

Kudos and Commendations

SCULPTURE HONORS CHAMPION BICYCLIST



The Major Taylor monument by Maryland sculptor Antonio Tobias Mendez depicts the 1899 world bicycling champion.



Archon Dallas C. Brown, Jr., of Alpha Lambda Boulé, Savannah, a retired army brigadier general and the only grandchild of the 1899 world bicycling champion Marshall W. “Major” Taylor (1878–1932), says he and his family have been quiet about their once-famous ancestor because the Indiana native’s remarkable life story was just “reflected glory” on them.

They were nevertheless honored and humbled to take part in a tribute to Major Taylor on May 21 in Worcester, Massachusetts, featuring the unveiling of a larger-than-life bronze-and-granite monument outside the Worcester Public Library. The sculpture of “the Worcester Whirlwind,” created by Maryland artist Antonio Tobias Mendez, is the city’s first monument to an African American and a long-overdue memorial to a man who overcame terrible racial prejudice.

Major Taylor was the first black international sports superstar, earning worldwide adulation and a sizable fortune in bicycling’s heyday, but he ended up dying in poverty and obscurity during the Great Depression.

His first cycling successes – and the nickname Major, for a brass-buttoned uniform he wore while performing tricks on a bike – came when he was a teenager working at a bike shop in Indianapolis. In 1895 he moved to Worcester with his mentor, former bike racer Louis “Birdie” Munger, partly to take advantage of a more tolerant racial atmosphere.

Still, he faced closed doors and open hostility, to which he responded with dignity and forgiveness. Despite race-based exclusions, threats, political maneuvering in the governance of the sport, dirty tricks on the track and even physical assaults, Taylor became *The Fastest Bicycle Rider in the World* – which is the title of his 1928 autobiography.

Featured speakers at the dedication ceremony were three-time Tour de France winner Greg LeMond and three-time Olympic track-and-field medalist Edwin Moses.

“Courage is what makes Taylor’s career so remarkable,” LeMond said. “I hope this statue can be a symbol of hope and, more important, courage.... Society has advanced greatly in the last hundred years. We’ve got a presidential race that could have the first black man as the president.... I’m voting for Obama... and I do hope that it [the statue] does inspire others to overcome and think about humans as humans, not by race or color.”

Moses said that Taylor was finally being given “his rightful spot at the top” of a list of outstanding black athletes



Archon Dallas C. Brown, Jr., and Edwin Moses stand in front of the statue depicting Brown’s grandfather.



Greg LeMond; Karen Brown Donovan, a great-granddaughter of Major Taylor; Lynne Tolman and Bob Nasdor, board members of the Major Taylor Association; Archon Dallas C. Brown, Jr.; and Edwin Moses, honorary national chairman of the Major Taylor Association

Photo Credit: Christine Peterson, Worcester Telegram & Gazette

Photo Credit: Antonio Tobias Mendez

who suffered discrimination: boxer Jack Johnson, baseball players Jackie Robinson and Henry Aaron, tennis player Arthur Ashe, runners Jesse Owens and Tommie Smith, and boxer Muhammad Ali.

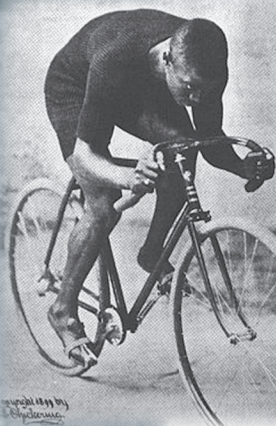
Other world-class athletes attending the tribute included John Howard, 1981 Ironman Triathlon world champion and cycling land-speed record holder, and Nelson Vails, 1984 Olympic silver medalist in track cycling and the first African American since Major Taylor to triumph in world cycling competition.

Before the ceremony, about a hundred cyclists from across the country, many wearing custom jerseys bearing a picture of Major Taylor, pedaled a thirty-mile loop in Worcester and surrounding towns with members of a local cycling club, the Seven Hills Wheelmen. That evening Clark University presented a panel discussion featuring authors and historians who explored the topic "Race, Sports and Major Taylor's Legacy."

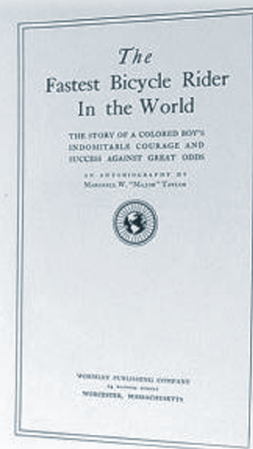
The \$250,000 monument, which was commissioned by the Worcester-based nonprofit Major Taylor Association, Inc., was nearly ten years in the making. It was funded by private donations and a \$205,000 appropriation from the state of Massachusetts. In donating the statue to the library, the Major Taylor Association also donated \$15,000 to establish a maintenance endowment.

For more information about Major Taylor and the monument, visit majortaylorassociation.org.

