

# 11.

## Frank Louis Kramer: An American Champion Bicycle Racer

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**Frank Kramer, the Racer**  
 Frank Louis Kramer [Figure 1] was the American National Professional Cycling Champion for 16 consecutive years, from 1901 to 1916, and then again in

1918 and 1921, sliding to second place in the standings in 1919 and 1920 Kramer was looking strong to clinch the title again in 1922 when he abruptly decided to retire from racing at the age of

42 after faltering in a championship qualifying race in early July. Kramer attributed his performance problem to sleepless nights caused by the stress of racing at his age.

Frank was born in Evansville, Indiana, USA, on September 15, 1880. His parents sent him East in the 1890s for health reasons, and to avoid an outbreak of tuberculosis<sup>1</sup>, with a bicycle for exercise to live with friends in East Orange,

1 "Frank Kramer," <https://www.museoeciclismo.it/content/articoli/3158-Frank-Kramer/index.html>, last visited Apr. 13, 2024

National Cycle Sprint Championship results 1902-1922						
Position	1 <sup>st</sup>		2 <sup>nd</sup>		3 <sup>rd</sup>	
Year	Points	Name	Points	Name	Points	Name
	1902	128	Kramer	57	Major Taylor	38 Iver Lawson
	1903	62	Kramer	50	Iver Lawson	21 McFarland
	1904	69	Kramer	29	W.S Fenn	20 M. Biddell
	1905	58	Kramer	48	Iver Lawson	26 W.S. Fenn
	1908	20	Kramer	11	W.A. Bardzett	9 Jos. A. Fogler
	1911	63	Kramer	52	A.J. Clark	23 Alfred Gouillet
	1913	49	Kramer	33	Alfred Gouillet	31 A. Jackie Clark
	1914	42	Kramer	35	Alfred Gouillet	23 Walter Rutt
1	1915	45	Kramer	45	Alfred Gouillet	23 Alfred Grenda
	1917	21	Arthur Spencer	18	Alfred Gouillet	9 Kramer
	1918	43	Kramer	36	Arthur Spencer	22 Robert E. Spears
	1919	39	Ray Eaton	33	Kramer	22 Alfred Gouillet
	1920	48	Arthur Spencer	19	Kramer	17 Ray Eaton
2	1921	30	Kramer	30	Ray Eaton	27 Willie Spencer

1. The tie for first in 1915 was resolved with a series of three match races between Kramer and Gouillet. A quarter-mile event was run on September 19; Kramer won the first heat and was awarded the second heat on a foul by Gouillet. A 5-mile race was scheduled, but was rained out on September 26, finally being run on October 3, with Kramer the winner.

2. In 1921, the tie for first was to have been decided with a 5-mile paced match race, which was to have been held on August 31. Although Kramer was willing to ride, his opponent, Ray Eaton balked, he requested additional financial remuneration, Velodrome management refused, stipulating that, should Eaton fail to show for the deciding race, Kramer would ride one lap and be proclaimed champion. Following the announcement, Richard F. Kelsey, NCA Chairman suspended Eaton for the remainder of the season for violating a rule relating to blackmailing the promoters for money. Kramer rode his lap and was named champion.



**Figure 1.** Frank Kramer in 1913 in France, showing determination. Source: Bibliotheque Nationale de France. (<https://www.bnf.fr>) In the public domain.

**Table 1.** Table showing results for top three finalists in the U.S. National Cycle Sprint Championships 1902–1921. For the years in this time-frame not listed, Kramer took first place, but his point tally is unknown as are the names of the others who placed in these races. Source: *Bicycle News, a supplement to Motorcycle Illustrated*, vols. 14–17 (1918–1921); *The World Almanac and Book of Facts*, 1902–1905, 1908, 1911, 1913, 1914; *Bicycle News, supplement to Cycle Car Age and Ignition, Carburation, Lubrication*, vols. 4 and 6, 1915 and 1917.

