

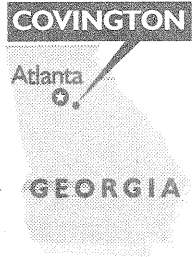
SPORTS ACROSS GEORGIA

Bradley returns to his old court

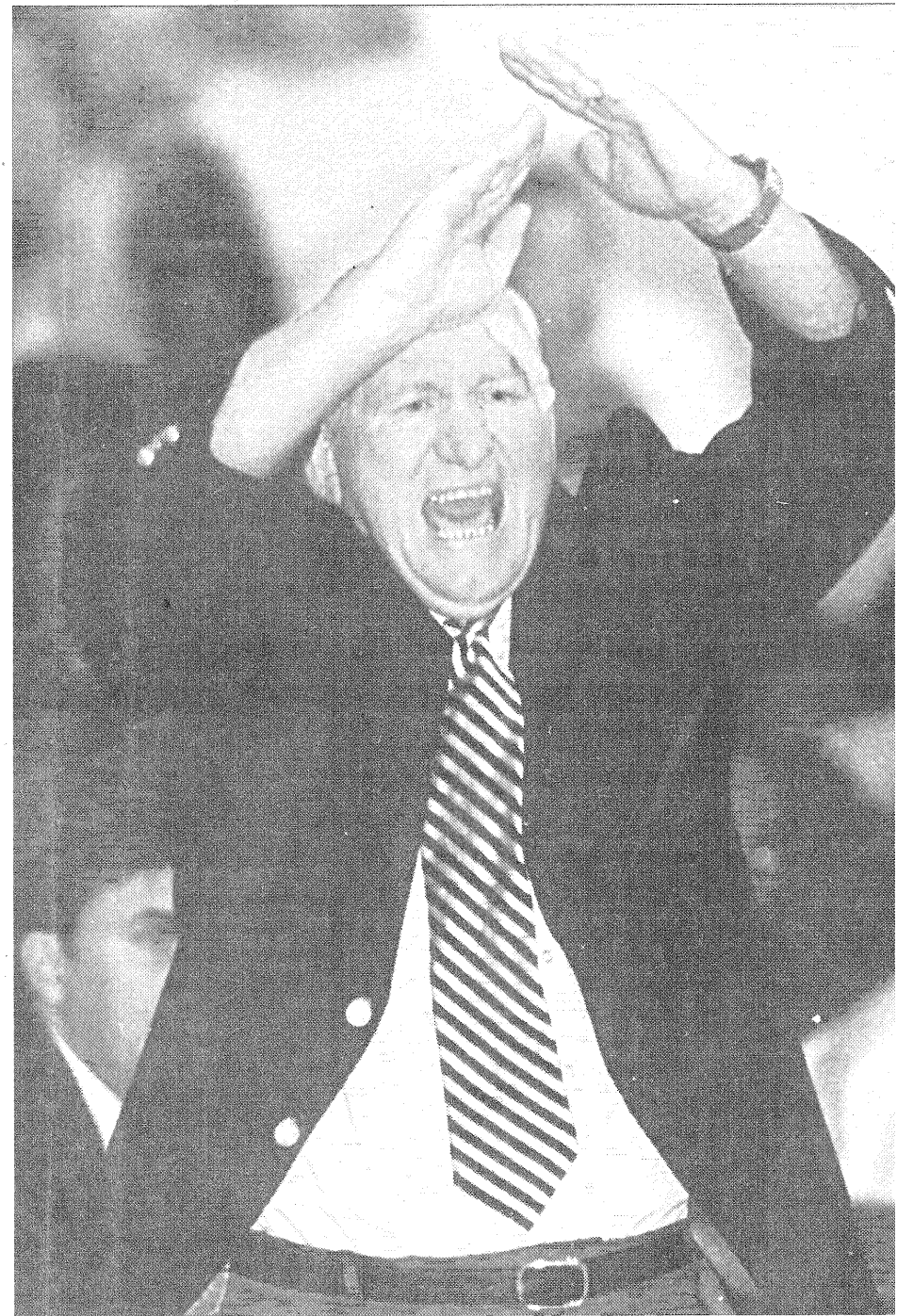


JOHN AMIS / Special

Brandon Farrar and teammates show off their **game-day dress code** Ronald Bradley returned to Newton County High.



