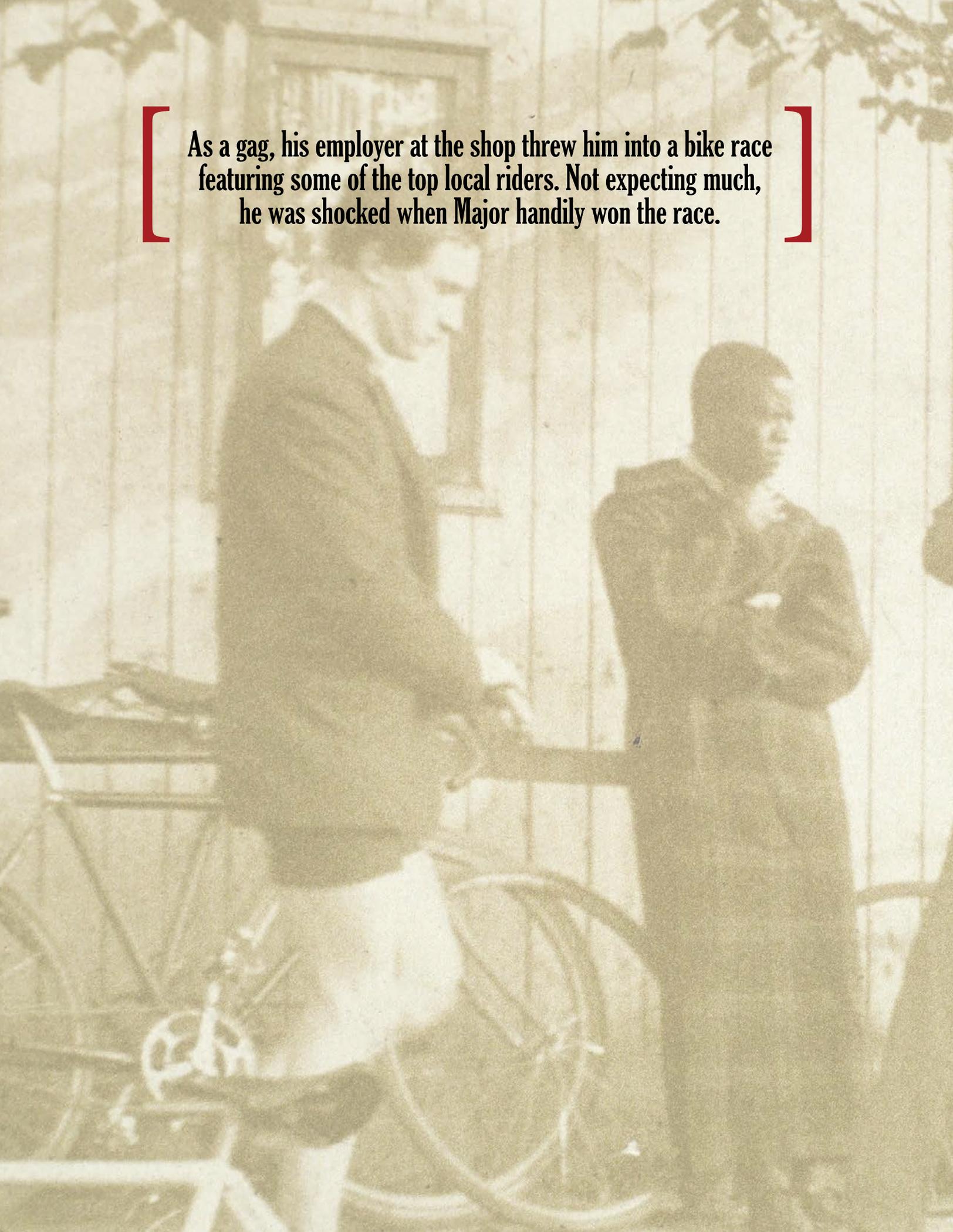




# THE BLACK CYCLONE

The Book and Film

**As a gag, his employer at the shop threw him into a bike race featuring some of the top local riders. Not expecting much, he was shocked when Major handily won the race.**





