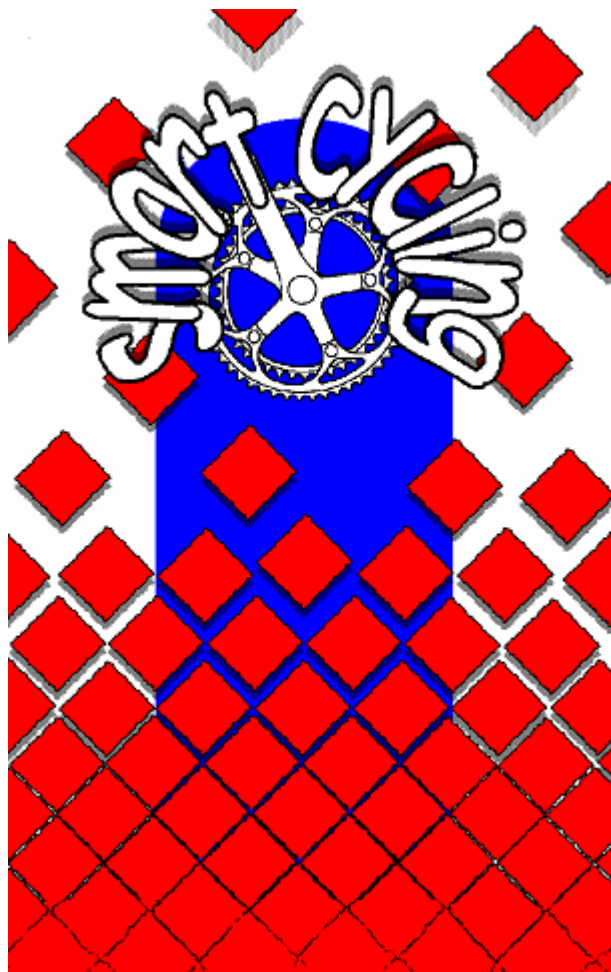


# The Basic Bike Racing Tactics Course

Student Workbook



**Developed by  
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### Acknowledgments

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European Cycling - The 20 Greatest Races by Noel Henderson  
Tour de France: Three Weeks to Glory, In High Gear, Breakaway, Champion: Bicycle Racing in the Age of Indurain - all by Samuel Abt  
Kelly by David Walsh  
Road Racing Technique and Training by Bernard Hinault and Claude Gentling

Additional sources include television coverage of the Tour de France, Giro d' Italia, Paris-Roubaix, Tour of Flanders, Milan-San Remo, Tour de Trump, Tour DuPont, The U.S. Pro Cycling Championship, The U.S. Pro Criterium Championship, Carolinas Criterium and the numerous races on Outdoor Life Network and the videos of World Cycling Productions.

## INTRODUCTION

In bicycle racing people refer to strategies and tactics when they describe what riders do to win a race. A tactic generally refers to individual actions performed in a mass start race, on the road, on a velodrome and occasionally off the road. However, there are also a lot of tactical maneuvers and strategies that are used in individual events, especially on a velodrome.

A strategy is the overall plan a team or rider has for the entire race. For example in the 1989 Core States Championship it was a strategy of the Wheaties-Schwinn team to try to win the Pepsi Wall Challenge. The tactic they used was to have Shaun Wallace attack and be the first rider up the Manyunk Wall on the first five laps of the race. That way their team would hopefully gain the most points and win the Pepsi Wall Challenge and the \$2,500.00 prize that went with it. Shaun Wallace drained all his physical resources during the first five laps and was eventually overtaken by another rider. As soon as Mike Farrell, the team coach, was sure that Wallace had gained enough points to win the prize, he let him drop out of the race. His work had been done and he got to relax. The Wheaties-Schwinn Team had used an overall strategy that employed specific tactics to win a prize.

During a mass start bike race there are only three things a rider can do.

- 1 Advance their position.**
- 2. Hold their position.**
- 3. Lose their position.**

A team will plan a strategy before a race that may have their riders doing all three of these things. Inside that race strategy are the individual tactics, which enable the team to work out their race strategy. The tactics for each person during the race will usually be different. A balanced team roster will usually include a couple of riders who specialize in climbing, one or two who can sprint, perhaps a time trial specialist and a few all around riders to do a variety of jobs. Then when the team competes in a race, those riders various skills are applied tactically to achieve the team's overall strategy and hopefully attain victory.

While there are countless strategies possible, there are only two basic tactics in cycling;

- 1. Attacking or advancing.**
- 2. Blocking or disrupting.**

Every action you take in a mass start race no matter how complicated, is a variation of those two items. They are used to hold or advance the rider's position in the race. Whether you work alone or with teammates, there is only one of two acceptable choices. The only other thing that can happen to the rider during the race is the losing of position. This is not an acceptable option.

Finally, a word about preparation. No matter how tactically smart you maybe, you need time to plan and think about what you want to do. Different types of races require different types of physical and mental preparation. There should always be time before a race to think things through. Race preparation involves so much more than just doing the right bike training.

**Describe a race strategy or tactic you witnessed and the effect it had on the race:**

## FIRST THINGS FIRST

There are many things to keep in mind when racing your bike, but two very important ones are;

- 1. Check out the course before the race.**
- 2. Know exactly where the finish line is.**

This may seem like an oversimplification, but it is a fact that many riders enter races without doing any homework at all. They may know roughly where the finish line is, but have little or no knowledge of the course itself. This leaves them unprepared to race properly because they will be unable to plan a solid strategy. Misjudging the location of the finish or your maximum sprint ability is as easy a mistake to make as missing your start time in a time trial. You have to develop good racing habits and one of those habits is to ask yourself a lot of questions.

Always try to take the time to check out the course you will be racing on either on your bike or in a car. There is no substitute for actually riding the course on your bike. Read the course description carefully or talk to the promoter if no description is available. If possible, talk with people who have raced on the course before. Always check that the course has not changed from the last time you or your friends rode it. Sometimes circumstances can force the promoter to alter the course because of construction, repairs or others problems. One other good idea is to learn how to read a topographical map. If you are going to a race far from home, you can have advance warning about what to expect by looking at the race course terrain. Stage races, National Championships and District Championships are often held on challenging courses. If you have never been to the race location and you don't know anyone who has, you can still be prepared if you can read a topographical map. There are numerous websites on the Internet that have downloadable topographical maps of almost every square mile of America. Some of these maps are available in a variety of scales, so close up details are easier to determine. Subtle changes in the shape of a climb can make the difference between whether you will attack on a climb or hang on for dear life.

Sometimes the race promoters will provide the riders with course profiles of the race route. These are two-dimensional graphs that show the elevation changes along the route. The more you know about a course, the better your race performance will be. If you look at a topographical map of the course and see it is an uphill finish, you can better prepare for it. Sprinting uphill at the end of the race is a lot different from sprinting on the flat. If you know you have trouble on uphill finishes, you can be prepared ahead of time. Remember that the absolute best way to judge a course is to ride it.