New Jersey. At that time, the “clean sea air” of Newark, New Jersey, was deemed beneficial and expected to help with the respiratory problems he suffered from as a child.<sup>2</sup>

Frank started racing in 1896, finishing last in his first event on May 30 in Weequahic Park, Newark. He went on to win the League of American Wheelmen’s (LAW) national sprint championship two years later, in 1898, riding an Eclipse machine, and the National Cycling Association (NCA) amateur title the following year, riding a Pierce bicycle. Major (Marshal Walter) Taylor convinced Frank to turn pro and the two competed against each other in the U.S. professional championship in 1900, Major Taylor taking the title, Kramer finishing second, with 18 first- and 8 second-place finishes, the championship being determined

<sup>2</sup> David Chauner, “Back in the Early 1990s, Bicycling was Big and Frank Kramer was King,” *Sports Illustrated*, Feb. 11, 1985.



**Figure 2.** *Winners of the amateur and professional versions of the Grand Prix de Paris, Jimmie S. Benyan (U.K.) and Kramer at the Velodrome de Vincennes, 25 June, 1905. Source: Bibliotheque Nationale de France. (<https://www.bnf.fr>) In the public domain.*

by the number of first, second, third, fourth and fifth place finishes one had in races sanctioned by the NCA, the organization responsible at the time for scheduling and conducting professional bicycle racing events. Amateur bicycle racing events were conducted under the authority of the LAW.

In 1901, Kramer accumulated

89 points in 37 sanctioned races, thus garnering the National Sprint Champion title, ahead of Taylor (66 points) and Iver Lawson (50 points). Kramer also was Champion in the 0.25-mile, 5-mile, and 25-mile distance races.

Kramer took the National Sprint Champion title 15 more times, consecutively, 1902–1916, regaining the title in 1918 and again in 1921. In 1919 and 1920, he came in second for the title. [Table 1]

Frank represented the U.S. in the 1904 Olympic Games in five non-medal cycling track events, taking first in the half-mile and two-thirds-mile races, second in the one-third mile and fourth in the one-mile and half-mile handicap.

In 1905, Frank was invited to race in Europe, a tour that led to three others (1906, 1913 and 1914), which, in total, resulted in 50 wins out of 62 races run in France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy and Denmark, including two victories in the Grand Prix de Paris (1905 [Figure 2] and 1906 [Figure 3]).



**Figure 3.** *In the winner’s circle, Kramer and Francesco Verri (Italy), winners, respectively, of the professional and amateur versions of the Grand Prix de Paris, 1906. Source: Bibliotheque Nationale de France. (<https://www.bnf.fr>) In the public domain.*



**Figure 4.** Edmond Jacquelin (France) and Kramer at the Veld’Hiv’, 16 April, 1905. Jacquelin was deemed unbeatable; in winning, Kramer proved himself a world-class champion. Source: *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*. (<https://www.bnf.fr>) In the public domain.

Kramer took on many of the premier European riders of the day on these trips. In 1905, Kramer won a race against Edmond Jacquelin, France, [Figure 4] who had taken third

in the world championship in 1896 in Copenhagen and 1898 in Vienna, first in Paris in 1900 and second in Berlin in 1901. Jacquelin also had won the Grand Prix de Paris in 1900.



**Figure 6.** At the start for the Grand Prix de Paques in the Parc des Princes, Paris, 24 March, 1913, Kramer, Thorvald Ellegaard (Denmark) and Leon Hourlier (France). Source: *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*. (<https://www.bnf.fr>) In the public domain.



**Figure 5.** Frank Kramer at the Veld’Hiv’, Paris, 1913. Source: *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*. (<https://www.bnf.fr>) In the public domain.

For the 1906 season, the French bicycle racing promoters, Victor Breyer and Robert Coquelle, promised to get Kramer a race against Frenchman Gabriel Poulain, who had won the world championship in 1905 in Antwerp, Belgium, (placing 2<sup>nd</sup> in 1906 in Geneva and again in 1908 in Berlin and 1909 in Copenhagen) and the emerging French cycling racer Emile Friol, who was to win the world title in 1907 and again in 1910 as well as the Grand Prix de Paris in 1907, 1909 and 1910. Kramer raced against these two top-rated French Racers in the Grand Prix de Paris and won with a spectacular finishing burst of speed.

