Anaerobic energy provision does not limit Wingate exercise performance in endurance-trained cyclists

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Calbet, J. A. L., J. A. De Paz, N. Garatachea, S. Cabeza de Vaca, and J. Chavarren. Anaerobic energy provision does not limit Wingate exercise performance in endurance-trained cyclists. J Appl Physiol 94: 668–676, 2003. First published October 4, 2002; 10.1152/japplphysiol.00128.2002.—The aim of this study was to evaluate the effects of severe acute hypoxia on exercise performance and metabolism during 30-s Wingate tests. Five endurance- (E) and five sprint- (S) trained track cyclists from the Spanish National Team performed 30-s Wingate tests in normoxia and hypoxia (inspired O2 fraction = 0.10). Oxygen deficit was estimated from submaximal cycling economy tests by use of a nonlinear model. E cyclists showed higher maximal O2 uptake than S from submaximal cycling economy tests by use of a nonlinear fatigue; anaerobic power; anaerobic capacity; lactate

The impact that acute severe hypoxia has on aerobic and anaerobic energy yield during the Wingate test remains unknown. Although moderate acute hypoxia [inspired O2 fraction (FiO2) = 0.13] has no effect on either O2 uptake (VO2) or performance during supramaximal exercise of a duration up to 30 s (39), conflicting results have been reported about the influence that higher levels of hypoxia might have on performance and metabolism (22, 23). McLellan et al. (23) observed unchanged mean power output (Pmean) and VO2 during a 30-s Wingate test performed with a FiO2 ~0.11. Prolonging the Wingate test duration until 45 s consistently resulted in lower VO2 with hypoxia (22, 23) whereas, compared with normoxia, Pmean during the 45-s Wingate test was not affected by acute hypoxia in one study (23) and slightly reduced (~3% less) in another investigation (23). Small differences in the FiO2 and time exposure to hypoxia before the start of the Wingate tests could explain the apparently contradictory results reported by McLellan et al. (22, 23). It was clearly shown, on the other hand, that during all-out exercise in acute hypoxia lasting 30 or 45 s, muscle lactate accumulation is markedly increased, indicating a greater anaerobic energy release with acute hypoxia (23). Furthermore, some pieces of evidence suggest that during supramaximal exercise producing exhaustion between 30 and 60 s the contribution of the anaerobic energy sources is increased in acute moderate hypoxia (22, 39). Whether a higher degree of hypoxia could enhance anaerobic energy release during 30-s Wingate tests is not known.

It has been estimated that, in general, anaerobic energy sources provide 70–80% of energy utilized throughout the Wingate test (6, 28, 33, 40). However, compared with sprint specialists, endurance-trained athletes have greater mean VO2 during the Wingate tests (12) and obtain a higher fraction of the energy from oxidative metabolism. In turn, sprint-trained athletes obtain a greater fraction of energy through the anaerobic pathways (6). Thus it can be hypothesized that because endurance-trained athletes rely more on aerobic energy sources to perform all-out supramaximal exercise they will experience a relatively greater impairment of performance than sprint-trained athletes with acute hypoxia, unless they compensate for the reduction in VO2 by enhancing the anaerobic energy release.

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Therefore, the primary aim of this study was to find out whether the reduction in $O_2$ supply elicited by severe acute hypoxia can be counteracted by enhancing anaerobic energy production during 30-s Wingate tests. Another purpose was to verify whether endurance-trained elite track cyclists would experience superior deterioration of performance than their sprint-trained counterparts during 30-s Wingate tests in acute hypoxia. To unravel more easily the effect of hypoxia, the $FIO_2$ was reduced to 0.104, which is equivalent to an altitude of 5,300 m. This level of hypoxia is close to the limit that a healthy nonacclimatized human can tolerate acutely during upright exercise (4, 32, 36).

