

Skittles and I both despise this race for the most part. It is one of the toughest races in Kansas as far as I'm concerned and is a mental grind as much as it is a physical one. The course leaves the Bazaar schoolhouse and heads south for about 17 miles, turns around and returns north but goes past the start/finish for 6 miles before turning around to the south again for the final 6 miles back to the finish line for a total of around 46 miles. Skittles had done this race twice before and didn't finish either time. I had done it once and when I did finish, I was 90% sure I was going to die, but managed to survive with some pretty awesome cramping and complete exhaustion. That was the Cat 4/5 race last year. This year was the 1/2/3 race and I knew I was in for a miserable afternoon. Bazaar is in the flint hills of Kansas and if it's not windy there, something is probably wrong with the world. Yesterday was no exception with the winds out of the SSW at around 25mph, maybe even more as the race progressed.

We started uneventfully until 1/4 mile into the race when some guy decided it was a good time for a breakaway. Skittles agreed and bridged up to the guy which meant I was in the position of doing as little as I could to keep the group moving. I blocked a little in cooperation with the other guy's teammates, but eventually some other guys decided to chase and the group caught them a few minutes later. I considered a counter attack right when we caught them, but had no interest in being in the wind by myself for another 40 miles, so I sat in. A couple more people tried to get away here and there, but nobody made it very far. Two guys did make it off the front for a little bit and I thought if I could get up there, we stood a chance of getting away with three guys. I bridged up and brought one other guy with me and we started rotating immediately. I think the peloton realized that our group should be allowed to get too far away and they brought us back pretty quickly.

As we approached the last couple miles before the turnaround, we rode up a decent sized hill that had me slightly concerned, but nobody could get away on a climb with that kind of headwind so it was no big deal. I was sitting a little farther back than I wanted, but I was on Andrew Coe's wheel so I wasn't all that concerned. I noticed him stand up really tall and try to look over the top of the group up the road. A short time later, he left the wheel he was sitting on and moved up the group, putting himself in the wind a little. I thought to myself "he knows something I don't." I decided I'd move up on the opposite side of the group where I'd be protected more but still get close to the front in case anything went down. A minute or so later, the road curved 90 degrees to the right and the effort went through the roof. Turns out I was right. Andrew Coe did know something I didn't. He must have known the road curved here and he got up near the front just in time for the biggest attack of the race. Not only did the pace pick up tremendously here, but the wind changed from mostly a headwind (slightly from our right) to a direct crosswind from our left. The race was completely strung out and we were all riding in the gutter, trying to get some semblance of a draft off the guy in front of us. The guy in front of me started to slow and I stood up to go around him and I was not happy with what I saw. There were about 5 guys in front of me that were kind of spread out all over the place, with gaps in between each of them. Then up the road a few bike lengths was a group of 5 or 6 strong guys (Coe included) setting a horribly painful pace. I hammered like a crazy person trying to bridge up to them, bringing only

Britton Kusiak with me. The road curved back to the left and we were back in the headwind slightly from the right. I knew this was the winning move and I was either going to bridge up and be in it, or have no chance of winning the race. I'm sure Britton understood that too and we rotated a few times, trying to help each other get up to the break. We were well ahead of the chasing group, making progress on the break. My heartrate was making progress too...toward it's limit. My legs were on fire. I let Britton rotate through and I told him I was done.

My decision to quit chasing was a calculated one. According to my Garmin, we had another 4 or 5 miles in to go in the headwind before the turnaround. I knew I had no chance to make it that long with just 2 of us chasing a group composed entirely of Cat 1/2 riders that were in the process of creating a winning breakaway. I also didn't want to work so hard that I'd be unable to hang on to the group behind us once they caught on. The only problem with this calculation is that my Garmin was wrong because I'd programmed the wrong wheel size into it. We were actually less than a mile from the turnaround. Had I known that, I would have continued chasing. Instead, the group behind caught on and I slid to the back of it, attempting to recover. We hit the turnaround maybe a minute or two later. I hadn't recovered yet and I knew this acceleration with the tailwind was going to make me want to cry. Andrew Lyles and Skittles began setting the pace at the front and I actually moved up near them as well. They started rotating and I took my turn at the front. I knew we had to go all out to try to catch the breakaway, so I pushed through the pain. At some point we passed Britton Kusiak who had flatted and was relaxing on the side of the road. Had I seen him I would have been incredibly jealous, but I didn't notice. I couldn't process much other than pain and the desire to keep pushing the pace.

