

NV Senior Olympics 2005

By Paul Rachal

10K Time Trial

This race was out and back on an absolutely straight road, in perfect conditions (temps in the high 70s and no wind). What made the course challenging was that the road is a slight downgrade on the outbound section and a slight upgrade for the return. It is very easy to push it too hard on the outbound leg and not have enough left for the difficult, uphill return leg. Because I ride intervals 2-3 times a week of this duration, I rode the course like my weekly intervals. My time was 17:28 and my NP (normalized power) splits were 258W/276W. Actually, the 276W wasn't a great effort since I had a 17-minute NP of 273W during the 2 hour Mt. Charleston hill climb. Before the ride, I estimated my FT (functional threshold) at ~280W and I purposely took it out a little below my FT, because I wanted to ride the return at ~20W higher than the outbound leg. But, I found it hard to keep my power up on the outbound (downhill) section. Also, I was really hampered by not being able to read my PM (power meter) very well on the outbound leg due to the angle of the sun. I wore sunglasses, which contributed to the problem. But, I realize that I need to work on riding at ~300W on fast sections. I usually do my hard efforts uphill and/or upwind, so I don't get a lot of practice going hard downhill and downwind. It's a little different because the bike moves out from under you so quickly with the application of power. Uphill and upwind you always have the hill or the wind to push against, so it's easy to keep power up, but that's not the case downhill (even a slight downgrade such as today). I think riding at high power downhill is a separate skill and must be practiced. My time was only good enough for 3rd place, but I was happy with the result, given the fact that I had no aero equipment at all (not even aero bars).

20K Road Race

The 20K RR was a stitch. There were only 5 of us in my age group. I was jealous of some of the other age groups where they had ~10 riders. But, the four other guys were no slouches. Two of them had better times than I did in the 10K TT and one guy was almost a minute faster, so I was certainly not overconfident. I decided at the beginning of the race to mark the guy who rode the TT course one minute faster than me. He was the only guy who could get away and stay away if I wasn't careful. The course was out/back, with the return leg uphill like the 10K TT. One idiot went out hard from the gun like it was a TT. The rest of us just settled into a smooth pace and let him go. I could tell by his pedaling style that he wasn't a threat and that he would eventually collapse. He collapsed when the road turned uphill toward the end of the outbound leg. We went by him and never looked back. The guy I was marking made only one surge that made me work much, on the slight uphill section. On the return leg, another guy took the lead for a while and I got on his wheel and the guy I was marking moved to my wheel. The guy up front kept looking at me with his little rear view mirror on his helmet and he shifted to the left side of the lane a couple of times to get me to

take the lead but I never did. Then the guy I was marking took the lead again as we approached the climb at the end. He didn't push it hard, just picked up the pace a bit. The guy who had been leading was on my wheel, and I just hoped nobody would go crazy until I got inside my 60s mark (60 seconds from the finish). We hit my 60s mark and nobody did anything. We kept going and going and still nobody made a move. Finally, at about the 30s mark the guy on my wheel came around me fast, trying to make the decisive move. But, he made a mistake and left me room to move left. I caught him coming out of the corner of my eye and moved to the left to get clear of the guy's wheel that I had been marking. So, now we were three abreast and about 20s from the finish line. I ramped it up to ~500W initially, closed the gap, then accelerated again to ~750W and opened a bike length on the guy to my left. Then the problem was that I lost sight of both of them. I was pretty sure I was done with the guy to my left who started everything, but I had no way of knowing where the guy was that I had been marking, who was on my right. So, I kept the pedal to the metal through the finish line, at ~30mph uphill. I still don't know how far back they were at the finish line because I was pretty focused on not crashing. I'm glad I practiced my sprint drills, especially the final 20s after a 400W/500W rollup. It was just like one of my drills and, once I got inside the 20s mark, I knew what I could do and that I could hold it to the finish. I think if I do some work on sprints I can eventually raise my 20s finishing power to ~800W – 1000W. But, 750W got it done today. RRs can be such a poor test of sustainable power. Today was a 30m training ride and a 20s sprint. Sitting in and waiting for the sprint seems somehow illegal, but if nobody is off the front I'm not going to go up front and work. If somebody wants to go to the front, let him go. If somebody gets away and we get a group organized to chase him down, that's a different matter -- I'll do my share on front. But, if everybody stays together I'm happy to ride all day at 150W. The gold medal was nice.

5K Time Trial

The second day was dramatically different, due to 25-30mph winds out of the south. My game plan was to ride the 5K TT at 300W for the first half, then pick it up as much as possible in the last half. I estimate my time at ~7m, and I had done up to 320W for 7.5m in the last 28 days in routine intervals.

I thought I paced myself on the 5K TT better, but when I looked at my workout file I only averaged 286W and 30mph. I have done up to 320W for 7.5 minutes in my intervals in the last month and I regularly do them at the 280W-300W level. I would have thought my average would have been at least 300W, but I found it really hard to make power going so fast. Part of the problem may have been my gearing – I didn't change my drivetrain since the Mt. Charleston Hill Climb. But, I still think I just need to practice doing 300W downhill and downwind. I think there's a technique to it and I haven't worked on it. I figured the guy who beat me by almost a minute yesterday might still beat me, but I thought I might beat the other guy. I got a lot closer to the fastest guy, but still lost 2 seconds to the other guy. Our times were 16:05, 16:16 and 16:18. I don't feel too bad since I had

aero nothing and they both had aero bars and deep-dish aero wheels. But, I was still disappointed in my pacing. So, another 3rd place finish.

