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Bicyclists rise to George St. challenge

Major Taylor Blvd. to be unveiled

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WORCESTER— Jennifer O'Brien, standing beside a bicycle with paper-thin tires and an odometer reading 4,000 miles, glanced up yesterday at the painfully steep, craggy George Street. Her eyes widened.

"I've never done this," said the 44-year-old Millbury resident, wearing khaki shorts and a pink T-shirt. "I hope I can make it up."

About a minute later — 64.53 seconds, to be exact — and after much huffing, puffing and quad pumping, she made it to the top.

Many others, from teenagers to 70-year-old John David of Worcester, battled the unforgiving hill during the annual Bike Challenge for Major Taylor.

The fifth-annual race raised money for a monument to Marshall W. "Major" Taylor of Worcester, one of the world's first African-American sports stars.

Thanks to local lobbying, legislators recently set aside \$205,000 in state money for the statue, which will stand in front of the Worcester Public Library. The city also recently renamed Worcester Center Boulevard in the cyclist's honor. A ceremonial unveiling of Major Taylor Boulevard will take place at 1:30 p.m. today near the entrance to the DCU Center.

Major Taylor won several championships around the world. His nickname was the "Colored Cyclone," and he frequently trained on 19th-century Worcester streets on his one-speed bicycle.

George Street was one of his regular training runs.

Yesterday, cyclists of all ages assembled there in his honor, ready to take on the challenge of the arduous climb.

There were mountain bikes and 10-speeds, BMX racers and tandems equipped for multiple riders. Some of the cycles were rusted, others shined and sparkled.

Hundreds of spectators, sitting on curbs or standing in the shade of trees, clapped and hooted as the riders chugged up the hill.

Cindy Brown of South Grafton was among those onlookers, cheering on her husband, Clayton Brown, who raced up the hill on a 9-speed road bike.

"It takes a lot of hard work to get up that hill," she said as she stood with her 9-month-old daughter, Caitlin, and her miniature schnauzer, Petey.

"I don't think I'd be able to do it."

Just then, her husband rode over and dismounted his bike.

"I was too slow," he lamented.



Danny Estevez, of Worcester, digs in yesterday at the top of George Street as he finishes the annual George Street challenge.
(T&G Staff/CHRISTINE PETERSON)

His time? An impressive 27.85 seconds, a speed that ranked him 20th overall in the competition.

"I like riding up hills," he said as he sipped from a bottle of water. "It's fun."

Everyday, he rides roughly 48 miles to and from his workplace in West Boylston, he said.

"I enjoy it."

"I thought you were going up there pretty fast," his wife interjected.

"My heart thinks so, too," Mr. Brown said, tapping his chest.

Other riders, though, seemed to think the hill was a cinch.

"It was no struggle at all," said Daniel Estevez, 17. "I was just trying to get up there as fast as I could."

The Worcester teenager finished first in his division, with a time of 23.35 seconds.

He races competitively, he said, and hopes to make a professional career out cycling.

These days, he trains about 20 hours a week with Frank McCormack, a cyclo-cross champion.

His ultimate goal? The Tour de France.

"I like the sport because you can do things no other sport lets you do," Mr. Estevez said.

"You can travel around the world, see what it has to offer."

George Street Bike Challenge

for Major Taylor, 2006

Men 18-34: First, 23.13 (seconds), David Flynn, 21, of Shrewsbury; second, 23.16, Rich Hollenbeck, 21, Wallingford, Conn.; third (tie), 25.22, Brian Chapman, 32, of Providence and George Costa, 29, of Middleboro.

Men 35-49: First, 25.28, Michael Cole, no age listed, of Marlboro; second, 26.15, Erik Olson, 35, of Worcester; third, 27.62, Peter Howard of Paxton.

Men 50-59: First, 30.97, Jack Whiteley, 57, of Somers, Conn.; second, 31.00, David Goodwin, 50, of Amherst; third, 33.00, Jonathan Rourke, 51, of Belmont.

Men 60+: First, 46.57, Eddie Crawford, 62, of Hastings -on-Hudson, N.Y.; second, 46.91, Richard Johnson, 62, of Jefferson; third, 49.94, George French, 61, of Lunenburg.

Juniors 12-15: First, 32.53, Sam Stevens, 15, of Spencer; second, 39.28, Ryan Packard, 13, of Arlington; third, 40.57, Zachary Angelo, 12, of Spencer,

Juniors 16-17: First, 23.35, Danny Estevez, 17, of Worcester; second, 27.25, Harrison McCann, 16, of Rutland; third, 29.75, Alden Ruml, 16, of Lexington.

Women 18-34: First, 36.66, Katie Paul Oliver, 34, of Worcester; second, 36.85, Emily Klass, 26, of Providence; third, 40.07, Hoshaiah Barcynski, 26, of Providence.

Women 35+: First, 47.01, Kathan Horne, 40, of Worcester; second, 57.35, Mary Sharkey, 56, of Grosvenordale; third, 60.38, Lynne Tolman, 43, of Worcester.

Tandem: First, 33.22, John Menard, 23, of Whitinsville and Kenny Ambach, 26, of Sterling; second, 45.75, Mark, 44, and Diane Shelley, 53, both of Holden.