

# TOM WADDELL

b. November 1, 1937

d. July 11, 1987

ATHLETE

**“He didn’t want men to lose their homosexual identity or hide it; he just didn’t want them to be pigeonholed by it.”**

*“Winning is doing your best.”*

Tom Waddell was an Olympic athlete and founder of the international sporting event, the Gay Games.

Born Thomas Flubacher in New Jersey, Waddell's parents divorced. At 15, he moved in with his neighbors, Gene and Hazel Waddell, who adopted him. Waddell attended Springfield College, where he studied pre-medicine and was a star gymnast and football player. In 1960, he enrolled at New Jersey College of Medicine. In the early 1960's, he participated in the African-American civil rights demonstrations in Alabama.

In 1966, Waddell joined the Army and served as a medical doctor. Two years later, he competed in the Olympics, placing sixth in the decathlon. Because of a knee injury, he retired from athletics. After the Army, Waddell completed a graduate fellowship at Stanford University.

In the mid-1970's, Waddell came out to friends and family and began exploring the burgeoning gay scene in San Francisco. After attending a gay bowling competition, he was inspired to organize a gay sporting event. Modeled on the Olympics, he founded the Gay Games, which first took place in 1982 in San Francisco. Originally called the “Gay Olympics,” the U.S. Olympic Committee sued Waddell for the use of the word “Olympics” and the organization was renamed “Gay Games.”

In 1981, Waddell began a relationship with Zohn Artman. That same year, he met lesbian athlete Sara Lewinstein, and they decided to have a child. After their daughter was born, Waddell and Lewinstein married.

Waddell experienced the success and international impact of the Gay Games. “Tom wanted to emphasize that gay men were men, not that they were gay,” said Waddell's biographer. “He didn’t want them to lose their homosexual identity, or hide it; he just didn’t want them to be pigeonholed by it.” In 1987, Waddell died of AIDS-related complications.

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