**List three conditions that can effect the outcome of a race and how each can impact a race:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## 20 QUESTIONS

There are many questions to ask yourself before, during and after a race. Before the race you may be asking yourself “What am I going to do and how am I going to do it?” During the race you may be asking yourself “What the heck is going on and what do I do now?” Sometimes after the race, the only question may be “What happened?” These are not the right questions to be asking. You must be as mentally prepared for the race as you are physically.

Below is a list of some important questions. It is not a complete list, just a guideline to file away in your head and make you think. When you race, you need to ask a lot of questions because physical strength alone will not win a race. Knowing your opponent’s strengths and weaknesses, your own strengths and weaknesses and the peculiarities of the course are as important as how much power you can produce. In fact they are probably more important, because they are tools you can definitely use to help you control and win the race. Your strength may not be as great as other riders, but perhaps your tactical knowledge will undermine their strength in the end. Everything in a race is constantly changing and you have to keep asking yourself what is going on now.

### **THINGS TO ASK YOURSELF AND YOUR TEAMMATES :**

#### **Before the race questions:**

- What is the weather like?
- How long is the race?
- Have you done this race before?
- Have your teammates done this race before?
- How was your performance?
- How was their performance?
- Did you have teammates the last time you did this race?
- Have your teammates done this race before?
- How was their performance?
- What is the layout of the course?
- Has the layout of the race changed since the last time?
- What is the layout of the finish line?
- Are there barricades in places?
- What types of barricades are being used?
- Are there any other hazards?
- How are they arranged?
- Does the road get narrower at the finish line?
- What is the road surface like?
- What is the road surface like at the finish?
- What are the weather conditions around the course?
- Are the conditions changing?
- If it is a velodrome, how steep is the banking?
- How wide is the track?
- Are there any surface irregularities?
- Is there any debris on the track?
- Is your bike geared properly for the event?
- Is there a paved apron at the bottom?

How long are the straight-aways?  
Is your bike geared properly for the course?  
How many teammates do you have with you?  
What are their abilities in this race?  
What are their jobs during this race?  
What are your plans for this race?  
What are their plans for this race?  
What conditions/locations that can restrict the riders?  
How often will you pass those locations in the race?  
Is there a feed zone on the course?  
How many people are working in the feed zone?  
Are there any other distractions on the course?

**During the race Questions:**

Is the field still together?  
Is there a real break?  
How big is the field?  
How big is the break?  
How far have you gone so far?  
How much farther do you have to go?  
If it is a points race, who is leading on points?  
Is anyone up a lap?  
Is anyone down a lap?  
How are you feeling at this stage of the race?  
Do they slow or speed up at the same place each lap?  
What are the other riders doing?  
Are the riders eating or drinking?  
Are any of the riders tired from previous action?  
Are the riders recovered from a previous action?  
Are the riders paying attention to you?  
Who is watching who?  
Who is not watching?  
Who is in the field with you?  
How many teammates are left?  
Who has dropped back?  
How many rivals do you have with you?  
Do they perceive you as a threat?

**Attack questions:**

What are their abilities to respond to your attack?  
Where is the best location on the course to attack?  
Has anyone attacked and how successful were they?  
How long must you work to successfully escape?  
If someone goes with you, will you have enough energy left to beat them?  
Do you have the energy to make a successful attack?

How close is the finish line?  
What is the terrain like ahead?  
Is attacking into the wind a valid option?  
Should you attack alone or with others?  
Who should you take with you?  
How good are those riders in a paceline or echelon?  
Will they work well together?  
Do you have teammates in the field to block?  
Will the attacking riders be too strong to overcome later?  
Have you worked with the other riders before?  
How strong is the tail wind?  
Is attacking with the wind a valid option?  
Can you recover enough to continue if caught?  
What is the current speed of the field?  
How close is the field?  
What is beyond the turn?  
How wide is the road and how tight is the turn in?  
What is the pavement like in the area of the turn?  
How are your turning skills on this course at speed?  
Has anyone successfully attacked here before?  
How close is the finish line?

**Describe a situation in which you discussed the unfolding of a race with a teammate and what was said:**

## I. ATTACKING

Some of the basic purposes of an attack are to separate yourself from other riders, to test the strength of opponents, to split the field to your advantage or to win. Because it is usually an individual effort, with or without assistance, it should not be a random act of wasted energy. There should be a reason, place and specific time to attack in order to get the best possible benefit from the energy used. We will look at the basic points one at a time.

The proper use of your energy is of the most importance. During a race there will be repeated attacks either by you or the other riders. Some attacks are meant to merely test the competition, while others will be to eliminate the competition. The reasons for an attack may depend greatly on what strategy your team may have in mind. If you are participating in a stage race, you may want different people to attack on different days to improve their overall standings. During a race like the Tour de France, a team may have a different rider attack each day in order to take over the top spots in the race. By having more riders in contention for the yellow jersey, they can better control the race.

While you may not be racing for control in the Tour de France, the idea can still apply. If you are a junior racer who wants to make the USA Cycling National Team, you will have a better chance of making the team if you and your teammates all place in the selection process. With teammates who are willing to work for each other, they can greatly reduce the chances of other riders winning. Having teammates wear out the competition reduces the number of people left for you to work against at the end of the race. Whoever puts on the strongest and best timed attack will likely win and you want that rider to be you.

When referring to making an attack it is important to remember that if you have a teammate you can have them attack for you. Often the best way to get ahead in a race is to have a teammate do the work and save your energy for the critical move. You can also feed off what other riders are doing, provided you are knowledgeable enough not to be used as a pawn by them. When you do make your attack, be sure you do it strongly. Remember, the description of this type of move is attack!

### TIMING AN ATTACK

Regardless of how strong a rider you might be, an ill timed attack becomes nothing more than a waste of effort. Knowing when to make an attack is really a matter of making an educated guess based on what is happening in the race. Sometimes you make a good guess and sometimes you do not.

What is on the course and how you use it are keys to your success. Consider physical objects as assets. Places where the road narrows, bridges, railroad tracks, bad pavement and tunnels can all be used to help you win if you take advantage of their potential. Anything that impedes the field's progress can help you win. Also remember to consider your location in the field of riders. If you find yourself surrounded by riders, you will hardly be in a position to attack or even respond to an attack. Try to always keep yourself in a position along the outside edge of the field. Avoid the right side of the road if there is a curb, as this will become a fence that holds you in. During races there is always a line of riders moving along the outside of the field. Being in this outer layer can speed your progress when the time comes to advance your position.

