

# Legendary coach steps aside

Bradley retires again after 45 seasons and more than 1,300 wins

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It was a real-world odyssey, a fairy tale in Chuck Taylors, an incredible journey that took him through two states, half a dozen schools and 1,654 basketball games.

Ron Bradley and the coaching profession parted ways Tuesday afternoon as he retired as head coach of the Newton High School boys' basketball team after 45 seasons on one bench or another.

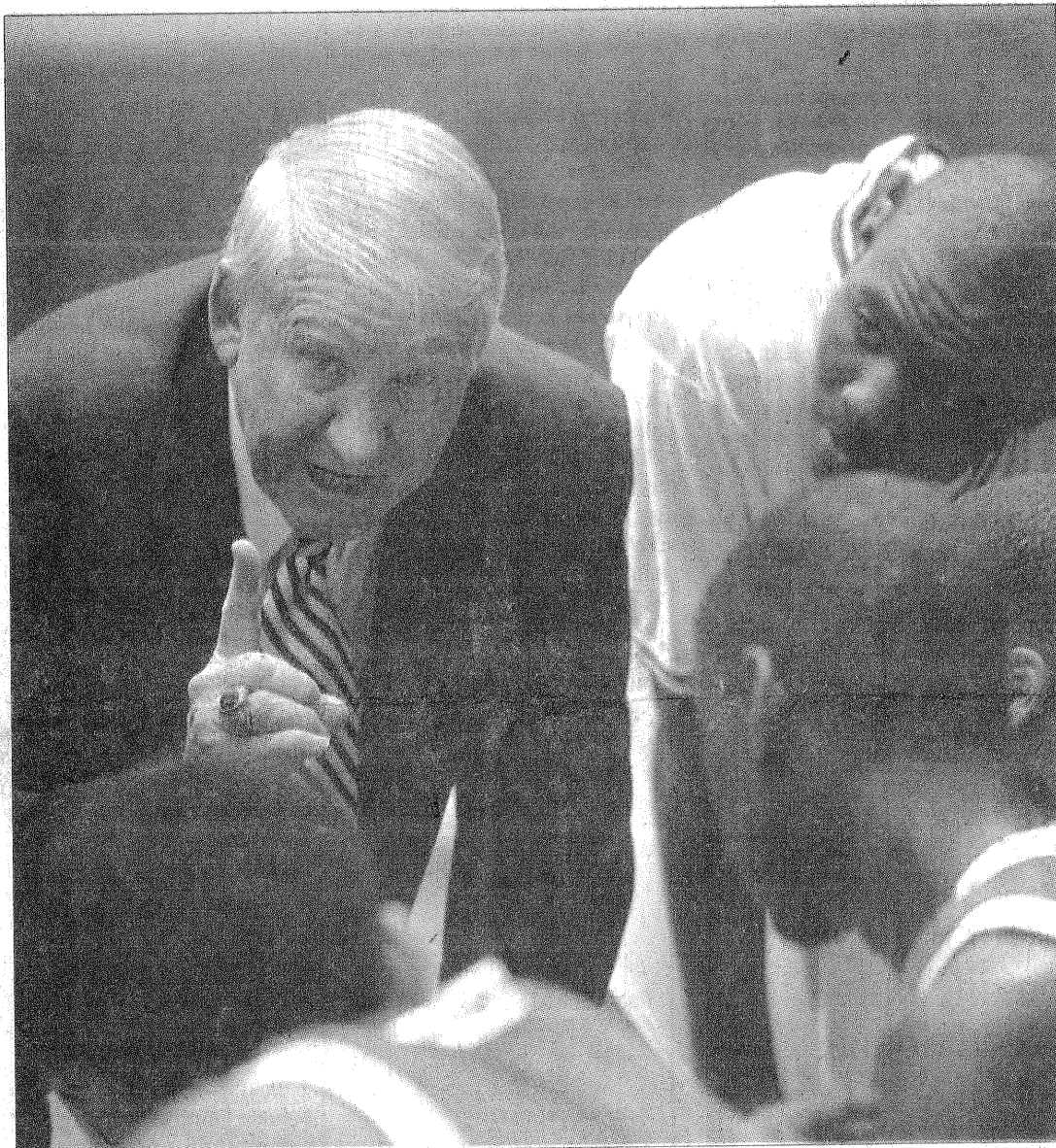
It ends where it started but with an astounding 1,301 victories, 24 region titles, 11 state finals appearances and three state championships to his credit.