Kramer also participated in the Grand Prix de l’UVF (organized by Union Vélocipédique de France), taking third in 1905 (Henri Meyer, Germany, was first and Poulain second) and second in 1906 (when Poulain came in first and Meyer placed third).



**Figure 7.** *A champion's finale: This was Kramer's last triumphant public ride taken in the Newark Velodrome in which he beat his own time for the distance, to tie the world record. At 42, the oldest professional athlete then competing, Kramer retired as Champion at the top of his game.*

In 1912, Kramer won the World Cycling Sprint Championship, when it was held in Newark, the only year the world championship was held in the U.S. while Kramer was racing. Alfred Grenda, of Australia, came in second and Andre Perchicot, France, came in third.

Races in 1913 [Figure 5] included a match-up against Thorvald Ellegaard, Denmark, and Leon Hourlier, France. [Figure 6] Ellegaard had taken first in the "World Championship Races" in 1901 in Berlin, 1902 in Rome, 1903 in Copenhagen, 1906 in Geneva, 1908 in Berlin and 1911 in Rome, and second in the worlds in 1904 in London, in 1905 in Antwerp, 1910 in Brussels, and 1914 in Copenhagen. Hourlier took second in the World Championship Races in 1911 in Rome and won the Grand Prix de Paris again in 1912.

While a sprinter, Kramer also participated in 6-day races, popular at the time, taking first, with William Fenn, in a Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, six, in 1908, and first in Newark and Boston, Massachusetts, sixes in 1910 (with Fenn and Jim Moran). Kramer also competed in tandem races.

Kramer started the 1922 racing season well, appearing to be on track to another champion title, but he then faltered in a championship qualifying race in early July, attributing it to sleepless nights caused by the stress of racing at his age. He announced that he was retiring and his last appearance as a professional racer was to be July 26, when he would attempt the world record for one-sixth of a mile (one lap of the track) at the Newark Velodrome [Figure 7]. Paced by Grenda for a flying start, Kramer tied the record 15.4 seconds set by Albert



**Figure 8.** *Kramer at Vel'd'Hiv', Paris, 29 Jan., 1929, for negotiations with the Union Cycliste Internationale. Source: Bibliotheque Nationale de France. (<https://www.bnf.fr>) In the public domain.*

Crebs in 1911, two-fifths of a second better than his previous best in that distance.

Following his retirement from racing, Frank remained active in cycling in various positions with the NCA, including spending time as Chairman of the NCA Board of Control. [Figure 8] During his racing career Kramer was mentioned as being groomed for a potential assemblyman's seat. Even in the last two years of his life in 1957 and 1958, Kramer was involved in public life doing such things as serving as Police Chief of East Orange, New Jersey, and handing out awards at the Tour of Somerville (New Jersey), a road bicycle race first run in May, 1940, and continuing annually up to the present time.



**Figure 9.** Kramer at the Velodrome d'Hiver, Paris, 1913. Source: *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*. (<https://www.bnf.fr>) In the public domain.

### Kramer: The man

It is unclear what role his father may have had in Kramer's success, but Frank's father, Louis<sup>3</sup>, was an entrepreneur (a lumber merchant), a Harvard graduate, and a winner of six world championship gold medals in gymnastics, wrestling, fencing, and the broad sword.

Frank, who was also known as "Big Steve," brought "class" to his sport. [Figure 9] He associated with people and products of quality. He lived his life slightly

3 Andrew Homan, "Frank Louis Kramer," <https://usbhof.org/inductee/frank-louis-kramer/>, last visited Apr. 14, 2024.



**Figure 10.** Kramer retained a trainer and a masseur to make sure he stayed at the top of his game. Source: *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*. (<https://www.bnf.fr>) In the public domain.

apart from his peers, maintaining Spartan discipline, going to bed regularly at 9 p. m., and not going out in the evenings to socialize (or carouse) with the other riders. Frank was quite restrained when it came to sex, not marrying until two years after he retired as a racer although a careful analysis of the information that has been gathered on this subject suggests that normal sexual activity between healthy adults does not affect their level of achievement in athletic endeavors.<sup>4</sup> His success

4 Gerald S. Zavorsky & Rebecca A. Brooks, The influence of sexual activity on athletic performance: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Scientific Reports* (2022) 22:25609,

has been largely attributed to his highly disciplined personal behavior by biographers.