**Explain how good timing helped you or someone else achieve success:**

Have you ever been riding out in the bright sunlight and gone under the shade of trees along the edge of the road? The sudden change in lighting causes your eyes to misjudge things on the pavement. You cannot tell if there are holes or objects in front of you. Objects in the shade ahead can go unnoticed until you are in the shade yourself. These visual problems lend themselves to making an attack. If you cannot see what is ahead, you can bet no one else can either. By staying close to the edge of the road and keeping as straight a line as possible, you can perhaps get away from chasing riders. At the least they will be uncertain as to the distance between you and them. Remember that if you are on a course doing many laps, that shadows will change throughout the race. Don't count on things to be the same for the whole race.

Another thought to keep in mind is the distractions along a criterium course. Criteriums are usually held within a town or city. The course is closed to traffic and there are usually fences to keep the public off the course. By staying close to the fences a rider can blend in with the colorful backdrop of spectators. Riders coming around a corner behind you will have to really focus their attention to pick you out from the crowd. This will slow them down and help you in your efforts to stay away. There is also the advantage of the air being calmer near the fences and barricades. Calm air is easier to ride in. Keep some of these ideas in mind as you ride a course when you are warming up. Use everything to your advantage and be on the lookout for changes.

Don't waste things like the onset of rain, feed zone confusion, crashes, primes, that moment when the pack slows down at the top of a hill or after a chase. And of course at the moment when someone else decides to attack. When there is an attack up one side of the road, there is no reason why you cannot attack up the other side. If everyone watches the other attack, yours may succeed while the other fails.

Use the knowledge of others to your advantage as well. Talk to riders in all categories, who have done the race before and find out who has won in the past and how. It is just as good an idea to talk to the people who lost. Their experience of what happened to them can help give you an insight into tactics from a victim's point of view.

If you have the chance to actually figure out when a break is occurring in your race, try to spot the place where you are and where the break seems to be when you can actually determine they have broken away. After the race, go back to that spot and see how far away they actually were when you saw them. You would be amazed at how different a distance looks from the side versus from behind. Learn to gauge distances and speeds so that you will know what the odds are when you start to chase.

Listen to tricks other riders use to determine what is going on up front. Try these for yourself and keep the ones that work. Listen to everyone's ideas.

**List three elements you have seen alter the events in a race:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## BLUFFING

Sometimes to make an effective attack you have to be an actor, like Lance Armstrong. If you can convince your opponents that you do not present a danger to their plans, they may make the mistake of not covering what you do. Sometimes you can confuse the real attacks by faking one of your own. Jumping off the front just enough to get the field's attention and then letting your teammates can go for real. However, this can become a mistake if you bluff too often. After a few clever moves or victories, other riders will be watching you carefully. You should also be watching carefully for people who seem to be having a little too much good luck.

What about the other riders in the field with you? Are they really working that hard or are they bluffing? Are they looking for someone else to get things going or are they planning something themselves? Take the time to observe them carefully. Everyone looks fresh as a daisy in the beginning, but some people can look better even after many miles. Watch their behavior and try not to be fooled. It is important to remember that every rider has the ability to recover. Even when the pace is high, a rider can still recover by controlling the amount of work they do. It isn't hard to put on a tired face. Ask yourself some questions about yourself and the competition.

- Do they look tired?
- Do they look focused?
- Are they sweating or panting?
- Are they rocking on their bike going up the climbs?
- How are they responding to the moves in the race?
- Are their arms locked to hold them up?
- Are they taking a lead or pulling?
- Are their shoulders drooping
- Are they looking around or at the ground?
- Are they drinking or eating enough?
- Did they run out of food or drink?
- Did they miss the feed zone handup?
- Are they able to maintain speed at the front?
- Are they struggling on the climbs ?
- Are they pedaling at a slow cadence?
- Are they constantly fumbling to find a better gear?
- Are they standing on the pedals with speed changes?
- Are they gripping the bars very tightly?
- Has this person pulled a fast one in the past?

Remember to apply these questions to yourself, because you can bet the other riders are. This is true of your teammates as well. If you have a race strategy to carry out and you or your teammates are falling apart, your plan may not work.

Be aware that your appearance can fool someone into thinking you are not able to react if they attack. The reverse is true as well. People can appear as though they are not a threat. Don't be fooled!

**Describe how you disguise your feelings during a cycling event:**

## **ATTACKING ON THE FLAT**

The majority of time in many races is spent on flat land. That is, land with little or no significant elevation changes. The key word here is significant. A climb of fifty feet over a distance of three hundred meters may not be considered very significant if it is only climbed once or twice in good conditions. That same climb if repeated ten times in bad weather can become very significant. While there may be climbs and descents along the way, flat land can be a good place to attack. Often the flat land leading up to or following a climb or descent can provide the platform for a well-timed attack.

Generally riders in the front of the field will watch the road ahead and occasionally look behind or to the side for rivals. Often there are turns or curves that obstruct the riders view from the rest of the field. Disappearing around a corner or a series of turns can help you toward your goal of victory. Also use of the weather conditions on the course to your advantage when possible. If the course changes direction that adds the obstacle of wind, use it as a weapon in your strategy.

The element of surprise is more important on the flat, because there are no terrain obstacles to restrict the other riders response to your attack or your opponents. Visibility ahead is only restricted for the riders at the back. Developing a sense of awareness for conditions and race situations is essential to success. Don't just ride in the pack and try to keep pace, observe people. Keep an eye on everyone in the race. Don't just ride the course, get to know it.

In a multi-lap race pay attention to how the other riders react to different parts of the course. Keep your eyes and ears open for distractions or disruptions. Doing the unexpected can give you just the help you need. In track racing, match sprinters sometimes poke along for the first two laps trying to unnerve each other. The pace can crawl or come to a complete stop as the riders struggle for position. Sometimes the riders go all out from the very beginning.

If you decide to attack, it must be a solid action. Remember this is you against everyone else. If you are merely testing the other riders, you can jump without expending too much energy to get a response. However, your outward appearance should be the same as if you were attempting to breakaway. You won't get any takers to your bluff if you don't look serious. On the other hand, if you are serious and you look as if you are clowning around, you can get away before people know what you are up to. When you decide you are serious, you must give your maximum effort to separate yourself from the group. There is no such thing as a half hearted attack.

**Describe how you keep track of riders positions when the terrain is flat:**

## **ATTACKING INTO THE WIND**

They say professional riders will never attack on the flat into the wind. One look at some of the early spring classics in Europe will show this is not true. Most of the races are held in regions that the wind never seems to stop blowing. They may not want to attack into the wind, but if that will help them win the race they will. On the flat, riding into the wind may seem like an obvious time to attack, but many riders miss a chance to escape by not using the wind. Riders know that riding into the wind is extremely tiring and may not willingly start something into the wind. Large riders have a larger surface area to the front and therefore will experience more wind resistance. Smaller or more aerodynamic riders can use the wind to aid their escape if they are strong enough.

You should be careful when choosing riders to attack with you into the wind. Teammates of equal strength are always the first and best choice. If you have no teammates in the race, try picking someone you know you can work with. The strongest rider may not be the best choice, especially if you may not be able to beat them at the finish. If there are other riders making the attack, speed and timing will be critical to ensure a clean break is made from the field.

