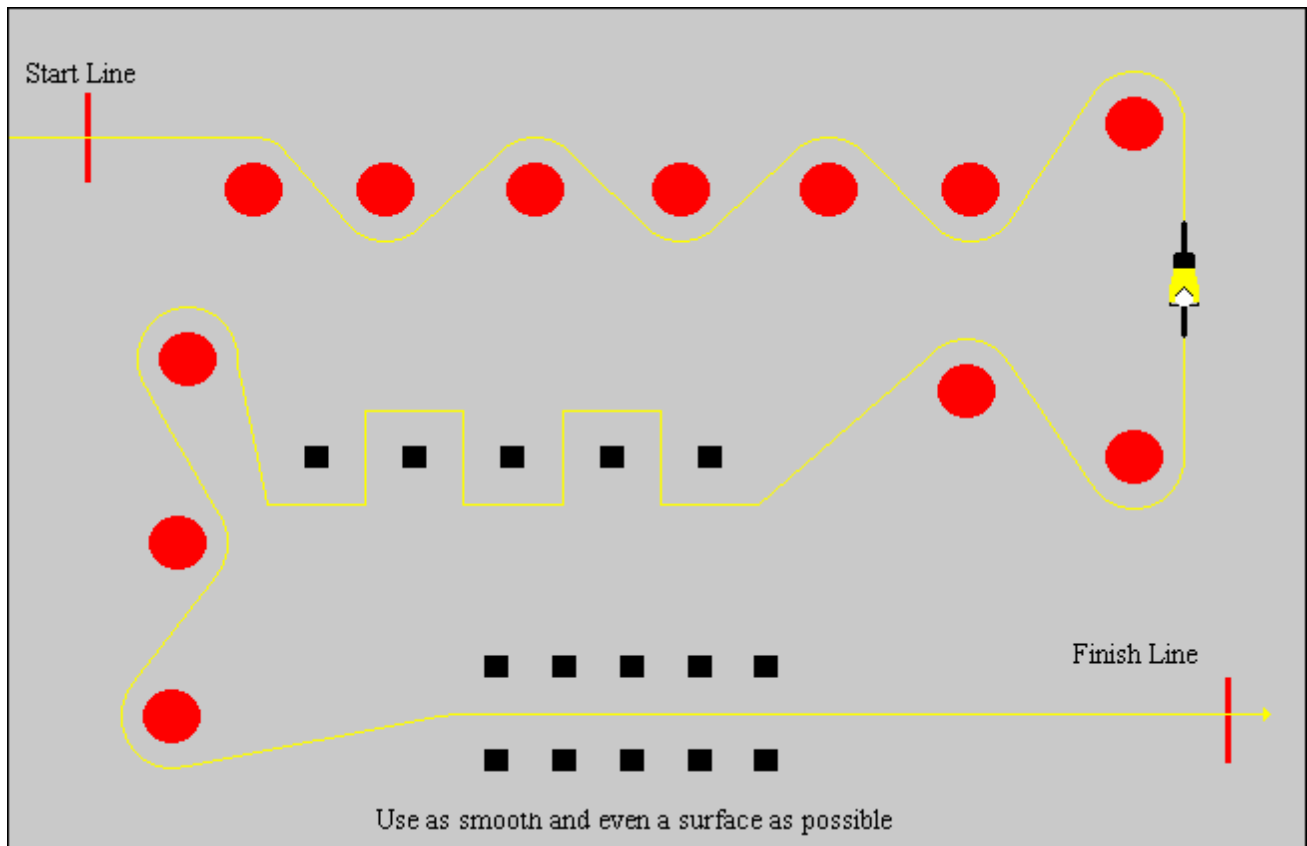
Instructions: Begin this drill by having the riders walk through it first to understand what is expected and avoid possible crashing.

Start with two riders pedaling in the small chainring and a cog somewhere in the middle of the freewheel. No shifting is allowed. The riders begin right next to each other. The third rider watches how it is done. With their hands in the drops, the two riders move closer together until their shoulders are touching. They then lean against each other without move their bikes apart.

Using their hands and shoulders as contact points, the riders pedal along side each other and gradually allow their bikes to drift apart slightly. The idea is to use the other rider to hold themselves up.

