



Power Training. Powerful Results!
PEAKS COACHING GROUP

The Next Level

By Hunter Allen

What's the next level? What does that mean and how do you get there? Everyone is always talking about the next level and that they are going to 'the next level'. What exactly is the next level that they are referring to? Do you want to have more endurance? Do you want a higher FTP? Do you want more 'matches' in your matchbox? Or do you just want more of everything! Well, of course it's that last one. "Sir, can you just give me more of everything, please".... But, really can you have more of everything at the same time, or should you just focus on improving one area and then another and then another and finally you have 'more' of everything. The question is of course really about improvement and making sure you go faster on a bicycle. The challenge is the "How" do I go faster on a bicycle?

Once you have established that you want to improve, you need to consider what is more important for you to improve in? If you want to take yourself to the next level then that means really improving in every part of your fitness. When we examine the overall picture of fitness, it's really your threshold power that holds you back from that next level. If George Hincapie could all of the sudden go to the next level and now crack out 450 watts at FTP, versus his norm of 420, then I would say that he's at the next level. Does this mean his sprint has also improved or that his ability to go hard on short steep hills has improved? Probably not, but maybe now that his FTP has increased so much, he won't ever be in a position in which he needs to do a sprint as he is winning solo off the front. This was the case with a masters athlete that I coached last year. He had focused on improving his sprint and vo2 max power, which did improve and now he was more competitive in his masters category, but still wasn't winning races in a dominating fashion and occasionally still being pipped at the line by his arch-rival. The solution was to 'go to the next level'. I had him focus on improving his FTP solely and not worrying about his sprint or Vo2 or any other specific area of fitness. He increased the amount of training he did by 15-20%, (which was a struggle for a masters rider with family, work, etc.) and he did more sub-threshold and threshold intervals than he had ever wanted to do. This focused effort of nearly 3 months working in one area made a difference as his FTP went up more than 30 watts that season over previous seasons. With this 30 watt increase in FTP, he no longer needed to contend in sprint finishes or worry about short hills, as he just simply rode away from everyone that he competed against.



Power Training. Powerful Results! **PEAKS COACHING GROUP**

So, how do you get there? What training should you do in order to make that quantum leap? To push yourself farther than you have gone and make it to 'the next level'. The first thing that has to be done is focus on improving your threshold power as that is what determines the 'level' that you are riding in. The average speed of a category 4 race is determined by the collective average threshold power of riders in the peloton and that is a lower power to weight ratio than the Category 3 riders, etc. So basically if you want to ride in the Category 3 peloton and you are now a Category 4 racer, then you need to increase your threshold power to at least the median of all the racers in the Category 3 pack. When your threshold has improved to the new level, you can then tune the engine so to speak with shorter, harder intervals that give you more race specific qualities. Here are four key things that you need to do in order to go to the next level.

- 1- Increase your overall training stress by 15-20%. This is something that many masters and category racers overlook. So many of us are time constrained that it's impossible to get in a ride longer than 2 hours each day and even on the weekend. If you want to go to the next level though, you are going to have to figure out how to squeeze it in.... and doing (2) separate rides in one day is not going to do it. You have to get in (2) big rides each month and preferably (3) big rides. Rides that are at least 5-6 hours long that force you to dig deep near the end, so that when you reach home, you are tired and your muscles are quivering(not cramping though) from the fatigue. This is the #1 thing you can do and you cannot skip this step if you want to go to the next level, no matter if you are a pro or a recreational cyclist, you have to increase the miles, hours, and overall volume of training stress in order to challenge your cardiovascular and muscular system enough to create positive adaptations for the future. Those longer rides enhance your endurance and there is no substitute for them. I have listened to countless stories of riders talking about how they just can't improve any more no matter how many intervals they do or how many group rides they ride in, yet they never do rides that are 5 hours or longer.
- 2- Focus on doing longer intervals at or very near your functional threshold power (FTP). You are going to need to do at least 40-60 minutes of work from 91-105% of your FTP three days a week and then bump it up from there. After 3 weeks of riding at this level, you need to increase the amount of time spent at or near FTP to 60-90 minutes, where one session a week will be a long ride and have nearly 90 minutes of riding at your FTP. Start out with (3) x 10minutes at 105% of FTP and build up so that you are doing (3) x 30



Power Training. Powerful Results! **PEAKS COACHING GROUP**

minutes at 100% of FTP, with lots of little steps in between. If you get too tired to ride right at your FTP, then lower the wattages down to your 'sweet-spot' wattage, 88-93% of FTP and continue from there. You'll still get plenty of training stress and as long as you can maintain at least 88% or so, then you should be training intensely enough to get improvements in your threshold.

