

Waldrop: Always a Miler

Tony Waldrop knew all along he was a miler. So did Joe Hilton his coach at the University of North Carolina.

And, so did Dr. George Vosburgh of Tryon, the man who first spotted Waldrop when he was a freshman at Polk Central High School in the western part of North Carolina.

For Waldrop, running the half-mile his first three years at North Carolina was a matter of pride, "a desire to prove to myself what I could do, to get it out of my system.

"I knew all along in the back of my mind that I eventually would be a miler," said Waldrop as he talked by phone from his dormitory room at the University of North Carolina. "There's a certain glory in breaking the four-minute mile. It's a goal for any runner . . ."

Waldrop has run eight consecutive sub-four minute miles. He will shoot for the ninth in the ACC meet at Chapel Hill Tuesday.

It was Waldrop's decision to run the half-mile when he went to Carolina four years ago, after being a three-time high school state champion in distance events. He won the mile his sophomore and senior years, and the half-mile his junior year in a state-record time of 1:53.9.

In his senior year at Polk Central, he had thought he would run the half-mile in state competition. But, at the last minute, his coach switched him to the mile. He won but his time wasn't what he had hoped. It was hard to have prepared for the half-mile and then make a switch. That made him want to concentrate on the half-mile in college.



"WHEN HE came to Carolina," said Hilton, "he

5-12-74

Mary Garber



wanted to know if he could run the half-mile. I knew he had the potential to run any distance, so I told him he could."

Hilton planned to move Waldrop to the mile as soon as he could convince Tony it was the thing to do.

"He had success in the half-mile," said Hilton. "But I wasn't at all satisfied that this was his best event. I didn't want him to settle for something if he could be better somewhere else."

Though Waldrop had good speed in the half-mile, Hilton doubted that he had enough to make him the best in the world in that event.

Hilton didn't push. He watched and waited.

Waldrop made the decision.



HE WON the ACC championship in the half-mile as a sophomore. In his junior year, he won the 1,000-yard run in the indoor nationals. Then he came to Hilton and asked the question the Carolina coach had been wanting to

See Tony, P. B4, Col. 1

Tony Waldrop Was Always a Miler 5/12/74

Continued from Page B1

hear; "what would you think if I switched to the mile next year?"

The plan was for Waldrop to continue with his half-mile work for the rest of his junior year, switching to the mile as a senior.

Then he tripped over a root.

"I was working out, running on a campus path when I tripped on a root and fell and hurt my hip," said Waldrop.

It was a painful injury that kept him from working on speed.

"He could run distance," said Hilton, "but when he tried to accelerate for speed work it pained him."

Without the speed work, it was better for Waldrop to run the mile in competition, rather than the half-mile.

He ran a 3:58.3 mile in the Big Three meet (Carolina, State and Duke) at Raleigh in the spring of 1973, but went back to the half-mile to defend his title in the ACC meet. He won again but, according to Hilton, it "wasn't a Tony Waldrop half-mile."

"When we were getting ready for the (NCAA) nationals last year, we were undecided," said Hilton. "We didn't know whether to run him in the mile or the half-mile. Both fields were strong. But I felt since he had not gotten the speed work he needed, his strength would carry him in the mile."

At Baton Rouge, site of the national, Hilton had second thoughts. He even looked for Waldrop to talk to him about switching to the half-mile.

"But I couldn't find him," said Hilton. "So, he ran the mile and finished second to (Dave) Wottle and his 3:57.3). He almost caught Wottle, but his lack of experience hurt him."

★ ★ ★

WALDROP WENT to the World Games last summer and finished second in the 1,500 meters . . . and was disappointed that he had not won.

He began his mile streak with a 3:59.5 mile at Richmond in doors. Then broke the world indoor record with a 3:55 mile at San Diego. And, most recently, he won the Penn Relays mile with a 3:53.2, the fastest mile ever run in the eastern United States, the second best in history.

It's easy to spot Tony Waldrop as a world champion now. But what about the men who saw him before he was world class?

Vosburgh, who admits he is a "track nut," saw Waldrop in the third race the youngster ever ran competitively.

"He was a freshman at Polk Central," recalled Vosburgh. "He was running against one of our good milers (at Tryon). The boy was a senior and Tony just ran away from him."

"I talked with him and tried to get him interested in track. He was interested in running but not in competing. He was quite shy about running against anyone. He was happy to just run in his own back yard."

"He hadn't had coaching. It was just raw talent. He ran with too much of a lean and he bobbed around too much. But he had tremendous strength. He would double in the mile and half mile and he had great recovery powers. It seemed to be no strain."

"I think it helped him to come along in North Carolina. If he had lived in California, he would have been pushed, and he might have burned himself out. But here, he was eased into it."

"There was never any question that he was a miler. He liked to run the shorter half-mile for a time, but the mile was obviously his best race."

Vosburgh, a high school track man in Illinois, lost a leg in World War II and since then has devoted all his spare time to promoting track and helping kids who like it.

★ ★ ★

HILTON HAD watched Waldrop through high school and wanted him for North Carolina.

"He was pretty highly-courted," said Hilton. "He was interested in South Carolina and Pennsylvania. His brother, Danny, was a student at North Carolina and he was eager for Tony to come here. But I didn't push. I just stayed in contact."

had it. He was a little ungainly with his striding. But the thing that impressed me was that he just got out and ran. He had a lot of stamina and pretty good speed."

For Waldrop track came naturally because of his brother.

"We ran when we were kids," he said. "Between us we always had the school record in the mile and all-mile."

Then when he got to high school Tony found he could beat Danny . . . and felt the joy of a kid who can beat his older brother.