Newton County coach is back at school where he established a legend



JOHN AMIS

At 67, Newton County High's **Ronald Bradley** still has the passion for coaching. "I want to keep coaching as long as I can. It's my life."

scorebook at her husband's games. "I heard someone say, 'Coach Bradley could find someone walking along I-20 and in a few weeks turn him into a NBA player.' Well I love my husband, but I know he isn't that good a coach."

Customers of People's Drug Store have a constant reminder that pharmacist Bob Richardson was a member of Bradley's 1964 state champions. Just inside the front door, there is a giant team photo with Bradley in the middle.

"The worst thing that New-

ton County ever did was let Coach Bradley slip away," Richardson said. "Everyone is really excited to get him back. There were people at the opening game that hadn't been there for years."

Bradley was afraid that expectations would be too high this season. But the Rams — despite not returning any full-time starters — won their first three games.

That put Bradley at 1,228 career victories — 26 short of tying the late D.B. Carroll for the most victories by a state

basketball coach.

"I never thought long enough to catch up to those records," said. "But now that I'd like to get it. Not for myself, but for those who have been part of the process I've had."

"I retired after 40 years. But I found how much I couldn't be happy here where it all comes full cycle. Not back, I want to keep coaching as long as I can. I

RONALD BRADLEY FILE

► **Update:** Back as Newton County High School boys basketball coach after a 26-year absence.

► **Age:** 67.

► **Residence:** Loganville.

► **Family:** Married to high school sweetheart Jan for 46 years. Sons Brad and twins Bill and Bob; daughter Brenda. Bill is the girls basketball coach and softball coach at Loganville, winning a state softball title this year. Eight grandchildren.

► **Athletics background:** Baseball, basketball and football standout at Avondale High School. Attending the University of Georgia on an athletic scholarship, playing baseball and basketball.



File

Ronald Bradley urges on his '70 Newton County team that reached the AA final.

► **Basketball coaching**

career: In first stint at Newton County, was 430-68 in 17 seasons (1959-75, winning the 1964 GHSA Class AA state title and finishing as the runner-up twice. Also coached at George Walton Academy, Trinity Academy, Loganville and Port St. Joe, Fla.

► **The streak:** Newton County won a record 129 consecutive home games. The Rams started the streak on Dec. 11, 1959, with a 71-51 victory over South Hall and didn't lose at home until Dec. 29, 1967, falling 59-41 to Wills.

► **Career basketball**

record: Went into season with 1,225-314 career record as a boys and girls coach. Boys record 872-223, with 26 seasons of 20 or more victories. Won two GISA state titles at George Walton. Girls record 353-91, with 11 seasons of 20 or more victories.

► **Record in other sports:**

In baseball, 158-60 in 18 seasons, with two GHSA state final teams at Newton County. In football, 130-69-6 in 19 seasons, with one GISA state title at George Walton.

► **Honors:** Inducted into the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame in 1997. First basketball coach to receive the Georgia Athletic Coaches Association's Circle of Achievement Award. The Ronald M. Bradley Gymnasium at the Turner Lake Recreation Center in Covington was dedicated in 2000.

By GUY CURTRIGHT
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Covington — As Ronald Bradley walks into the old gymnasium where his Newton County High School boys basketball team won a record 129 consecutive home games, the memories begin to flow just like the the victories used to for the Rams decades ago.

Thanks to a YMCA renovation project, the hardwood glistens like it did when the coach would get down on his hands and knees to polish it in the offseason. Gazing at the floor, Bradley can remember old plays and old players like it was yesterday, even though some of the events were more than 40 years ago.

