

Bradley back in the habit

Former Newton coaching legend bound for GACS

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NORCROSS

It was only Thursday morning that Ron Bradley said by telephone that the itch to coach would probably nag him forever.

"I think I'll always have it," said Bradley, the legendary high school basketball coach who retired from Newton High School just months ago. "But I'm learning to be with my family. Part of the reason I left was that I thought it was time for coach [Rick] Rasmussen to have a chance. It's just the second time in my career that I've [stepped down for someone] ... I have a great respect for him."

But in a matter of hours, it seemed, a metro Atlanta high school had come through with an offer Bradley just couldn't refuse.

Bradley was signed Thursday afternoon to head the boys' basketball program at Greater Atlanta Christian School in Norcross, the second largest private school in Georgia.

The nationally renowned coach arrived at his press conference at GACS Friday morning, clad in a dark blue suit and a very large smile.

In the entrance way to the media room, Bradley's wife Jan tenderly smoothed his hair prior to his introduction. If the winner of 1,301 career games was nervous, you'd have never guessed.

But Bradley quickly removed all doubt when he spoke.

"I thought I'd known pressure before," Bradley gleamed after a round of applause. "This is awesome."

Bradley was introduced by school President Dr. David Fincher, who called Bradley exactly the type of man they wanted at GACS — a Region 8-AA school with three state championships to its credit.

"In the last several weeks, we conducted an intensive, national search not just for a coach, but a stellar coach," Fincher said. "There were many candidates for this job ... and we found one who is stellar, outstanding and excellent."



Ron Bradley exits the floor following a Newton playoff win over Lowndes County in February. The coaching legend has agreed to head the boys' basketball program at Greater Atlanta Christian School.

GACS did not have to look far for the coach they expect to take them to the next level. Bradley's return to coaching comes just four months after he concluded his career at Newton High School with an improbable run to the state Final Four, having endured arguably the toughest region in the state in 2-AAAAA.

Bradley replaces Tom Kelsey, who left GACS to head the boys' program at Belhaven College in Mississippi.

Bradley said he was pleased to have accepted the position — he had admired the school from afar, he said — and looked forward to the opportunity to help shape the lives of his new students.

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— Ron Bradley
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Greater Atlanta Christian School
boys' basketball team

Bradley's position includes oversight of boys' basketball, grades 7-12, and he will serve as an assistant athletic director at the school.

Those duties are not at all novel to Bradley, who served 19 years of his illustrious career as an athletic director and has headed 121 different varsity teams since he began

coaching in 1957.

GACS players — many of whom had already met with Bradley and were on hand for Friday's press conference — spoke with optimism about the chance to play under their new coach.

"This is really exciting," said Reece Wiedeman, a member of the basketball team. "We have a new coach coming in, with a background like he has — this is going to be a good thing."

Bradley said he had great admiration for the history and ambition of his new employers.

"I admire a school that says we are a school of champions," he continued. "It's great to be with someone who wants to be successful."

"It was an opportunity I couldn't pass up," he continued. "This is the first day of the rest of my coaching career. It's not just about wins and losses, it's about being part of lives."

Retirement not meant for coach Bradley

If you're fortunate, you'll cross paths with one, perhaps two, truly great people in your lifetime, people who can impact your life just by being there, people who have a God-given ability to drive you to be a better, more complete human being.

And I know — and have

written more than one story — about one of those people.

When Ronald M. Bradley's named Caller ID screen last week, I had an inkling that the next chapter in his storybook life and career had already begun, that he had "unretired" for the third time, that his hat had been hurled back into the coaching ring.

And I was genuinely happy when he confirmed my hunch in a pleasant 5-minute phone call Friday morning.

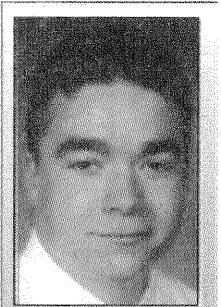
"I guess you've heard," Bradley said in a commanding yet encouraging voice.

He needed say no more.

People like Bradley weren't made for retirement. They were meant to do what they do best, and in his case, that means coaching basketball.

The 70-year-old legend, who won his first basketball game 21 years before I was born, has accepted an offer to become the head coach of the Greater Atlanta Christian School boys' basketball team in Norcross.

With 1,301 career victories, he will enter the 2005-06 season as the winningest active coach in the United States.



Brian Knapp
Columnist

Knapp: Bradley one of a kind

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Some will undoubtedly question his motives under their breath. Why come back? Why not ride off into the sunset after leading the Newton High School boys' basketball team to its first state semifinal appearance in 23 years? When is enough enough?

The people who ask those questions never will understand the answers.

In the movie "Braveheart," Mel Gibson's William Wallace utters the line "God makes men what they are."

Well, God made Ron Bradley a basketball coach, just as he made Hemingway a writer, just as he made Beethoven a musician, just as he made Da Vinci an artist.

Age cannot stop you from answering your calling, and personally, I can think of no better place for Ron Bradley to live out the rest of his days than on a 94-foot piece of shiny wood, teaching young people how to play the game of basketball the right way.

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Staggering though they may be, numbers do not define Bradley's career, nor will they dominate his legacy.

Still, they are worth noting and remembering.

In 45 seasons as a head coach, he is nearly 1,000 games above .500 and has won 24 region championships and three state titles.

He is one of only three coaches in national history to have surpassed the 1,300-win

plateau. Bradley has been named the state coach of the year four times and was chosen as national coach of the year by two different organizations in 2004.

His has been an utterly riveting ride, and I consider myself blessed and fortunate to have been a very small part of it.

He takes over a Greater Atlanta Christian program that went 21-10 and advanced to the quarterfinals of the state Class AA State Tournament last season.

Implausible as it may sound, another state championship for Ron Bradley seems within reach.

My most pressing wish is that the people who are backing Greater Atlanta Christian will do what we in Newton County, for the most part, failed to do, and that is appreciate a man whose knowledge, talent and ability are, in my honest opinion, unmatched in his chosen craft.

Coach on, coach Bradley, until there's no coaching left to do.