

Get Stronger This Winter

Winter isn't a great time in Iowa to get out and ride so we have to do more of our training indoors, or at least we should! But this gives us the opportunity to vary our exercise routine and work on some things we neglect during the summer riding season. As you may have guessed from the title, this month I'm going to discuss strength training in more detail. During the summer season, you are most likely riding your bike for your exercise and may not be doing much else. Riding is the best exercise in the world, in my opinion, and probably yours, but it does not give you a complete body workout. Last month I touched on some of the reasons why you should consider some strength training, especially during the winter. This month I will specifically cover leg strength exercises you can do to maintain and even build leg strength during the winter. This time of year is a good time to work your leg muscles. First, you aren't able to ride outside as much so this gives you an alternate indoor workout to do. Second, doing leg workouts make your legs tired for a day or two which can interfere with your riding. But since you aren't doing much riding outside, it's a perfect time to do it. Third, you can actually increase your muscles strength during the winter in ways you can't by only riding your bike. What could be better than hopping on your bike in the spring and actually feeling strong?

I am going to review some of the many ways you can work on leg strength this winter. First, there's the traditional weight machines found at most gyms: leg press, leg extension and leg curl machines. If you use these, start off with fairly light weight and high reps (20) to get your muscles used to them. Also make sure you get proper instruction on their usage. Are you afraid you will turn into Thunder Thighs? Well, the good news is that if you do these correctly and unless you spend hours working on leg strength, you likely won't notice much gain in leg size. To maximize the benefit while minimizing bulk, which cyclists don't want or need, keep your reps of these exercises high and work on strength-endurance. This is primarily what you need for cycling anyway – the ability to push the pedals over and over again. You can then also do some higher weight with lower reps (4-6 reps) to work pure muscle strength. Keeping the reps low with high weight will also help avoid gaining bulk. Do these once or twice a week. If you are looking to gain some muscle mass in your legs, the way to do that is with lots of volume, meaning you do a lot of different leg exercises with a moderately high weight and a moderate number of reps (10-12). And you need to do them 2-3 times a week.

There is also a wide variety of exercises you can do with a barbell, dumbbells or just your own body weight. Some examples include squats, lunges, step-ups, box squats, one legged squats and split squats. These all work the quadriceps muscles and the buttocks, your cycling powerhouse muscles. With these exercises its best to work on strength endurance (very high reps, moderate weight) because you will use lower weights than on a machine, as you have to be able to hold the weight and balance while doing the exercises.

Finally, don't forget about the bike. You can use your bike as a leg strengthening tool as well. When riding outside, you can find hills to work on strength. But when you are stuck indoors on your indoor trainer or on a spin bike at the local gym, you can work on strength as well. The new fluid trainers provide a lot of resistance, all you need. Put your trainer at a high resistance level, if you can adjust it, and shift to a high gear on your bike. If using a spin bike, just crank up the resistance

till you can just barely pedal. You can do a variety of workouts on your bike set up this way. For example, set it for a fairly hard resistance/gear combination so it is difficult to pedal at 60-70 RPMs. Start out doing this for a minute and work your way up to five minutes at a time doing high resistance/low RPM riding, as if you were riding up a steep hill sitting down. Concentrate on pushing and pulling on the pedals all the way through the pedal stroke.

So give it a try and add some variety to your indoor winter training and you might just reach spring stronger than you are now.

By the way, I want to let the DMCC club members aware of what your race team is doing this winter. For the past several winters, we have conducted our own indoor team rides on Tuesday nights. We bring our trainers and bikes and have our own workout, led by one of the coaches (myself, Randy Catron and Dave Hammer). These are very intense workouts about an hour long. We have been doing these at Team Fitness in Urbandale but we were not able to return their this year, so Randy worked out a deal with the city of Grimes to use space in their community center. So now we have our own official DMOS/RDMB Race Team Indoor Training Center. We've fixed up the room and had our first workout on Tuesday Nov 4. We will continue to do indoor workouts until daylight savings time starts. These indoor training sessions are reserved for race team members only due to space limitations. However some of the area bike shops are offering their own indoor workouts you might check into. The Race Team also tries to get outside on weekends for either road rides or mountain bike rides. The Team truly trains year round!

Now, a shameless plug for my new e-book, "Training For Busy Cyclists". This book discusses ways to make the most of your limited riding time and discover how you can get in great shape just with 3-5 hours of riding per week. **DMCC Members get a discount** – only \$12 – contact me directly to get yours for this price.

And, if you would like more training tips, please read my blog each week for more cycling training ideas. www.CyclesportCoaching.Blogspot.com.

Coach David Ertl

David Ertl is a USA Cycling Level 1 (Elite) Coach. He is the lead coach with the DMCC/DMOS/RDMB Race Team and the coach for the JDRF Greater Iowa Chapter for the Ride to Cure Diabetes, and he coaches individual cyclists. He is also an NSCA certified Personal Trainer. He is accepting new coaching clients and can be contacted at Coach@CyclesportCoaching.com or at 515-689-1254.