If the course terrain is not a major factor, the wind may be the only aid in making a successful attack. The pace must be kept high enough to keep the field at a distance.

If you attack and draw riders with you who will not work to escape, your move will be wasted. Just because someone is able to make a break doesn't mean they can help the break to stay away. You must be prepared to attack more than once. You should also be prepared to counter an attack more than once. If you are in a group that is trying to close a gap, do not give up or the race will be over for you.

Remember that the weather conditions may not be a factor throughout the entire race. It is not unusual for the wind direction to change as the day goes on, especially near the mountains. Be alert the changing conditions and adjust accordingly. Whatever you do, don't count on the weather in your plans.

## **ATTACKING WITH THE WIND**

Attacking on the flat with the wind has limited benefit because the chasing riders will get the same assistance. Timing and location is even more important. If the tailwind is strong enough you may not even be able to breakaway at all. Without the element of surprise, any gap opened up will be short lived. Make sure there is a very good reason for making such an attack, such as a flat stretch just before a climb. If you are a good climber, attacking on the flat before the climb may give you an advantage over the other climbers in the field. This tactic will not be wasted on the other climbers, who will be looking for a chance to make the same move against you.

Solo attacks with the wind will be of greater benefit to you because a paceline or echelon will not always improve the chaser's speed, in fact it may even reduce it. In the chasing field, riders in the back will act as a wind break for the front of the field. The faster you get out into the wind, the more advantage you will have. Attacking from the opposite side of the road will add distance to your gap and force the chasing riders to cut across the rest of the field. As the riders behind react, they will get in each other's way. The larger the field, the more chaos you will create behind you. Especially if you have teammates there. Be sure you always try to ride on a part of the road that will not give a rider behind you any draft.

**Describe how you change your riding technique when going into or with the wind:**

## **ATTACKING FROM THE FRONT**

Sometimes the hardest part about carrying out a plan, is getting into position to begin. In your efforts to place yourself near the front of the field, you have to first get up there. The trip to the front can expose you to other team's tactics to control the race. Keeping unwanted riders behind is a primary goal in race control. That means you may get boxed in behind other riders on your way up front

Most experienced riders will look to the opposite side of the road for an attack, so you must use this to your advantage. If the wind is blowing, it will definitely effect the field. If the wind is from the right, shelter will be on the left of a rider. If the wind is from the left, shelter will be on the right side of a rider. If the wind is from the front, shelter will be behind a rider.

How the wind is blowing will determine the basic configuration of the field. The configuration of the field will help determine where you will make your attack off the front of the field. The main problem is that at the front of the field, the riders most able to respond to your attack can see everything you are doing. This can sometimes work in your favor because the opposing riders may dismiss your move as unwise and not respond with much determination. Knowing the course and how the riders have been responding to it will help you make your decision about when and where to attack. The more successful you are, the more you will be watched and your moves covered. Remember that an attack doesn't always have to be a huge charge, sometimes an unnoticed, gradual acceleration will give you the gap.

## **ATTACKING FROM THE MIDDLE**

This may not seem like an obvious place from which to launch an attack, but most of the successful breaks start here. In the early stages of a race, the best place to be is near the front of the field and in the middle of the road. This enables you to see anything that could have an impact on the race and be within range to respond. If you plan to make an attack, being near the front of the field and in the middle of the road lets you see the road ahead and the people who will respond. It also keeps you in a place that you can get out of easier if there is a crash or the field bogs down as they start up a steep hill.

The shape of the field is constantly changing and you may be able to move into a front position that blocks your opponents. Remember that if you start to form up with teammates in anything that resembles a formation, you will set off the alarm bells in the more experienced riders. When it comes time to make your move, it should be done quickly and precisely. That means practice before the race and good communication during the race.

The physical demands on your body will vary greatly depending on the type of race you are in. A criterium on a course with tight turns and constant attacks may drain the energy from the riders more quickly than a long road race. Staying in the middle of the road near the front of the field will help to preserve your energy. It is essential to save as much energy as possible until you need it to help you win. Look for the riders who are working the most and the riders who are just sitting in. Keep an eye on riders who drift back and forth in the field, but don't seem to be working as they should. Some of these riders will be biding their time for an attack. Some of these riders will be struggling to survive. Unless they are extremely strong, the wobblers will not have enough left at the end. Beware of the riders just sitting in, because they will still be able to withstand late attacks.

## **ATTACKING FROM THE BACK**

Attacking from the back of the field almost sounds like a contradiction in terms. If you are at the back of the field you aren't going anywhere because everyone else is in your way. Sometimes that may be the case, but an attack is not always a massive acceleration out in the open. Often an attack is a steady increase in speed that can go unnoticed until it is too late. Remember that an attack is your effort to separate yourself from the field in order to win or accomplish a goal. A lot depends on the size of the field.

Try to think of the field as a big school of fish. Especially in a criterium or points race. People are drifting all over the place and the swarming mass of color can be confusing. It can be hard to keep track of what rider is where. It can be easier to move up through the field without being noticed if you pay attention to how fast you go. Move too fast and you draw attention to yourself. Move too slow and you don't get anywhere.

In a points race on the track, riders often go off the front in search of points over their rivals. Eventually they catch the back of the field and must work their way to the front again, in order to score points. What they are doing is essentially attacking from the rear. Looking for any way they can squeeze through the field to get back in front. This is also what happens in a criterium with a large field. Riders stretch the field out chasing after primes or in attempts to split the field. When they all get bunched back together, riders at the back must thread their way through to regain a more strategic position. There are definite disadvantages in riding from the back of the field. When the time comes to make your move, you must go past nearly every rider in the field. There is also the possibility that a crash at the front may take you completely out of contention.

A lot depends on the type of race you are in. On the track in a points race, your position in the back may not last long as riders constantly fight for points. In a road race, the terrain can quickly rearrange the riders position based on their ability to handle climbs, descents and turns. Criteriums shuffle the riders every time they go into a turn. Road races usually have the riders drifting around as the pack moves down the road.

There are also a few advantages in being in the back. If the field is not too large, being in the back allows you to watch every move the riders make. When the road is in good shape and wide enough to prevent you from being blocked, you can still respond.

**Describe a race situation you have seen or participated in that involved being at the front, middle or back. Explain how this location worked for or against the rider.**

## **ATTACKING FROM A BREAKAWAY**

The goal of every rider in a race should be to win. If you find yourself in a breakaway group, you are part way there. The question becomes what to do next to help your cause. If the break you are in is on the flat and you have to attack, there are a limited number of options available. Since breakaways are usually not very big, everyone will be watching each other. Surprise will be difficult because everyone will be expecting an attack. In order to be successful, the pace of the break must be kept high. If you stay at the back of the paceline or echelon too long, everyone will know what you are up to and you will have no control over the pace. It will take a burst of power to get away when you attack, so make sure you have been drinking and eating. The strongest riders in the race are probably right there with you.