"It's been 45 years," Bradley said. "I've felt all along that this was the year."

At 70, Bradley steps aside after leading the Rams to 21 victories, three consecutive state tournament berths and their first Final Four appearance since 1983. He considers it "the most surprising season" he has ever been through, and although he intends on staying retired, he has not closed the door entirely on a possible

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For more on Newton boys' basketball head coach Ron Bradley's career see **PAGE 1B.**



Mandi Singer/The Covington News

Newton boys' basketball coach Ron Bradley instructs his team during a recent state playoff game. Bradley led the Rams to the state Class AAAAA Final Four this season. On Tuesday, Bradley announced his retirement from the game. He leaves as the state's all-time winningest coach.

return. Who could blame him?

"I've retired twice before," Bradley said. "You never know, but unless a good opportunity comes along, [I'm through coaching]."

At least one person — the

most important person in his life — believes he has coached his final game.

"[My wife] Jan says we won't coach any more," Bradley said. "She doesn't think anyone will hire an old man."

Bradley is publicly endorsing Rick Rasmussen as his successor.

Rasmussen, 33, has served as an assistant under both

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# Bradley: Endorses Rasmussen

From front page

Bradley and previous head coach Billy Hendricks, working six state tournaments since 1998. Loyalty, Bradley believes, ought to be repaid.

"I think we've got a young man here who can keep our program going if they give him a chance," Bradley said. "Rick's paid his dues."

Already a Hall-of-Famer — he was inducted into the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame in 1997 — Bradley leaves behind a formidable legacy that is certain to stand the passage of time. The achievements, records and honors are too many to list.

During his first tenure with Newton's boys' basketball team (1958-75), Bradley won 10 region championships in 17 seasons and posted an average record of 25-4. He guided Newton to its only state crown in 1964 and directed his teams to a national-record 129 consecutive home wins during one 9-year span. A legend was born.

Upon returning to Newton prior to the 2001-02 campaign, Bradley led the Rams to three 20-win seasons and three state tournament appearances. He went 76-39 during his second tour at the school where he got his start, winning the Region 8-AAAA championship in 2003.

"We made a lot of progress," Bradley said. "When I came back, I didn't have any expectations of it being like it was in the old days. We were the only game in town back then."

"I'm just thrilled we've been able to run a program with integrity. All of our teams had the same goal — to be just as good as they could be."

He earned further honors and passed three more milestones over the past four

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— Ron Bradley  
head coach, Newton boys' basketball team

In 2004, Bradley was selected as the national coach of the year by the National High School Athletic Coaches Association and the National Federation of State High School Associations, becoming the first coach in state history to hold both awards simultaneously.

Nearing mythic status, Bradley became the state's all-time winningest coach in 2003 with victory No. 1,255 and supplanted the late Eric Staples as its all-time leader for wins as a boys' coach (925) a year later. Bradley's 948 boys' wins rank him seventh nationally; he won 506 of those at Newton, where he leaves as the all-time wins leader.

Embracing the twilight of his life, Bradley admits coach-

ing has been about far more than win-loss totals and state championship rings. Mostly, he treasures the relationships he has established over the last half century.

"It has been my life," Bradley said. "My entire family's been involved in one way or another. It's a way to touch lives. I've learned that it's great to be alive, to have the opportunity to work with other people's children, to try and live the faith you share with them."

All told, Bradley has won 1,589 games in three sports, losing only 482. In basketball alone, he is almost 1,000 games above .500 for his career (1,301-353).

"It's been fantastic," Bradley said. "I can't imagine going to work every day. I've seen people doing jobs all my life. Every day, I say 'Lord, I'm so thankful I didn't have to do that.'"