Frank was powerfully built, standing 5'11", and weighing 180 pounds. He was given a bicycle by his parents in his early teens as part of treatment for his symptoms of tuberculosis, and he took to it with a passion, training fanatically. In addition, he studied his sport, employed a trainer to help him improve his physical condition, and a masseur to administer daily massages [Figure 10]. He made a study of sprint-racing tactics and went to factories to learn bicycle

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-19882-2>

construction and mechanics in detail.

For much of his career, Kramer rode Pierce bicycles [Figure 11]: from 1915 on, these Pierce bicycles were nickel-plated and custom-made for him each season at the Pierce-Arrow plant in Buffalo, New York.<sup>5</sup> (Note: Major Taylor rode a bicycle made by the Iver Johnson Bicycle Company, another popular brand of racing bicycle of the day in the U.S. that paid a famous bicycle racer to ride its bicycles thereby popularizing the brand to increase its sales). Kramer's first amateur title was won while he was riding an Eclipse, which the next year he traded for a Pierce. Kramer rode Pierce cycles [Figure 12] until 1910, when he changed to riding European bicycles until 1915, when he changed back to riding Pierce machines. Pierce advertising of the time claimed that Kramer had spent three days in their frame department designing a bicycle for himself and for the Pierce Company: This special bicycle was marketed as the Pierce-Kramer Special.

Frank was also known for his admiration of sports cars and he enjoyed playing golf. The Automobile Magazine Annual, Vol. 20, Issues 1–12, of 1909, reported on March 1 that Kramer had purchased a 40-horsepower Jackson runabout automobile for some \$2,000, which he had used to serve as demonstrator to aid the company from which he had purchased the car, selling several in the process. Subsequently, Kramer's name was used by Cadillac as an owner in an advertisement.

<sup>5</sup> Op cit Chauner.



**Figure 11.** Made to Kramer's specifications, the Pierce Bicycle Company marketed the Pierce-Kramer Special, a racing bicycle. Source: *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*. (<https://www.bnf.fr>) In the public domain.

Racing was conducted, largely, on a steeply banked one-sixth-of-a-mile wooden track and could get physical, then ending in broken bones and splinters. The stress of racing caught up to Frank, who suffered from insomnia at the end of his career. Nevertheless, in his final appearance, Frank beat his personal best time and tied the world record of 15.4 seconds in the one-sixth-mile time trial in front of more than 20,000 at the Newark Velodrome.

By the time he retired, Frank had earned some \$500,000 in 22 years of professional bicycle racing, at a time when top baseball stars were earning about \$10,000 a year. In 1911, Frank signed a contract with "Colonel" John M. Chapman, a promoter who became the czar of bicycle



**Figure 12.** Practicing a little brand marketing, Kramer advertised his connection to Pierce with a jersey he wore while in Europe in 1905. Source: *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*. (<https://www.bnf.fr>) In the public domain.

racing, controlling the talent and managing the tracks, under which, for a guaranteed annual five-figure income Frank agreed to appear in a certain number of Chapman's promotions each season.

## The Sport

Frank Kramer was an exceptional athlete in one of the most popular sports of the age, yet today his name is unknown except among a small group of bicycle historians. In fact, most Americans are unaware of the sport that Frank

participated in and dominated for more than 20 years. At the time that Frank dominated track cycling, bicycle racing was more popular than baseball. However, baseball has survived to the present as have the names of its early heroes, whereas track cycle racing and its heroes have disappeared, except in the Olympics. In the early 1900's, it is said that for sports entertainment on the weekend, one went first to the cycle track, and only when the cycling program was sold out did one walk over to the ballpark. As of this writing (March 2024), there are about 38 velodromes in North America, many meeting the requirements for that designation only by stretching the definition. In 1900, there were some 100 velodromes in North America, with the hay-day of the sport yet to come. Crowds watching the races increased from about 4,000 in 1900, to about 20,000 in 1920, as crowd accommodation increased at venues, mirroring the growth in the popularity of this sport at that time.

