

Bicycle legend memorial's unveiling finally set



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Some things are really worth waiting for.

In the late 1990s, a group of bicycle enthusiasts and others thought it would be a great idea to erect a memorial in Worcester to Marshall W. "Major" Taylor, a professional cyclist who set seven world records in 1898 and captured the world cycling title a year later.

Mr. Taylor was a black American from Indiana who made Worcester his home. Unfortunately, like baseball great Jackie Robinson, he frequently faced prejudice from rivals and spectators alike.

Mr. Taylor, however, refused to let racists deter him from his goal of becoming the best in the bicycle racing world.

The local people formed the Major Taylor Association and began the effort to construct a statue to the "Worcester Whirlwind" in front of the Worcester Public Library at Salem Square.

In 2000, they selected Maryland artist Antonio Tobias Mendez to design the sculpture.

Mr. Mendez, who had sculpted memorials of former Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall and pitching legend Nolan Ryan, was one of about 60 artists from around the country who had expressed interest in the project.

Worcester area residents became excited about the plans, but, like similar projects, it took awhile to raise the money.

In 2006, the fundraising campaign got a mighty boost when the state appropriated \$205,000 for the memorial. Along with at least \$70,000 in private donations, the association was finally able to contract out for the work.

On May 21, the statue will be formally unveiled at a ceremony that will be attended by three-time Tour de France winner Greg LeMond and three-time Olympic medalist Edwin Moses.

Mr. LeMond, who won a world championship in cycle racing 90 years after Mr. Taylor did, and Mr. Moses, a star track and field athlete, were each named "Sports Illustrated Sportsman of the Year."

Before the noontime ceremony, the Seven Hills Wheelmen and the Charles River Wheelmen's Wednesday Wheelers will lead a 30-mile bicycle ride that starts and ends at the library.

Later that day, the Clark University History Department and the Higgins School of Humanities will sponsor a panel discussion on race, sports and Mr. Taylor's legacy.

The panelists will include Andrew Ritchie, who authored a book about Major Taylor; Janette T. Greenwood, a Clark associate professor who compiled a case study of Worcester County's black community in the late 1800s; David V. Herlihy, the author of "Bicycle: The History," and C. Keith Harrison, associate professor of sports business management at the University of Central Florida and associate director of the Institute for Diversity & Ethics in Sport.

Lynne Tolman, an association board member, said that some descendants of Major Taylor are expected to join in the day's festivities.

The two-sided sculpture wall is 10 feet high and 12 feet, 4 inches wide.

One side will be inscribed with text about Major Taylor's life under a 4-foot-by-8-foot bronze bas relief of cyclists racing.

The other side will feature a larger-than-life, three-dimensional figure of Mr. Taylor with his bicycle in front of a velodrome.

Ms. Tolman said the bronze casting for the statue has been completed and the stone has been cut.

"Now, all we need is some warm weather to put it up," Ms. Tolman said.