**METHODS**

**Subjects**

This study was approved by the ethics committee at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. The subjects were fully informed of the purpose and possible risks and benefits of their participation in the study before giving their written consent. Ten track cyclists from the Spanish National Team participated in this study. All them had qualified more than once among the first three finishers in the Spanish National Championship. The group included several National Champions and a silver medalist in the last World Championship, who was a sprint specialist. Five cyclists were sprint specialists, and the other five were endurance-trained cyclists. The mean ± SE ages, heights, weights, and percentages of body fat were 19.0 ± 0.7 vs. 18.4 ± 0.4 yr, 176 ± 2 vs. 179 ± 0.7 cm, 74.7 ± 3.1 vs. 65.8 ± 1.0 kg, and 13.2 ± 1.9 vs. 9.3 ± 0.5% in the sprint and endurance cyclists, respectively. Subjects were requested to follow similar diets and lessen physical activities during the 48 h before the experiments. They were also instructed to refrain from any food for at least 4 h before each test session.

**Experimental Protocol and Procedures**

The percentage of body fat was estimated anthropometrically by using a population-specific equation, which was developed and validated in our laboratory by using dual X-ray absorptiometry as a gold standard (19). Subjects completed four test sessions in separate days. First, their maximal $V_{O_2}$ ($V_{O_2\text{max}}$) and maximal power output ($W_{\text{max}}$) were assessed via an incremental exercise test to exhaustion (25 W/min, at 90 rpm). During the next 2 testing days, the relationship between $V_{O_2}$ and intensity (or cycling economy) was determined. Then, during the last test session, Wingate tests were carried out while the subjects were breathing either room air (normoxia) or air from a Douglas bag containing 10.4% $O_2$ in $N_2$ (hypoxia), equivalent to an altitude of ~5,300 m. This level of acute hypoxia was chosen because it reduces $V_{O_2\text{max}}$ by nearly 50% (10, 36), creating, therefore, a condition in which a potential limitation to aerobic energy supply would be present during the Wingate tests performed in severe hypoxia. Normoxic and hypoxic Wingate tests were performed in random order and separated by a recovery period of at least 1 h, which is enough to allow for a complete recovery (6).

**Cycling economy tests.** Cycling economy was determined by using 12 submaximal workloads at intensities of between 60 and 90% $V_{O_2\text{max}}$, at four different pedaling rates: 60, 80, 100, and 120 rpm. Exercise intensities and pedaling rates were administered in random order, separated by rest periods of 3–5 min. To reduce thermal stress and minimize water losses due to sweating, subjects were fan cooled and ingested in total 600 ml of water during the resting periods. Tests were performed at 18–24°C, 60–80% relative humidity, and 750–770 mmHg atmospheric pressure. The duration of each submaximal bout was set at 6 min. The mean $V_{O_2}$ registered during the last 2 min was taken as representative of each submaximal exercise intensity. To relate $V_{O_2}$ to power, individual nonlinear regression equations were calculated by least-square linear fit, applying the following nonlinear model: $V_{O_2} = a + b \cdot W + c \cdot rpm + d \cdot rpm^2$, which gave a standard error of estimate that was always lower than 100 ml/min of $O_2$, where $a$, $b$, $c$, and $d$ are the constants to be determined by the nonlinear regression equation; $W$ is the exercise intensity; and rpm is the pedaling rate. Wingate tests. To determine whole blood lactate concentration ([La]) in the femoral vein, a 20-gauge catheter (Hydrocath, Ohmeda, Swindon, UK) was inserted percutaneously by use of the Sellinger technique into the right femoral vein under local anesthesia (2% lidocaine) as previously reported (29). The catheter was inserted 2 cm below the inguinal ligament and was advanced 12 cm toward the knee to avoid contamination of the blood coming from the deep quadriceps muscle veins with saphenous vein blood. Once in place, the catheter was sutured to the skin to minimize the risk of movement or creasing, and the outlet of the catheter was connected to a three-way stopcock. After a resting period of ~5 min, subjects carried out a standardized warm-up consisting of 10 min of continuous cycling at an intensity close to 60% $V_{O_2\text{max}}$ followed by five maximal accelerations lasting no more than 5–6 s. Then the subjects rested for 10 min and were randomly assigned to a normoxic or hyperoxic Wingate test. To minimize the risk of hypotension and respiratory alkalosis during the hypoxic Wingate tests, the subjects commenced to breathe from the hypoxic gas bag only 3 min before the onset of the exercise (36). During the Wingate tests, femoral vein blood samples were drawn continuously for periods of 5 s, given a total of six exercise samples. An hour later, the Wingate test was repeated in the other condition. After both Wingate tests, the subjects recovered in normoxia while lying on a bed, and additional blood samples were withdrawn from the femoral vein 5, 5', 7, and 10 min after the start of the recovery periods. To minimize the risk of respiratory alkalosis, the catheter was connected to the hypoxic gas bag only 3 min before the onset of the exercise (36). During the Wingate tests, femoral vein blood samples were drawn continuously for periods of 5 s, given a total of six exercise samples. An hour later, the Wingate test was repeated in the other condition. After both Wingate tests, the subjects recovered in normoxia while lying on a bed, and additional blood samples were withdrawn from the femoral vein 5, 5', 7, and 10 min after the start of the recovery periods. To minimize the risk of respiratory alkalosis, the catheter was connected to the hypoxic gas bag only 3 min before the onset of the exercise (36). During the Wingate tests, femoral vein blood samples were drawn continuously for periods of 5 s, given a total of six exercise samples. An hour later, the Wingate test was repeated in the other condition. After both Wingate tests, the subjects recovered in normoxia while lying on a bed, and additional blood samples were withdrawn from the femoral vein 5, 5', 7, and 10 min after the start of the recovery periods.
sion equation was derived by least-square linear fit between
flywheel deceleration and load.

