

# Tony Waldrop

*UNC Track, 1970-74*

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Tony Waldrop ran nine consecutive sub-four-minute miles while a student at North Carolina in the 1970s.

Now Waldrop's running is confined to running between the medical office and the lab at the University of Illinois.

He is Dr. Tony Waldrop, a professor of physiology and the chairman of a program that combines M.D. and PhD degrees. He serves as chairman of the university athletics committee that advises the chancellor.

Waldrop is married and has two sons, Cabe, 10, and Dallas, 8. The boys play Little League baseball, soccer and basketball, and they compete in gymnastics. So far, neither has shown any interest in running, and Waldrop says he is not going to push either into it.

In a world in which athletes often brag and swagger, Waldrop was a refreshing change. When he was recruited by track coach Joe Hilton, Waldrop was considered promising. But in 1974, he had a streak that other runners couldn't match.

He ran a 3:59.5 indoors at Richmond. He went on to New York to run 3:59.7 in the Millrose Games, and to San Diego and a 3:55 mile. He kept running, and he kept winning. And soon the track writers were surrounding him and questioning him.

He would tell them he was surprised he had done so well.

He went outside and continued to run well, and had a 3:53.2 at the Penn relays.

With the ACC meet coming up, Waldrop was expected to shatter records. Instead, he struggled, not against the field, but against a 100-degree fever. He ran because he felt he should. And he won, but he said it wasn't worth the price he paid.

**THAT HAS BEEN** characteristic of Waldrop. Track was important to him, but not all-important. It was an activity he enjoyed, but academics came first, and in time he was ready to put running behind him.

He visited Russia as the member of an American team. Some of his teammates complained that the Russians were rude, that they were pushed around in the subways.

Waldrop disagreed. He liked the Russians. They pushed him, but he just pushed back.

He won the 1500 meters in the Pan American games in 1976. Some of the U.S. athletes complained the Mexican fans showed animosity toward the Americans.

Waldrop shrugged it off.

"It wasn't any worse than a Duke-Carolina game," he said. "Anyhow, I don't understand Spanish, so I didn't understand what they said."

After his graduation from UNC in 1974, he helped



FILE PHOTO

**Tony Waldrop ran nine consecutive sub-four-minute miles at UNC.**

coach the Tar Heel track team. One of the team members was Julie Briscoe, a cross country runner and later captain of the UNC team. He coached her, and a few years later, he married her.

On the side, he washed dishes in the research lab at Chapel Hill.

"My roommate and I used to kid around and say that a college education would get you a dishwashing job in a high-class place," Waldrop said.

He realized that women athletes sometimes didn't get the coaching they needed. So, he gave special attention to them.

After he got his masters, he went on to get his doctorate in physiology in 1982. He worked at Southwest Medical School in Dallas, Texas, for two years and then moved to Illinois in 1986.

He works with the Illinois gender equity program. He is still a strong believer in giving women the opportunity to compete.

He doesn't agree that a program based solely on numbers is the answer.

Gender equity can also be achieved by having the ratio of female athletes reflect the women's enrollment percentage. A university can also show a history of continuing expansion of programs for women. And they can show they are meeting the interests and demands of their women students.

"I think we're doing a good job," he said.

Waldrop stays busy, and because of that he doesn't have as much time as he would like to attend his son's games.

He still likes to read. At one time, he reported that he kept three books going: a novel, a book of plays and a book of poetry.

His job provides him a great deal of pleasure.

"My job is work and enjoyment both," he said. "It changes from day to day."