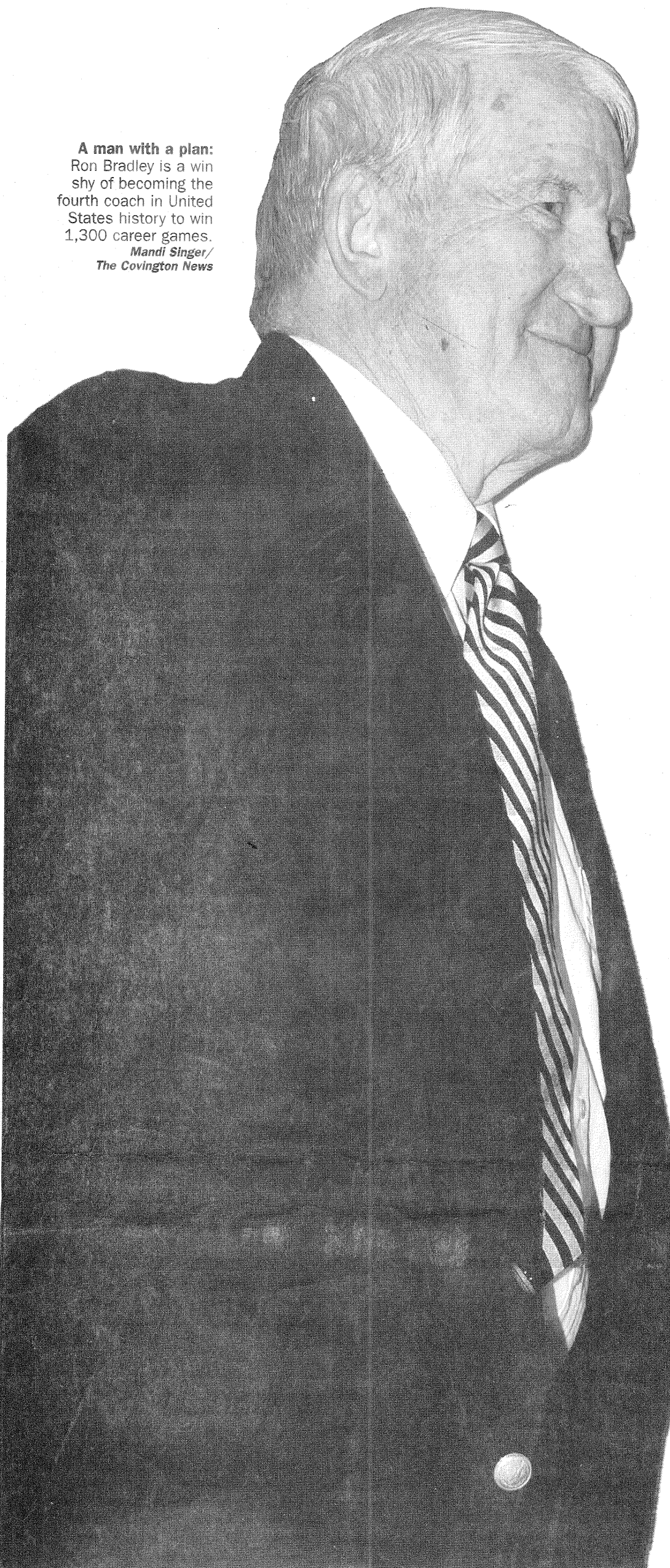


Sports



A man with a plan: Ron Bradley is a win shy of becoming the fourth coach in United States history to win 1,300 career games.
*Mandi Singer/
The Covington News*

THE 1,300 CLUB

Cinderella season has Bradley on brink of another milestone

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The number itself is so far out of step with reality, with the normal expectation of logical bounds that it remains utterly incomprehensible, even when it is put to the printed page.

For a coach — *any coach* — to win 1,300 games, he or she would have to string together 65 consecutive 20-win seasons. With just one more victory, Ron Bradley will get there.

He has paced the sidelines, commanded respect in the huddle and inspired greatness in the locker room for 45 years, longer than some of the coaches he now coaches against have been alive.

