

Waldrop Isn't Trying For Olympic Berth

By Mary Garber
Staff Reporter



TONY WALDROP
... too busy...

CHAPEL HILL — This is Tony Waldrop's last year as a competitive runner.

Waldrop, the former North Carolina performer who ran nine consecutive sub-four minute miles in 1974, is competing on a limited basis this year, and doesn't plan to try for the Olympics. He may run some this spring, but after that, his running will be strictly for fun.

It's a common belief that distance runners including middle distance runners, get better as they get older, reaching their peak usually in their late 20s, which would mean Waldrop should be better now than he was when he graduated from Carolina in 1974.

"But," says Waldrop, "it doesn't work out that way."

While it's true that a runner gets stronger and smarter as he gets older, he has little chance to take advantage of it because he doesn't have the time.

"I came to college on a Morehead scholarship," said Waldrop. "All I had to do was go to class and run track. This year, I am carrying a heavy academic load, finishing up my masters in physical education. I'm working washing dishes in a lab. I pay for the place I stay by doing some work around the Baptist church. I'm

helping coach the middle distance runners on the Carolina track team. And, I work out twice a day on my own. Sometimes, I'm too tired to do the work I need. If I tried for the Olympics, I would have to train harder. I just don't have the time to prepare myself, physically or mentally.

"Next fall, I want to make up some science courses I need and start work on my doctorate in physiology."

Waldrop has competed in two indoor meets. He won the mile at College Park, then finished second behind Paul Cummings of Brigham Young in the Millrose games at New York. He plans to go to Toronto next weekend and has perhaps one more indoor meet scheduled.

Waldrop wasn't surprised to lose to Cummings, a former NCAA champion.

"Basically, the race went just about as I expected," he said. "I didn't have any idea I could beat Paul. I don't know any American who could beat him the way he is running now."

Waldrop and Cummings have competed several times before and have broken even. They are good friends.

Waldrop won the 1,500 meter race in the Pan American games in Mexico this fall. The games were an enjoyable experience for Waldrop who felt the reports of the Mexican fans' animosity toward Americans was exaggerated.

"Oh, sure there was some booing of the Americans," he said, "but it wasn't all that bad. If the games had been held in this country, it's very likely that some group in the stands would have booed one of the teams. The track people had no complaints. Really, it wasn't any worse than a Carolina-Duke game." Anyhow I don't understand Spanish. I don't know what they said."

Waldrop has not been under four minutes in either of his indoor miles this year but that doesn't bother him.

"The four-minute mile doesn't mean that much," he said. "I could run slower times and if I was running well, I would be pleased."

Waldrop said he enjoys coaching.

"It's a challenge. It takes a lot more than I ever realized. There's always something you could say to a guy to help him. I work with close to 20 runners and I have to plan workouts for all of them but take into consideration the individual needs of each one."

Once he quits competitive running, Waldrop plans to try some other sports.

"I'd like to learn to snow ski, to parachute jump and to do gymnastics. I always thought I'd enjoy those."