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'Hey, hey, here we go'

Rams head
to Final Four
Thursday night

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It has been almost 25 years since Newton County sent a basketball team to the state Final Four.

"That was a great team," recalled Newton High School Principal David Eas-terday of the 1981 players. "That team had some athletes."

Thursday afternoon the current Rams and their cheerleaders will board buses for the ride of a lifetime: to the Gwinnett Arena in Duluth and a battle

MORE INSIDE

See page 1B for a comprehensive look at Newton's game against Wheeler.

against third-ranked Wheeler High School for a chance to play for the AAAAA state championship. The game begins at 5:30 p.m.

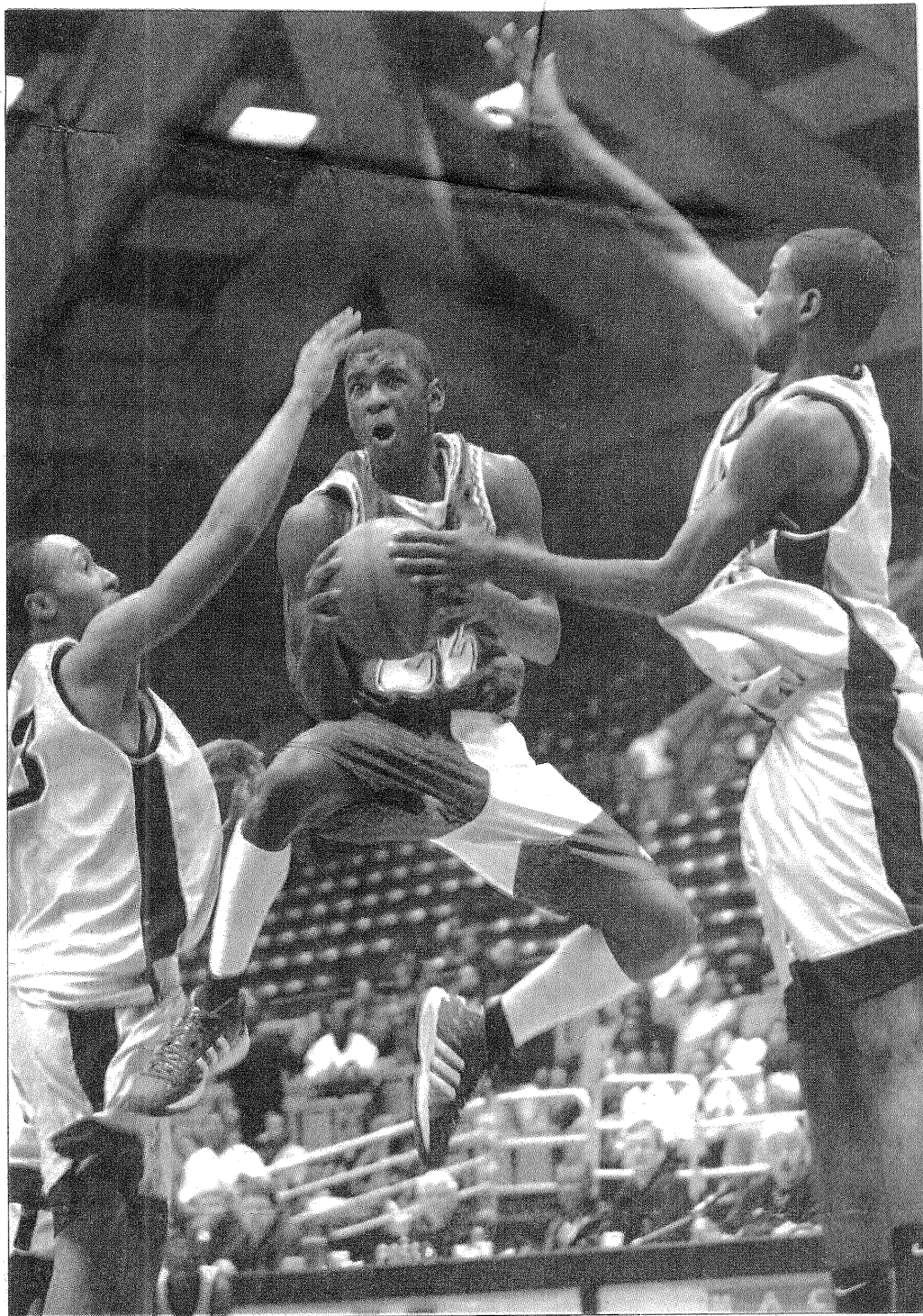
Senior Tiffany Sands, a varsity cheerleader for the past four years, said there hasn't been this much excitement at Newton High in a long time.

"Wheeler is a strong team, but I think we can pull through," she said. "They have so much talent."

Her fellow cheerleader, Katie Hurd, in her first year on the squad, says the girls have made gifts and goodie bags for the basketball players, but other than that there is no big send-off planned for the team that is making history again.

"We'll just get on the buses and go," she said, saying that the school with its 2,500 students, "is just too big for a pep rally."

Stanley Bray, a tenth-grader who just moved here a few weeks ago from Columbia, S.C., has become



Mandi Singer/The Covington News

Newton junior shooting guard Jerrell Boswell soars between Douglass' Greg Smith, left, and 6-foot-8 Xavier Smith Saturday night during Newton's 51-44 win over the Astros in the Macon Coliseum. The victory propelled the Rams into the Class AAAAA Final Four. Newton takes on Wheeler at 5:30 p.m. Thursday at the Gwinnett Arena. If the Rams win Thursday, they play the winner of the Stephenson-Norcross game at 8:15 p.m. Friday at the Gwinnett Arena.

one of the Rams' biggest fans and attended the last home game before the tournament frenzy started a little more than two weeks ago.

A former shooting guard with the Richland Northeast Cavaliers, Bray wants to play for his new school.

If the Rams defeat Wheeler Thursday night, they go against either Stephenson or Norcross for the state AAAAA championship on Friday. They have won five of the last six games.

Cheerleader Ashley Lynch likes to think the rousing

support from the sidelines gives the players a boost. After one of their hard-fought games, one of the players told her, "You guys don't know it but, you inspire us!"

Her favorite cheer is "Hey, hey, here we go. Rams ... let's go!"