The anaerobic energy yield during the Wingate tests was
calculated as the O2 deficit as previously reported (6). First,
the O2 demand was estimated individually by extrapolating
the nonlinear relationship between V02 and power output
measured at submaximal loads. Then the O2 deficit was
computed as the difference between the O2 demand and the
O2 consumed during the supramaximal bouts (25, 39).

Respiratory variables. Ventilatory and gas exchange vari-
ables were monitored breath-by-breath by an open-circuit
sampling system (CPX, Medical Graphics, St. Paul, MN) and
averaged every 15 s during the incremental exercise tests
d and every 5 s during the Wingate tests. The metabolic cart
was calibrated with calibration gas mixtures of known O2
and CO2 concentrations (accuracy 0.01%), which were pro-
vided by the manufacturer (CPX, Medical Graphics). In our
laboratory, V02 and CO2 production during submaximal cy-
cling has been assessed with a coefficient of variation lower
than 5%, as well as with an intraclass reliability coefficient
higher than 0.98, as determined in six physical education
students at four different intensities on 4 different days. The
highest V02 value attained during the incremental exercise
tests was taken as the V02 max, whereas the intensity at-
tained just before exhaustion is referred to as Wmax. The
Wmax was adjusted by extrapolation depending on the du-
ration of the last step (18). To determine the kinetics of the
V02 on-response, breath-by-breath data were averaged every
5 s and fit to a curve by using an exponential model, by means
of the least-squares error approach. The curve-fitting pro-
dure was iterated until any further changes in the param-
eters for the model did not result in a reduction in the mean
squared error between the curve obtain from the model and
the original data set. The model used to fit the V02 on-data
had a constant, which corresponds to resting V02, an am-
plitude term (b), and a time constant (c) as follows

\[
V_{O2}(t) = a + b(1 - e^{-ct})
\]

where \( t \) is the time in seconds and \( V_{O2}(t) \) is the time-depen-
dent variation in \( V_{O2} \).