# Major Taylor

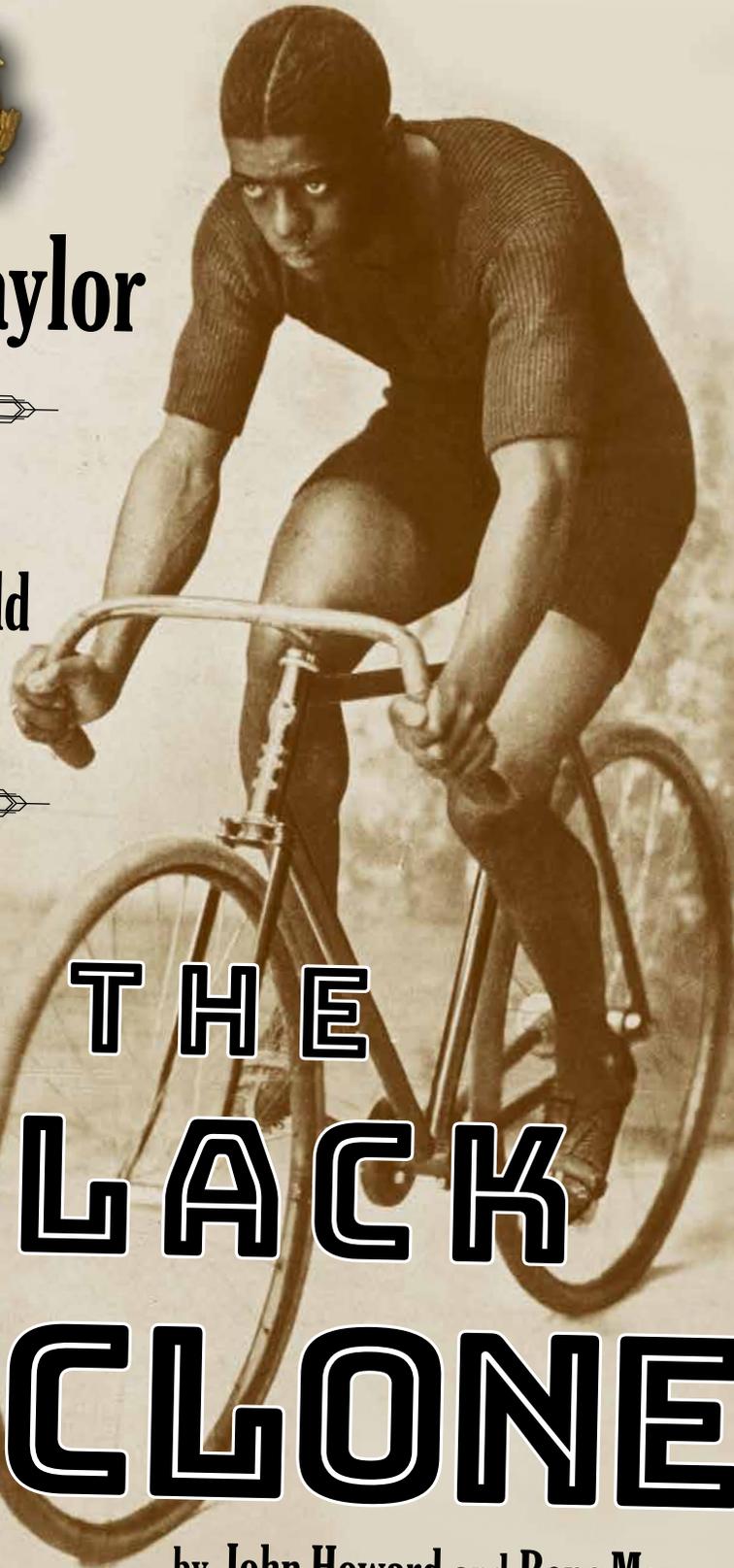


A Hero  
The World  
Forgot



# THE BLACK CYCLONE

by John Howard and Rene Maurer





# THE BLACK CYCLONE

**F**ortune smiled on young Marshall Taylor the day he was given a bicycle. This black teenager developed the talent and courage to become champion of the most popular sport in turn-of-the-century America. American sports fans went to the ball game when the seats were sold out at the many cycling tracks.

As a boy working in an Indianapolis bike shop, Taylor performed acrobatic tricks on his bicycle that drew animated crowds to watch him entertain. As a gag, his employer threw him into a bicycle race featuring top local riders. Not expecting much except some publicity, he was shocked when Marshall handily won the race.