The first recorded bicycle race was a 3-miler run on Ordinary Bicycles in Beacon Park, Boston, Massachusetts, on May 24, 1878. The race was won by C.A. Parker, a Harvard University student.

To illustrate how important bicycle racing became, by the mid-1890s, races were being held around the country and more than 100 U.S. cities had dirt, concrete, and/or wood cycling tracks. The bicycles raced were fixed gear, brake-less safeties, with pneumatic tires.

A race program in Springfield, Massachusetts, (held Tuesdays-Thursdays) could feature more than 500 riders (novices, open

amateurs, and professionals). Events featured races of distances ranging from 0.25 miles to 25 miles) for amateurs and professionals.

The Newby Oval in Indianapolis, Indiana, built in 1898, could hold up to 20,000 spectators.

A significant slice of the effort expended in this era of extreme technological advancement was focused on a growing interest in "speed". This was evidenced by:

George M. Hendee set the world record for the mile (2 minutes, 27.4 seconds) in 1886; he had won the LAW National Championship in the mile in 1882.

June 30, 1899, Charles M. Murphy broke the speed record for the mile (57.8 seconds) on a bicycle (drafting behind a train), after which he was known as "mile-a-minute-Murphy."

In 1900 there were some 8,000 automobiles on "the road." A car cost more than \$1,000.

In 1928 there were about 17.7 million cars on the road. A car could be purchased for less than \$600 (a bicycle cost about \$35).

In the 1910's many early bicycle racers turned their passions to building automobiles and airplanes.

With the depression, however, the crowds fell off. In 1930, the Newark Velodrome was demolished after the land lease ran out, and the Coney Island (New York City) Velodrome burned. A new New Jersey velodrome was built in 1932 in Nutley, near Newark, but crowds never returned in the numbers of earlier days. The Nutley Velodrome was shuttered in 1937. The one-seventh-mile Nutley track reopened in 1938

hosting midget car races but it was forced to close after several accidents occurred, including three that involved fatalities in which cars left the track and hurtled into the grandstands.<sup>6</sup> Attempts to restart bicycle racing in Nutley were made, unsuccessfully, and the last races there were held on September 15, 1940.

Independently, local bicycle clubs were staging road races, and, on May 30, 1940, a lasting bicycle race appears to have been started when the first Tour of Somerville (New Jersey), a criterium, was held, as it has been, annually, since 1946.

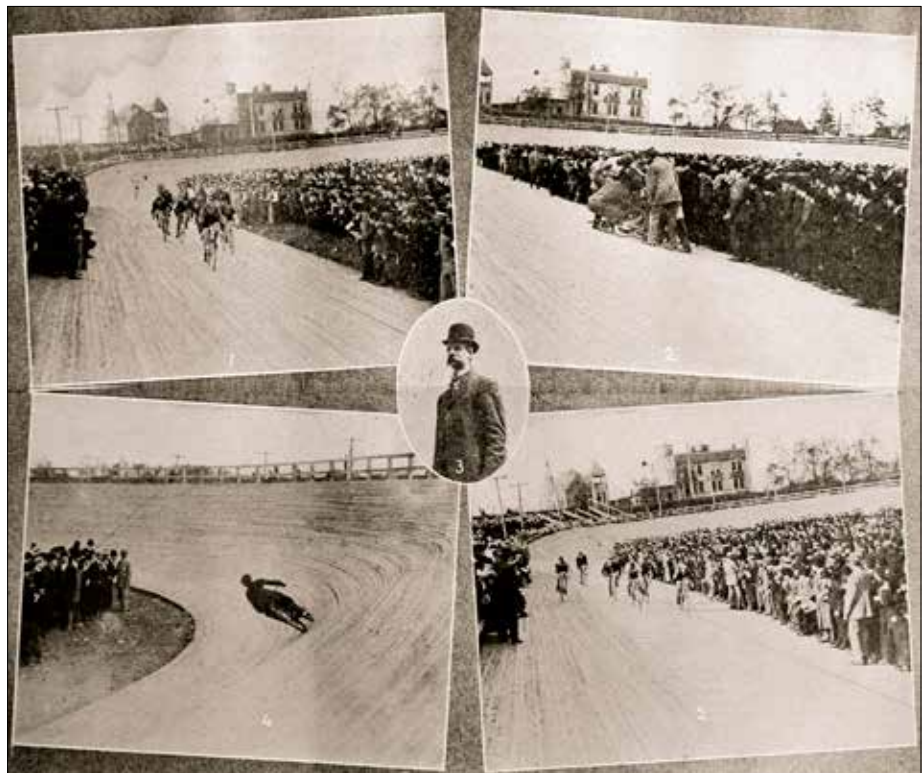
Numerous explanations for the disappearance of cycle track racing have been advanced and the ultimate cause, or causes, may rest in some of the explanations. We, here, note that cycle track racing started while riders were transitioning from ordinaries to safeties. By the time Frank Kramer started his rein as American National champion, ordinaries had been exiled from the track. At the same time, the automobile and the motor-bicycle (motorcycle) were wowing crowds that could not yet afford them with their speed. Those crowds turned from the streets to the velodrome [**Figure 13**] to witness, and to bet upon, men powering their machines at amazing speeds (more than 35 miles per hour), and suffering amazing injuries when they made mistakes on highly banked (43-degree) tracks. Indeed, one of the more thrilling, fast, and dangerous events was the motor-paced race, in which