Blood lactate. [La] was determined in whole blood by using
a lactate analyzer (YSI 1500 Sport, Yellow Springs, CO)
provided with hemolyzing agent (Triton X-100). With this
instrument, we obtained a coefficient of variation for whole
blood [La] assayment lower than 1%, for [La] between 1 and
26 mM. Recovery blood [La] curves were integrated over time
and expressed as millimolar-seCONDS. Reported values corre-
spond to the net area under curve, i.e., the area under the
curve after accounting for the resting blood [La] immediately
before the start of the Wingate tests.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were performed on each variable to
confirm the assumptions of normality and homocedasticity.
The effect of O2 inspired fraction on femoral blood lactate
during the Wingate tests was determined using a two-way
repeated-measures analysis of variance with cyclists spe-
cialty as a two-level factor. In the case of a significant \( F \)
value, planned comparisons were carried out by using a
Student’s paired or unpaired (as appropriate) t-test with
Bonferroni correction to account for multiple comparisons.
The significance level was set at \( P < 0.05 \). Data are expressed
as means ± SE.

RESULTS

Differences Between Endurance- and Sprint-Trained
Cyclists

Endurance cyclists showed higher \( V_{O2\: max} \) than the
sprint-trained cyclists (72 ± 1 and 62 ± 2 ml·kg\(^{-1}·\)
min\(^{-1} \), \( P < 0.05 \)). As depicted in Fig. 1A and Table 1,
absolute and relative peak power output (Pmax) and
\( P_{\text{mean}} \) were greater in the sprint than in the endur-
ance cyclists. Accordingly, sprint cyclists reached
greater maximal and mean pedaling rates than endur-
ance-trained cyclists (Fig. 1B). Sprint cyclists, how-
ever, fatigued faster than the endurance cyclists, as
indicated by the fatigue index during the Wingate test,
which was 0.46 ± 0.12 and 0.32 ± 0.12 W·s\(^{-1}·kg\(^{-1} \)
body mass in the sprint and endurance cyclists, respec-
tively (Fig. 2A; \( P < 0.05 \)). In consequence, the sprint
cyclists’ superiority in power output was reduced pro-
gressively during the second half of the Wingate tests,
developing in both groups almost similar power output
values per kilogram of body mass during the last 15 s
(Fig. 1A). The sprint cyclists incurred a greater O2
demand during the first 10–15 s of the Wingate test
(Fig. 1, C and D). Likely because of their greater
\( V_{O2\: max} \), the endurance cyclists were able to consume
26% more \( O2 \) per kilogram of body mass during the
Wingate tests than the sprint cyclists (\( P < 0.05 \)), be-
cause both groups utilized a similar percentage of their
\( V_{O2\: max} \) during the Wingate tests in normoxia (Fig. 2B).
In fact, a close correlation was observed between the
mean \( V_{O2} \) during the Wingate test and \( V_{O2\: max} \) (Fig.
2C; \( r = 0.86, P < 0.001 \)). With greater \( O2 \) demand and
lower \( V_{O2} \), \( O2 \) deficit per kilogram of body mass re-
sulted 33% higher in the sprint than the endurance
cyclists (Fig. 1H). The difference between 26% superior
aerobic energy yield in the endurance cyclists and 33%
higher \( O2 \) deficit in the sprint cyclists leads to the ~8% 
superior \( P_{\text{mean}} \) developed during the Wingate by the
sprint specialists. Despite these remarkable differ-
ces in anaerobic energy yield during the Wingate
tests, the rate of femoral vein blood [La] accumulation
during exercise was similar in the endurance and
sprint cyclists. In both groups, femoral blood [La] did
not change during the first 15 s of exercise, but there-
after it augmented, describing a parabola as exercise
time passed (in all conditions, \( r = 0.99, P < 0.001 \); Fig.
1G). During the first 10 min of the recovery period, the
sprint cyclists accumulated 27% more lactate in the
femoral vein than their endurance counterparts (\( P <
0.05 \); Fig. 3).

