



Name of Article: What is a Match?

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A “match” is an elusive term used by riders, and coaches within the bike racing world. When you burn a “match”, you have done a hard effort. It’s an effort that in which you had to dig deep, or you had to really push yourself. Any bike racer knows what it –feels- like to have burned a match, but until now, no one has really tried to quantify a -match-.

Why do you need to know what a -match- is? Well, you as a rider, start out the day with a full set of matches in your matchbook, but every time you go hard, do an attack, have to hammer over a hill, you burn one of your matches. All of us have different size matchbooks, but nobody has an infinite number, so it’s important to burn your -matches- at the right time during a race or in training. Otherwise you are left with an empty matchbook and then your chances of performing well have been drastically reduced. Burn all your matches before the end of the race and it’s doubtful you will win. Indeed, I propose that not only is it doubtful that you will win, but it’s certain that you won’t win.

So, your goals are fourfold: figure out what exactly is a –match- to you, figure out the size of your matchbook, try to increase the number of matches you have, and then burn your matches at the right time in the race in order to optimize your chances for success.

As a starting point, I propose that for most riders and racers, a match can be defined as an effort in which you go over threshold power by at least 20% and hold it there for at least one minute. Of course, burning the proverbial –match- could involve an effort longer than 1 minute, but as the time period gets longer that you are burning a match, the % above your threshold power would be lower. The chart below begins to take a stab at defining a “match” for different time periods. Before you read this, remember that there is no exact definition of match, I am just introducing this concept quantitatively so that riders can refine it for themselves.

| Time | Percentage over Threshold Power | Power needed to burn a 'match' assuming 300 Threshold Power. |
|------------|---------------------------------|--|
| 1 Minute | 20+ | 360 watts |
| 5 Minutes | 15-20% | 360-345 watts |
| 10 Minutes | 8-12% | 324-336 watts |
| 20 Minutes | 0-8% | 300-324 watts |

Now, that you have a general idea of what a match is, you need to figure out how many matches you have at your disposal. The only way that I know to do this is to do a super hard training ride in which you have pre-planned matches that you are going to burn, or to do a really tough race with lots of -match burning- ! The great thing is that you know based on your rating of perceived exertion and also your rate of exhaustion, when you burned a match and when you are out of matches! So, listen to your body here and then go back through your downloaded data to “find” all of your matches.

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