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Ultimate Types

There are three main types of ultimates:

Power Ultimates, Value Ultimates and Conditional Ultimates

Power Ultimates

Ultimates that, when used correctly, provide a massive impact on the outcome of the round. Essentially these are ultimates that if you use them should almost guarantee that a fight or round is won by the user.

Examples of Power Ultimates are Killjoy's Lockdown or Breach's Rolling Thunder which make a large part of the map completely unplayable or dangerous to enemies. Any enemy affected by these ultimates should die unless a mistake is made or they are properly countered.

Another more complicated example of a Power Ultimate is Hunter's Fury which often only becomes a Power Ultimate in post plant situations but if used simply to take a fight tends to be more of a Value Ultimate. This is because if used to fight in the middle of a round Hunter's Fury CAN get a kill but more often just clears space as an info tool or does some chip damage and info gathering. If used in a post plant situation Hunter's Fury is much more likely to hit and kill players while they try to defuse the spike and significantly impacts the win condition of the round.

Another example of a complicated Power Ultimate is Viper's Pit. On defense Viper's Pit is often a permanent denial of an entire side of the map whereas on attack a good Viper's Pit requires that attackers have reached a site and planted the spike. However, once these conditions have been achieved it changes from being a Conditional Ultimate into a Power Ultimate.

Power Ultimates should have a very high priority in the ultimate economy in terms of their Orb and plant allocation as well as the discipline in which they are used.

Value Ultimates

Value ultimates are ultimates that are usually pretty easy to get some minimal value from and can have a strong impact on the outcome of a round when used correctly.

An example of a Value Ultimate is Dimensional Drift which can be used as a high value drone for information but often forces enemies to run for cover and give up space on the map as well. Dimensional Drift achieves maximum value when it is used to take space, gather information and then can be combined with other utility to net a kill as well.

Other examples of Value Ultimates are Run It Back, Showstopper and NULL/CMD. All three ultimates get some immediate value for the team by being used and do grant an advantage in a fight for space. However, their value depends on how the other team reacts, when they are used and how well coordinated they are within the overall gameplan. For example, a Showstopper that is triggered off of a trap and combined with some form of movement impacting ability like stun or seize will always provide much more value than a Showstopper that is popped and sent blindly into the map without supporting utility.

NULL/CMD is another case where if used at the proper time can completely cancel multiple enemy ultimates (Neon, Sova, Jett) or fully destroy an enemy gameplan (Suppressing a Breach who is about to ult for retake so that his teammates run in without utility).

Conditional Ultimates

These are ultimates that usually have their value limited by external conditions. Though they tend to have less impact than the other two categories, good use of conditional ultimates can still be round winning.

Examples of conditional ultimates are Neural Theft, Resurrect and Bladestorm. The first two ultimates are pretty self-explanatory since they require an enemy or teammate to have died to even be used. A well-timed Neural Theft can have a huge impact on the round if the resulting information results in being able to avoid a trap or rotate correctly to counter an enemy game plan.

Bladestorm and Tour de Force are ultimates that vary wildly in impact depending on the skill of their user and the round in which they are used. For example, a Bladestorm used in a full-buy versus full-buy round is kind of just like having a rifle and only gets value if the Jett is particularly skilled with the knives and can abuse movement to outskill enemies. However, if Bladestorm is used in a round where the economy is poor it can have much more impact because it upgrades at least one player to a weapon that can take engagements against rifles on even or even advantaged footing. Probably the best use case for Bladestorm is in a round where it not only upgrades the Jett's weapons but also allows the team to buy in a way that they can be classified as a full-buy round. This could mean having Jett use Bladestorm and buy an ally a rifle and then allow those two players to take all of the first engagements versus enemies with rifles supported by ally utility.

Tour de Force is another complicated case. Even in a full-buy round it can upgrade a rifle into an Operator but much like Bladestorm it probably has more impact when upgrading a weak buy into a much stronger one. However, on the defense side Tour de Force can be classified as a Value Ultimate since the activation notifies the attacking team that they now need to be afraid of an Operator and could impact their gameplan in addition to simply upgrading the weapon.

Ultimate Economy

It is obvious that different ultimates have different levels of impact and as a result should be prioritized and used differently. This impact should always be considered when and how ultimates are used.

Let's assume the following (these numbers will obviously be a bit different depending on the map and side):

- Full-buy versus full-buy round is 50/50 on who will win the round.
- Full-buy versus eco is 90/10 on who will win the round.
- Full-buy versus low-buy is 75/25 on who will win the round.

Let's also assume that using a Power Ultimate increases the chance of winning a round by 50%. This would change the math to be:

- Full-buy versus full-buy round + Power Ultimate is 75/25 on who will win the round.
- Full-buy versus eco is 95/5 + Power Ultimate on who will win the round.
- Full-buy versus low-buy is 88/12 on who will win the round.

The biggest change is obviously in the full-buy versus full-buy rounds which makes these the most obvious targets for using high impact ultimates. We can make this an even more impactful ultimate if the resulting win in the full-buy round pushes the enemy team onto an eco round resulting in almost winning two rounds for the price of one ultimate usage.

