



Become a student of your sport.

By BJ Basham, Level 1 and Power Certified Coach.

Something that I have noticed when I have talked to successful racers, it is the fact that they are not just strong but they are smart as well. Having strong legs is only part of the formula, having the intelligence to know how to use that strength can be the key to doing well in bigger and harder events. Some folks seem to have a feel for when to go hard and when to hold back, or what line to take through a turn, but most of the time, these are things that can be learned if you make the effort.

Learn from those who know:

The easiest place to learn is to listen and watch the riders around you who have the experience and the knowledge. The most successful riders tend to know why a race turned out like it did and sometimes more importantly, why things did not turn out the way they had planned. Watching what these riders do and if you have the chance, talking to them after the race can be a great learning experience.

Learn from your coach:

Your coach will not only help you prepare for your events physically. In most cases your coach also has experience in the event or type of event you are training for and they can pass on what they have learned and help you to devise a strategy that will suit your strengths and weaknesses.

Learn from your own experiences:

I often ask my athletes to write me detailed race reports after big events. Lap by lap reports of what they did, what the rest of the riders did and what they were thinking. A lot can be learned if you take the time to stop and think about what happened and if you are honest with yourself. Thinking about strategies and tactics that you used and what you might have changed to help the race come out differently should be on everyone's post race checklist.

Learn by observing:

Whether you are at a race or watching it on TV, if you do more than just root for your heroes, you can find things that you will be able to use in your own racing. Watching the pros on a course that you have just finished racing on, or even better a course you will be racing on later in the day, can give you a great chance to see how experienced riders tackle the course. What line do they choose through the corners and what tactics seem to work and what did not.

Learn from the past:

As you prepare for your races, you can look back through the results and race reports posted on the web and you can learn a little about how races on that particular course usually turn out. Does the break always seem to go on the steep climb? Is it easy for the field to bring back the break? Where does the sprint get won, in the final 200 meters, in the last corner, or two or even three corners from the finish? There is no guarantee that your race will play out exactly the same, but you can have an idea of what has worked in the past. If it plays to your strengths, then great, but if not, then you know what to look for and what you need to plan to do to make things come out in your favor.

Learn from your training:

This one is a little more personal. Knowing what your strengths and weaknesses are is integral to planning your race tactics. The best place to learn how many hard accelerations you can do or how hard you can attack and then settle into a break at your FTP is in training. Pay attention to what you are doing as you go through your workouts so you have an idea of what you can expect to be able to do on race day.

As I said at the start, riders who win tend to know what they did tactically and strategically to get the race to turn out in their favor. I know riders who can tell you the reason for everything they did in a race from where they attacked or moved up to why they followed a certain line in the corners. Before your next event, think about what you can do in your race to improve your chances of success. Look at the course, watch the races before yours or talk to folks who have raced there before. And most importantly, during the race, don't disconnect your brain. Use what you have learned as a student of your sport.