

Deck of Cards by:sam krieg



A deck of cards is built like the purest of hierarchies, with every card a master to those below it, a lackey to those above it.

Ely Culbertson

Training in the winter for bike racing is a brutal activity that very few people can comprehend. Hours spent suffering quietly so you emerge in the spring ready to race and brawl against all of your rivals and your mental demons. Our past racing results and failures are what motivate us daily on our winter-long pilgrimage of torture and torment. Living here in Idaho I have the choice to either go outside and brave the elements or suffer for hours on the trainer. Neither are very pleasant but both are essential.



Each and every one of my winter training experiences builds a foundation for the coming road season. The one thing I know for sure is that the harder and longer I train the more indestructible I become.

Recently while surfing the internet I came across a cycling blog that had a great quote “train so you can make yourself harder to kill.” On my way down into the basement to train the same day I picked up a new deck of playing cards from a shelf. I opened the box and took out the promotional cards from the deck. I easily ripped them in half and tossed them in the

trash. There were 54 cards left. It struck me that this particular workout which I was dreading was just one card in a deck of many. That doesn't mean that the particular workout didn't have value. What it meant was this workout was one opportunity for

me to “stack my deck” for road season. Today’s training might create the 1 second gap I will need later on the top of a climb or to win a TT. Today’s workout might also crush me and make we re-think why I do this sport. To be completely honest most of my workouts do a bit of both.

I was now sitting on the trainer and I tried to tear the entire deck in half. It was impossible for me. I have seen a You-Tube video where a guy ripped a phonebook in half so I know it is possible. But, I have also seen Fabian Cancellara time trial at 50k an hour and I can’t do that either.



The 2 promotional cards I threw away were easy to tear. They took a few watts at most. To destroy the deck was going to take some power that I do not yet possess, and to time trial at close to 50kph is going to take a bit more work. Both the phone book ripper and Cancellara the

T.T. ripper could literally destroy my personal deck of cards.

Thinking back to last year’s road season I realized that the epic winter of training I had done allowed me to do the same thing on a different level. I certainly didn’t become world class or star in my own You-Tube video, but I did have a few magical days on the bike. My deck of cards was definitely more robust than some of the guys I was racing, and in a few cases I was able to simply destroy a few others who in the past have destroyed me. I had moved myself up in the hierarchy and created a few lackey’s along the way. If you think of a field of bike racers like a bunch of playing cards this starts to be a valid



training theory. As a whole the field is a vicious monster. Just like a full deck of cards.... It is hard to rip it in half. But during the race you have many opportunities to play the game and manipulate it in your favor. If you can’t climb and the race finishes on a hill you better get in a break, if you can climb

don't panic you can win from the break or the field. Just like in any form of gambling if you want to win, you have to be prepared to lose. The great thing about bike racing is you can win even if you are not the strongest; you just have to know how to play the game to optimize your strengths. Here's the trick: don't handicap yourself by not coming to the race prepared. If you were dropped the year before on the climb you better show up lean and ready to rumble. You have all winter to prepare. Don't waste the opportunity. Every time you train you have a chance to "stack your deck." If you do it right you will eventually be strong enough to survive even the most desperate of moments.

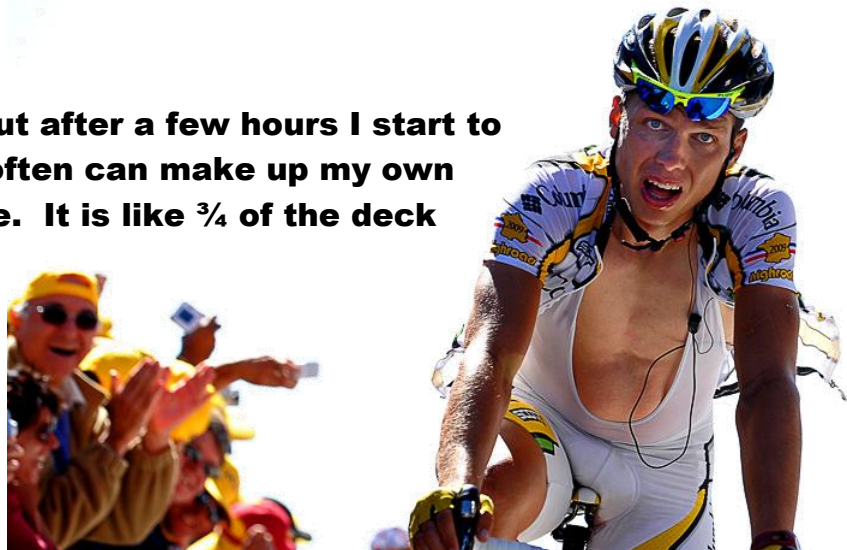
We train hard "day in and out" with the goal of becoming a winner. In the short run you might lose a ton. You will have some terrible workouts and results. These losses will test you more than any good workout or race you have ever had. Bad wattage during a workout or test is the best medicine in the long term. Training hard will make you more consistent. The more consistent you become the more durable you will be. I don't have the highest 5 minute or 20 minute power. But I race well almost every weekend and I can sustain my peak wattages on a regular basis regardless if it is at mile 10 or mile 100. Just like everyone I