<sup>6</sup> Gabriele, Michael C., *The Golden Age of Bicycle Racing in New Jersey*, 2011, The History Press, Charleston, S.C., U.S.A.

a cyclist would pedal behind a motorcycle fielding a shield to cut the wind for the cyclist, who had to maintain a distance of not more than one foot from the rear tire of the motorcycle to take advantage of the shield and the draft that it afforded.

The last days of the cycle track racing era saw the U.S. and the world gripped in the throes of depression or caught up in the winds of war. Cities were being crisscrossed with trolleys, and cars and busses were multiplying on roads that continued to improve as they spread. The U.S. was becoming a motorized nation, the bicycle relegated, largely, to the role of child's toy.

It has also been suggested that an infrastructure that would support and foster the continuance of a sport such as bicycle racing was never developed in the U.S. and that this contributed to the demise of Track Cycle Racing in this country. While there were plenty of riders early in the sport's history that were interested in racing, over time those riders aged, retired, and were replaced mainly by riders imported from tracks overseas, from Europe and Australia. There was no "farm team" to foster local enthusiasm for the sport and travel became more difficult for riders due to global political tensions. The important races were confined to the networks of velodromes owned and operated by a small group of individuals, John M. Chapman being the most important person in this position, further restricting access of riders to recognition and advancement of cyclists with a serious interest in racing.



**Figure 13.** From the local illustrated press, the Newark Velodrome drew large crowds to Saturday and Sunday events. Crowds flocked to see the wins (upper left and lower right), the spills (upper right) and the spectacle (lower left).

### Organization and Management of Cycling Events

The LAW had been formed on May 30, 1880, to promote the interests of bicyclists (such as the "Good Roads Movement"), and to act as the governing body for amateur racing in the U.S. In 1894 the organization amended its bylaws to exclude non-whites from membership. After reaching a peak membership of more than 103,000 in 1898, membership declined precipitously, to 76,944 in 1900 and only 8,692 in 1902, when the LAW dissolved. The LAW membership bubble mirrored sales of bicycles.

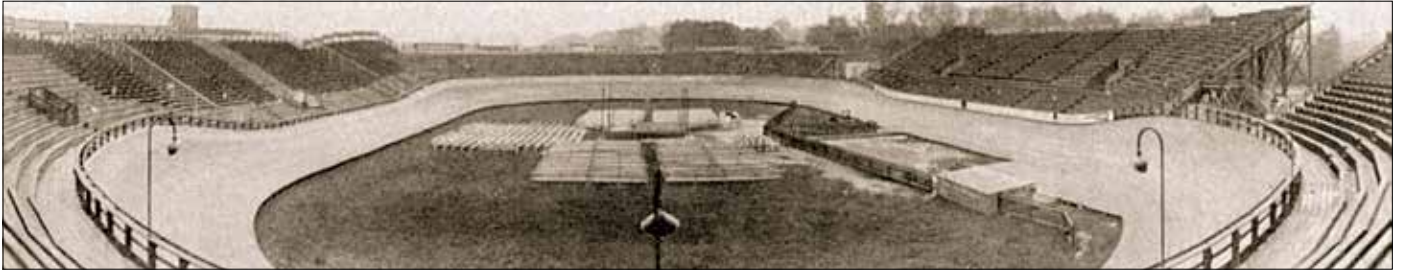
Professional racing started in 1893, and the NCA was formed to manage and promote it.

