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Spouses stand by Pirate hoops leaders

The team and the game often dominate family life at the Baldwin-Tener and Stokes houses, but the couples find time for what's important — each other.

By Brock Letchworth
The Daily Reflector

Whenever he's able to attend an East Carolina women's basketball game, Matt Tener says he likes to wait near the Pirate locker room for his wife afterward.

But as Sharon Baldwin-Tener makes her way out after addressing the team, a quick hello and a few kind words for her husband are all that stand between the coach and her next obligation of meeting with the media.

So go the lives of college basketball coaches and their families.

It's a lifestyle the Teners, who've been married for three years, have grown accustomed to. What has become a year-round whirlwind filled with recruiting, speeches, camps, practices and games, has led to the couple cherishing each moment they have with each other, even if it's just for a brief period.

"It's tough, there's no doubt about it," Tener said. "There is very little alone time."

ECU men's basketball coach Ricky Stokes and his wife of 16 years, Karen, also are all too familiar with the scenario that leads to him piling up hours on the job. Comparing some aspects of what his wife goes through to being a single parent, Ricky Stokes says it takes a special person to be a coach's spouse.

"It has to be tough being the family of a coach," Ricky Stokes said. "I think the most important thing you have to do is value your time when you are there. I heard a horror story once about a coach who came home from being on the road so much and his wife and kids had gotten so used to him being gone it wasn't a big deal. "I've always said that wouldn't be me."

Baldwin-Tener tried to ensure the same thing with her two kids and with her husband. However, it's not easy finding time for them when the road to success in hoops doesn't include very many stops in the home.

Tener, a former college football player, has an understanding of what is required of his wife as a coach at the collegiate level, and Baldwin-Tener says that understanding is essential.

The same is true for Ricky and Karen Stokes, who began dating when Ricky was a freshman basketball player at the University of Virginia. Karen says she has always dealt with her husband's busy schedule, whether it was in his playing days or during his 19 years of coaching.

"It's really funny because with every stop we've made, all the new friends we've made just feel so sorry for us because of the lifestyle," Karen Stokes said. "But honestly, it's all I've ever known, it's all my daughter has ever known growing up. We really don't know any other way."

Both Baldwin-Tener and Ricky Stokes agree that once they do make it home from work, it's important for that to be family time, regardless of whether they're coming home from a tough loss or a bad day at practice.

In an effort to get in some time with his wife and 9-year-old daughter, Ricky Stokes likes to go home right after practice for dinner and a couple hours talking about one another's lives before returning to the office later that night.

Baldwin-Tener tries to take advantage of days off from practice by spending time with her family, adding that she also does her best to make up for time lost with them during the offseason.

"It all gives me balance and it's probably made me a better coach," Baldwin-Tener said. "You feel a little bit guilty when you have to leave them, but you also know they're in good hands. Matt is great with them, and I've had a lot of good help from my mother and my mother-in-law, so you do feel confident knowing that somebody good is looking out for them."

Separating work and family is not always easy for college coaches, who find the state of the program is always a hot topic among fans and friends away from the court.

"He's very good about spending time with us, but we still live it," Karen Stokes said of her husband. "You have to have some sort of off-limits in the home, because you know you will not have it anywhere else. But it's like a lot of jobs, you can't leave it behind. If you want to be good at something, you tend to live it."

And everyone around the coach lives it too, through the good and the bad.

"It sounds like it's a really bad way to live, but it's definitely not," Tener said. "As long as you love your husband or wife and your kids, you make the most of it. And it's all worth it."

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ECU to honor Dr. Andrew Best

East Carolina University will celebrate the life of Dr. Andrew Best at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday in Harvey Hall at the Murphy Center. The free event will include speeches from Chancellor Steve Ballard; the Rev. Ken Hammonds, pastor of Union Baptist Church in Durham; and Dr. Tom Irons, associate vice chancellor of the Brody School of Medicine at ECU. The ECU Gospel Choir will perform, and members of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity will read poetry. A reception will follow the program. Best, who died in December, served medical needs in the community for 50 years and helped establish the medical school at ECU. He also helped to desegregate Pitt County Memorial Hospital in the 1960s.
Graduation rates

Thanks for articulating the UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Trustees' interest in improving graduation rates in the Feb. 6 editorial "Faster toward degrees." It noted that more can be done to encourage progress.

UNC's recent ranking as the top value in public higher education by Kiplinger's Personal Finance helped illuminate this issue for trustees. Among the four factors feeding into Kiplinger's analysis of academic quality was a comparison of four- and six-year graduation rates. UNC's current rates are about 67 percent and 83 percent, respectively. Encouragingly, projections show that we already are expecting them to rise.

While only seven other institutions of varying sizes posted stronger six-year rates among the top 50 on Kiplinger's list, Chapel Hill's four-year rate was the only one above 35 percent among the five UNC system campuses on the list. Obviously, there is room for improvement.

UNC's administration has been studying parts of this issue, completing a report last year on factors related to retention and graduation. The report suggested steps for improvements. Some have been implemented; others are being evaluated or require additional funding.

Our board will work closely with our administrative colleagues to push for improvements. By raising the graduation rates, we will not only improve the quality of education, but deliver it in a more efficient manner. This is in the best interests of the people of North Carolina, who have a right to expect our diligence on this issue.

Jean Almond Kitchin
Vice Chair
UNC Chapel Hill Board of Trustees
Scotland Neck
February 13, 2006

Reporters Find Science Journals Harder to Trust, but Not Easy to Verify

By JULIE BOSMAN

When the journal Science recently retracted two papers by the South Korean researcher Dr. Hwang Woo Suk, it officially confirmed what he had denied for months: Dr. Hwang had fabricated evidence that he had cloned human cells.

