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# EAST METRO

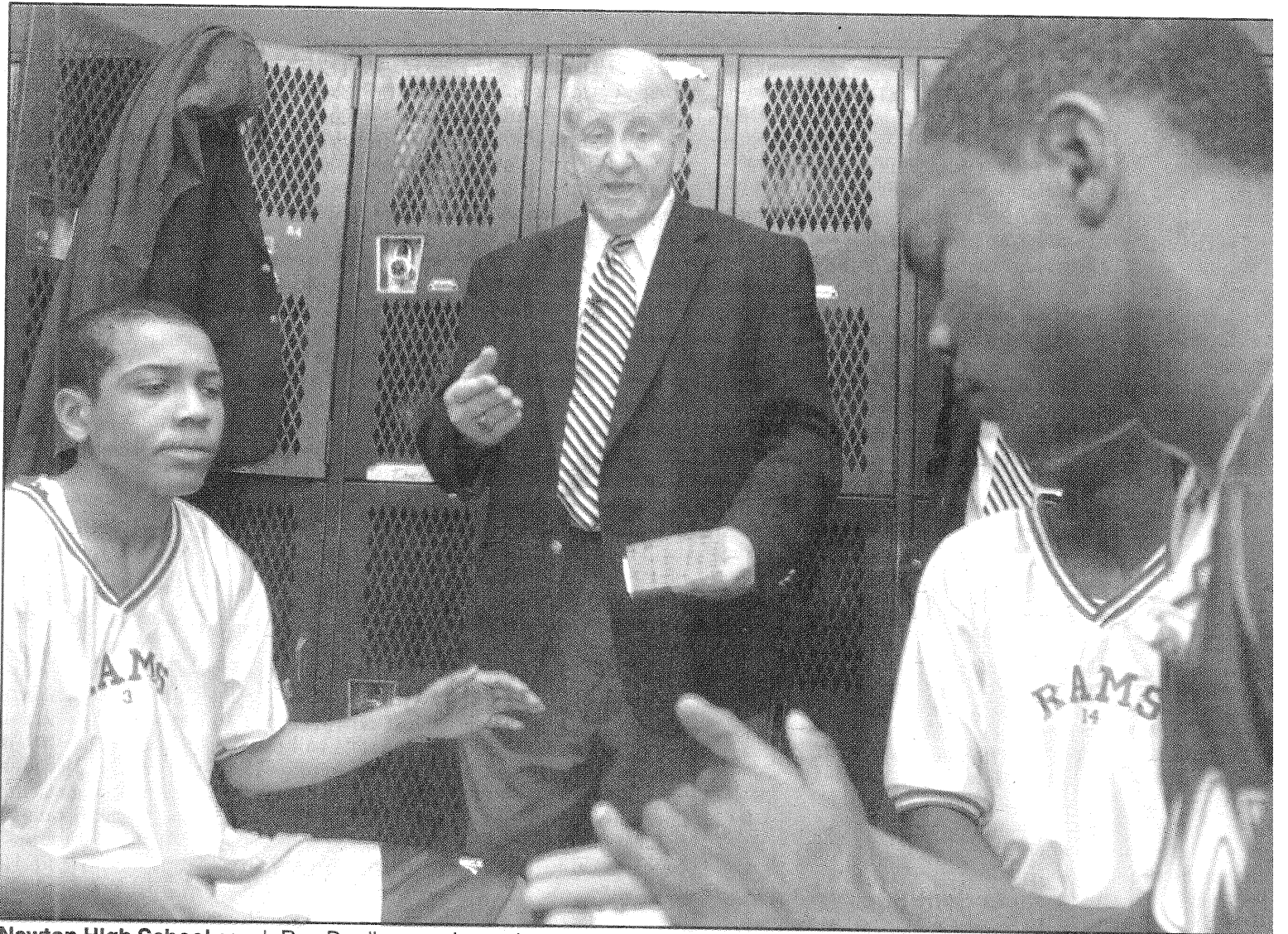
## Winningest coach in the state

# Bradley rewrites history

By DARRELL HUCKABY  
Special to the Citizen

The setting was just about perfect – a high school gymnasium in Covington that had been filled to capacity hours before tip-off. There were television cameras and reporters everywhere. Two teams were preparing to play a game with sub-region and region title implications. The Newton Rams filed into their dressing room midway through the third quarter of the girls' game to thunderous applause. They were resplendently dressed in matching blue blazers, gray slacks and striped ties. Hundreds of those in attendance had seen similar scenes played out many times over the past four or five decades.