40K Road Race

In the RR, my plan was again to mark the guy with the fastest time in the TT, but I figured the other guys would try something different since they now know that I have a decent sprint. But, the RR was completely different from the day before. They started all 60+ age groups together, so there were ~20 in our group. The course was two laps of out/back. The wind was a big factor on the 2nd and 4th legs, ~25mph right in our faces. The guy who launched the sprint yesterday did a little trash talking before the race. He commented on my size and how that would be a liability on the two legs into the wind. He also said that he thought that he and the other guy that I had beat yesterday should have pushed the pace up the hill yesterday because they're lighter and have an advantage going uphill. I just smiled and said, "Good point." Little did he know that I always go to the front upwind in my group rides and I do hill climb intervals every week. Before the race started, I knew this race was going to come down to the second return leg and I assumed that both of my rivals would be there for another sprint finish.

With the tailwind, the 1st outbound leg was furiously fast. I saw 42mph on my speedometer once, and I was completely geared out. I had to turn a cadence of ~136 to do 42mph with my hill climb drivetrain. I just marked the same guy I marked yesterday and everything went well until just before the 1st turnaround. The road's pretty bad for ~1/4 mile before the turn and we hit a pretty big bump. A couple of parts flew off the bike of the guy I was marking, including his computer. He stopped (and eventually just rode back to the start line as a DNF). At the turnaround, there were five of us out front with a bit of a gap, including the guy that had been trash talking. I went to the front to set the pace on the 1st return leg and, for the most part, it was an amicable sharing of the work. But, at one point I pulled off to let the next guy through and he just stayed on my wheel. I went a little further and pulled over again and he did the same thing. I looked back and it was, of course, the guy who had been trash talking. So, I figured, "Okay, you want to play games – let's play." I did a 500W acceleration for ~30s and opened a gap. Then I backed off and pedaled easy at 150W. When they caught up to me, I went way over to the left side of the lane to let them by. If they had gotten on my wheel again, I would have surged again. I would have thrown in 30s 500W surges all the way to the turnaround if necessary. But, everything settled down from that point to the 2nd turnaround so I didn't need to throw in any more surges.

After the 2nd turnaround, the outbound leg was another free-for-all, with speeds ~42mph. And, of course, the guy who had been trash talking just rode my wheel as I chased down two guys off the front. I could have cared less as long as I caught the guys off the front well before the turnaround so I could rest up a bit for the very hard upwind, uphill final leg. What happened next caught me totally by

surprise but I seized the opportunity. For whatever reason, the guy who had been trash talking (and who I now considered my main rival in my age group since the other guy had quit on the first lap) dropped back a few bike lengths just before the 3rd turnaround. We made the turn and started into the wind and there were three of us, with my rival just far enough back that he was getting no drafting benefit from us. I saw that both of the other two guys were not in my age group and immediately said, "Hey, do you guys want to work together, the three of us?" They said, "Sure." and I said, "Okay, let's do 15-second pulls and off. Just keep a steady pace." So, we started working together and moving at a pretty good speed given the strong wind. After about a mile, one of the two guys waved me through when he came off the front, so then there were just two of us. I said to him, "It looks like it's just you and me. Want to keep working together?" He said, "Sure, you call the shots." I said, "Okay, 15-second pulls. I've got a stopwatch and I'll call both the changes." So, we went about our business very workmanlike. Initially, he was taking too long to get on my wheel after his turn on front (and thus wasting energy), so I showed him how to do it more efficiently. I kept us on a very strict schedule of 15-second pulls, taking full advantage of the Coggan Rule (the 30-second half-life of the physiological response to exercise intensity). When we were about 1.5 miles from the finish line, I looked back and we had at least 2 minutes on the chase group. I knew then the race was over, so I told my new team-mate to just pull at whatever pace he was comfortable with when he was on front, and I started taking somewhat longer pulls. We introduced ourselves. His name was Howard and he is 68! I said, "Awesome! You're doing great." We crossed the line with our front hubs exactly even and shook hands while we were rolling out. It was a blast, and a shocker. I would never have imagined that I'd find a 68-year old partner for the final, crucial leg of this tough race. I wish the other guy (the one with the fastest TT time) had not dropped out. It would have been interesting to see what would have happened. What I thought was going to happen is that he and I would form a temporary alliance and make a move off the front. Then, it would have been interesting to see how the partnership would dissolve as we set up for the sprint finish. I don't think either of us could have dropped the other, so it would have come down to another sprint finish. Too bad it didn't play out. Oh, well, maybe next year. And, the 2nd gold medal was nice.

Unfortunately, I didn't get to race against my true competition next year (because Southern NV and Southern CA are combined for the state championships). But, the races allowed me to get a couple of good benchmarks on my TT speed and my RR skills. Basically, I confirmed what I already knew. I need more power and a more aero bike and wheels. For example, one of the guys in the 50-54 age category did 15:30 to my 17:28 in the 10K TT and 5:30 to my 6:18 in the 5K TT. Those are the kind of numbers I need to attain if I'm going to be competitive next year. Of course, he was also on a fully tricked out TT bike, but I'll have one of those too next spring. All in all, it was a fun weekend – and the two bronze and two gold medals are nice.