



VINO WONG / Staff

With more than 1,300 wins in his 45-year career, Greater Atlanta Christian boys basketball coach **Ron Bradley**, 71, is Georgia's all-time winningest coach and is shy of the national all-time record by 10 games.

THE RON BRADLEY FILE

Position: Greater Atlanta Christian boys basketball head coach.

Age: 71

Career highlights: Record of 1,303-353 in 45 years coaching girls and boys ... four state championships ... nation's winningest active coach and winningest all-time in Georgia ... member of Georgia Sports and Georgia Independent Schools halls of fame ... named 2004 boys coach of the year by National Federation of High Schools and the National High School Coaches Association ... coached Newton teams that hold national record for consecutive home victories — 129 from 1959-67.

Personal: Married to Jan for 51 years; the couple have four children and eight grandchildren ... One of his twin sons, Bill Bradley, is a high school coach in Colorado and has won the past 63 games, including two state championships. ... The other twin, Bob Bradley, is a former high school basketball coach and now is a vice principal at Heritage High School.

Giving it another go

For GAC's 71-year-old boys basketball coach, retirement will have to wait

By **JOHN HOLLIS**
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Ron Bradley's latest try at retirement proved short-lived, much like his previous two.

Again, the opportunity to pass on what he knows about the game he loves proved too enticing to the nation's winningest active basketball coach.

Three weeks after his departure from Newton High School in June, the 71-year-old was back at it again when Greater Atlanta Christian called.

"I've never tired of basketball," he said. "You just live each day and do the best you can. It's a lot of fun to be active and to be a part of things. I was having so much fun I figured I could go another 10 years."

Now at the start of his 46th season as a coach, Bradley, the state's most successful coach of all-time, hopes to do for the Spartans what he's managed in seven stops at six previous schools.

Win.

The Hall of Fame coach, who succeeded Tom Kelsey at GAC, holds a career mark of 1,303-353, including four state championships with boys and girls teams.

He guided a modestly talented Newton boys team to last season's Class AAAAA semifinals, where the Rams fell to eventual champion Wheeler.

Bradley should soon become the nation's all-time winningest coach, surpassing the 1,313 of former Fort Worth, Texas, Dunbar coach Roger Hughes from 1959 to 2004.

"Somebody told me I could go 0-30 the next 30 years and still have a winning record," he joked.

"But, seriously, I've always enjoyed coaching youngsters. It's a challenge wherever you go. You feel like you have something young people wanted and something you could share with them."

That's what he was born to do, said his wife of 51 years.

"He's always said if you didn't want to work, then find something you love and you won't have to work a day in your life," said Jan Bradley, who has attended all but five of her husband's nearly 1,700 games. "It's not a job for him. It's his passion."

Bradley, who began his coaching career at Newton in 1957, relishes the chance to make a difference in the lives of young people. Winning is great, but doing so the

right way matters even more to him.

Many figured he'd coached his last game in March when he stepped aside to allow a longtime assistant to inherit the reins at Newton.

This time, Jan Bradley figured it really was the end. She figured there was no way another opportunity would arise for a man then 70 years old.

But fate had other ideas for the icon who was honored in 2004 as national boys coach of the year by the National Federation of High Schools and the National High School Coaches Association.

GAC administrative vice president Bill Burton was skeptical of his chances at luring Bradley to the school but figured it couldn't hurt to try.

"It was providence," Burton said. "It stunned us. Wherever coach Bradley has been, he's been able to take sometimes average talent and make it better."

Agreed school president David Fincher: "We didn't want to just get a warm body. We wanted somebody stellar. We were thrilled to death he would even talk to us."

Bradley was familiar with GAC, having been close friends with

Jackie Bradford, the school's former coach for whom the gym is named.

A visit to the Norcross school's picturesque campus sealed the deal.

And he hasn't been naïve to think his reputation would win over current players whose parents might not have been born when Bradley began coaching.

"He's the same age as my grandfather," senior guard Wade Weldon said. "We were all kind of shocked."

But Bradley has changed the minds of many skeptics with his enthusiasm and knowledge.

His new office isn't big enough to hold all the accolades that have come his way, but the few that do adorn the walls have added to his credibility.

"That stuff helps," Weldon said, "but mainly you can just tell what kind of guy he is. After you spend some time with him, you know you're in good hands."

Bradley is relishing the chance to continue doing what he's always loved to do.

"When you see all they've done with their lives," he said, "it makes you realize we have something to offer them."