Archon Julius S. Scott, Jr.
 Graptee, Alpha Lambda Boulé



Major Taylor



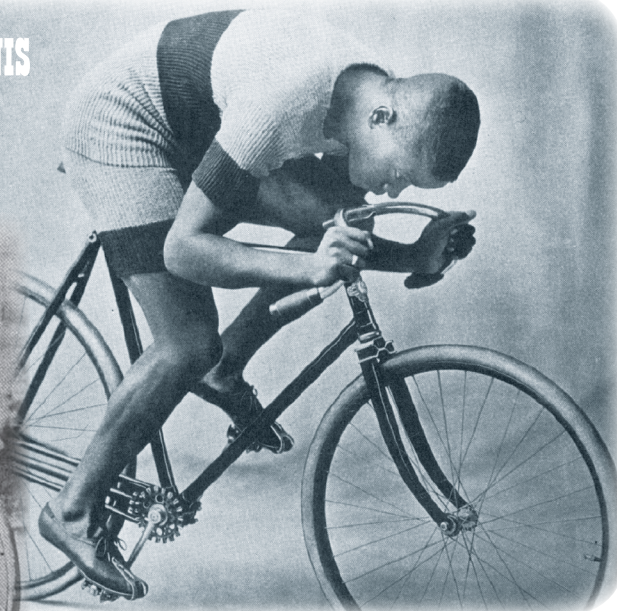
Major Taylor wrote a biography, *The Fastest Bicycle Rider in the World*, which included these excellent life lessons for young athletes:

A DOZEN DON'TS

- Don't try to "gyp."
- Don't be a pie biter.
- Don't keep late hours.
- Don't use intoxicants.
- Don't be a big bluffer.
- Don't eat cheap candies.
- Don't get a swelled head.
- Don't use tobacco in any form.
- Don't fail to live a clean life.
- Don't forget to play the game fair.
- Don't take in unfair advantage of an opponent.
- Don't forget the practice of good sportsmanship.



FINIS





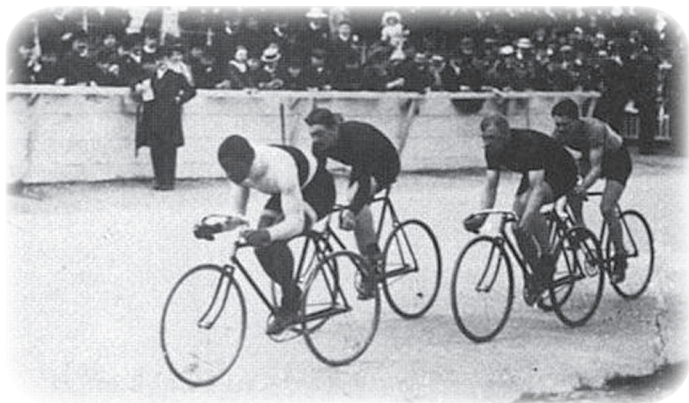
Major Taylor's first European bike race was held at Berlin's Friedenau track in April 1901.



Marshall Walter "Major" Taylor (USA) and Don Walker (Australia) pictured together in Sydney in 1903. Taylor was the world champion in cycling and the two rivals became great friends, regularly riding before packed houses at the Sydney Cricket Ground.



Major Taylor, holding his daughter, talks to the press in Paris in 1907.



Major Taylor racing in Paris in 1908

November 26, 1878 – Marshall W. Taylor is born in rural Indiana to a black couple who moved north from Kentucky around the time of the Civil War.

1886–91 – Taylor is raised and educated in the home of a wealthy white Indianapolis family who employ his father as coachman. The family gives him a bicycle.

1892 – Taylor is hired to perform cycling stunts outside an Indianapolis bike shop. His costume is a soldier's uniform, which earns him the nickname "Major." He wins his first bike race that year.

Fall 1895 – Taylor moves to Worcester, Massachusetts, with his employer and racing manager, Louis "Birdie" Munger, who plans to open a bike factory there.

August 1896 – Taylor unofficially breaks two world track records, for paced and unpaced 1-mile rides, in Indianapolis. But his feat offends white sensibilities and he is banned from Indy's Capital City track.

December 1896 – Taylor finishes eighth in his first professional race, a six-day endurance event at Madison Square Garden in New York.

1898 – Taylor holds seven world records, including the 1-mile paced standing start (1:41.4).

August 10, 1899 – Taylor wins the world 1-mile championship in Montreal, defeating Boston rival Tom Butler. Taylor is the second black world-champion athlete, after bantamweight boxer George Dixon's title fights in 1890–91.

November 15, 1899 – Taylor knocks the 1-mile record down to 1:19.

September 1900 – Thwarted in previous seasons by racism, Taylor finally gets to complete the national championship series and becomes the American sprint champion.

October 1900–January 1901 – Taylor performs in a vaudeville act with Charles "Mile-a-Minute" Murphy, racing on rollers on theater stages across Massachusetts.

March–June 1901 – Taylor competes in Europe, which he has long resisted because his Baptist beliefs preclude racing on Sundays. He beats every European champion.

March 21, 1902 – Taylor marries Daisy V. Morris in Ansonia, Connecticut.

1902–04 – Taylor races all over Europe, Australia, New Zealand and the United States, with brief rests in Worcester.

1907 – Taylor makes a brief comeback after taking a two-year hiatus.

1910 – Taylor retires from racing at age 32. Over the next two decades, unsuccessful business ventures and illness sap his fortune.

1930 – Impoverished and estranged from his wife, Taylor drives to Chicago, stays at the YMCA and tries to sell copies of his self-published 1928 autobiography, *The Fastest Bicycle Rider in the World*.

June 21, 1932 – Taylor dies at age 53 in the charity ward of Cook County Hospital, Chicago, and is buried in an unmarked grave.

May 23, 1948 – A group of former pro bike racers, with money donated by Schwinn Bicycle Co. owner Frank Schwinn, has Taylor's remains exhumed and reburied in a more prominent part of Mount Glenwood Cemetery in Illinois.