struggle early in races when

everyone is fresh. But after a few hours I start to feel like a beast. I often can make up my own rules late in the race. It is like $\frac{3}{4}$ of the deck

is gone. Now I am playing with just a few racers and that is when the real game begins and I know there will be 4 face cards and a joker

left. All 5 have a shot to win, but often it is the rider who pulls the ace from his or her back pocket who wins the race. Last year I remember racing to the KOM against a particular racer



who I for sure thought I was going to beat. We had gapped almost 100+ racers and I was definitely riding at a new PEAK 5 minute power. We were 10 meters from the KOM line. He stood up and humiliated me. In just 10 meters he shredded my deck of cards. That experience is definitely one I will not forget, I didn't have a bad day or bad legs....his (better) was just better than mine.

This makes me think about the past 7 years of training and racing. Over those 7 years I have had a ton of good and bad moments. I have 2000+ power files and every one of them tells a story, and they all make me a bit harder to kill. I realize now that my current fitness is a sum of those 7 years. They enable me to survive hard training sessions day after day. At times they have allowed me to ride the break into pieces and occasionally they have dealt me the sweetest hand.

A racer doesn't have to look much further than Cadel Evans to find inspiration to fight for an entire season. Evans came up short all season for every one of his goals. He had an awful Tour de France and Vuelta. I am sure his team was about to fire him! But, he his deck was so stacked that he knew he had an ace left in his pocket. Evans won the world championship by holding his cards close and playing the game until the very last deal. He



could have easily packed it in for the season and stopped racing. But, like all good addicts, he couldn't stop gambling. He knew that he was ridiculously fit and just needed a few things to go his way. That day at the world championships is proof that you can't win...if you don't play.

Even the bad workouts and races have a place in my deck. If you notice there are a lot more plain cards with numbers than ones with pretty pictures. The pretty pictures are the rare cards. They can win you tons of money in Vegas or in the back room of a smoky bar. They are the cards you wish you were dealt every day. But to be honest what fun would gambling be if you won every time? It is in the

losing and stress of losing that makes winning such a cool experience. Training is just like that. If your goal was to always feel good on your bike and to always win you wouldn't have gotten into bike racing. You would have just done "tours" and your local group rides. You would search out events where you were the strongest and just crush people. That would be like going to Vegas and betting a penny.

So as you sit on your trainer or ride in the freezing cold I want you to think of your ride today as just one card. This one ride will not make you a PRO or win you a national championship. This card is just one in a deck of many. The larger you make the deck the harder you will be to destroy. This one ride is part of what will make you the beast in the breakaway that rides everyone's legs off. This one card is the 1 second that will win or

lose you a time trial. Don't expect every ride to be perfect. Don't be shocked when the watts are awful. Be excited when things go your way because you know that the cards will be against you at some point and this success will help. Think about riding hard 54 times before you expect to see great fitness gains. That is 52 hard training sessions and 2 jokers before you expect to improve. A few good workouts will not win you races. You need tons of good and bad rides



before you truly become an excellent bike racer. You will learn how to play and win with a poor hand. The longer and harder you train will enable you "stack the deck." Eventually you will be playing with 5 Ace's and a few jokers up your sleeve. From the outside your stellar performance will look like a damn magic trick but, like all magic, it's the hard work put in by the magician that makes it look real.