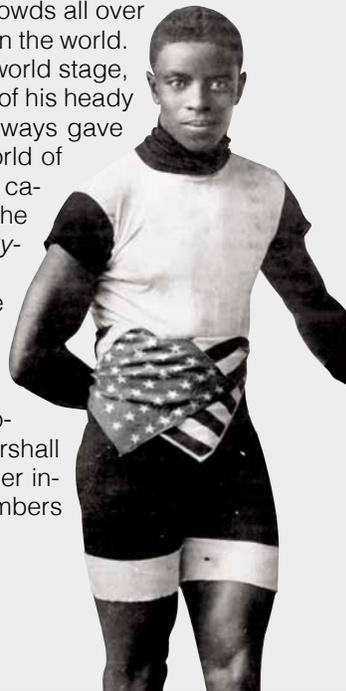
After this unlikely victory and under the watchful eye of lifelong older friend, coach and bike manufacturer Birdie Munger, Taylor started training and racing in earnest. Still in his teens, he quickly became a formidable racer on both the road and track. There were only a couple of black racers on the circuit but Marshall became the star and the crowds followed. This pocket-sized racer had a ferocious final sprint that few riders could match. Skillfully using the polished tactics Munger and others had taught him, Marshall was a threat in any race in which he managed to gain entry.

**Some of the top riders refused to race against him, yet he climbed to the pinnacle of American cycling, then won the World Championship in 1899, his story continued in Europe. Racing against top European riders, he became the cycling star of the continent.**

The American racing establishment of the day was not pleased with the talent and success of an African-American. Many white riders rode not to win but to make sure Taylor didn't. Battling overt racism on and off the track, only his extraordinary balance, courage and ring savvy skills kept him out of trouble. Some of the top riders refused to race against him, yet he climbed to the pinnacle of American cycling, then won the World Championship in 1899, his story continued in Europe. Racing against top European riders, he became the cycling star of the continent. The Europeans applauded both his African heritage and his athleticism. He entered their velodromes wearing an African robe like a championship boxer. Taylor drew huge crowds all over Europe and Australia, soon becoming the highest paid athlete in the world.

Taylor was the first great American sports star on the world stage, yet is virtually unknown in American sports history. In spite of his heady success, Marshall was a modest, thoughtful man who always gave the Holy Spirit credit for protecting him in the brutal world of turn-of-the-century bicycle racing. Throughout his long career, he steadfastly refused to race on Sundays. The world he lived in was also brutal and *The Black Cyclone* chronicles his amazing personal life as well.

The son of a coachman for a wealthy white Indianapolis family, Marshall received the rarity of a private education in a white world. He and the son of his father's employer became close childhood friends and their education was provided by private tutors. A precocious child, Marshall taught himself to play the piano and several other instruments. Joining a youth band where the members



**The Major was a model and beacon of pride and accomplishment to African-Americans during the Jim Crow years. His courage, resolve and relevance speak eloquently to today's discussions of race in sports and politics.**

wore mock military uniforms, Marshall's "rank" as "Major" quickly became his life-long nickname.

From his coach and employer, Birdie Munger, Taylor learned the trade of machinist. The Major designed and built his own racing bikes and the mechanical components that helped him win. In spite of his success he was a modest, thoughtful man. He married the vivacious Daisy Morris of Hudson, New York, and the couple had one daughter, Marshall's beloved Sydney. It is through Sydney that I developed a kinship with this famous bike racer.

The Major was a model and beacon of pride and accomplishment to African-Americans during the Jim Crow years. His courage, resolve and relevance speak eloquently to today's discussions of race in sports and politics. This 20th century sports hero never succumbed to racist threats and brutality that would nearly cost him his life. Marshall Taylor was the first black sports hero of the modern era and yet, until now, he has been largely forgotten.



**Marshall Taylor was the first black sports hero of the modern era and yet, until now, he has been largely forgotten.**

## Somerville, New Jersey May, 1989

Sunny and humid, my shirt was sticking to my skin under the coat of my best (and only) suit. Approaching the outdoor reception at the hotel, I loosened my tie slightly. Spotting a small, smartly-dressed, elderly black woman, I waved as I caught her eye. Her hair was a little grayer and a few more wrinkles creased her face but she still stood erect, smiling in my direction. Sydney Taylor Brown and I exchanged a warm hug and she recalled my many visits to her Pittsburgh home where I'd interviewed her extensively about her late father.

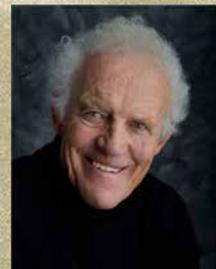
It was the third U.S. Bicycling Hall of Fame awards ceremony and much time had passed since cycling had been one of the most popular spectator sports. The Hall of Fame had not been founded until 1987 so there were two classes of inductees: present-day cyclists and those predating the Hall of Fame. On this day, I was to share the honor of induction with my friend Audrey McElmury, America's first world road racing champion; Jack Heid, the Yankee Clipper; Bobby Walthour Sr., the Dixie Flyer; Arthur Zimmerman, the Flying Yankee and the Jersey Skeeter, and my fiercely-competitive kindred spirit, Marshall "Major" Taylor. Fifty-seven years after his death, a plaque commemorating Major Taylor's induction was presented to his 87-year-old daughter.