Remember that many successful attacks are repeat efforts. If you attempt to breakaway and are overtaken, do not give up attacking. Take time and recover for the next attack. Your attack may immediately prompt other attacks within the group. Be ready to hang on until things settle down. Watch the paceline and monitor everything; speed, time of each riders pull, changes in speed and what the other riders are doing. Be very aware of the finish line and who is still a threat. One of the drawbacks in most attacks is that you don't have any choice about who may be in it. You may get a rider in the break that will use you to get to the finish.

Making the right choice about whether or not to work in a break can sometimes be difficult. You cannot let your personal feelings override your tactical sense. No matter how you are feeling mentally or physically, you must look at the riders with you as either assets or liabilities. If the assets outweigh the liabilities then perhaps you would be better off to work. Even if the other riders are not doing their share, you must plan for your own success. Be careful how you choose.

So looking quickly over the section on flat ground, remember a few of the important points:

1. Know where everything is on the course, especially the finish line. Use the shape of the course to your advantage.
2. Even if the terrain is flat. use the other riders and the distractions that arise to aid your race plan.
3. Don't allow frustration to control how you race. You may have to attack many times against the same people in order to finally succeed.

**List three methods you would use in making an attack from a breakaway:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## **ATTACKING ON A HILL**

The only reason God made hills and mountains was for riders to attack. A well timed attack that eliminates the bulk of the competition may seem a divine gift, but it's more like work. The same effects that can wipe out your rivals, can wipe you out as well if you're not careful. The hills may be your allies, but only if you have trained to use them. The advantage to attacking on a climb is it will take more effort from the opposition to respond. In addition to the normal power required, there is the grade of the hill. Length and steepness determine how useful it will be. A well timed attack on a climb may overpower a rider enough to keep them out of the break for the whole race, even if they recover later.

The actual height of the climb is not as much of a factor as the length. The longer the climb, the harder the effort to scale it. Riders will gradually run out of energy trying to hold a steady pace on a long climb. Short abrupt climbs are more likely to get an immediate reaction in the field. The pace at such climbs often changes very quickly. Riders will be scrambling to change gears and jumping out of the saddle to avoid being dropped.

Even a short, steep climb can prove lethal to the field if it must be climbed many times during a race. An example is the U.S. PRO Criterium Championship course in Downers Grove, Illinois. On the southwest end of the course is what appears to be a small climb. Less than a block long, it is always a breaking point for many riders. Not because of its great height, but because the riders must climb it 100 times. The San Francisco Grand Prix presents a different challenge. The riders must ascend a long climb that can best be described as leg breaking.

## **ATTACKING ON A DESCENT**

Unlike the obvious tactical advantage of being a good climber, a gift that few riders possess, descending can be learned and used by almost anyone. The challenge often is not a matter of physical ability as much as sheer courage (or foolishness) when making a descent. Just as the grade of a hill will hold all the riders back, descents will give everyone a push. Making a move away from the field on a descent will require more finesse or you will end up in the ditch.

Remember that abilities on climbs and descents are not just built into riders. They are skills that must be developed. Listen to the old saying about training your strengths and your weaknesses. Attacking on climbs may be a winning move, but only if you can do it better than the competition. Practice, watch the good climbers at work and learn from what you see. Above all, keep your mind clear and focused regardless of whether you are off the front or chasing the leaders. Don't allow the heat of the moment to cloud your judgment and possibly cause you to crash or cause a crash.

**Describe how you could combine attacks made going up and down hills to effectively advance your position in a race:**

## **ATTACKING INTO A TURN**

Attacking on the flat, into a turn may afford you the chance you need to escape or split the field. A change in direction can sometimes help you by taking advantage of terrain, wind direction, elevation or visibility. Making an attack into a turn has a certain level of risk which must be weighed carefully. The tightness of the turn is the most important factor. This is followed by the condition of the pavement. The natural tendency of the field is to swing to the outside curb approaching the turn and cut in towards the inside curb at the turn. Going against this normal maneuver too close to the field can cause a crash within the field.

Attacking into a turn should actually begin before the turn in an effort to create a gap that will give you the space you need to move without causing alarm to the riders behind you. By the time following riders see you in a lead position, you will already have a gap. There are really only two places you can go, towards the outside of the turn or the inside of the turn. Riders on the outside of the turn will have to ride a greater distance than riders on the inside.

The normal reaction coming out of the turn is to accelerate. Therefore being on the outside will put you in a position of having to work harder. This is especially true in criteriums where riders may be chasing for a prime or the finish line. However, the rider's normal tendency is to look to the inside for the next move. If you are strong enough, fast enough and near the front, you can catch the field by surprise and create a gap up the outside before the field swings to the outside.

## **ATTACKING OUT OF A TURN**

Attacking on the flat, out of a turn is actually what happens in most criteriums and many track races. The pace slows going into the turns and the riders accelerate out of the turn. The moment to make the attack will have several factors that determine its timing and location on the road. Most important of these is; Where are you going to be in relation to the field coming out of the turn? To attack out of a turn on the flat means being in front. Positioning yourself properly can be a major challenger as all the contenders will want to be in front. Reducing the final size of the field is one of the best reasons for attacking during a race.

Coming out of a turn will generally have the field on the inside of the turn headed for the outside shoulder of the road. What is on the other side of the turn is the main determining factor for where the riders will go. Bad pavement or the shape of the turn may force the riders to make the turn and stay to the left.

Pay close attention to how the riders make the turn throughout the race. If a pattern develops, use that to your advantage. You may also know riders who always corner the same way. Keep that in mind as well. It is essential when attacking to be able to create a gap. That gap may come from finding a line through a turn that no one can follow you on. If all the riders in the field are charging too hard out of a turn, it may be impossible to get a gap. You must time the move to play on your ability to accelerate.

**Describe how you have used turning to advance your position during a cycling event:**

## FORMATIONS

One last thought about attacking has to do with formations of riders. In other sports, most notably football, players are put into very well thought out patterns. The idea is to put the other players at a disadvantage when play begins. This same thing can be used in bike racing if the players are clever enough to use it properly. The idea is to place the riders in a position to not only attack as planned, but to prevent the opposing riders from joining in. This means getting the riders into a formation that will place them in a position of control. The more riders on your team, the better the formation will work. Let's look at a simple formation and see how it works. Imagine that we have a group of riders spread out across the road in no particular order. There are 5 riders from your team and they have placed themselves in a rough X shaped formation. One rider on either side of the road at the front. Another rider somewhere near the center of the field. Two more riders on opposite sides of the road at the back.

One of their teammates has begun to move off the front of the field. The riders forming the pattern are in a better position of control things than if they were simply spread throughout the field. By having a rider on either side of the road and one in the middle they can not only respond to other attacks, but they can shut down the chase better and more quickly.