The riders switch sides and repeat the drill until they feel comfortable doing it. The third rider then takes the place of one rider and the drill is repeated completely. When all three riders are comfortable doing this drill, they ride three abreast and repeat the leaning process. The rider in the middle keeps the other riders up.

Object of this drill: During a fast paced, large pact race like a criterium championship or track points race, the riders become squeezed together. In order to maintain a strategic position in such a field, a rider must be able to ride in contact with other riders and their bikes. The use of the shoulders and hips keep the other riders away. The use of the hands and elbows keep the handlebars apart.



## **BICYCLE OBSTACLE COURSE**

Minimum number of participants: 2

Materials needed: A flat open parking lot with no loose gravel or small stones, chalk, a supply of water bottles, a whistle and a stopwatch or timer.

Instructions: Begin this drill by having the riders walk through it first to understand what is expected and avoid possible crashing. Start with two riders pedaling in the small chainring and a cog somewhere in the middle of the freewheel. No shifting is allowed.

Layout an obstacle course that requires the riders to turn back and forth between objects on the pavement. Be sure the layout allows for the turning radius of the bicycles being ridden and the skills of the riders involved. Have the riders proceed through the course as many times as needed, in order to make them feel as comfortable with the course as possible.

When all the riders have demonstrated competence with the obstacle course, have them run through it with a timer or stopwatch running. The rider with the best time and least mistakes is the winner.

Object of this drill: To teach riders how to deal with controlling their bicycles around objects they might encounter on the pavement, such as potholes, broken glass, debris or even fallen riders.

## DOWN HILL DRAG RACE

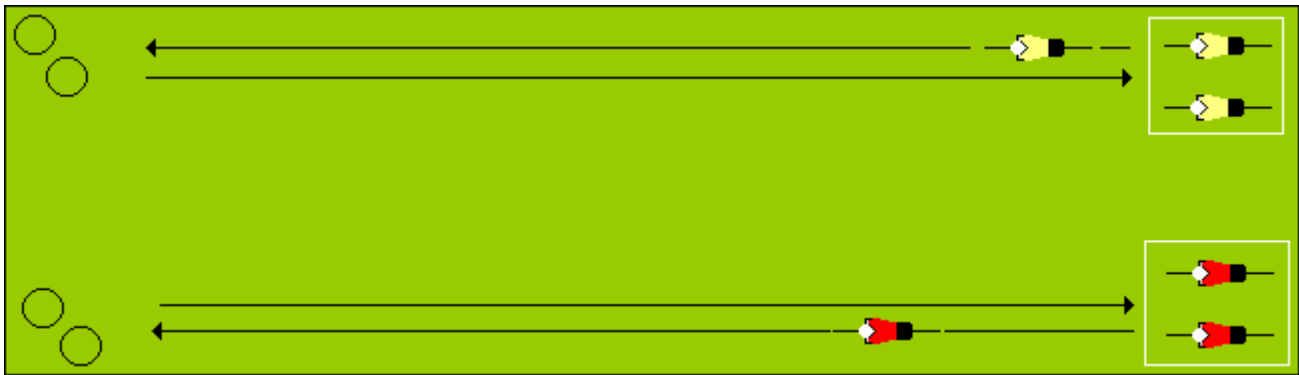
Minimum number of participants: 2

Materials needed: A steep, smooth hill at least one block long with at least one block straight flat paved surface after it. Try to find a location with no cross streets. If there are cross streets, you will need people at those cross streets to monitor automobile traffic.

Instructions: Riders will start from a chalk line on the ground at the top of the hill. No pedaling allowed. All riders will be given a starting push from the coach. Riders must assume their most aerodynamic position and coast as far as possible. Have observers posted along the descent to watch for flaws in technique.

Riders repeat the drill in an effort to find their most aerodynamic position that allows them to coast their maximum distance.

Object of this drill: During a race, riders may find it more beneficial to coast down a long gradient, than to pedal. Having a good position on the bike will help the rider to obtain the highest possible speed.



