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POTENTIATION OF SPRINT CYCLING PERFORMANCE: The Effects of a High-Inertia Ergometer Warm-Up

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science
in
Sport and Exercise Science

at Massey University, Auckland,
New Zealand.

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APRIL 2013

Abstract

Assimilating current knowledge in the field of acute post-activation potentiation (PAP) of athletic performance, this study attempted to ensure optimal conditions for performance gain, by utilising highly-trained sprint-athletes, a biomechanically similar conditioning activity and following recommendations for the most appropriate conditioning protocol. Employing a randomized, counterbalanced, cross-over design with repeated measures, 4 male and 2 female national and international competitive sprint cyclists (age 19.2 ± 3.2 years; height 175.2 ± 7.0 cm; body mass 75.5 ± 9.8 Kg; training years (sprint cycling) 4.0 ± 1.5 years; training years (strength) 3.5 ± 1.2 years; peak isometric pedal torque 255.85 ± 37.75 Nm) executed multiple sets of short maximal contractions on a custom-built high-inertia ergometer as a potentiating stimulus prior to sprint cycle performance. Three trial conditions were completed on three separate days: a standardised warm-up followed by either dynamic (DYN: 4 x 4 complete crank cycles), or isometric (ISO: 4 x 5-second MVC) conditioning contractions (CC), or a control condition (CON) where subjects actively rested for the total equivalent time post-warm-up. Performance was assessed in a short (~6 seconds) maximal acceleration from standing start to maximum velocity on an inertial-load ergometer at baseline (Pre), 4 (Post4), 8 (Post8) and 16 (Post16) minutes following the CC protocol. Torque-cadence and power-cadence relationships were derived from crank data recorded throughout the sprint. Performance time and peak and average biomechanical measures were assessed over 4 discrete sprint segments. Outcomes were assessed using 2-way repeated measures ANOVA and magnitude-bases inferences. DYN Post4 was the only trial improving performance time, affecting a $3.91 \pm 3.74\%$ (92% likelihood of exceeding smallest worthwhile change (SWC)) decrease in time over the first segment of the sprint such that overall performance time was substantially improved. Biomechanical improvements in this trial were predominantly on the ascending limb of the power-cadence

relationship, affecting an increase of $6.24 \pm 5.95\%$ in peak torque (94% likelihood of exceeding SWC) and $4.04 \pm 6.52\%$ (87% likelihood of exceeding SWC) in average power during initial acceleration. Conversely, ISO Post16 enhanced performance over the descending limb of the power-cadence relationship, affecting an increase in optimal cadence ($\sim 3.1\%$ increase when compared to change from baseline in control condition, 82% likelihood of exceeding SWC) and augmenting average power ($\sim 5\%$ improvement when compared to change from baseline in control condition, 76% likelihood of exceeding SWC) during the maximal velocity phase of the sprint. DYN Post16 affected only small improvements at either extremity of the relationship, while few changes were observed in the remaining trial conditions. Results imply that each trial-time combination presented distinct performance conditions characterised by the predominance of different PAP mechanisms. This study provisionally suggests the efficacy of including a high-inertia ergometer component in the sprint warm-up. Improvements at the functional extremities of the sprint would benefit starting acceleration or finishing speed, where compromise in gear and pedal length selection strategies would, otherwise, impose limitations on performance.

Keywords: post-activation potentiation, sprint cycling, neuromuscular performance, warm-up

Acknowledgements

My heartfelt thanks go to the staff and athletes of the BikeNZ High Performance sprint programme whose contribution made this project a memorable life experience and whose passion and professionalism were a source of inspiration. Particular thanks to Justin Grace (Head Coach) for ensuring this project was supported by his team and for prioritising testing time within, already hectic, training and competition schedules; Angus Ross (Lead Strength and Conditioning Coach) for his counsel and direction in getting the project underway; Grant Davidson and the Technical Support Team for helping in the preliminary testing and providing me with engineering know-how; and, most especially, Damian Wiseman (Sport Scientist) whose time and assistance throughout the course of the project was totally invaluable. To the athletes who gave their time and energy in the testing sessions, my deepest gratitude for your contribution and commitment. Sincere thanks and appreciation for the mentoring provided by my primary supervisor, Dr. Andrew Foskett, who gave me his full and unabated support and encouragement throughout the study. Thanks also to my supporting supervisors, Dr. Phil Fink, whose mathematical and biomechanical wisdom has been truly enlightening, and Professor Steve Stannard, whose mechanical genius and passion for cycling made this research possible. Further thanks to Simon Bennett, Massey University Laboratory Manager, for ensuring my testing sessions were completed with minimum levels of stress and maximum standards of service. To my parents, Laura and Angus, you have been my enduring foundations in so many aspects of my life. Your unwavering and tireless support can never be fully repaid, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for everything you do and have done. My partner, Karen, who made sure I had all the support and belief needed to complete, that is no small feat and I truly thank you with all my heart for always being there for me. The support, love and belief of those passed have equally contributed, and my thanks are with them also.

And to my dad, who has been alongside me every step of the way.

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List of Abbreviations

ADP	adenosine diphosphate
ATP	adenosine triphosphate
BP	bench press
BPT	bench press throw
BS	back squat
Ca²⁺	calcium ion
CC	conditioning contractions
CMJ	counter movement jump
DJ	drop jump
ECC	excitation-contraction coupling
EMD	electromechanical delay
EMG	electromyography
EPSP	excitatory post-synaptic potentials
ES	effect size
F₀	peak isometric force
FVP	force-velocity-power
GTO	golgi-tendon organ
H-reflex	Hoffman reflex
HC	hang cleans
HFF	high-frequency fatigue
JS	jump squat

LFF	low-frequency fatigue
MA	musculoarticular
MB	medicine ball
MF	metabolic fatigue
MGL	gastrocnemius
MHC	myosin heavy chain
MLCK	myosin light chain kinase
MRLC	myosin regulatory light chains
MTU	muscle-tendon unit
MU	motor unit
MVC	maximal voluntary contraction
NMF	non-metabolic fatigue
PAD	post-activation depression
PAP	post-activation potentiation
pCa²⁺	plasma ionized calcium
PS	power snatch
PTA	peak torque angle
PTP	post-tetanic potentiation
RFD	rate of force development
RM	repetition maximum
RP	reflex potentiation
SEC	series elastic components
SJ	squat jump
SOL	soleus

SSC	stretch shortening cycle
SWC	smallest worthwhile change
TDC	top dead centre
TJ	tuck jump
TP	twitch potentiation
TT	twitch torque
V₀	maximum unloaded shortening velocity
VJ	vertical jump
VO₂	oxygen consumption
VO_{2max}	maximal oxygen consumption