Building Blocks **031912**

You have seen it before, hundreds of times: the Natural Rhythm of Athletic Movement displayed by elite-level cyclists. However, until I demonstrate it for you, you are not likely to be aware of these abilities or identify them as cycling specific Movement Patterns. As in any other sport, cycling requires learning, reinforcing and correcting movement patterns as the athlete develops.

I have defined two Movement Patterns, namely the Sidebend Hip Hike (SBHH) and Trunk Pelvic Roll (TPR). These straightforward sequences of movement can be looked upon as the "building blocks" for all skilled movement and they apply to all cycling events.

You need climb, but how do you actually do that? What is the sequence of events? Begin by finding out how you move in the first place on the bike. Climb on the indoor trainer and have this videotaped, then match the observations with either the SBHH or TPR. If you are not sure what to do, the SBHH may be your best bet, as athletes appear to gravitate there. Then it's a matter of identifying your particular needs. There is weight shifting on the handlebars, and then bringing your athleticism to the forefront, in the way you bring the movements of the trunk and pelvis together to optimize leg movement.

As you make improvements in your very own movement pattern, you might feel that you are having trouble connecting with the upstroke. Your coach will then want to videotape your performance. He or she will assess your performance and reach into their "tool chest" and identify a feature that you need to correct or fine tune, and help you resolve your problem. This could be sketched out in your video assessment, indicating where in the movement the correction needs to be made. They will have drills for you to work on, there will be trainer workouts and you will be well prepared to make the improvement. All the background work will pay off and you will feel that movement come together. That will be a special moment.

Contrast this with the current "guidelines" to take care of the "upstroke". These are well intended; unfortunately, the legs in isolation will never accomplish that task. You need the specific movement in the trunk and pelvis to reverse the direction of movement, weight shift, initiate and prime the muscles to perform the task. This all has to happen at the rpm for the event. Don't trust me? Just take a look at what each and every elite athlete does! Then compare those performances with the amateur in general. There is a reason why elite athletes are in that special category, and why the amateur needs significant help with their technique. Performance has as much to do, if not more with the quality and timing of your cycling specific "Movement Patterns" than with the physiology or aerodynamics.

In other words, these building blocks are the lifeline to the sport. If you want to improve your climbing, practice the “Movement Patterns” through the full ride, what you practice on flat terrain will complement your climbing and vice versa. It’s very straightforward, time spent training these “building blocks” in many situations will pay dividends later on and will allow you to choreograph a more complex series of movements, let you adapt and learn new skills.

Success in events from road racing to triathlons, climbing to sprinting, track to cyclocross and mountain biking is always the result of quality “Movement Patterns”. It is no wonder that elite athletes make successful transitions from one discipline to the other by adjusting their technique to the new situation.

For all athletes and in particular youngsters, the emphasis of training should be dynamic balance activities and the movement patterns presented in such a way that keeps them engaged and have fun in the process.

Performance gains are subject to the proverbial learning curve; a number of important features need to be in place before the movement pattern appears cohesive and effortless. A single feature which does not quite work well may be enough to keep you from improving in the manner you expect, and it will take quality training time and perhaps some innovation on your part, for that feature to get up to speed. Use the video collections to advantage and imitate the expert performances. All of a sudden, you may find yourself performing the movement pattern at a higher level and to the best of your abilities, stay the course to make that happen.