As depicted in Fig. 4 the anaerobic energy contribu-
tion to the overall energy expended during the Wingate
test decreased following a parabolic pattern (\( r > 0.98,
P < 0.01 \)). The sprint cyclists obtained a slightly
greater proportion of energy through the anaerobic
pathways (Table 1). Extrapolation of the curves de-
picted in Fig. 3 to 0% anaerobic energy contribution
permits us to predict the duration that an all-out test
should have to enable a complete utilization of all the
anaerobic energy potential (Fig. 4). Because the sprint cyclists had larger \( O_2 \) deficit and obtained a greater fraction of energy through the anaerobic pathways, the rate of anaerobic energy release was much higher in the sprint than in the endurance cyclists. Despite this fast recruitment of their anaerobic capacity, the sprint cyclists needed 4–5 s more than the endurance cyclists to fully express their anaerobic capacity.

Effect of Severe Acute Hypoxia

The time course of power output, \( O_2 \) demand, \( \dot{V}O_2 \), \( O_2 \) deficit, and blood [La] during the normoxic and hypoxic Wingate tests are depicted in Fig. 1. Although Pmax was not affected by hypoxia in any group, Pmean and pedaling rate were reduced by 6–7% in the sprint cyclists \( (P < 0.05) \). In the endurance cyclists, however, Pmean and pedaling rate remained at same level as in normoxia. With a lower Pmean, \( O_2 \) demand was diminished in the sprint cyclists exercising in hypoxia \( (P < 0.05) \). In both groups, hypoxia resulted in a 16% lower mean \( \dot{V}O_2 \) \( (P < 0.01; \) Fig. 1E). The divergence between normoxic and hypoxic \( \dot{V}O_2 \) during the Wingate test began 10 s after the start of the test and became more accentuated as the exercise progressed \( (P < 0.05) \).
Hypoxia had opposed effects on O₂ deficit in sprint and endurance cyclists, inasmuch as, compared with normoxia, hypoxia resulted in a 5% lower O₂ deficit in the sprint cyclists (P < 0.05), whereas it promoted a 7% greater value in the endurance cyclists (P < 0.05). This different effect was further sustained by a significant interaction effect in the ANOVA analysis. In agreement, the endurance cyclists achieved an 11% greater area under the blood [La] curve during the recovery period after the hypoxic Wingate tests (P < 0.05; Fig. 3), whereas recovery [La] was unaffected by hypoxia in the sprint cyclists. During the 30-s exercise period, however, the rate of blood lactate accumulation was similar in normoxia and hypoxia (Fig. 1G). Fatigue index was also similar in normoxia and hypoxia (Fig. 2A). The anaerobic contribution to the energy expenditure in hypoxia was greater than in normoxia. However, this effect was significant only in the endurance cyclists (P < 0.05).

**DISCUSSION**

The effect of severe acute hypoxia, equivalent to an altitude of ~5,300 m, on exercise metabolism and performance has been studied in elite endurance and sprint-trained track cyclists. This study demonstrates that severe acute hypoxia does not alter peak power output and fatigue index during 30-s Wingate test. In contrast, Pmean is reduced with acute severe hypoxia in sprint but not in endurance-trained cyclists, despite the fact that in both groups mean VO₂ was reduced by 16% during the Wingate tests in hypoxia. In addition, it has been shown that, compared with sprint, endurance-trained cyclists display superior maximal aerobic power, attain lower Ppeak and Pmean, achieve a lower O₂ deficit, have a lower fatigue index, obtain a greater fraction of the energy expended via oxidative pathways during a 30-s Wingate test, and show a lower femoral venous blood [La] after the Wingate test.