Still going strong at 70, Bradley guides the Newton High School boys' basketball team against Region 1-AAAAA champion Lowndes at 5:30 p.m. Thursday in the second round of the Class AAAAA

State Tournament at the Macon Coliseum in Macon.

Having led the Rams to a 45-37 victory in the ninth-ranked East Coweta Saturday, he paused at 1,299 career wins. Only three other coaches in United States history have ever won 1,300 games in a career.

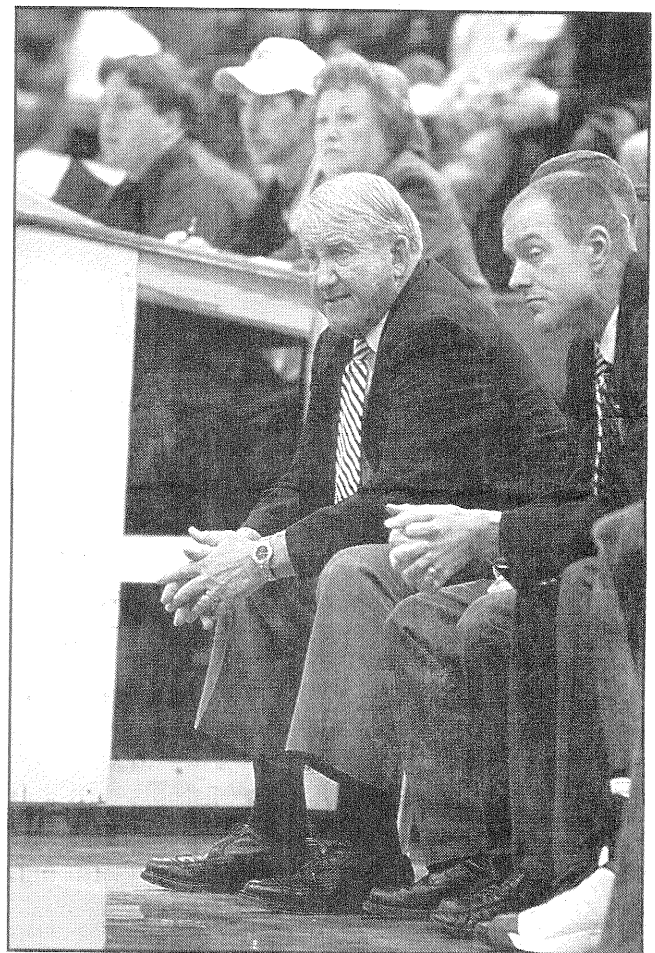
"If 1,300 comes," Bradley said, "that's not a goal, but I hope it doesn't become a factor. I don't want to put any added pressure on the team. We're trying to win a game to stay alive."

A Cinderella season

When it was learned Newton was headed to the

Class AAAAAA state tournament, the Class AAAAAA team was in the Region AAAAAA tournament. The Rams gave the defending champion a fight, but they couldn't make a season of it. The Rams lost to the defending champion, the state champion, in the first round. "I was taken a little bit," Bradley said. "I said, 'I'm 14-13, I've taken a little bit, but I wasn't able to win on the region; five out of seven.'"

See Coaches



Ron Manson/The Covington News

On the bench: Newton's Ron Bradley has Newton in the Sweet 16 for just the second time in 21 years.