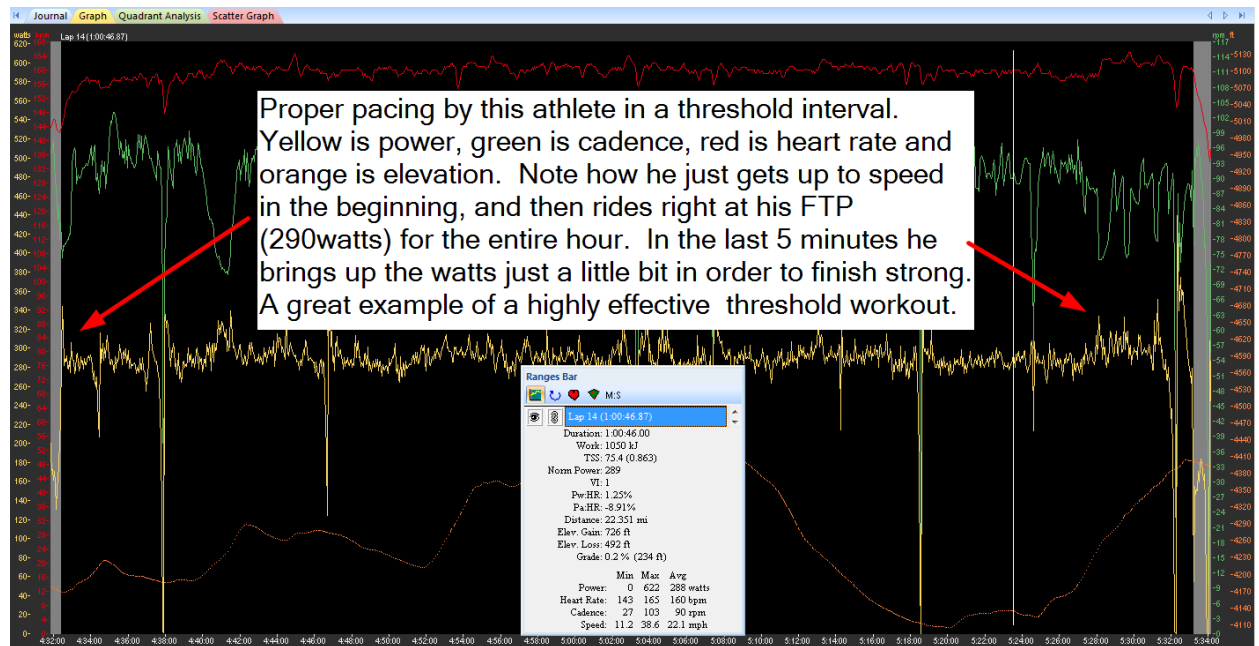
- 3- REST between sessions. Give yourself a rest day between each training day. If you are really serious and want to improve your FTP, then you will need a rest day between each workout. This is another important step because if you are doing intervals and don't hit any numbers each day, then you won't be receiving the same benefits either! The beauty of your power meter is that you have a goal wattage to hold in each interval, so you know you are training correctly. The power meter also tells you when you can't do the work and that is equally important to know. If you head out to do a threshold workout and you can't hit your goal wattages, and then give yourself some rest (endurance pace) and try again in 20 minutes. If you still can't hit them, it's time to go home and rest up for another try the next day.
- 4- Quality and Quantity counts. You want to hit those intervals and at the same time you need to also get in a much larger quantity of intervals/work in the legs. Most of the time you are going to emphasize quality over quantity, because if you can't physically produce the wattages at your threshold power, then you are not straining your systems enough to improve. For example, you could do (4) x 10 minutes at threshold power with 10 minute rests between each and still get in a total of 40 minutes at threshold, which is better than doing (2) x 20 and the first effort is at FTP, but the second one you can only eek out 85% of ftp. So, for certain focus on the quality first and if you start to fatigue, shorten the interval length (no shorter than 10 minutes though) in order to still hit the goal wattages. As you get stronger and stronger, you'll be able to do more and more intervals and lengthen the total amount of work done at threshold, and eventually you'll be doing (3) x 30minutes or even (1) x 60 minutes and (1) x 30 minutes. In that last interval set of each workout, remind yourself that it's 'this' one that really counts. It's always the last hill repeat, the last interval, the last week of your build cycle that really makes the difference. So dig deep in that last effort in order to really get the most out of the effort. The intervals themselves and how you execute them are also important. If you start too hard in the effort, then you won't be able to maintain your threshold pace or higher for the entire effort. If you start too easy, you are cheating yourself of precious training strain. So, proper pacing is critical to success when doing all intervals, especially threshold ones. I recommend that you start out quickly to get up



Power Training. Powerful Results!

PEAKS COACHING GROUP

to speed, but no need to sprint, then immediately settle in on your threshold pace or 10-15 higher. Hold this pace until the last minute or so of the effort and then bring up your pace by 10-20% and push hard to the very end. This gives you a 'double peak' shape in your downloaded power file with a peak of wattage in the beginning and then another peak at the end. This is the ideal pacing strategy for a time trial, threshold interval and many other intervals as well.



The next level isn't as easy as just doing some random intervals, riding 50 more miles each week or by focusing on one specific energy system alone. It's the combination of all of these things done in a rational, progressive manner that allows you to overload your lactate threshold system and then when you rest, it improves to give you a higher threshold power. It does take time and do at least three months of highly focused training on your threshold before expecting any significant gains. There will be days when you are tired and there'll be days when you are doubting whether the training is working or even worth it. You have to have faith and push through these days as if we only trained on the days that we felt great, then not much training would get done at all. The next level is there, and you can get there if you work for it with an intelligent and focused plan.



Power Training. Powerful Results!
PEAKS COACHING GROUP

Hunter Allen is a USA Cycling Level 1 coach and former Professional Cyclist. He is the co-author of "Training and Racing with a Power Meter, co-developer of CyclingPeaks Software, and is the CEO and Founder of the Peaks Coaching Group. He and his coach create custom training plans for all levels of athletes. He also has online training programs available at www.TrainingPeaks.com/hunter and you can contact Hunter directly www.PeaksCoachingGroup.com