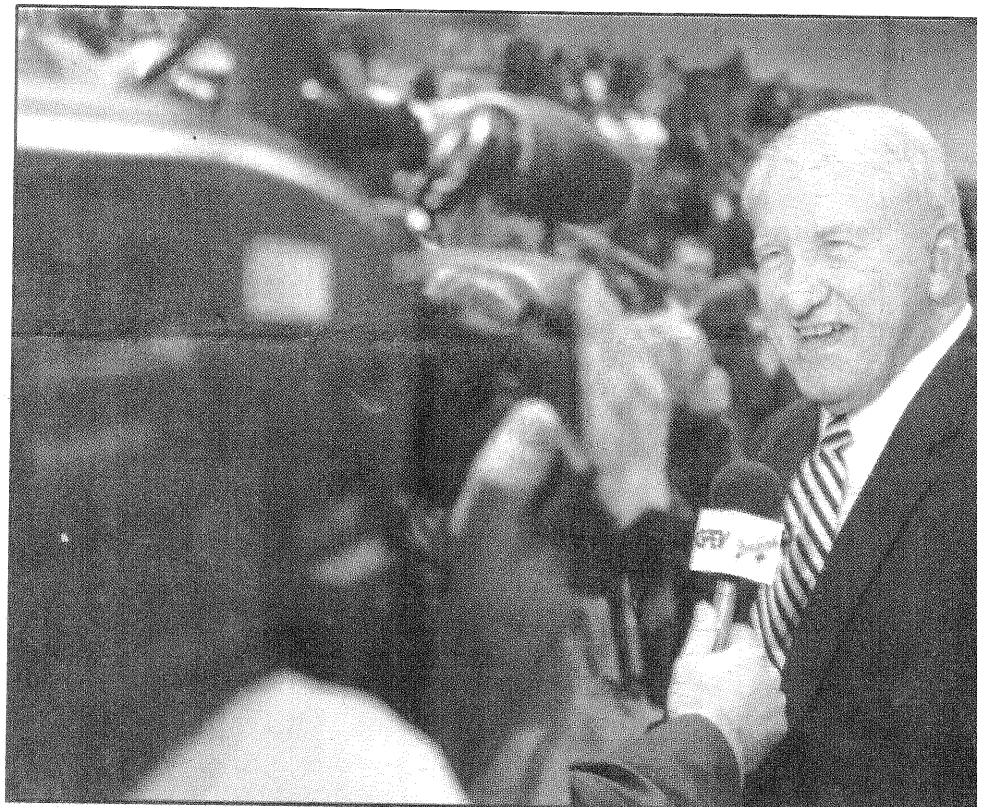
The game, between the Newton Rams and their cross-town rival Eastside Eagles, was different from any other high school game that had ever been played in the state of Georgia, however, because when this game was over, if his team won, Ram Coach Ronald Bradley would own 1,255 career victories – more than any other coach in the history of Georgia basketball. There were many nay-sayers in the crowd who doubted that the Rams – who were not nearly as tall or as physical as their opponents – would prevail on this particular night. They should have known not to doubt Bradley's boys. When the last basket had been recorded and the last whistle had blown, the Rams had defeated Eastside 66-43 and Bradley had surpassed the late D.B. Collier to become the winningest coach in Georgia history.

