



Mandi Singer/The Covington News

Flashing fours: Todd Hoskins, left, Brandon Finch, Rudy Nolley, John Monk, Trent Brown and Jerrell Boswell will lead the Newton High School boys' basketball team against third-ranked Wheeler in the Class AAAAA Final Four at 5:30 p.m. Thursday at the Arena at Gwinnett Center in Duluth.

NEWTON'S Dreamcatchers

Can underdog Rams spring one more surprise?

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This is the improbable team that made the most improbable of runs. Movies have been crafted from lesser stories. None of them stand taller than 6-foot-4; none of them, save one, would be regarded as all-star material outside county lines. Yet here they are walking among giants, without fear, without doubt, without pressure.

The Newton High School boys' basketball team was supposed to lose a long time ago. To ninth-ranked East Coweta. To Region 1-AAAAA champion Lowndes. To rugged and determined Douglass.

What the Rams have done over the past 103 days is nothing short of remarkable, having survived the state's toughest region in its largest classification. Nearing the finish line, Newton is one of only four teams left standing some 15 weeks into the high school basketball season.

Two wins shy of their first state championship in 41 years, the Rams have embraced their role as underdogs from day one and must do so again when they toe the line against third-ranked Wheeler (29-1) in the Class

“No one could have expected this. I don't think I've had a team achieve this much with less talent.”

— **Ron Bradley**

head coach,
Newton High School
boys' basketball team

AAAAA State Tournament semifinals at 5:30 p.m. Thursday at the Arena at Gwinnett Center in Duluth.

Led by legendary head coach Ron Bradley, a man who has left the court victorious exactly 1,301 times in his 45-year career, this team represents another crowning achievement in his unprecedented run of success on the bench. He has had teams with more talent fall short of the dream. This one caught it and kept right on going.

“No one could have expected this,” Bradley said. “I don't think I've had a team achieve this much with less talent. I've had some great teams that never even got here.”

How did it happen? Bradley can give you six reasons to start with.

Shooting star

On a team where the sum is greater than the individual parts, Jerrell

Boswell is the player opponents fear most, and with good reason.

Averaging better than 20 points per game, Boswell is arguably Region 2-AAAAA's most prolific long-range shooter. Need evidence? Consider his 41-point game against Lithonia in which he nailed nine 3-pointers, the most by any Newton player in a decade.

The focus of virtually every opposing team's defensive gameplan, Boswell has lived up to his preseason billing and carried the Rams on his shoulders for much of the season. He is putting up 13 points per game in the state playoffs but has yet to connect on a 3-pointer, a sign perhaps that he is evolving as an offensive player, more willing to put the ball on the floor.

“He's worked hard, shoots the ball well and has the right mentality for scoring,” Bradley said. “He works as hard at shooting a basketball as anyone we've had the last four years.”

Relatively quiet in the state tournament, the 6-foot junior tagged Douglass for 15 points — a dozen in the second half — in a 51-44 victory over the Astros in the quarterfinals.

“He had a great second half [against Douglass],” Bradley said. “Everybody's defense is geared towards him. He only shot twice in the first half.”

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