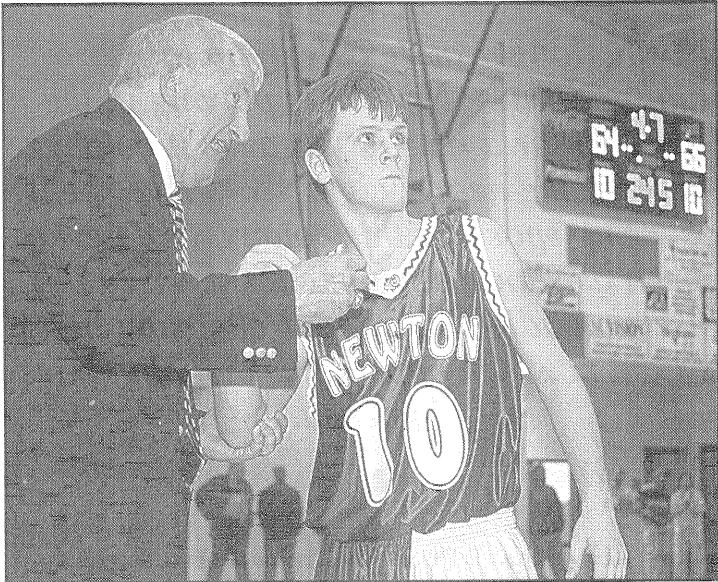
Sports

Coach: Could become fourth to reach 1,300 wins

page 2B

mood surrounding the has done a 180 since. ere they are in the Sweet just the second time in ars, a win shy of the quarterfinals. h only one player — center John Monk — ng 6-foot-5 or taller, on thrived in one of the s harshest regions, d it could compete and ately played for the 2-AA championship. w did it happen? ey've been account- Bradley said. "When el like young people ceptive, when you feel they're trying to do the thing, they're fun to with." ategy, patience and fun- tinals have outweighed strength and talent on nights. Newton won of its 14 regular-season s and two playoff games st region opposition. ruly has been a Cin- a season. The only ion that remains is ... the slipper still fit? his has been an awesome regardless of what hap- Bradley said. "It's hard lieve what this team has nplished. I have a lot of ct for what these young ave done."

aching lives'
stranger to recognition, ey's career is crowded honors and achievement. now, in the twilight of oried run, Bradley teach- e game better than any- lse. 2004, he was chosen as nal coach of the year by ational High School tic Coaches Association he National Federation ate High School Associa- , becoming the first 1 in state history to hold awards in the same year. rfter players still revere e just knows how to get est out of people," said Harris, who played for ley in the 1960s. "He ys taught us preparation liscipline, and those s carry over in life. I'll ys remember his fairness, though he was a good plinarian, he was always legendary local figure, ley became the state's me winningest boys' bas- all coach a year ago this h, supplanting the late Staples with his 925th ry. Staples' record of 924



Ron Manson/The Covington News

In-game tension: Newton head coach Ron Bradley, left, discusses strategy with former point guard Justin Herring during a game against Rockdale County in 2003.

wins as a boys' coach had stood for more than four decades. Bradley's 946 wins rank him seventh nationally. In fact, Bradley has passed two historic milestones since he returned to coach at Newton prior to the 2001-02 season. He jetted past D.B. Carroll as the state's all-time winningest high school basketball coach (boys and girls) with win No. 1,255 in January 2003.

"You like to feel like you're touching lives," Bradley said. "You want to make young people feel special. That's your job."

Enshrined in the State of Georgia Sports Hall of Fame in 1997, Bradley has also been recognized by the Georgia Athletic Coaches Association as the first basketball coach ever to receive its Circle of Achievement Award. And in 2000, the Atlanta Tipoff Club named him as its Steve Schmidt Award winner for his outstanding contributions to the game.

Currently in his second tour with Newton, he led the school to its only state championship back in 1964 and directed his teams to a national-record 129 consecutive home wins during one 9-year span. He has won 24 region championships and three state titles over an unparalleled career that has spanned six different decades.

Michael Jordan had not even been born when he started coaching in 1959.

"For me," Bradley said, "it's about the love of the game."

Been here before

Ron Bradley had not yet turned 30 when it happened, when it all came together like

he had planned.

He had won 130 of his first 146 games at Newton County High School and would go on to win over 1,100 more, but as he walked into his sixth season with the Rams, Bradley found himself in search of the signature victory that would define him as a coach.

He found it in 1964.

The 1964 Newton boys' basketball team won its first 27 games, shook off one controversial defeat and then won its last eight games by an average of 16 points, crushing Hart County by 22 points in the Class AA State Tournament championship game before 6,200 at the Georgia Tech Coliseum in Atlanta.

The Rams finished 35-1 and gave birth to the icon Ron Bradley has since become.

"What I remember most about 1964 is just how special those kids were and the commitment the town made to them," Bradley said. "It was a fantastic period."