## WHEEL PIT RELAY

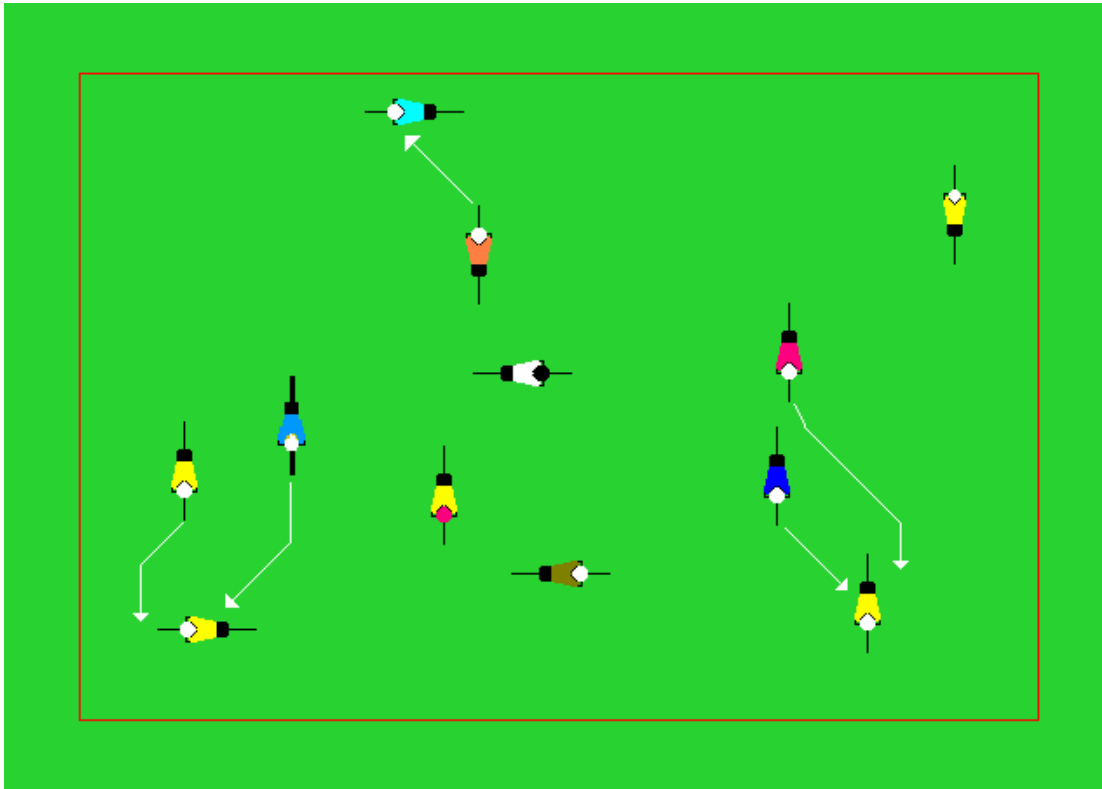
Minimum number of participants: 6

Materials needed: A flat paved surface such as a parking lot, a chalk starting line and a pair of wheels for each team of riders.

Instructions: Riders will start from a chalk line on the ground at one end of the parking lot. Suggested gearing is the small chainring and any cog.

Riders are broken up into teams of three or more. Riders line up at one end of parking lot, with one pair of wheels for each team at the other end. Riders race to the other end of the lot and take off their wheels. They then put on the other pair of wheels and return to the starting line. The next rider is tagged and repeats the wheel changing operation.

Object of this drill: During a race, riders may be in a position where they need to change wheels, but are without a mechanic. It is important for all riders to know how to change wheels as quickly as possible. If they are in a position to have their wheels changed, but are not ready, they will slow down even the best mechanic.



## **PUSH THE RIDER OUT OF THE SQUARE**

Minimum number of participants: 6

Materials needed: A flat grassy area such as a football or baseball field with a square area 20' x 20' marked off on the ground.

Instructions: Begin this drill by having the rider walk through it first to understand what is expected and avoid possible crashing. Start with all the riders pedaling in the small chainring and a cog somewhere in the middle of the freewheel. No shifting allowed.

The riders must keep their hands on the handlebars and their feet on the pedals. Using the skills learned in the previous drills, the riders must attempt to force the other riders out of the square. Riders are eliminated from the game when they either leave the square, their feet touch the ground or they take their hands off the handlebars. The last rider in the square wins.

Object of this drill: During a race with a large field, such as a points race on the track or a criterium, riders will have to deal with physical contact. Not knowing what to do can lead to a crash. The more competent a rider is on their bike, the safer they are.