

IN OUR OPINION

A proper tribute

Major Taylor statue a laudable community effort

A century after his athletic heyday, a local hero whose story was fading into the mists of time is getting a fitting memorial. The community has reason to be proud not only of his accomplishments, but also of the decade-long effort by the Major Taylor Association, public officials and other community members whose hard work transformed the idea of a lasting tribute into a reality.

Ceremonies at the Worcester Public Library today will unveil an impressive memorial that pays tribute to Marshall “Major” Taylor, a world champion cyclist who lived for most of his adult life in Worcester.

At a time when competitive cycling was the premier professional sport in the country, Major Taylor was among the very best. A formidable cyclist, he moved from Indiana to Worcester as a young man in 1895. He set seven world records in 1898 and won the world cycling championship in Montreal the next year.

The memorial also recognizes his pioneering role in breaking down racial barriers in professional sports. Even after escaping the institutionalized racism of the South and Midwest at the time, he frequently endured the overt bigotry of spectators and other cyclists. Like Jackie Robinson a half-century later, he refused to be intimidated, prevailing by dint of his athletic ability, determination and strength of character.

Professional cycling was lucrative, and Major Taylor used part of his winnings to buy a house in Worcester. In 1930, though, his money depleted, he moved to Chicago, where he died two years later at age 54.

Scheduled to speak at today’s dedication are three-time Tour de France winner Greg LeMond — like Major Taylor a world champion — and Olympic hurdler Edwin C. Moses, two-time gold medalist and honorary national chairman of the Major Taylor Association. The memorial by sculptor Antonio Tobias Mendez is the first in the city of an African-American.

Congratulations to all the community residents and public officials whose efforts made this fitting tribute possible.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED: Dedication ceremonies are noon to 1 p.m. at Worcester Public Library. A panel discussion, “Race, Sports and Major Taylor’s Legacy,” moderated by Boston Globe columnist Derrick Z. Jackson, is at 7 p.m. in the library’s Saxe Room. Learn more about Major Taylor and today’s events online at www.majortaylorassociation.org.