The idea here is to get you thinking about how to design some formations specific to what you or your teammates want to do. It may take a while, but smarter riders from other teams may eventually catch on to what you are doing. When they see you and your teammates form up into a pattern it will put them on their guard. Even if you do nothing with it, you have already intimidated them and that can give you an edge right there. Remember what this section is about; Attacking. The purpose of an attack is to gain an advantage over your opponent. Anything that can give you the upper hand should be considered part of an attack. Think about what things put you off balance or on guard and use those things offensively. You are not racing Superman or Superwoman and things that have an effect on you will have an effect on them.

**Design a formation of your own, using at least three riders. Explain how this formation could be used to advance the position of at least one rider:**

## II. BLOCKING

Just like attacking, blocking has a definite goal. That is to disrupt the progress of someone else or their ability to respond to an attack. When making an attack, the goal is to advance your position. When you are blocking an opponent, the goal is make them lose their position or at least not advance it. Sometimes it can take just as much energy to block or disrupt as it does to attack.

Blocking can be a race tactic even when you have no teammates. On the velodrome during a points race you may block an opponent to prevent them from beating you to the line and getting more points than you. While not as exhausting as a sprint, this is still an energy consuming move. Remember that a block does not have to be a long drawn out maneuver. It only takes a moment to disrupt someone. Recall the example at the beginning of the book about the two riders from Redline, who simply slowed down at the right time to eliminate a rival.

If your team strategy calls for an attack to be made it should include teammates blocking to prevent opponents from joining in. Make sure you are in the right position in the field if your job is to block. Remember that blocking is not chasing or physically pushing. Having a teammate up front means preventing other people from joining that teammate. If you are disrupting a breakaway or attack you are trying not to close the gap.

You will need the same sorts of things blocking that you would attacking:

1. You need to be in a good position to respond to the opposing riders.
2. You need to know the strengths and weaknesses of your opponents.
3. You will be more effective if you have teammates to assist in whatever action you take.

Almost all of the situations you will be in have been covered in the section on attacking. The difference now is preventing or disrupting someone else. The demands are nearly as tough and require just as much attention as if you were attacking. The ease or difficulty depends a lot on the number of teammates in the field. The more teammates you have, the more control you have. As with the section on attacking, we will break down the various situations into small segments. Things plan out the same way as attacks, but with entirely different goals.

Remember always that what you will be doing when you block will frustrate your opponents. Some of them will recognize what you are doing and try to not be blocked. Some will be caught unaware and be effectively blocked. Then there are some who will lose their temper and let you know what they think of your maneuver. You must not allow someone's verbal abuse and lack of sportsmanship to prevent you from doing what you have to. Likewise if you are blocked, do not unleash any harassment on your opponent. Blocking is a classic tactic accepted by all in the cycling world. If someone gets the better of you with a well timed block, don't get mad. Remember it and learn to not fall for it next time. How a block is made says a lot about the sportsmanship of the rider doing it.

**Describe how you recognize when a blocking action is taking place:**

## **BLOCKING ON THE FLAT**

Blocking on the flat can be a little more difficult than in the hills. With the hills you have the terrain as an additional obstacle to help your blocking. However, if there are no significant terrain changes along the course then it will be up to the riders alone. There are quite a few standard techniques that can be used to block. Again, the more teammates you have, the better the blocking will be.

**Closing the front** - You and your teammates should be at or near the front when your team attacks. The riders who will be blocking will have to spread out. They position themselves across the road in such a way that no other rider can get around or between them without crossing the centerline or going into the ditch. Four teammates can effectively close the road. This will definitely get an unpleasant rise from your competition and you may not want to proceed with this block for too long. You need to keep the ends of the handlebars just close enough together so as to prevent a rider from trying to get between them.

**Drifting across the road** - Assuming that you will be making your attack from either the far right or far left side of the road, have your teammates position themselves between the other front riders. If you are on the right hand edge of the road, the person to your left should be an opponent. To their left should be a teammate and then another opponent. They should be followed by another teammate on their left. When the attack is made your teammates can move across the front of the field to the right, slowing the pace. This will reduce the number of people who can get on your wheel or chase. If it is your job to block, resist the temptation to go with the attack and force your way towards the right shoulder of the road.

**No work** - If the riders in your race are strung out in a mass and you or a teammate launches an attack, the simplest block is to soft pedal and drift slowly towards the middle of the road. This not only creates a gap, but forces the other riders behind you to apply their brakes or go around you. Once the gap is made you follow in their wheel tracks and watch. If the field gets back together you simply sit in and wait. If there is a breakaway, you simply ride near the front of the chase and disrupt the flow of things. When your turn comes to work at the front, you soft pedal and then drop off to the left. Completely refusing to work at all will get you launched out of the group fast. You cannot block if you are not in the field.

**Boxing in the strong rider** - Boxing in the best rider on the opposing team long enough to make a clean break has two immediate benefits. First, it will give you or your teammates a good gap on the field when they do attack. Second, it will force the boxed in rider to work extremely hard to get back into the action. Remember though that this tactic can be used against you as well, so keep your eyes and your options open. Watch for riders from other teams working together.

**Give two examples of blocking you have seen or participated in during a race:**

1.

2.

## **BLOCKING ON A HILL**

The first things to consider with any climb or hill are the steepness, length and shape of the terrain. Hills are a lot like people; no two are the same and they should be handled one at a time. Just like when making an attack on a hill, blocking on a hill will work only as good as the riders who are doing it. As with anything else in sports, practice makes perfect. If you want your team to pull off tactical maneuvers well, they had better practice.

Having terrain as a course factor can greatly aid in your team tactics. Everyone has to put up with the same experience when climbing; the effect of gravity. The tactical use of hills or steep climbs can change the entire outcome of any race. It is all a matter of using them correctly. Often the ground leading up to a climb is flat, so preparation should be made as the field approaches the hill.

Placing you or a teammate toward the centerline of the road reduces the area open for chasers. When the riders begin the climb, blocking teammates simply slow down and start to fall back. The good part about this type of block is that it can create a big gap with the riders in front moving off quickly. The riders behind it will have to scramble to change gears and regain their momentum. The bad part about this block is that anyone who is blocking will be left behind. The blocking rider will then have to work to prevent this part of the field from catching up.

Another technique for blocking going up the hills is to fake an attack just before you or a teammate actually does attack. Drawing part of the field to you on the right side of the road will add the edge of the road as a barrier. When the fake attack is made up the right side of the road, riders will jump to the attacker's wheel. If you or a teammate make an attack like this make sure your teammates are aware of what is going on and don't follow. The person making the fake attack should look back to make sure they have drawn a response. If no one responds, your fake attack is now a good attack. If riders do jump to your wheel, then continue working until they are working hard to catch you. As they close up to you simply quit working and drift a little to the left. This will be the moment of the real attack. The riders following the false attacker will be trapped behind, and have to scramble hard to get around on the left. If the blockers move fast enough they will block off the left side of the road. Anyone following behind them will be out picture unless they work very hard. When you block, anyone immediately behind you becomes a blocker to the riders behind them because they are now in the way.