★ ★ ★

WALDROP WILL run in the ACC meet, then go to Modesto, Calif. He plans to run in the NCAA and the AAU meets later this spring.

"I'd like to tour Europe this summer," said Waldrop, "and I think it would be fine to run in the meet against Russia (at Durham July 5-6.)"

Track doesn't leave much time for other activities, but Waldrop likes to sit around and talk. He enjoys concerts and plays. His tastes runs from country to classical music.

In Russia last summer, he went out on his own on shopping tours. When he got lost, one of the Russian citizens helped him find his way back, even though Waldrop didn't speak the language.

Though some of the American athletes complained that the Russians were rude and shoved in the stores, that didn't bother Waldrop.

"I just shoved them back," he said.

Waldrop is a senior and plans to move following graduation to California where he will work on his running next year. After that, it may be law school. He is definitely not interested in professional track.

His track exploits have had little effect on his personality.

"It has been far ahead of anything I dreamed it could be," he said. "It has given me confidence that I could do far more than I ever expected."

"But the publicity doesn't really mean anything. There's just the feeling that next year I might be forgotten."



HILTON HAD watched Waldrop through high school and wanted him for North Carolina.

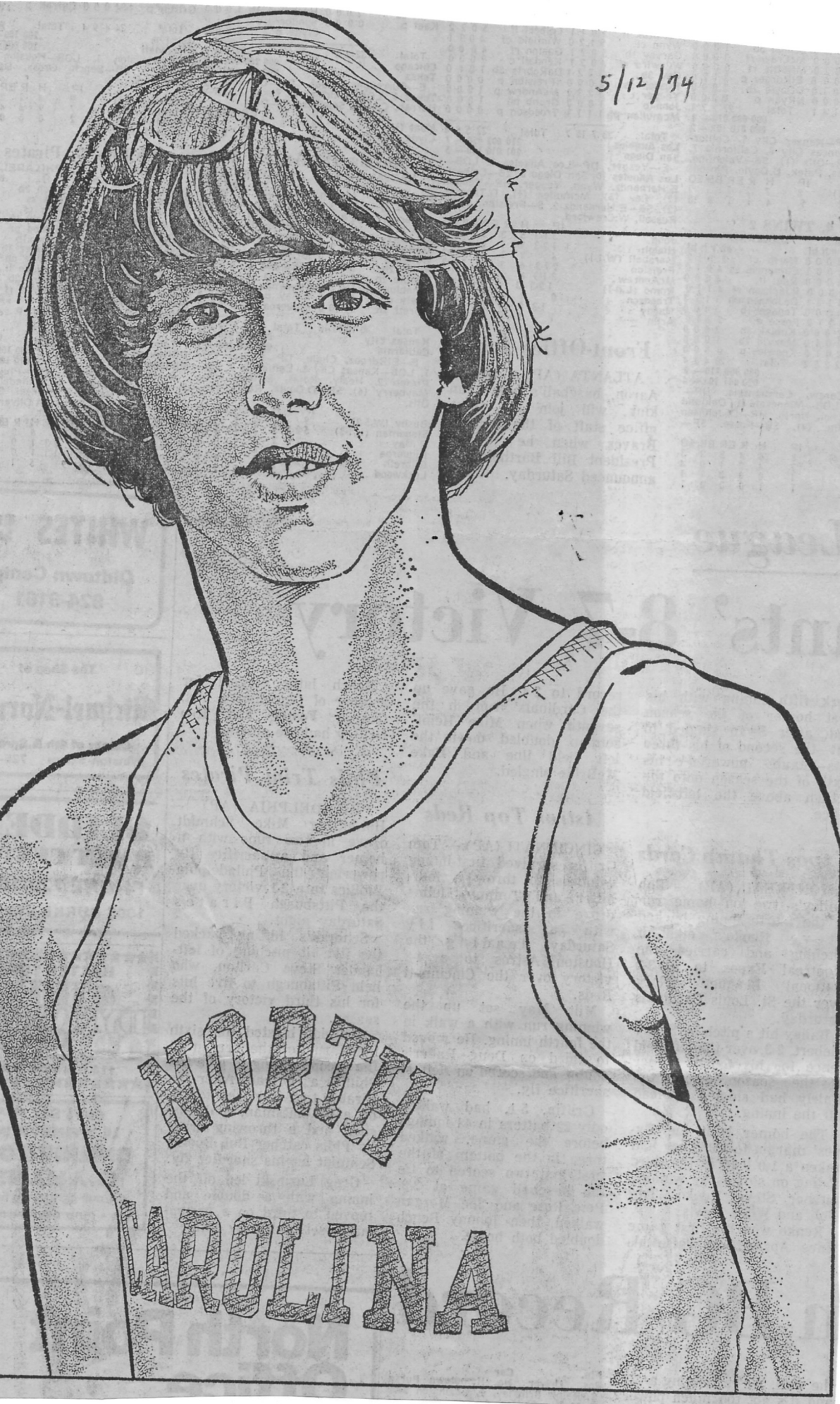
"He was pretty highly-courted," said Hilton. "He was interested in South Carolina and Pennsylvania. His brother, Danny, was a student at North Carolina and he was eager for Tony to come here. But I didn't push. I just stayed in contact."

Perhaps the thing that swung the decision to the Tar Heels was that Waldrop won a Morehead Scholarship. He's majoring in political science.

Hilton would like to say he knew Waldrop would be super. He knew Tony was good, but how good he wasn't sure.

"I could see the talent," said Hilton. "I knew he

5/12/74



NORTH

CAROLINA