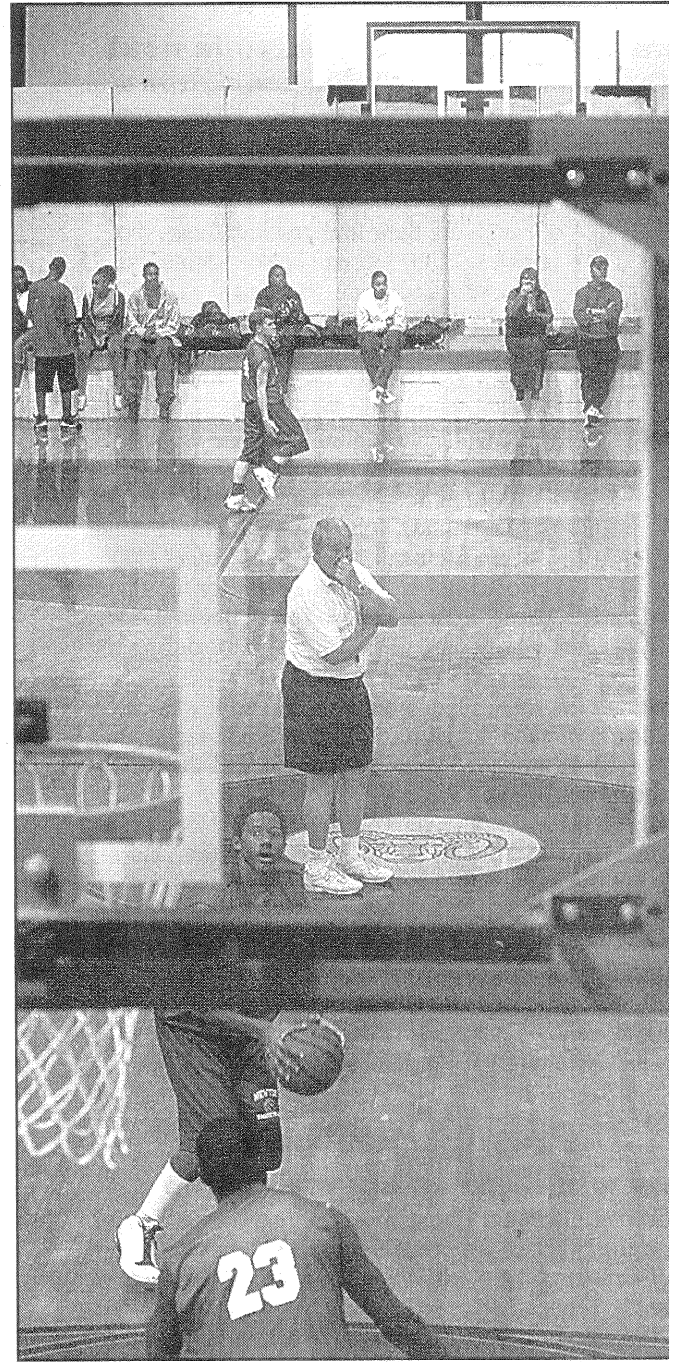
The coach and his 11 players that year formed an unbreakable bond that still exists today. They were the perfect match, according to Bob Richardson, a sophomore in 1964.

"It all started with Coach Bradley," Richardson said. "He had a brilliant basketball mind. On top of that, he got players to buy into his program, which consisted basically of being fundamentally sound."

"It wasn't an accident that we practiced fundamentals six months out of the year. When it came down to crunch time, we didn't dribble the ball off of our leg or miss free throws; we knew what to do. People talk about how lucky we were. The harder you work, the luckier you get."

Bradley's methods and tireless work ethic instilled belief, confidence and fear in his players. They knew they were expected to get the job done, and they did it.

"It all goes back to our coach," Eddie Hinton, the state championship team's lone freshman, said. "He was probably the hardest-working person I've seen in my life. I don't think we'll see anybody like him again."



Ron Manson/The Covington News

Keeping watch: Newton head coach Ron Bradley stands on midcourt circle and watches over practice.