

# Newton enters state rankings No. 8 in AAAA

## Eagles drop one spot to ninth

**By Brian Knapp**

Sports Editor

The Newton boys' basketball team has the state's attention.

Thrust into celebrity by a 41-37 victory over cross-country rival Eastside last Friday, the Rams pushed into the Atlanta Tipoff Club's state rankings Tuesday at 14-5 (5-0 subregion).

Newton enters the poll at No. 8 behind top-ranked South Atlanta, Douglas County, Cedar Shoals, Statesboro, Griffin, Jordan and South Forsyth. The Rams have moved into sole possession of first place in the south subregion with wins in eight of their last nine games.

Newton head coach Ron Bradley welcomed the recognition.

"I think we deserve to be ranked," Bradley said. "The upside to it is that the guys will start to figure out that we must be pretty good and that maybe something good is in store for us come tournament time."

All five of Newton's defeats have come against quality opposition, including a last-second setback to third-ranked Cedar Shoals and a three-point loss to Lovejoy (ranked fourth in Class AAAA) in December. The Rams also fell to perennial contender Clarke Central, red-hot Franklin County and Class AAAA titan Parkview.



**Legale Floyd** says he and his teammates welcome pressures of being ranked.

"Everybody's going to shoot at us a little more now," Bradley said. "But we don't sneak up on many people anyway. We're in first place in our subregion, and we're going to find out if we can handle this kind of recognition."

Led by their three-headed monster of Legale Floyd, Antwone Smith and Darius White, the Rams have posted a 6-1 mark in January. Floyd, the county's leading scorer and a top candidate for Region 8-AAAA Player of the Year honors, did not shy away from the pollsters' new-found admiration either.

"It's a good thing to be ranked," Floyd said. "We've been working hard and we're getting more confident."

This marks the first time in two seasons that Newton has cracked the state poll. The Rams climbed to No. 1 in December of 2000 under then head coach Billy Hendricks and went on to win the school's first region championship in over a decade.

Eastside, ranked eighth last week, slipped to No. 9 in the latest poll.