Andrew Lyles jumped off the front of our group and James and I both did work to bring him back. Andrew looked to be feeling pretty good. Once we brought him back, Skittles, Andrew, his teammate Chris, and I all rotated for a while trying to organize ourselves and make up some ground. It seemed like it was working and in a few minutes we could see the breakaway up the road and I actually thought we might bring them back. The only problem we were having was that there were a bunch of guys who had teammates in the break who were just sitting on our wheels as we rotated at the front. One of them would occasionally jump into the rotation and pick up the pace so much that he'd drop us as we rotated. Then he'd go rest for a bit and do it again. It was frustrating and screwed up our rhythm a lot. If I went back and sat in for 10 minutes, I could hammer off the front too, but that wasn't the goal. Whenever he'd do that, we'd get disorganized and our progress would halt. Eventually, we couldn't see the breakaway anymore, but could see a couple of guys who had gotten dropped from that group. We were making up ground on them slowly.

Chris Hudson and I were chatting and were getting annoyed because for a while, he and I were the only two people doing any work at all. He said he was done working and I said I was too. He drifted back and nobody came around him as I kept the pace a little higher than his was. Suddenly I had a little gap and figured I might as well keep pushing. I got in the most aero/powerful position I could and rode away from them. I

was off the front for maybe 10 minutes before they brought me back, but I did get to cross the start/finish line ahead of them so people may have thought I was actually accomplishing something. I passed a dead turtle in the road and wasn't sure if I envied the thing or not, but I just kept pedaling. I got caught a little later and just attempted to hang on until the next turnaround. As we headed down the big hill toward the turnaround, I got low and didn't have to pedal much to keep up. As soon as the road started flattening out, somebody on the front started picking it up big time. I knew I was hurting, but this effort was trouble and I started to yo-yo off the back a little. As we rounded the turnaround cone, I made up about 5 positions and tried to sit on a wheel. Unfortunately the wind had shifted a bit more to the West and the wind speed had also picked up significantly. Everybody was trying to sit on a wheel, but that put us all directly on the yellow line, and often times over the line into oncoming traffic. I was trying to play by the rules, but other people didn't seem to care and they were crossing the yellow whenever they felt like it. Things started to get really stupid and I was barely hanging on anyway so I decided my race was over before we ever got to that last big climb. I put it in the small ring and figured I'd just have a nice easy ride back to the schoolhouse. Brian Lingenfelter caught up to me and we rode back together just relaxing as much as possible. I'm not sure how much power I was putting out (I left my Garmin in James' car) but even without trying, it seemed like the effort required to keep moving was pretty high. A couple other guys caught up to us and we rode with them. As we approached the line, there were 4 of us in a group and I told the guys I wasn't sprinting for nearly last place. They mostly agreed and I said we should all try to cross the line at the exact same time to see how they'd score us. One guy jumped and decided to cross the line ahead of us but the rest of us did the best we could to confuse the officials. They scored us in order of who was closest to them to who was farthest it seemed. I crossed in between the two guys so they scored me in between them.

I ended up 19th out of 26 overall, with 3 guys not even finishing. I probably could have finished 17th if I'd wanted to be even more miserable for the last 5 miles, but 17th and 19th are pretty much the same thing as far as I'm concerned. I'll let James tell his part of the story, since he stayed in the group I dropped out of and I didn't get to watch them finish. He seemed to be feeling pretty good, so I was hoping he'd finish well.

Good job out there everybody and thanks DanR for snapping some pretty sweet pics of us. I think average wattage for the race was 263 for me (if I remember right from when I saw it on the Garmin) and I finished in 2:15. Max speed was 50mph. Last year's max was 53mph. I think that's all due to the fact that the wind didn't pick up until after the fastest parts of the course.