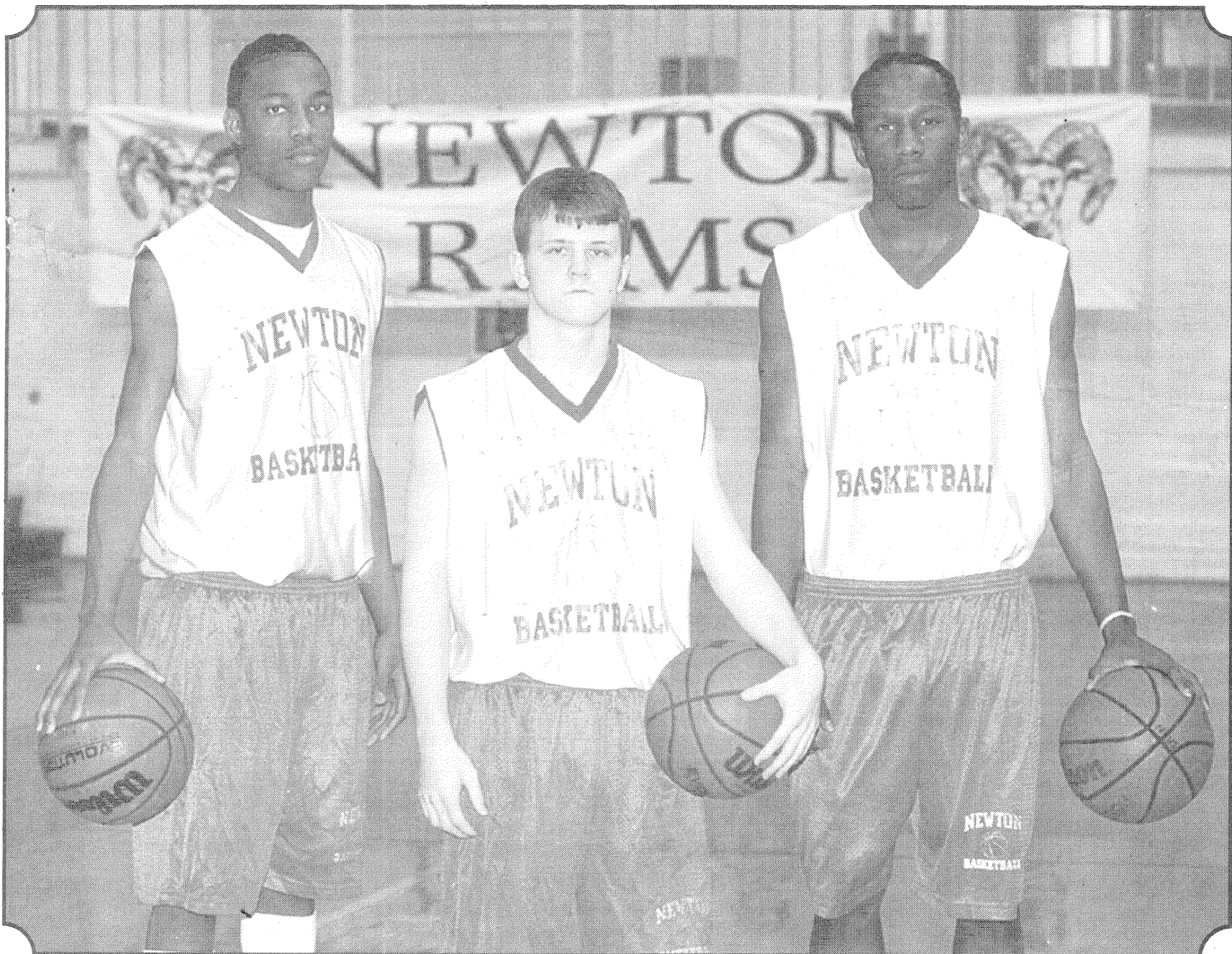


# Sports

## CLASS AAAA STATE TOURNAMENT



Mandi Singer/The Covington News

**Experience counts:** Darius White, left, Justin Herring and Vincent Scott lead Newton against Mays in the first round of the Class AAAA State Tournament at 5:30 p.m. Friday at Cedar Shoals High School in Athens. The Rams have not won a state playoff game since 1999.

# One last chance

## Newton seniors give fate a final go in state tournament

**Brian Knapp**

bknapp@covnews.com

**R**on Bradley believes in the confidence bred by experience, believes in depending on players who have proven themselves dependable over time on stages both big and small.

So it is that the legendary head coach guides the Newton High School boys' basketball team against No. 11 Mays in the first round of the Class AAAA State Tournament at 5:30 p.m. Friday at Cedar Shoals High School in Athens.

Three players in particular carry his hopes for advancing.

Justin Herring, Vincent Scott and Darius White are seasoned players who have been there and done that over the course of their careers. The authors of many a magical moment, they own a region championship and have defeated some of the state's premier teams, helping to keep alive the tradition that has long defined the boys' basketball program at Newton.

That said, they have yet to advance beyond the opening round of the state playoffs.

"They were part of something special last

**"T**hey were a part of something special last year. This year, they're still trying to make their mark, and they've got one last chance to make it."

— Ron Bradley

head coach, Newton High School boys' basketball team

year," Bradley said. "This year, they're still trying to make their mark, and they've got one last chance to make it. They're important to us."

The three most visible Newton seniors still have the lingering aftertaste of a 22-point defeat to Creekside in the first round of the Class AAAA State Tournament last February. Roles were reversed then, as Newton came into the tournament as the Region 8-AAAA champion and Creekside entered as a No. 4 seed.

"I don't think that has any effect on this group, other than to let them know the caliber of teams that come out of that region,"

Bradley said. "Everybody starts out 0-0 now."

Herring is the spiritual fuel in this team's tank, a player who relies more on instinct, knowledge and effort than on his limited physical ability. A superb defensive player with a nose for the ball, the 5-foot-6 senior always seems to be in the right place at the right time. He is a classic point guard in every sense of the word, striving to find the best shot for a teammate.

"He has a lot of intestinal fortitude," Bradley said. "He works hard, and he's been a joy to work with."

Herring is averaging a modest 3.0 points, 4.5 assists and 3.0 steals per game entering the state draw.

"He's probably the lowest-scoring player we've ever had starting on one of our teams," Bradley said. "But he's so valuable in other ways that no one's been able to take his spot."

Scott is the team's best rebounder and only legitimate scoring threat in the paint. He posted two double-doubles in three region tournament games, pouring in a career-high 24 points and ripping down 10 rebounds in a 71-50 victory over Madison County.

See Seniors page 13