The wooden stands have been empty since 1974, when Newton County opened a new high school. But Bradley vividly recalls when the 1,800 seats were always filled to overflowing. He can remember where the most loyal — and earliest arriving — fans sat.

Arriving early was the key. If you didn't get to a Newton County game a couple of hours early, you didn't get in. But that didn't necessarily mean you couldn't see the game. Fans would climb up on the roof of the school or improvise the best they could to watch games through the high gym windows.

"This man said he really enjoyed the first half of one of our games," Bradley said. "Someone asked him why he didn't stay for the second half, the best part. He said he couldn't. His arms got too sore hanging onto the pole."

Bradley, who has won more than 1,200 games as a basketball coach, laughs. Life is perfect again. At age 67, the old coach is back where it all began. Back in a town where basketball was once king and a home winning streak that stretched from 1959 to 1967 brought national recognition.

Twenty-six years after resigning following 17 ultra-successful seasons at Newton County, Bradley is coaching the Rams again. J.W. Rutledge, who played on Bradley's 1964 GHSA Class AA state championship team and never lost a home game, is the one responsible for that. Rutledge is the Newton County principal and his former coach's new boss.

When Billy Hendricks retired from coaching after three consecutive 20-win seasons, Rutledge had a job to fill. He said that there was no question who the new coach would be once he heard that Bradley, twice retired, was interested in returning to Georgia after taking Port St. Joe to the Florida state semifinals last season.

"Who wouldn't want someone with a record like his?"

Rutledge said. "But more importantly, who wouldn't want a man like Coach Bradley, no matter how old he is. He has touched so many lives. I'm an example of that. And I know he can touch many more. He still has the energy and the passion."

Although playing for the demanding Bradley was always rewarding, it was never easy. Bradley had turned Loganville into a surprising winner in the mid-1990s, but would his old ways work now at Newton County?

During his first tenure at Newton, Bradley's players — like Rutledge and his two brothers — were primarily the sons of white mill workers from nearby Porterdale. Now, the players come mainly from black sections of Covington.

"I know some people thought I was too old and couldn't adjust," Bradley said. "But kids are still kids, despite all the distractions today. They want someone to care about them and help them be as good as they can be. They love the game. I love the game. That's what matters."

Bradley, who finished last season with a 1,225-314 record as a boys and girls coach, has always believed in discipline, fundamentals and making his athletes feel that they are part of something special.

All of his players have to agree to abide by strict team rules. In addition to no alcohol, drugs or tobacco, Bradley has had to add a few rules like "no new tattoos." He has also had to add "no earrings" and "no braids in back."

But watching Bradley's players enter a gym on game night is like having a flashback to the early 1960s. They wear matching navy blazers, white buttondown shirts, striped ties, gray slacks and black dress shoes — just like a Newton County team would have in the first Bradley era.

At first, the players didn't know what to think of the new (old) look.

"But Coach Bradley asked us if we dressed up for a special occasion, like a wedding," said senior center Jarvis Releford. "We said 'yes.' He said that a basketball game was a special occasion, too. I kinda like it now."

None of the players had heard of Bradley when he was hired. Nor did they know that it was their coach that the new recreation center gym at Turner Lake was named after.

Said senior guard Brandon Farrar, "I looked up at the sign over the rec gym one day, and said, 'Coach, is that you?'"

The older residents of Newton County definitely remembered Bradley.

Said Bradley's wife of 46 years, Jan, who keeps the

WINNINGEST COACHES

Here are the winningest Georgia high school basketball coaches, according to the Atlanta Tipoff Club:

Coach	Years	Boys	Girls	Overall record
D.B. Carroll	1935-66	557	697	1,254-283
Glenn Cassell	1952-77	762	482	1,244-502
Ronald Bradley	1958-present	875	353	1,228-315