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## Mayor takes 'Major' route

### Boulevard may be renamed after cyclist

TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

**WORCESTER**— Picture Worcester Center Boulevard decorated with posters and pictures of cyclists. Only, it won't be Worcester Center Boulevard anymore.

Under a proposal announced yesterday, one of Worcester's main arteries could be renamed Major Taylor Boulevard, honoring Marshall W. "Major" Taylor, Worcester's famous cyclist, and paying tribute to a man who rode his bike past all barriers, particularly racial prejudice. Proponents of renaming the street are hoping for a boulevard colored with artwork depicting cyclists, with a planned statue of Major Taylor at the nearby city library.

It's only fitting for a man who personified the city's diversity and spirit, said those who proposed the name change.

"We think it's time to honor someone who personifies everything special about Worcester," said Mayor Timothy P. Murray, who proposed the name change. Mr. Murray said he will submit an order to the full City Council to consider the proposal.

"It's also a fact that he overcame so many prejudices to be one of the first athletes to break the racial barrier in sports," the mayor said, calling Mr. Taylor the Michael Jordan or Tiger Woods of his day.

"He really was the Jackie Robinson of the early 1900s."

Major Taylor was one of the first international black athletes and considered the fastest bicycle rider in the world from 1898 to 1903, according to a biography provided by supporters. He was known as the Worcester Whirlwind, and the Colored Cyclone, and broke several world records, winning a world championship in 1899.

Mr. Taylor became known as Major because he wore a military uniform when performing bike stunts in Indiana, where he was born. He moved to Worcester at the age of 13 with his bicycling coach, Louis "Birdie" Munger.

Soon after arriving in the city, Major Taylor quickly dominated the steep George Street hill, off Main Street, climbing the incline twice in a 15-minute span, something unheard of at the time.

Today, local cyclists hold an annual time trial on George Street, along with other local events to raise money for a statue in Major Taylor's honor to be located outside the public library. It would be the first monument to an individual black person in Worcester.

"Major Taylor had to fight prejudice just to get on the starting line," said Lynne Tolman, a board member of the Major Taylor Association, which is raising funds for the statue.



Earlena Yelverton, left, president of the Worcester chapter of the NAACP, stands next to Mayor Timothy P. Murray as he announces a plan to rename Worcester Center Boulevard as Major Taylor Boulevard, in honor of Worcester's Marshall W. "Major" Taylor, who won a world cycling championship in 1899.

(T&G Staff/MARK C. IDE)

"It's really important that the backdrop to everyday life in the city (the boulevard) ... reflects the diversity of the city," she said. "Worcester can really take pride in Major Taylor's story."

Indeed, Major Taylor faced constant battles as a black man trying to race in bicycle competitions in America. It was one of the reasons he moved here from Indiana, according to his biography. Blacks were banned from amateur racing in the country in 1894, just as cycling surged. In the meantime, however, black racing clubs and groups started to emerge, giving Taylor his early opportunities.

In 1897, Major Taylor had to quit his quest to become national sprint points champion because blacks were banned from Southern races.

"When he did compete, he faced hostility from white riders, including threats and physical assault," according to his biography, provided by the Major Taylor Association.

Major Taylor did say in his own writings, however, that he found a new home of tolerance in Worcester. He joined the YMCA, something he had not been able to do in Indiana, and bought his own home in Columbus Park.

City Councilor Frederick Rushton, whose district covers that neighborhood, said Major Taylor was one of the area's best-kept secrets. Mr. Rushton was at yesterday's announcement, along with Councilors Michael C. Perotto and Barbara G. Haller.

"Major Taylor broke the color line and out-cycled the best," said Earlena Yelverton, president of the Worcester chapter of the NAACP.

Gloria Hall, from the Columbus Park neighborhood, said she was proud to buy, and now restore, the 4 Hobson Ave. home where Major Taylor lived.

"Major Taylor not only climbed George (Street) hill as a cyclist, but he climbed higher and inspired so many of us, and inspires us today," said the Rev. Roosevelt Hughes, president of the Worcester Black Clergy Alliance and pastor of John Street Baptist Church, where Mr. Taylor was a parishioner.