In 1898, the LAW asserted its opposition to racing on Sundays, But, the assertion led riders and

promoters to abandon the LAW for the NCA, which did promote Sunday races. When the LAW dissolved, in 1902, it transferred its authority to sanction National amateur races and participation in the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI), which sanctioned international events, to the NCA. Also in 1898, William A. Brady, who became Major Taylor's manager, and had managed world heavyweight boxing champion James "Gentleman Jim" Corbett, took over the December Six-day races at Madison Square Garden in New York City.

John Chapman, after a short period in 1908 of racing and managing the Salt Palace Velodrome in Salt Lake City, Utah, convinced a Newark, New Jersey, tavern owner, Frank J. Mihlon, to invest in a joint venture to establish and run a network of cycle races,

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**Figure 14.** A view of the Newark Velodrome at a quiet moment in its prime.



**Figure 15.** Frank Kramer in 1912 after having won the world champion sprint title. Source: *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*. (<https://www.bnf.fr>.) In the public domain.

based in Newark with competitions radiating out like spokes to bicycle race tracks in New York, New Haven, Providence, Boston, Worcester, Springfield, and Philadelphia. Chapman also traveled to Europe and acquired contracts with European promoters and riders looking to go to America and participate in the six-day races run in his circuit. He also reached out to riders in Australia and assisted with their travel to the U.S. to compete.

Chapman then persuaded Mihlon to fund the construction of a third, replacement, velodrome in Newark, with seats to accommodate 12,500, to be managed by himself. Ground was broken for the new structure in early 1911. [Figure 14] Using contacts developed in Europe, Chapman was able to garner support to convince the UCI to award the 1912 world cycling championships to him and Newark. At the same time, Floyd MacFarland, a former racer, and then manager of the Salt Palace, convinced about 20 riders from the Newark circuit to move to other venues, many going to the Salt Palace.

A number of the riders from the Newark circuit cabled MacFarland letting him know they were prepared to ride at the Motordrome across the street from the Newark Velodrome

that was under MacFarland's management. The Motordrome, owned by Inglis Moore Uppercu, a Cadillac automobile distributor, was a quarter-mile oval track for motorcycle racing, that had opened on July 4, 1912.

On September 4, 1912, Kramer won the world professional sprint championship in a race against Andre Perchicot (France) and Alfred Grenda (Tasmania). [Figure 15]

A week later, two riders at the Motordrome lost control of their motorcycles and smashed into the crowd killing 6 spectators. Both riders died. Days later, the Motordrome was destroyed by fire. Uppercu announced he was prepared to build a Velodrome for bicycle racing and ready to hire the riders to challenge the Newark Velodrome. [Figure 16]

In 1913, MacFarland brought Mihlon and Uppercu together, suggesting that Mihlon let Uppercu buy a half-interest in the Newark Velodrome in exchange for Uppercu not building a competitive facility. MacFarland was hired to take over management of the Newark Velodrome.

[Figure 17] MacFarland then established a track in Chicago and planned to open another track in Toronto, Canada. MacFarland selected Chapman to manage the Toronto franchise with a racing



**Figure 16.** A crash during an open race in 1928. The downed rider was Frank Turano, known for his participation in 55 six-day races. Turano also worked as a stunt man in movies.



**Figure 17.** Kramer on the track at the Velodrome Buffalo in 1913. Source: *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*. (<https://www.bnf.fr>) In the public domain.

circuit modeled after what he had done in Newark.