**List three ways in which a climb can be used to block competition;**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## **BLOCKING ON A DESCENT**

Blocking while descending on a hill presents problems similar to blocking on the flat. There are additional difficulties that relate directly to the speed of the riders. Going downhill allows the riders to accelerate easily and hit speeds that cannot always be controlled. Blocking on a downhill must be well thought out, not only to insure effectiveness, but the safety of all.

Blocking to the right side of the road on the flat or a climb may force a rider to slow down in order to avoid the ditch. Blocking to the right side of the road on a descent may cause a rider who cannot stop in time to crash into the ditch. No amount of tactical advantage is worth the risk of injuries to another rider. Think before you move!

So how do you disrupt the progress of other people who want to chase down your attack? Start with what probably got you to a downhill in the first place; a climb. The crest of a hill is the place to layout a blocking move against your rivals. One sure way to block the field is to force it to stay together.

As the field of riders reach the top of a climb they will most likely be stretched out. You and your teammates must be at the front of the field at the top of the climb, in order to help keep the field together. Cresting a hill will prompt a few changes not the least of which is a gear change. Riders may also be reaching for a drink and adjusting their position on the saddle. That is the moment to take charge by placing your teammates across the front in key positions. A large group of riders will go down a hill slower than a stretched out line or small group.

The fear of crashing effects even the professionals and the sharper the descent, the greater the fear. Keeping the group in one piece going downhill will make the descent slower. The riders who are at the back of the group will not complain about the pace being reduced because they don't want to be dropped. You and your teammates can try and convince the riders with you to wait for the stragglers so they can help with the chase. If some of the riders with you have teammates up ahead they should want to help you block.

**List three things that can go wrong while trying to block on a descent:**

- 1.**
- 2.**
- 3.**

## **BLOCKING INTO THE WIND**

The most important things to remember about the wind is how hard it is blowing and which way it is going. Just like attacking into the wind there are limitations to blocking into the wind. Riders will always seek shelter from the wind so there is a natural tendency to grab a wheel. If you or a teammate has attacked going into the wind, blocking by your team may be easier because the riders are likely to grab the wrong wheel. Once an attack has been made and a gap opened up blocking must take place as quick as possible. If you and your teammates have worked things correctly your team will be represented at the front of the field. When the attack occurs the field must be prevented from getting any draft from the breakaways. Work too hard will pull the field back up to the break. Work too little and the field will pass you up and continue the chase.

The key is to work just hard enough to not be attacked while working little enough to prevent the riders from closing the gap.

## **BLOCKING WITH THE WIND**

Blocking the field with a tailwind is not much different than blocking on a downhill. Unlike the downhill though, the problem of possible crashes is greatly reduced as a tailwind has less of an effect on speed than a descent.

Consider what benefit a tailwind has for riders and then try to take it away. Chasers in a group will try to use their speed to close any gap. Getting in with the chasers will give you or your teammates the job of not pedaling to your potential. Again if you work too little you'll be gotten rid of. If you work too hard you will not be blocking, you will be chasing. By having your teammates lead the field up the opposite side of the road, they block the tailwind for the attackers. Without the added advantage of a tailwind, it may be easier to keep any riders thinking of attacking, in the field. Any time you or your teammates are in a position to block, it must be remembered who is getting the benefit of the block.

**Describe how the efforts to block would change with a change in wind direction, such as making a turn from a tailwind to a crosswind:**

## **BLOCKING INTO A TURN**

The dangers of attacking into a turn are mirrored in blocking into a turn. There are certain guidelines to follow when blocking into a turn and the first of these should be the speed of the field. Riders from behind may be traveling at high speed, like in a criterium or a track points race. Sudden reductions in speed can be disastrous, especially on the track, so subtle control is the key.

Remember that the job is called blocking and that simply means disrupting someone's progress. All it takes is a short, effective reduction of speed and the block is made. Now the riders behind will not only have to go around your blocking teammates, they will have to accelerate even harder to recapture the attackers.

Making the block should not overshadow the safety of the other riders in the field. If making the block for a teammate will cause a crash, it is better to let the riders go. The closer the field is to the end of the race, the more desperate the rider's actions will be. The worst crashes usually occur near the end of a race. Just watch some of the crashes in the Tour de France. They are usually in the closing meters of the day's stage when the riders are fighting all out for a moment's glory.

If the blocking riders are on the left side of the road, going into a left turn, the riders behind them are now forced to ride on the right side and around the outside of the turn. The idea works the same way when making a right turn. In this case the blocking riders move to the right side of the road. This type of blocking will cause the field behind to bunch up quickly and slow the riders down. Constantly causing the pace to be reduced and increased will tire the riders out quicker. Just try to make sure you are not one of them.

## **BLOCKING OUT OF A TURN**

Again, the distance to the finish line is of great importance. When blocking before or going into a turn, the field behind can see the road being blocked up and clogged. When blocking on the other side of a turn, the riders behind will not see what is happening until they make the turn. That can be a good thing, because the confusion behind the attackers will be even more than before the turn. Remember also that it may be too late for the following riders to slow down and a crash may occur. This is just the sort of chaos that can cause serious injuries if a block is improperly implemented coming out of a turn.

The point of blocking is to disrupt and that usually means reducing someone else's speed or progress. Not every rider is a good sport or forgiving in nature. You may unintentionally cause a crash and if there is any doubt about your motives, someone may try to get even later. Don't carry a grudge and try to keep others from carrying one as well.

**Describe a situation where blocking before or after a turn lead to a crash and what could have been done to block without causing a crash:**

### III. TACTICS WITHOUT TEAMMATES

So you are at your first road race of the season and none of your teammates show up. Or perhaps you are like most riders on a racing club and you don't really have any teammates in your category. Where does that leave you?

Being in a race without teammates does not mean you will not have anyone to work with or have no help. Having to do things on your own is often the scenario for most riders, even team leaders when they find their teammates cannot stay with them. There isn't a rider in a peloton who hasn't been in a position of having to go it alone. Sometimes they actually plan for such times.

You are in the same position every time you race. Sure there will be limits to what you can do tactically, but there will still be room for creativity. If you have ever been in a breakaway with other riders, you know opponents will work together when needed. If you have no one on your team with whom you can work, then think of the race as one long breakaway.

Start with the people at registration. They will usually be glad to let you see who is already registered in your category. Look carefully and see if you know any of the names. Is there someone on the list who you know well enough to work with? Are there any dangerous riders to look out for? Sometimes you will have an easier time convincing someone to work with you if you are both trying to overcome a common rival.

Returning to your vehicle, you prepare yourself and your bike for a good warm up. It is a good idea to bring someone with you to the race. Not just for company on the trip there and back, but to help you at the race. You never know when you will need an extra set of hands for working on the bike, or just handing you up a bottle in the feed zone. As you prepare, look around the area. Who is already on the scene? Go warm-up and check out the competition. Look for a familiar face or jersey. If there is enough time, go around the course to check things out. What possibilities does this day hold?