**Effect of Severe Acute Hypoxia**

In contrast to our hypothesis, Wingate test performance was only reduced with severe acute hypoxia in the elite sprint cyclists whereas it was maintained in the endurance cyclists. In both groups, VO₂ was lowered in the same proportion (i.e., 16%), but because VO₂ per kilogram of body mass was larger in the endurance cyclists, the absolute reduction of VO₂ was slightly greater in the endurance than the sprint cyclists. If we assume similar cycling efficiencies in normoxia and acute hypoxia, the only possible explanation for these findings is superior anaerobic energy release in hypoxia (39). The fact that O₂ deficit increased with hypoxia in the endurance but not in the sprint cyclists supports this concept. Several metabolic pathways are stimulated to supplement energy production when aerobic metabolism is not capable of matching aerobic ATP production to consumption, especially the splitting of phosphocreatine and glycolysis. To our knowledge only McLellan et al. (23) have investigated the effect of moderate acute hypoxia on muscle metabolism during the Wingate test. They reported that, compared with normoxia, muscle [La] doubles when Wingate tests are performed in acute hypoxia. Because the glycolytic branch of the anaerobic metabolism represents ~3/4 of the anaerobic capacity (1, 3, 33), an increase in muscle lactate accumulation of the magnitude reported by McLellan et al. (23) would account for most of the reduction in aerobic ATP generation with hypoxia in the present study.

It has been shown that during all-out bicycling lactate production commences almost at the onset of muscular contractions reaching concentrations up to ~7 (11), ~11 (16), and ~17–29 mM (3, 16, 23, 28) in 6, 10, and 30 s, respectively. Despite the superior muscle lactate accumulation with hypoxia, recovery blood [La] (measured in a forearm vein) was found to be slightly lower in hypoxia in one study (23) and similar to the
normoxic conditions in another study from the same group (22). In a novel procedure, in the present study blood was sampled from the vicinity of the contracting muscle because systemic and local arm metabolism may interfere with forearm [La]. Moreover, by sampling blood every 5 s we have been able to measure for the first time the kinetics of femoral vein blood lactate accumulation during Wingate tests. Our data demonstrate that the kinetics of femoral venous blood lactate accumulation is independent of $F_{\text{O}_2}$ during 30-s all-out exercise. In both conditions there was a 15-s lag between the onset of exercise and the beginning of blood lactate accumulation, indicating that most of the lactate produced at the onset of exercise is retained inside the muscle. No clue is given by the present study to explain why lactate is not released during the first 15 s of exercise. If the principal motor driving lactate net
release is muscle pH (30), the fact that muscle pH is barely changed at the onset of exercise could facilitate muscle lactate accumulation, or perhaps the muscle lactate transporters must first be activated.

A number of studies have shown that the total anaerobic capacity cannot be used up in 30 s (6, 7, 25, 26, 31, 33, 35). Hypoxia appears to stimulate additional utilization of the anaerobic capacity to compensate for the reduction in aerobic ATP production. This effect was clear in the endurance cyclists, whereas the sprint cyclists showed a small reduction in their O2 deficit, which, combined with the lower VO2max, led to decreased Pmean. The critical question is what limits performance during the Wingate test? Our findings contrast with the prevailing paradigm, which proposes that performance during the Wingate test is limited by the rate of anaerobic energy release (2, 7), which, in turn, depends on substrate availability and enzymatic control (7, 28, 35). It is well known that performance during the Wingate test is not limited by glycogen availability (16, 17, 23, 26). Our study novelty shows that neither the availability of anaerobic energy nor the rate of anaerobic energy release limits performance during the Wingate test in the elite endurance cyclists. Our results point to the rate of ATP utilization as the performance-limiting factor during the traditional Wingate test. According to our results, the factors reducing the rate of ATP hydrolysis should be common to the aerobic and anaerobic pathways. This requirement is fulfilled by ADP and P, which accumulate during all-out exercise and thus could set the upper limit of ATP utilization throughout their inhibitory effects on muscle contraction (9, 38). In contrast, according to our results, performance in sprint cyclists appears to be substrate limited in hypoxia, as reported in normoxia in nontrained (35) and physically active subjects (7).