On April 17, 1915, MacFarland was assaulted with a screwdriver and died from his wounds. On April 22, Chapman was named manager of the Newark Velodrome and a new manager was to be appointed for the Toronto position.

In 1920, George Louis (“Tex”) Rickard leased Madison Square Gardens from the New York Life Insurance Company for 10 years at \$200,000 a year and took over as manager. Rickard was a friend of Chapman’s and manager of heavyweight boxing champion Jack Dempsey. On August 1, Rickard and Chapman signed a five-year contract to jointly hold two Sixes a year in the Garden, each with a purse of \$50,000.

For the 1920 Olympics, Chapman and the NCA had authority to select 11 road and track riders to represent the U.S. Riders and their clubs were

required to pay their own travel expenses, leading to outrage from riders and clubs. After the Olympics, more than 24 clubs broke with the NCA to form the Amateur Bicycle League of America (ABLA). Years of bickering followed before NCA agreed to let the ABLA put on races as long as they were not held in Velodromes and were not held for professionals.

The New York Velodrome opened in May 1921, managed by Chapman for owners Uppercu and John Ringling, the circus

entrepreneur and Uppercu became president of the NCA. [Figure 18]

In early 1929, Kramer, as NCA representative, told the press that the UCI had awarded the 1929 world cycling championships to the U.S. On January 6, Rickard died of acute appendicitis. The post of president of Madison Square Gardens, previously held by Rickard, was awarded to John Reed Kilpatrick.



**Figure 18.** Sunday at the cycle track in the mid-1920s.

The UCI then awarded the 1929 world championships to Zurich, Switzerland. The UCI had added road racing to its schedule of events and Chapman had no interest in running road races. Pro and Amateur sprints were to have been held in Newark and motor-paced events were to have been held in the Garden. The matter might have ended differently had Chapman been willing to make a substantial cash contribution to the UCI, which Chapman was too parsimonious to agree to.

### The Decline of Cycle Track Racing in America

The U.S. Stock Market crashed on October 29, 1929, and the U.S. economy went into a serious decline.

In August 1930, the New York Velodrome was destroyed by fire (two weeks after the opening of the Coney Island, New York, Velodrome).

On December 4, 1930, the wrecking ball was taken to the Newark Velodrome on which the land lease expired in 1931. [Figure 19]



**Figure 19.** A race on in the Newark Velodrome in 1925.

Riders put up \$38,000 to start a fund to build a new Newark Velodrome, but other potential investors were not interested. This Velodrome was never built.

While a new Velodrome was opened in Nutley, New Jersey, [Figure 20] close to Newark, in 1933, with 12,000 spectators in attendance (Kramer had recommended that the track be seven laps to a mile, closer to the

current Olympic standard of 250 meters, than the standard then of six laps to the mile), attendance fell off in 1935 and further in 1936. The venue finally closed in the fall of 1940.

American professional sprinters continued to make appearances in Europe until 1935, the last being Bill Honeman, the NCA professional champion, 1934–1936, who was the first person to wear the jersey with the design that became the design for the U.S. National team jersey.

Chapman, who had managed the Newark Velodrome for most of its life and was in charge of racing at Madison Square Garden, continued to run Six-Day races at the Garden and around the country until he retired on December 7, 1937. Kramer resigned his positions with the NCA at the same time.

In December 1939, the Garden ran its 66<sup>th</sup> and final International Six, although the race was shortened to five days.

World War II started.



**Figure 20.** Outside the Nutley velodrome in 1939.

While Sixes continued to be run, they were not the popular events they had been before the war. Professional cycle track racing also was not resumed in the U.S. after the war. Road racing, in the form of criteriums, were pursued locally through amateur organizations that fed candidates into Olympic programs, including track racing. The NCA's authority to manage national races and its participation in the UCI were transferred to USA Cycling, when it merged with the ABLA in 1966. NCA authority to manage amateur races had been transferred to the ABLA earlier.

Interestingly, the biographical information about Kramer on the World Wide Web is relatively sparse and poorly indexed; an internet search on the NCA yields nothing; there is no formal listing showing Kramer's accomplishments; all race results involving professionals are missing from tables maintained by amateur organizations; there are no professional organizations that maintain records of professional race results from the past.