But the editors of Science were not alone in telling the world of Dr. Hwang's research. Newspapers, wire services and television networks had initially trumpeted the news, as they often do with information served up by the leading scientific journals.

Now news organizations say they are starting to look at the science journals a bit more skeptically.

"My antennae are definitely up since this whole thing unfolded," said Rob Stein, a science reporter for The Washington Post. "I'm reading papers a lot more closely than I had in the past, just to sort of satisfy myself that any individual piece of research is valid. But we're still in sort of the same situation that the journal editors are, which is that if someone wants to completely fabricate data, it's hard to figure that out."

But other than heightened skepticism, not a lot has changed in how newspapers treat scientific journals. Indeed, newspaper editors openly acknowledge their dependence on them. At The Los Angeles Times, at least half of the science stories that run on the front page come directly from journals, said Ashley Dunn, the paper's science editor. Gideon Gil, the health and science editor for The Boston Globe, said that two of the three science stories that run on a typical day were from research that appeared in journals.

Beyond newspapers, papers from journals are routinely picked up by newsweeklies, network news, talk radio and Web sites.

"They are the way science is conducted, they're the way people share information, they're the best approximation of acceptance by knowledgeable people," said Laura Chang, science editor for The New York Times. "We do rely on them for the starting point of many of our stories, and that will not change."

There are limits to the vetting that science reporters, who are generally not scientists themselves, can do. Most journal articles have embargoes attached, giving reporters several days to call specialists in the field, check footnotes on an article and scrutinize the results.

"Scientific discoveries are more difficult because they often require in the generalist reporter a good deal of study, follow-up interviews and some guidance on how to make sense of technical matters," said Roy Peter Clark, a senior scholar at the Poynter Institute, which studies journalism. "But I think the scandals do require both a new level of skepticism on the part of the reporter and also maybe some new protocols between scientists and journalists."

The Hwang case was not the first time journals had been duped: recently, editors at The New England Journal of Medicine said they suspected two cancer papers they published contained fabricated data. In December, the same journal said that the authors of a 2000 study on the painkiller Vioxx had omitted the fact that several patients had had heart attacks while taking the drug in a trial. A study on the painkiller Celebrex that appeared in The Journal of the American Medical Association was discredited when it was discovered that the authors had submitted only six months of data, instead of the 12 months of data they had collected.

While the journals have a peer review process that is in part meant to filter out fallacious papers by checking research techniques and conclusions, perhaps the greatest difficulty for science reporters is trying to catch what journal editors have missed.

After hearing the news of Dr. Hwang's fabrications, Mr. Gil of The Globe said he immediately remembered his newspaper's coverage of the stem cell papers.

"We were blown away, in part because we had written those stories on Page 1," Mr. Gil said. "And when we wrote them, we called the leading experts in the world on all this embryonic stem cell stuff, who are here in Boston. And they were as hoodwinked as anybody else."

Despite the fraud cases, most of what the journals publish is basically credible, said David Perlman, the science editor of The San Francisco Chronicle. Among the most prestigious science journals that reporters consult regularly are Nature, Science, The New England Journal of Medicine and The Journal of the American Medical Association.

"I think they and we have been burned enough that they're making efforts," Mr. Perlman said. "They're being more careful now, and I think reporters are too. I definitely have more of a 'Hey, let's look more carefully' attitude now that I did 5 or 10 years ago."

Donald Kennedy, the editor of Science, said in a statement in December that the journal itself was not an investigative body. But when reporting on journal findings, most news outlets fail to caution that studies must be replicated to be truly authenticated.
"Beyond Hwang, the more fundamental issue is that journals do not and cannot guarantee the truth of what they publish," said Nicholas Wade, a science reporter for The New York Times. "Publication of a paper only means that, in the view of the referees who green-light it, it is interesting and not obviously false. In other words, all of the results in these journals are tentative."

The journals' own peer review processes, which are intended to be the first barrier against fraud, have come under criticism lately. A cover story in the February issue of The Scientist said that the top-tier journals were receiving more submissions every year, overtaxing peer reviewers and weakening the screening process.

After the Hwang scandal, Science announced it was considering a set of changes to better prevent fraud: Dr. Kennedy said in January that new rules could include "requiring all authors to detail their specific contributions to the research submitted, and to sign statements of concurrence with the conclusions of the work," as well as "implementing improved methods of detecting image alteration, although it appears improbable that they would have detected problems in this particular case." (Through a spokeswoman, Dr. Kennedy declined to be interviewed and said the editors were currently conducting a review of the episode.)

Some newspapers have adopted guidelines of their own to check for conflicts of interest involving authors of journal articles. The Globe instituted guidelines last July requiring reporters to ask researchers about their financial ties to studies, and to include that information in resulting articles. In its weekly health and science section, The Globe outlines any shortcomings of a study under the heading "Cautions."

Kit Frieden, the health and science editor for The Associated Press, said: "We've always had our own peer review process, where on the major studies we seek outside expert comment. We've always regarded scientific research cautiously because mistakes can be made, and I don't think that's changed."

The growing competition for the most important research among the journals may contribute to mistakes and fabrications, even in the most prestigious of the bunch. But in the end, the severe consequences of presenting fraudulent research generally act as a deterrent, said Mr. Dunn of The Los Angeles Times.

"Unlike financial fraud, where you can bamboozle somebody of their money and disappear and then start over again, in science the researchers are in one place," he said. "If they get caught in this type of thing, their careers are over."