It should be highlighted that the level of hypoxia used in our study is very close to the limit that a human can tolerate acutely. During incremental exercise to exhaustion under these conditions, arterial Po2 values at exhaustion approached 30–35 mmHg (36). This level of hypoxia is very close to the limit that can be tolerated for a short time by an unacclimatized human and is similar to that reported in altitude-acclimatized subjects at the summit of Mt. Everest simulated in Operation Everest II (34). Severe hypoxemia, in turn, could have elicited central fatigue (27) or reduced peak leg blood flow (5). Although we cannot rule out a central component in fatigue appearance, in agreement with previous investigations performed with lower levels of hypoxia (22, 23), no effect of severe acute hypoxia on fatigue index or peak power output was found in this study. Furthermore, clinical signs of fatigue and the ventilatory response during the hypoxic Wingate tests (data not shown) were similar in both groups of cyclists. It does not seem, therefore, that differences in central fatigue mechanisms could explain the reduction of performance with hypoxia in the sprint cyclists.

Oxygen deficit, as measured in this study, is not a pure estimation of the anaerobic energy utilized because the O2 consumed from the O2 stores [especially O2 bound to myoglobin, which has been estimated to be 2 mmol/kg wet wt (14), and O2 bound to hemoglobin] at the onset of the exercise is computed as the O2 deficit, leading to an overestimation of the anaerobic energy production and, conversely, an underestimation of the real VO2max (25). This intrinsic error of the deficit method is, however, rather small because of the comparatively low amount of O2 stored in the skeletal muscle in relation to the magnitude of the O2 deficit. If exercise bouts are performed in normoxia and hypoxia, the O2 stores at the beginning of the exercise would be lower in the hypoxic condition, reducing the overestimation of the O2 deficit. Resting myoglobin saturation, however, was likely very similar in normoxia and hypoxia, owing to the especial characteristics the O2 dissociation myoglobin curve, which has an O2 pressure at which myoglobin saturation is 50% that is close to 3 mmHg (30). With the level of hypoxia used in this study, a resting arterial Po2 of 45–50 mmHg and saturation of ~80% have been reported (32). Consequently, the amount of O2 stored as O2 bound to hemoglobin was probably 20% lower at the onset of the hypoxic Wingate test. If this was actually the case, the hypoxia-normoxia O2 deficit difference could have been even higher than the 7% calculated for the endurance cyclists, and perhaps no reduction in O2 deficit with hypoxia would have been observed in the sprint cyclists. Assuming that both groups had a similar reduction in their O2 stores with hypoxia, our data demonstrate that endurance cyclists have a greater capacity to enhance the anaerobic energy production in response to hypoxia than the sprint cyclists. Perhaps the sprint cyclists are already using their anaerobic energy at a rate close to the maximum in normoxia, and, thus, they are not able to compensate for a reduction in aerobic ATP production with hypoxia via an enhancement of rate of anaerobic energy release.

![Figure 4](image-url)
Differences Between Endurance and Sprint Specialists

One singularity of this study is the outstanding level of the cyclists examined, who were among the best in Spain with several very successful achievements in international competitions in both groups. In the case of the sprint cyclists, Ppeak and Pmean were among the highest reported in literature (8, 12, 22, 23, 40). It should be mentioned that the Pmax obtained in the Monark cycle ergometer was similar to and closely correlated with the Pmean measured during the first 30 s of a 500 m track sprint (measured in the 10 cyclists here studied with a SRM ergometer, data not shown; Ref. 8). The Pmean developed by these cyclists was far beyond the maximal aerobic power output; accordingly, O2 deficit was also higher than reported in previous studies for cyclists (8, 13, 40). As expected, sprint cyclists had lower VO2 max but much larger O2 deficit than the endurance specialists (8, 24). Assuming that the sprint cyclists utilized 80–90% of their anaerobic capacity in 30 s (6, 25, 31, 33), their actual maximal accumulated O2 deficit can be estimated to lie in between 75 and 85 ml/kg. In fact, it has been suggested that world class sprint athletes may reach even higher O2 deficits (8, 25, 31). The superiority of sprint cyclists in anaerobic power and capacity is probably the result of an increased percentage of type II fibers, more appropriate enzymatic machinery to produce ATP through anaerobic pathways, and enhanced buffer capacity (8, 13, 20, 21). However, fatigue index was markedly higher in the sprint than the endurance cyclists. Because sprint cyclists have a higher proportion of type II fibers than the endurance cyclists (21), they should choose a faster pedaling rate, because type II fibers are more efficient at a faster contraction speed (15). The drawback of this strategy is that type II fibers are less resistant to fatigue (15). The election of high pedaling frequencies may be advantageous for speed in track competitions (37). In an interesting experiment using an isokinetic cycle ergometer, Jones et al. (17) demonstrated that the same Pmean is developed at 60 and 140 rpm, but peak power output is considerably higher at 140 rpm, at the price, however, of an increased fatigue index.