On the other side of the equation is using ultimates in lower economy rounds. Using a Power Ultimate in an eco round might take the round from a 10% win chance to a 20% chance but unless the map is about to end in a loss, this investment is often a mistake.

Ultimate Cycles

The Ultimate Cycle is the timeline of ultimate acquisition and usage over the rounds. This is a way to track and predict power spikes in both your and your enemy's chance to win rounds. Aligning high impact ultimates with important rounds is the best way to maximize the impact of those ultimates on the overall outcome of the half.

Building Gameplans around Ultimate Cycles

Any good game plan should be taking the Ultimate Cycles into account to try and snowball the momentum of the game. As an example, if you could align each Power Ultimate usage with an enemy full-buy round you would have a great chance to constantly reset the enemy economy and rack up round after round.

Let's use the FNATIC Haven comp as an example: Cypher, Iso, Omen, Sova, Yoru.

This composition has Three Value Ultimates that can become Power Ultimates with proper usage and two Conditional Ultimates. In an ideal situation, Orbs get stacked on Iso and Yoru during the attack side so that Iso and Yoru ultimates can be used to help break open the bomb sites and take advantaged fights.

If, for example you could align your first Iso or Yoru ultimate with the defender's first full-buy round and use that to get an easy kill and spike plant you can put the enemies back to eco where the Iso and Yoru can continue to find easy Orbs. After the resulting eco round, either Iso or Yoru should have another ultimate which you can then use to boost your win chances against the next enemy full-buy round. In a less ideal situation maybe you need to use two ultimates or cannot stack the Orbs properly so you can use the Sova, Omen and Cypher ultimates to try and bridge the gap between Iso and Yoru ultimate usage.

A properly executed game plan and ultimate cycle should result in having the opportunity to have a cascading effect that regularly attacks important enemy economy rounds with the advantage of ultimates to consistently end up in odds that are stacked in your favor.

Enemy Ultimate Cycle and Trading Ultimates

Understanding enemy ultimates and their potential cascading effect is extremely important to countering their gameplan. Valorant strategy does not exist in a vacuum which means that you need to always account for enemy plans and resources. Understanding the value of your ultimates, your enemy's ultimates and the current economy and ultimate cycle situation are all things that are necessary to playing good Valorant.

For example, if the enemy attacking team has a Killjoy who has Lockdown and a KAYO who has NULL/CMD it is reasonable to expect at least one of those ultimates to be used to take the site. In some cases maybe both will be used and in others maybe one will be used after the plant to protect the site. In this example let's say that we have a Sova with Hunter's Fury and a Raze with Showstopper. If we know that the enemy wants to use Lockdown to take the site and NULL/CMD to protect the post plant then it may be a good idea to trade our Hunter's Fury to kill the Lockdown which stops the enemy's game plan and forces them to adapt. There is a good chance that our use of Hunter's Fury to kill the Lockdown will be countered by the enemy trading NULL/CMD to stop Hunter's Fury and protect the game plan of using Lockdown to take site.

In this situation the trade of Hunter's Fury ends up only disrupting the post plant plan and so the attackers probably win the trade of NULL/CMD for Hunter's Fury because Hunter's Fury is a pretty good ultimate to use on the retake that also was also not able to destroy the Lockdown. If the defenders understand this likely outcome they can make better decisions such as saving Hunter's Fury and Showstopper for retake and conceding the site. They could also decide to make an aggressive early round play with the Showstopper in an attempt to kill either Killjoy or KAYO to remove one of those ultimates from the round before it can be used. This may even result in KAYO using NULL/CMD in trade with Showstopper before the Killjoy is in position to use Lockdown which then allows Hunter's Fury to be traded for the Lockdown later in the round.

These types of trades are extremely important to consider in the ultimate cycle because it may be possible to consistently trade a lower value ultimate for a higher value enemy ultimate in a way that completely counters the enemy game plan.

Conclusion

Mistakes in ultimate usage and understanding of the ultimate cycle have a large impact on the overall momentum in a half of Valorant. Even using too many ultimates in a full-buy versus full-buy round can have a negative impact on the overall outcome of the half if it leads to a negative imbalance in the allied and enemy ultimate cycles. Sometimes winning one round may end up costing several more rounds later in the half as a result of poor ultimate economy management.

Using multiple ultimates in a round is a risky investment but can be the correct one if traded for enemy ultimates properly. This is especially true if the round is a hugely impactful round in the gun economy. The worst case scenario is using multiple ultimates only to lose the round but also the gun economy and ultimate economy as well.

This is why it is almost always a mistake to invest multiple ultimates into a low economy round early on in a half. The impact on the win percentage of that round is usually quite low and the negative impact on the rest of the half could be very high. There are always some exceptions to this rule. A team at an economic disadvantage that has managed to gain an advantage in a round against better weapons may find an opportunity to correctly use a high impact ultimate to win that round and flip the gun economy in their favor. Just keep in mind that there are always risks when investing such a powerful resource and there may be many future rounds impacted by decisions made in the current one.