

# Should Cyclists Do Strength Training?

Strength training, weight training, resistance training, whatever you call it chances are you have an opinion, one way or the other, whether you should do it to improve your cycling. There seem to be strong opinions both pro and con for strength training for cyclists.

Cycling is a sport which requires leg strength, you can't deny that fact, but one question is how much strength do you need? With the advent of power meters we can now measure the number of Newtons of force a cyclist generates, and with typical pedaling, it is not an awful lot. However, you don't want to be exerting 50, 60, 70% of your maximum force with each pedal stroke or you won't make it very many pedal revolutions. The more strength you have gives you two advantages: 1) with each pedal stroke you are using a lower percentage of your total strength thus conserving muscles and 2) you will be able to exert a greater force on the pedals when attacking, jumping for a sprint or climbing a steep hill. So leg strength is important.

The next question has to do with the best way to gain leg strength for cycling. Although I recommend strength training in the gym for cyclists, I also believe that the best training for cycling is riding a bike! It's the most sport-specific exercise there is. There are a number of good leg strength workouts you can do on a bike. But leg strength training in the gym is also useful for a number of reasons. First, it's efficient – it doesn't have to take long to get a good strength workout done. Secondly, you can stress your muscles more than you can riding a bike because you can use more resistance. A third reason, and the reason I recommend it in the winter, is that it gives you an indoor workout when the weather isn't conducive to riding outdoors.

Winter is the best time to do leg strength training. You aren't doing as many miles on the bike outdoors, so you have more time to do strength training. Strength training is hard on the legs and requires some recovery, thus it works better in the winter when you aren't wanting or able to ride every day. And, winter is a good time to shore up your leg strength in preparation for the upcoming road season.

One of the main arguments against leg strength training is it's not sport-specific. Doing ten 250# leg presses does not replicate pedaling up a hill at 90 RPM. True enough, but you do strength training to get stronger and the best way to get stronger is to lift heavy weight. Another argument against it is that it doesn't mimic leg speed of cycling. That's true, but you can also modify workouts such that you are doing quick leg action, such as low weight, high speed reps and plyometrics. I'll be discussing different types of leg strength training in the next article. Then there's the issue of upper body strength training which I'll also cover in the future.

While leg strength is important, it's just one component of cycling fitness. You need the aerobic fitness to fuel these muscles and you also need muscular endurance so they can crank out power for hours on end. But leg strength training can help your cycling and this is a good time of year to be doing it.

-- David Ertl

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