

## Height of success in 24 seconds

Steep task conquered by bike competitors

**By Melanie Mangum  
T&G STAFF**

WORCESTER- As Lance Armstrong was pedaling his way to a sixth consecutive win in the Tour de France yesterday, bicyclists faced a much shorter, but daunting time trial event in the city.

The record time to beat? Just under 24 seconds.

This is the third year of the George Street Bike Challenge for Major Taylor. The event is named for the first African-American world champion cyclist, Marshall W. "Major" Taylor, who lived and trained in Worcester.

The event was a success for the Major Taylor Association, which raised about \$5,500.

"We're very pleased," said Lynne Tolman, spokeswoman for the association. "We had more sponsors, more riders, and made more money from the raffle."

Proceeds from the event will go toward the construction of a monument to honor Mr. Taylor, who held seven world records in 1898.

Major Taylor, once called the "Worcester Whirlwind," won the world 1-mile championship in Montreal in 1899. Having lived in Worcester since 1895, he trained on the streets of Worcester, including George Street, which at the time was an unpaved road.

Cyclists today have it a little easier, riding up a paved George Street, with bikes that have more than the one gear Mr. Taylor rode with.

But the steep grade and length of the course still make it a daunting challenge. The George Street climb involves a 500-foot sprint up a hill with an average grade of 18 percent. In comparison, the steepest climbs in the Tour de France reach average grades of 8 percent to 9 percent, although the length of the climb is much longer.

Peter Howard, owner of Barney's Bicycle Shop and an organizer of the event, said the course is unique, even worldwide, for a time trial event.

"It's unusual because it's so short and steep," Mr. Howard said. "It's also a lot less formal than most time trials. We welcome anyone who wants to try it, whether they're in blue jeans on a mountain bike or in full racing gear with race bikes."

Riders raced up the hill individually, in one-minute intervals, trying for an elusive time of under half a minute.

Most of the riders yesterday wore brightly-colored racing gear and helmets and took the challenge on bikes made specifically for racing. A few others opted for mountain bikes or fixed-gear bikes for sprinting. There was even a BMX bike.



Matt Loftus, 25, of Worcester, approaches the top of the George Street Bike Challenge for Major Taylor yesterday. He placed fourth in his category (men 18-34) and sixth overall. (T&G Staff/ CHRISTINE PETERSON)

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PAUL CURLEY  
35-49 DIVISION WINNER

Thomas Gomes, a Rhode Islander, turned in an impressive time on his BMX Trail Boss bike. Knocking over cones at the standing start of the race, he clocked in at 34.38 seconds.

Mr. Gomes' racing bike was stolen the day before the event, but entering on a BMX bike was no problem for him - he did it in last year's event as well.

"I came in a little under 33 seconds last year," Mr. Gomes, a regular BMX rider, said. "BMX races are quick sprints, and so is this race."

Taking the top time in yesterday's event was Brian Chapman of Providence. The 30th entrant in the race, Mr. Chapman had a different technique than most riders. While keeping in a straight line, his bike teetered wildly from side to side as he pumped up the hill that some cyclists were calling a "quad-buster." His technique paid off, as he came in first with a time of 24.13 seconds.

There were seven divisions of the event. Ryan M. Bateman, 15, of Worcester, competed in the juniors category - girls and boys ages 12-17. He didn't win a medal, but he did win a raffle prize - the children's book "Major Taylor, Champion Cyclist."

Mr. Bateman rode his mother's 20-year-old bike, opting for casual gear - cargo shorts and a T-shirt. Only recently interested in bike racing, he competed well in his first race event, pulling in a time of 37.63.

"It's not the bike, it's the power of the rider that matters," Mr. Bateman said.

There were many serious cyclists, including those from the Seven Hills Wheelmen, which co-sponsored the event.

One very serious cyclist was Paul J. Curley. At 49, he is a current national criterium champion in his class. And Mr. Curley, of Taunton, had a little more than pride riding on a fast time in yesterday's event. His friend, former state Rep. Kevin O'Sullivan, president of Massachusetts Biomedical Initiatives, of Worcester, put out a wager of dinner for four - paid for by the one with a slower time.

Mr. Curley graciously granted Mr. O'Sullivan, "a runner, not a biker," a handicap of 10 seconds and the use of a race bike. Mr. O'Sullivan estimated he could finish the course in under a minute. Mr. Curley had recently finished another bike race in Connecticut.

"I'm hoping his legs are tired," Mr. O'Sullivan said.

As it turns out, Mr. O'Sullivan barely needed the handicap, finishing with a respectable time of 42.28. Mr. Curley still beat him, coming in at 25.85 and winning the gold medal in the men's 35-49 age division.

"I don't see it as a hill," Mr. Curley said after the race. "I looked at it as more of a sprint."

The event was great for spectators as well, who lined the sides of the George Street hill and waved noisemakers and blew bubbles.

"There aren't many (bike) races that are good for spectators, where you can see the whole thing," said Walter G. Trice, of Holden, who came with his wife and granddaughter. The Trices, avid cycling race spectators, came to the event while the last day of the Tour de France was being taped at home.

The medalists and their times:

Men's 18-34 Division: 1st, Brian Chapman, Providence, 24:13; 2nd, Ari DeWilde, New Hartford, Conn., 25:25; 3rd, Jake Hollenbach, Burlington, Vt., 25:71.

Men's 35-49 Division: 1st, Paul Curley, Taunton, 25:85; 2nd, Thomas Orsini, Leominster, 25:88; 3rd, Pat Convery, Shrewsbury, 27:56.

Men's 50-plus: 1st, Chris Fuhrmann, Holden, 35:41; 2nd, John Pare, West Boylston, 36:40; 3rd, Mark Dubois, Haddam, Conn., 37:18.

Women's 18-34 Division: 1st place: Amy Waterman, Brimfield, 40:34; 2nd, Kyrsten Koebach, Ayer, 42:06; 3rd, Jennie Allen, Worcester, 44:62.

Women's 35-plus Division: 1st place: Kathan Horne, Worcester, 44:50; 2nd; Kathy Carlson, Millbury, 48:22; 3rd, Cynthia Rup, Boylston, 48:94.

Junior Division: 1st, Dylan O'Sullivan, 16, Worcester, 31:13; 2nd, Brandon Hall, 14, Sutton, 31:40; 3rd, Michael Urbanowski, 15, Paxton, 34:63.

Public Safety Division: 1st, Ray Anair, Winchendon police, 48:64; 2nd, Rodney Witkos, Worcester EMS, 85:40.

» [Event results and information](#)

[www.majortaylorassociation.org/events.shtml](http://www.majortaylorassociation.org/events.shtml)