Hopefully you will at least have time to drive over the course. Even if you have raced a course before, there is always the possibility that something has changed. Road construction, pothole repairs or substances spilled on the pavement can all effect the race. Farm vehicles entering or exiting a road can leave mud and rocks that can cause a crash or flat tire. Take the time before the race to check everything out.

It is important to try and be in a good spot for the start of the races you do. Sometimes that can be easy if the field is not really big or the start area is large. Getting a good spot at the start of the race can help with controlling the flow of the race. Seeing a starting line filled with fit and focused riders can be intimidating, but it should not prevent an athlete from trying their hand at victory inspite of the apparent odds. Finding in a good spot for the start of the race when the field is large can be more difficult because there will be more people fighting for the limited space available. If an athlete is alone at the start of the race, they may have to deal with bad starting position as an additional obstacle in their quest for victory.

Being alone in the field should not be looked at as a handicap. Sure there are limitations, but often they can be overcome with a little hard work. In the spring classic Paris-Roubaix, the field is usually split early on and riders in each part of the field may find themselves without teammates. This can free them from the burden of following the team strategy for the race and concentrate on working for themselves. How you look at things makes all the difference in the world.

## CHOOSING A PARTNER

Let's say you made the first break and are well ahead of the field. The pace is high but not unbearable. You know the spot you want to attack is coming up in about another mile. Should you go alone, or take someone with you? You may not have a choice about having someone go with you.

You decide that you will attack after you have dropped back in the paceline just before the last climb. The rider immediately behind you seems like a good choice for someone to go with you. You will attack just as he is approaching the rear of the paceline. The rider in front of you begins to drift to the left and now you are in the lead. Keeping the pace steady, you take a slightly shorter pull and begin to drift to the left. By now the previous rider is at the rear of the paceline and you are near the back. Your chosen rider is now drifting back toward the rear. You shift to the next cog and begin to accelerate. As you get along side your temporary teammate, you tug at his jersey to get his attention and charge towards the left side of the lane. An attack at this point of the race must be an all or nothing move. If you are to get away as planned you have to ride like a champion.

You pedal for all your worth and shift into the next gear. A look under your arm and the gap is made, but with two riders behind you. No time to worry about who they are, just go! You get another hundred meters and look back again. The riders behind are chasing, but dropping back. Jumping back to the other side of the road, you let your two companions pull through. As they pass, you find neither is the rider you had picked. It seems when you attacked, all your rider could do was get in the way of most of the other riders. Instead you have the sprinter you were worried about and the guy who was laughing at the top of the climb

It is question time again and the question is now what do you do? You definitely can't slow down to try and rest because the other riders are still chasing and your two companions will not wait. You aren't sure what will happen at the finish line, but fighting two beats fighting seven.

This all may seem a bit contrived, but it is and for a reason. By putting you in the imaginary position of a rider in the winning break, you have a chance to evaluate what your choices would be. When you are riding at speed and the pack is chasing and your legs are killing you, there isn't time to reflect very much. After the race, you think back on what you did or didn't do.

Maybe you're happy with your choices, maybe you're not. The point is to adjust how you react during a race to get the desired results. Your response to what goes on should become almost an instinct. You train with a heartrate monitor to learn the limits of your strength and endurance. The goal isn't to become a slave to a digital readout. The goal is to learn how your body feels in each of those ranges. When you get into a race, you will know how you can respond by how you feel. You will have learned your limitations and before the actual race.

The same applies to your tactical abilities. Riding without teammates puts you in a position that will require more discipline and concentration. You learn what you can do and you work on what you can't do. The experience you gain with each race and training ride helps you do better in the next race. Reading a race and timing a move can only be learned through experience. While being a rider without teammates can be restricting, it can also force a rider to become more resourceful. The real Mother of Invention is making something out of nothing.

**Describe a situation where you were forced to keep adapting to a changing race scenario:**

## ATTACKING FROM THE FIELD

Looking at the field as they pull away from the starting line, a rider may feel overwhelmed. How can one individual deal with so many competitors? The way to start is one rider at a time. Not everyone in the field has the same abilities. Attacks, climbs, descents and the wind can reduce a pack of riders faster than you may think. The challenge becomes not how to eliminate all the other riders, but how to avoid elimination. That may mean taking action before someone else does.

You may know someone that you ride with or even race with. As the ride or race progresses, they just seem to get stronger and faster. When they get to the toughest part of the course, they pull away and are gone. They are not Superman and you are not a 98 pound weakling. Everyone rides their own way. Some people take longer to get into the rhythm of things than others. Maybe it isn't that they get stronger as much as you fade sooner. Use that knowledge in a race. When you arrive at the starting line and Superman is there, plan to make an attack early in an effort to eliminate him while he is still Clark Kent.

Don't give anyone a chance to play to their strength if you can prevent it. Alone you cannot cover every move the pack makes, but if you make a move before them, they will be on the defensive. Let them try to get in their rhythm by having to chase you down. The field will be reduced and you will have advanced your position. And you will have done it without the aid of teammates.

So how exactly do you attack the field by yourself? You don't. When a rider attacks, do the other riders sit back and wave goodbye. They jump after who ever attacks and they stay with it until the attacker is caught or the race is over. That's what you have to think about when you decide to attack the field. You are as good as any other rider. Use them to help you.

As the riders get into the rhythm of the race, do what you must to stay near the front. If you are in a field of fifteen or twenty riders, you can probably stay in or near the front for a long time before you have to do any real work. Going unnoticed is a good tactic. Saving energy is also a good tactic. At some point you will have to expend energy, but it is often best to wait until it will make a difference. Despite all the preparations a rider makes, the only thing they have any control over in a race is how they use their energy. By making the other riders use up their energy you are saving yours.

At the beginning of this manual we said it was supposed to be a guideline to help the rider with tactics. It is not meant to be a definitive writing, but a means to stimulate the riders tactical awareness. The ideas discussed are meant to get the rider thinking about what they do in a race. You probably have already come up with better ideas than the ones suggested. Take the time to watch races. If you are going to be competing in a criterium in the morning, stick around for the other races and watch what they do. Go to the velodrome and study the tactics and habits of the top riders. Watch videos of the Tour de France or one day classics with the sound off and see how the professionals do it. Talk to people at races. Ask what they did during a race. Above all, be conscious of everything you do when you are on the bike. Don't give anything away about yourself. Be unpredictable when you are in a race and don't be afraid to take chances.

Remember to be a little like Eddy Merckx, Bernard Hinault, Greg LeMond and Lance Armstrong as well. Watch the other riders. Know the course and the competition and above all, know yourself. Your training is preparation for competition, so training should have a definite purpose and definite goals. Set yourself three goals for every training session and try to make one of them tactical. Write down your training goals in your logbook and comment after the ride if you reached your goals.