Sydney Taylor Brown's memories of her father were not of his glory days that preceded her birth but of shared experiences with her father that she'd never publicly revealed, revelations adding rich threads to the tapestry that illustrates who Marshall Walter Taylor really was. The intricate weaving of the personalities and the roles they played brings *The Black Cyclone* to life. This is the story of Major Taylor and men and women who lived in an era that is still relevant in 21st century America. A time when bicycle racing reigned supreme of all sports in the United States, Europe and Australia.

In writing *The Black Cyclone*, I have drawn from both public and private archives, travel and microfiche labs on three continents. Part of what makes this book unique is my extensive interviews not only with Sydney but also the Major's friends and contemporaries. Reaching many of them in the closing months of their lives, their and Sydney's personal details uniquely enrich the story.

Some of the top riders refused to race against him, yet he climbed to the pinnacle of American cycling, then won the World Championship in 1899, his story continued in Europe. Racing against top European riders, he became the cycling star of the continent.

After more than three decades of research, writing, and editing, this work is historically accurate, culled and fermented into the novel *The Black Cyclone*. —John Howard



**John Howard** is a 3-time Olympic cyclist from the United States, who set a land speed record of 152.2 miles per hour while motor-pacing on a bicycle on July 20, 1985 on Utah's Bonneville Salt Flats.

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# THE BLACK CYCLONE

## Endorsements

**Earvin “Magic” Johnson**, former NBA star

Major Taylor has to be the greatest African-American sports hero nobody has heard of. Howard and Maurer tell a compelling story.

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**Greg Le Mond**, three-time Tour de France winner and Sports Illustrated’s former Athlete of the Year.

Howard and Maurer’s *The Black Cyclone* relives the sport of cycling in its prime, when people went to the ball game only after the seats at the bike track were sold out.

It was an era dominated by Major Taylor, the man who became the world’s first African-American sports hero.

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**Peter Nye**, US Bicycling Hall of Fame, author of *Hearts of Lions*, and America’s foremost cycling historian.

History is a brutal editor, and one of its victims is Marshall “Major” Taylor—the first African-American to cross the color line in professional international sports. Now authors John Howard, himself a three-time U.S. Olympian and Ironman Triathlon champion, and his co-author Rene Maurer have rescued one of America’s sports heroes in their welcome book, *The Black Cyclone*.

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**Lynne Tolman**, president,  
Major Taylor Association  
[www.majortaylorassociation.org](http://www.majortaylorassociation.org)

Major Taylor’s hard road to glory demands to be depicted on the big screen, and John Howard’s telling of the story is uniquely informed and passionate. Howard, a world record cyclist himself, and his team eloquently convey the thirst for speed that fuels a champion against the odds.

*The Black Cyclone* documentary will bring a trailblazer out of the shadows and inspire new generations to overcome. We’re going with a winner!

**Bill Walton**, former NBA star and cyclist

No one tells a champion’s story like another great champion. John Howard and his co-author Rene Maurer tell a powerful, compelling, yet bittersweet story. *The Black Cyclone* is the untold dramatic saga of a legendary, pioneering black cycling sports icon who battled unrelenting racism in America to become an incredible hero on all fronts, against all odds, more than a century ago. John Howard has been King of the Mountain for five decades now. This is a fine and provocative work in which Howard and Maurer turn a big gear. It is an honor and privilege to be associated with this masterpiece.

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**Rashid Bahati**, father of  
cycling champion Rashaan Bahati

As the Executive Director of the Bahati Foundation, and on behalf of President Rashaan Bahati and the entire Board of Directors, we endorse the novel based on a true story about Marshall Walter (Major) Taylor, *The Black Cyclone*. This undertaking by John Howard and Rene Maurer, which is an extremely important work, captures the life and time of one of America’s most amazing athletes. As our country and the world wrestles with all types of injustice and inequity, your book on “Major” Taylor provides insights to the life of a true American hero, one who stood against negative forces as a shining example of perseverance and determination, one who overcame the odds to become a champion on and off the bike.

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**Lonnie Ali**, wife of Muhammad Ali

Major Taylor lived his life with the idea of excellence, and that’s one of the things that Muhammad Ali stands for.