

DISCIPLESHIP

Running The Race - How's Your Cadence?

Discussion

This summer I've added cycling to a list of activities aimed at getting and keeping me in shape. Jumping into it with a passion, I've read several articles on training and, true to my long distance running instincts, I've been studying how to plan and execute a long ride. Eventually I'd like to do a "century" ride, a ride that goes for one hundred miles. It takes training and a lot of advanced planning if you want to make a ride of that length and still be able to walk after the event.

Accordingly, I have been reading and practicing a variety of things that should help me improve as a cyclist: diet, getting the right sleep, having the right gear to ride safely, doing sprints and time trials, etc. Along the way, I came across something that I did not anticipate: "Cadence Training". In its simplest form, "cadence" is the number of revolutions per minute that a cyclist turns the crankshaft (the pedal) one full revolution. Cadence, it turns out, is something that most competitive cyclists pay a lot of attention to. Now that I understand the principle, I pay a lot of attention to it as well.

It turns out that most of us weekend riders pedal at around 60 rpm while a serious competitor will typically crank out 90 rpm. Extremely good ones, like Lance Armstrong, ride at 110 rpm! Oh, and did I mention that Lance rides 100-150 miles a day at that pace for three solid weeks in the Tour de France?!

Okay; I realize that I am not Lance Armstrong. Like Tiger Woods in golf, or Michael Jordan in basketball, Lance Armstrong is an extremely gifted athlete. So I have concluded that attaining a continuous cadence of 110 rpm is probably not a realistic training goal for me; however, increasing my current cadence of 60 rpm up to or close to 90 rpm is certainly attainable if I work at it.

Another training insight that I have discovered is that it's better to cycle up a hill using lower gears and keeping your cadence high than trying to hammer up a hill in a very high gear. Using a higher gear, you might take the first couple of hills faster than everyone else, but by the end of a 25- or 50-mile race, you will probably finish last, as your legs and energy level will have been exhausted. In fact, it turns out that if you practice keeping your cadence up while climbing hills, you will actually climb the hill faster using less energy, especially if it's the fifth or sixth hill that you've encountered within a thirty minute stretch.

Then it struck me that several aspects of this training lesson can be applied to our Christian walk. First, when we don't focus on our cadence, we can become one of two different types of people: (1) those who try to overcome the hills in life by powering up them as hard and fast as they can and then burning out early, or (2) those who do not try to improve their cadence and become satisfied with simply keeping pace with the pack. I realized that I had been both at one time or another.

Second, as Christians we are clearly commanded not just to run the race God has set before us, but we are to run that race with intentionality, with the express purpose of winning that race. In Hebrews 12:1, the author writes: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." Paul in his writings also talks of running so as to win the race. He writes in Philippians 3:13-15: "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you."

And again, in I Corinthians 9:24, Paul writes: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize." If we are to take our Christian walk seriously, if we are to be the "ambassadors" that Christ calls us to be; then we should be doing it with intentionality, and with purpose. We should be running the race to win, not just to get the t-shirt. Are you?

As you consider your answer to that question, consider your cadence. Are you trying to hammer up and over every hill? Are you trying to keep pace with a faster runner rather than setting your own pace? Are you allowing Christ to lead you in this race, or are you trying to do it all on your own strength? Alternatively, perhaps you have been content staying with the pack, running along with the group rather than running to win. Do you even think about winning, or is your focus simply to complete the race?

During certain stages of the race that Christ has set before me, I have been a power runner, running very hard in my Christian walk and then being so burned out that I couldn't complete the next lap. Conversely, I've also had times in my life when simply keeping pace with the pack was my only goal.

Neither one of these is good, and neither one is what Christ intends for us. We need to be constantly monitoring and working on our pace, on our strategy, on overcoming the next obstacle, and on enjoying those times when the wind is at our backs, all with the express purpose of running to win, not simply to finish.

So here is a piece of wisdom from a newbie cyclist: "pedal faster, not harder" and work on getting your cadence up. It will make the hills come and go much faster and easier, and the level ground will simply fly by. Don't be satisfied being one of the "average" weekend riders.

May Christ begin a new work in you today that will increase your cadence and bring you the victory that awaits each of us through Him!

In Christ,

Wes