

GAC lures legendary coach

By BOB GILES
bgiles@ajc.com

One question Tim Vick never asked Georgia coaching legend Ronald Bradley, the man he was about to hire as Greater Atlanta Christian's boys basketball coach, was his age. The more the GAC athletics director talked to Bradley, the more he realized how irrelevant it was.

"I wanted a coach who is passionate, who has experience and cares for young people," said Vick, who interviewed about 15 applicants. "The one thing that just stood out about coach Bradley in my mind was the energy. . . . I don't know if anybody is ever perfect for a job, but he's as close as you come."

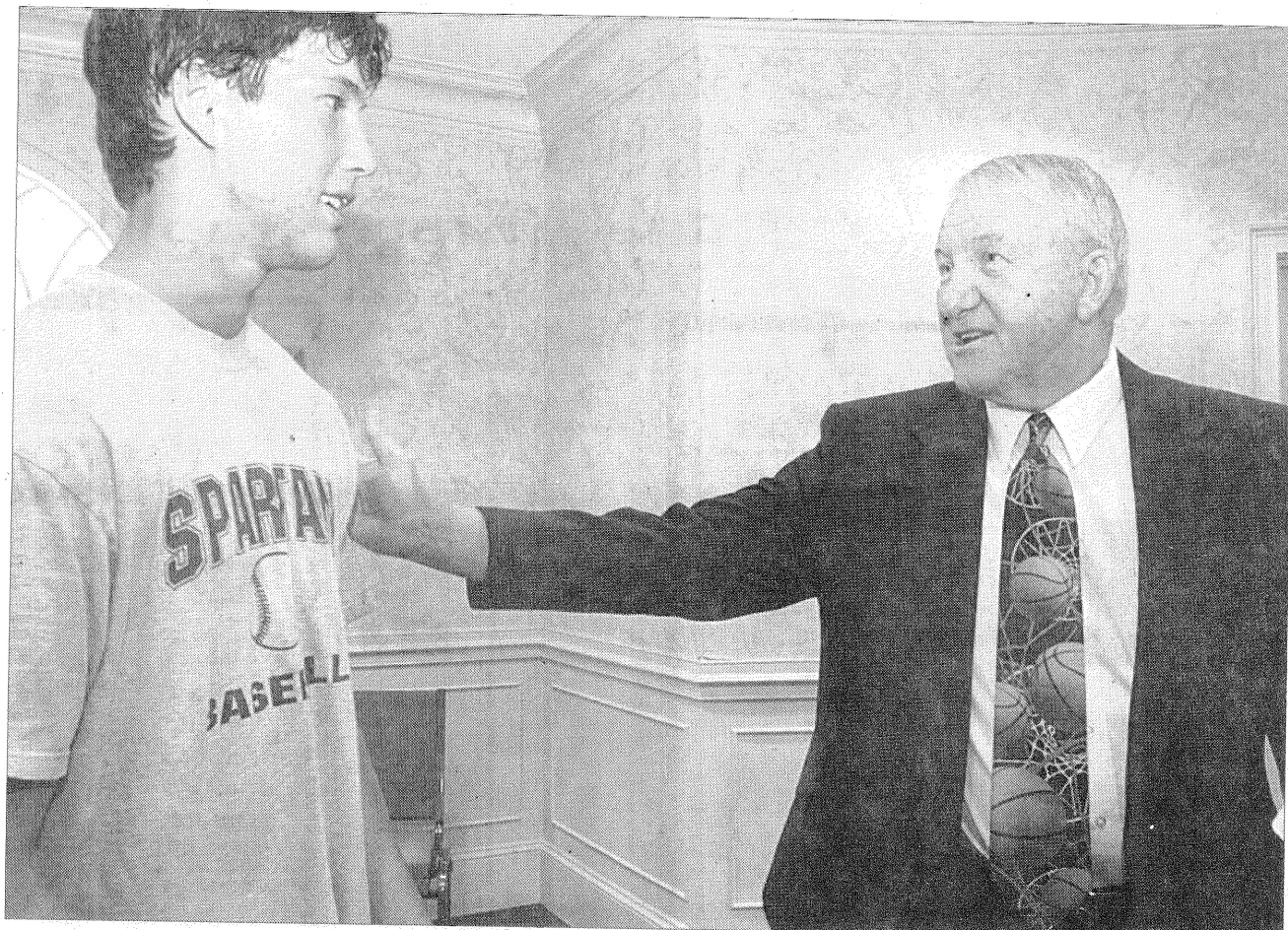
Bradley, who is 70, was introduced to the GAC community Friday morning at a news conference to announce his hiring. He will follow Tom Kelsey, who resigned in late May to accept the men's basketball job at Belhaven College in Mississippi.

With the recent retirement of Robert Hughes, the legendary coach at Dunbar High in Fort Worth, Texas, Bradley becomes the nation's winningest active high school basketball coach. Hughes left with 1,333 wins, and Bradley will enter the 2005-06 season with a 45-year record of 1,301-353. He retired after leading Newton (21-10) to the 2005 Class AAAAA semifinals, where it was beaten by eventual champion Wheeler.

"We thought about it and decided that after 45 years it was about time," Bradley told the AJC in March when announcing his short-lived retirement. "It was nice that it happened on a real good year, and that made it even easier to do."

When the GAC job opened, Bradley said, "It was an opportunity I couldn't pass up. . . . I'm just bubbling over."

Bradley has never coached against GAC in his long career. He first came to prominence at Newton County, where he stayed from



Ronald Bradley, the new boys basketball coach at Greater Atlanta Christian, talks with student and potential basketball player Justin Schneider, 16, after a news conference at GAC on Friday.

JESSICA MCGOWAN / Staff

THE RONALD BRADLEY FILE

School: Greater Atlanta Christian

Current position: Just hired as boys basketball coach

Previous jobs: Newton County (1958-75), George Walton Academy (1975-87), Trinity Christian (1989-94), Loganville (1994-97), Piedmont Academy (1997-99), Port St. Joe, Fla. (2000), Newton (2001-05)

Record: 1,301-353, 45 seasons

1958-75. His teams there won a then-national-record 129 straight home games and the 1964 Class AA

title. He's also had stints at George Walton Academy (1975-87) in Monroe, Trinity Christian (1989-94) in Dublin, Loganville (1994-97), Piedmont Academy (1997-99) in Monticello and Port St. Joe, Fla., in 2000. His teams have won 24 region titles and three state championships. Twenty-nine times, his squads have won 20 or more games.

When he started coaching in 1958 at Newton County, Bradley's players were typically the sons of white mill workers from nearby Porterdales. When he returned in 2001, lured back by principal J.W. Rutledge, one of his former players, most were black youngsters from Covington.

He's able to bridge the generational and cultural gap because, he says, "I have something they want. I have a passion for the game they love."

Bradley will become only the fourth boys coach in GAC history. He was preceded by Jackie Bradford (275-110, 1968-81), Vick (362-189, 1972-2001) and Kelsey (47-40, 2002-05). Kelsey's final squad compiled a 21-10 mark and reached the Class AA quarterfinals.

Bradley's age notwithstanding, Vick hopes he'll stay around awhile.

"When we hire a coach, we hire 'em for life," Vick said. "Until he decides he wants to retire again, he'll be here."