Withers et al. (40) reported that endurance-trained cyclists can utilize 94% of their anaerobic capacity in a 45-s all-out test. Using a different approach, we have estimated that the endurance cyclists might utilize the totality of their anaerobic capacity in 43 s whereas the sprint cyclists would need 47 s (see Fig. 3).

Limitations of the O2 Deficit as a Measure of the Anaerobic Energy Yield

Despite the limitations of O2 deficit as a method to estimate the anaerobic energy yield, we should emphasize that our estimations on the partitioning between aerobic and anaerobic energy sources during the Wingate test agree amazingly well with the ATP turnover rates reported by Parolin et al. (28). These authors measured the aerobic and anaerobic ATP turnover rate in muscle biopsies obtained at three different time points during an isokinetic Wingate test at 100 rpm. During the last 15 s of the Wingate test, the mean aerobic contribution to the energy expenditure was 54% in Parolin et al.’s work and 48% in our endurance cyclists. The small difference between our estimations and the biopsy data of Parolin et al. probably reflects the fact that lactate release from the muscle was not accounted for in Parolin et al.’s work. Thus they probably underestimated slightly the anaerobic contribution during the last 15 s of the Wingate test, a period in which we have shown an increase in femoral venous lactate.

The real values of O2 deficit could be lower or higher than reported here, but if we assume that mechanical efficiency during the Wingate tests was similar in normoxia and acute hypoxia, as has been demonstrated for submaximal exercise, then our conclusion that anaerobic energy production is increased during 30-s all-out exercise in hypoxia to account for the reduction in VO2 is irrefutable.

In summary, the effects of severe acute hypoxia, equivalent to an altitude of ~5,300 m, on exercise metabolism and performance have been studied in elite endurance- and sprint-trained track cyclists. We have demonstrated that peak power output and fatigue index are not altered by severe acute hypoxia, whereas mean VO2 is reduced by 16% in endurance- and sprint-trained cyclists. Interestingly, despite this marked reduction in VO2, only endurance-trained cyclists are able to maintain Pmean by increasing their anaerobic energy production, which shows that neither anaerobic capacity nor the rate of anaerobic energy release limits Wingate test performance in endurance cyclists. Conversely, a small decrease, inferior to that expected from the reduction in VO2, of Pmean with hypoxia is observed in the sprint-trained cyclists. Endurance-trained cyclists, on the other hand, possess superior maximal aerobic power and obtain a greater fraction of the energy expended during a Wingate test via oxidative pathways than sprint-trained cyclists. In turn, sprint-trained cyclists develop larger O2 deficit (+33%), rely more on anaerobic energy sources, and achieve higher peak and Pmean during a Wingate tests. Sprint-trained cyclists, however, develop fatigue at a faster rate than endurance-trained cyclists during supramaximal all-out exercise. In contrast to the prevailing paradigm, this study shows for the first time that performance during the traditional Wingate test is not limited by anaerobic energy supply in endurance cyclists.

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