
RACE WITH HONOR

by Gordo Byrn

Last November I wrote a piece on cheating. As I gain more experience in sport, I become more familiar with the way people cut corners. Sport mirrors life -- the folks that cheat in life are often the one's that cheat in sport.

Going into Clearwater, a number of fast athletes told me that I would have to cheat. I was advised to draft all day, as that was the only way to ride. I wasn't sure what I would do but I spent race week reviewing Marcus Aurelius. A strong dose of stoicism is useful in race week (I certainly could have done with more at Mile 10 of the run!).

I've been in races where I could not escape from drafters (Ironman New Zealand) but I've never been in a situation where I was forced to draft off another athlete. The athletes who claim they were forced to draft -- those claims ring hollow to me. Far better to admit that you decided to draft because you thought you could get away with it, or your insecurities got the better of you.

The first thing that surprised me at Clearwater was race management did a great job at splitting the field up with wave starts. The waves were assembled with the men split up as much as possible. By the way, if race directors read this then please don't start the Byrn's first every year. Let me chase the Zuk's half the time!

The conditions on race day were favorable to clean racing. There was swell at the far end of the swim course, crosswinds and an uphill bike start. I'd listened to Julie Dibens talk about her win in 2009 and she said that she had drilled it for the first 25 miles of the bike. When I came out of the water in third spot that seemed like a good way to play it. Thanks J-Dib!

I saw a fair amount of drafting but I was able to ride through the bunches. A few athletes were intent on blatant cheating but these men and women were few. It's easy to figure out the offenders by looking at arrival times at T2.

What's required to drop the folks that are intent on sitting on you?

When you notice you've picked up a hitchhiker, relax! You don't want to give an effort while they are on your wheel. You have no idea how long they've been sitting back there.

Look forward on the course for an opportunity to drop the offender. Generally, I like to back off at the crest of a roller, pull to the side and gently touch the brakes.

The drafter(s) will be going so hard to hang onto your wheel that they will sail right past. Then chill out, have a drink and let them pull into the wind. The benefit of this strategy is you lose very little time; the far side of the roller is a high-speed section of the course. Let them hit the front when air speed is high.

Wait until the drafter(s) tire. Ideally, they will swap out. It's pretty comical because they will often sit up, looking confused at being caught at the front. Enjoy the show!

To punch them out the back, you need the ability to surge to 400w and hold over 300w until the gap is established. That's not going to shake elite men but it will be sufficient to free you from most amateurs. (Beth's note: re-read what Gordo is suggesting your abilities must be before you decide to try this).

With the packs, another technique is to whistle as you approach them from behind. That scares the drafters, they pause a little, and you roll through. By splitting the pack, you end up with fewer people on your wheel (and can deal with them individually).

While I didn't win in Clearwater, the guy who beat me (Curt Chensey — he also won in Kona) rode legit. He confirmed my power numbers as well as sharing my observation that the cheaters just weren't going that fast.

Drafting is like doping -- you don't need it to go fast!

If you don't have the horsepower to drop the cheaters then choose events where the course is your enforcer.

- Wave starts with men split up
- Ocean and non-wetsuit swims
- Uphill starts early in the bike
- Decisive climbs (more than 10 minutes duration)
- Single loop on bike
- Heat and wind

Basically, look for courses where Matt Reed does well. Wildflower has to be one of the fairest courses on the circuit. Vegas also has the potential to be very legit.

Ultimately, we can't control the athletes who we race but we can control how and where we race.

People sell more of what we buy.

Choose wisely.