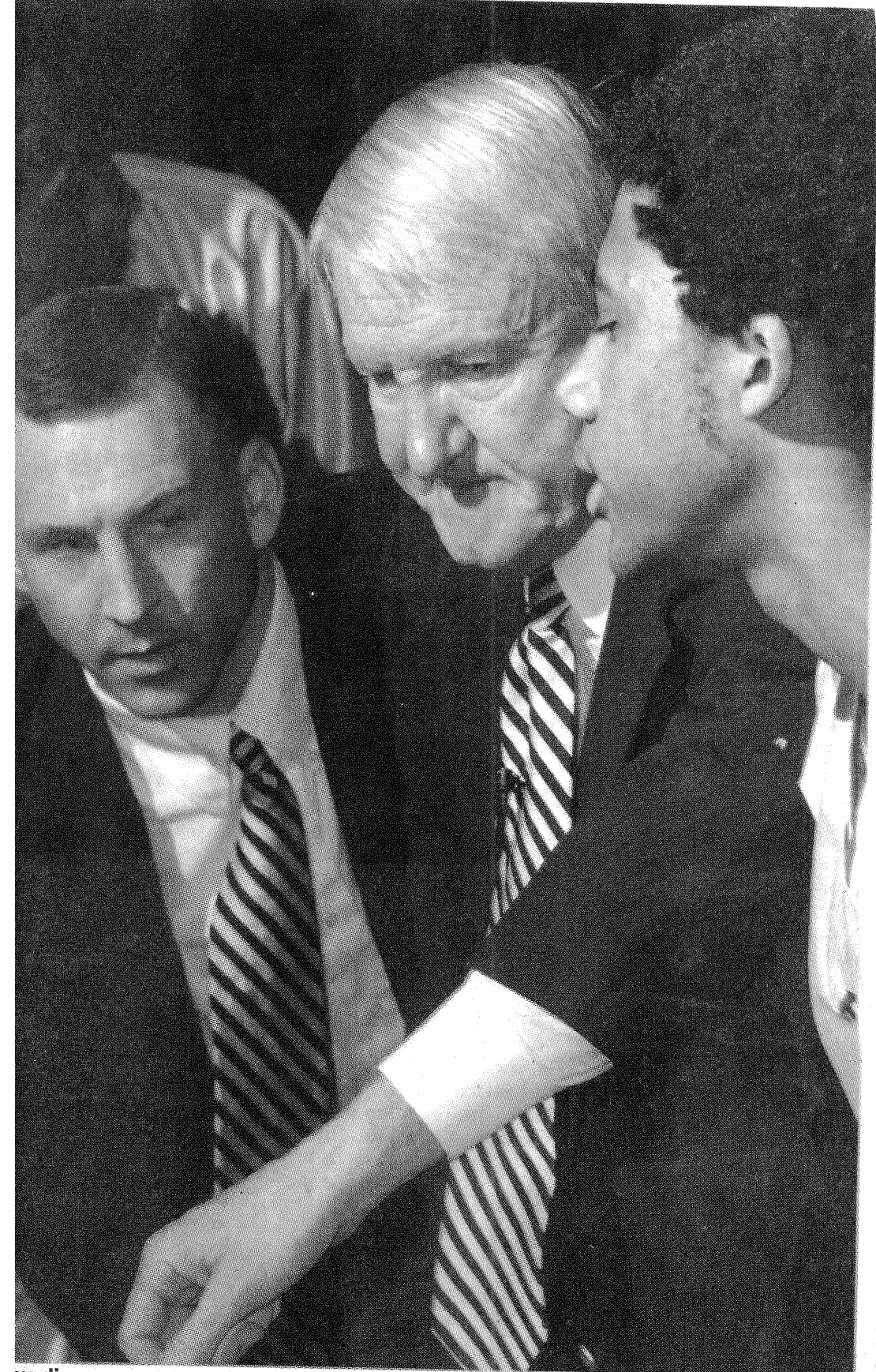


Newton High School coach Ron Bradley speaks to players at half time (above) and speaks to reporters (below) after the big win. Bradley's rank of Georgia's all-time winningest coach after the Newton boys basketball team beat Eastside High School 66-43 on Jan. 31, a total of 1,255 combined career wins to date. —Photos by Dan Henry

Bradley's first win came 44 years ago as his Newton team trounced Loganville. That was way back in 1958. Eisenhower was president of the United States and Elvis Presley was a soldier. Bradley's first team wore crew cuts and canvas Converse All-Star basketball shoes. His team won with discipline, strong defense, smart play, and great shooting.

It's doubtful that any of Bradley's current team has ever owned a pair of canvas high tops, and even though his game attire has remained constant, the appearance of his team has changed dramatically. Most of his players wore their hair in cornrows Friday night and not crew cuts. But like their predecessors, they won with discipline, strong defense, smart play, and good shooting.





Bradley discusses game strategy with players and assistant coaches during the historic Newton County basketball game.

Ronald Bradley was raised in the mill village of Scottdale and was a star athlete at Avondale High School. He went on to the University of Georgia where he played basketball for Coach Red Lawson and was a star outfielder on Coach Jim Whatley's SEC champion baseball squad. After graduating from UGA he moved with his wife, Jan, and their baby daughter, Brenda, to Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., where he worked in the city's recreation department.

His life, and the lives of hundreds of young men and women, took a dramatic change the following year when Newton County High School principal, Homer Sharp, hired him to teach and coach at the Covington school. After coaching the junior varsity for one season, Bradley took the helm of the varsity boys' team the following year and immediately began to create a following among the people of Newton County that has rarely, if ever, been matched in the annals of high school sports.

Year after year his Rams won almost every time they took the floor. They won sub-region and region championships with regularity and competed on the state level every year, finally winning the Class AA State Championship in 1964. Even more remarkable, they almost never lost at home.

During one improbable nine-year stretch, the Rams won an incredible 129 consecutive home games - a feat equaled only by Adolph Rupp's University of Kentucky teams and never by another high school team, anywhere in the world.

The interest he sparked in Newton County basketball grew into a fever and game after game, year after year, capacity crowds would cram into the Newton gym which became "Death Valley" to visiting teams.

Bradley left Newton County in 1975 and began coaching boys and girls at George Walton Academy in Monroe, where his unparalleled success continued.

While at George Walton he coached all three of his sons, Brad, Bill and Bob, in basketball and football. He retired in 1988 and spent a couple of years traveling around the world before resuming his career at Trinity Christian in Dublin. He later coached at

Loganville High School, Piedmont and Port St. Jo, Fla. before retiring in Newton County in 2001, having won 1,255 games.

**AMONG THE 1,600** witnesses to the night's record-setting performance were many of Bradley's former players and many fans who have followed him since his first tour of duty in Covington. They gathered around the ledger as he received a congratulatory letter from his wife of 47 years, Jan. He then spent a few minutes to greet his former players and Newton students stood by to cheer "Bradley, Bradley, Bradley."

He finally had a chance to speak and put the events of the night in perspective.

"This has been a great evening but it's really not about me. It's about the future of Newton County. It's a tribute to many young men and women who have loved basketball and want to work hard to be the best. The record belongs to them, as well as to the fans and the people in the community where we've lived and worked. So please have played a part in our success. I just wish I could tell every one of you how much they have meant to me and to our lives."

Many have speculated that Bradley might retire - for good - after finishing the win record, but the 68-year-old sounded like retirement was the last thing from his mind as he outlined his plans for the next season.

"We have a huge game against Loganville Tuesday night and then we travel to Port St. Joe next Friday. We still have a chance to have a 20-win season this year and anything after that would be on the cake."

And who knows what his team will accomplish next year? After all, the first 1,255 wins are always there.

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