

A new era at Newton

Rick Rasmussen inherits Newton basketball legacy

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In a small office, just a short walk from the basketball floor that spans Newton High's gym, Rick Rasmussen reflects on how he got here, and how he intends to stay.

The new head coach of the Newton basketball team, he succinctly discusses his past, last year's remarkable postseason run and the pressures associated with replacing a coaching legend, all the while emitting a confidence that prevents you from doubting him.

He is a man of faith, he says, and he is game.

Time to start the show.

"I love teaching and coaching — it's my calling," said Rasmussen, who served seven years as an assistant Newton High before being selected to manage one of the school's most valuable assets — its basketball program. "But I think there'll be an adjustment period, with me now calling the shots."

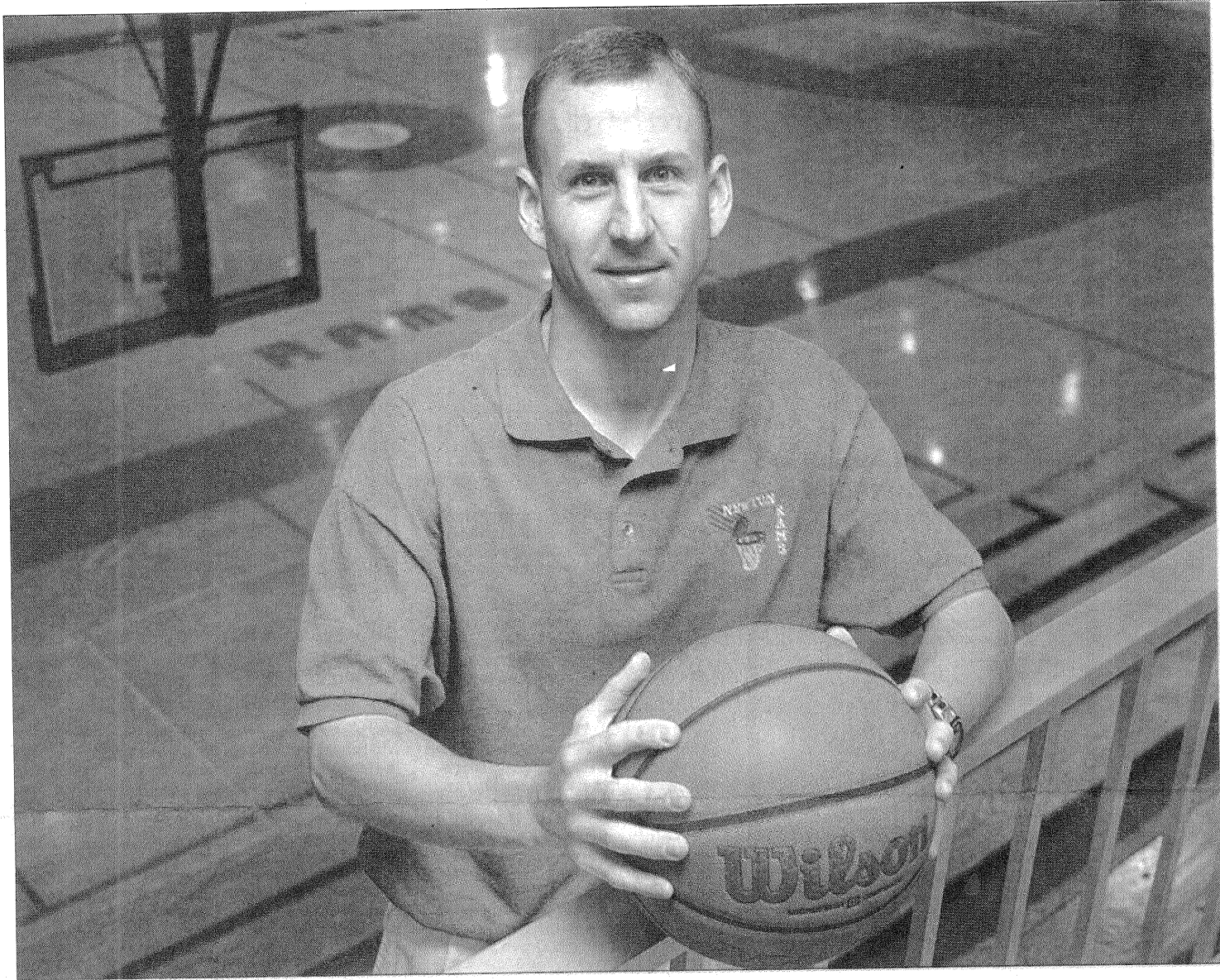
Rasmussen — who was raised in Washington state — grew up in the Seattle area and attended Washington State University, where he majored in business.

Rasmussen has loved basketball since he was a child, and though he never played collegiately, he said he felt drawn to the sport.

Work, or perhaps fate, brought him to Georgia, where he attended the University of Georgia and received his master's degree in English education. He also served as an assistant coach at schools such as Madison County before coming to Newton, where he was given his first teaching job in 1998.

His relocation to Newton County would also prove personally fulfilling. It was in Newton County where he met his eventual wife, with whom he is now raising his 4-year-old daughter.

"I love it here," he said. "I'm a man of faith, and it seems obvious to me that the Lord has worked everything out for us."



Mandi Singer/The Covington News

New Newton High boys basketball coach Rick Rasmussen intends to carry on the rich tradition of Rams basketball. Hired to replace the retiring Ron Bradley, Rasmussen spent seven years as an assistant coach at Newton before being given his first head coaching job last spring.

Paying his dues

At Newton, Rasmussen spent three years on former head coach Billy Hendrick's staff and spent four more under Ron Bradley, who returned to Newton in 2001, 37 years after guiding the Rams to their lone state title and, in time, establishing himself as one of the premier coaches in the United States.

Earlier this year, after Bradley had solidified his reputation by collecting his 1,300th win and guiding Newton to an improbable appearance in the state Final Four, Bradley announced his retirement.

Rick Rasmussen was his choice to succeed him.

"I'm a different man, I have a different personality from coach Bradley," Rasmussen said. "We were on the same page as far as philosophies,

but we realize that the psychological aspects of coaching are just as important. He told me to be ready to do what you believe is right."

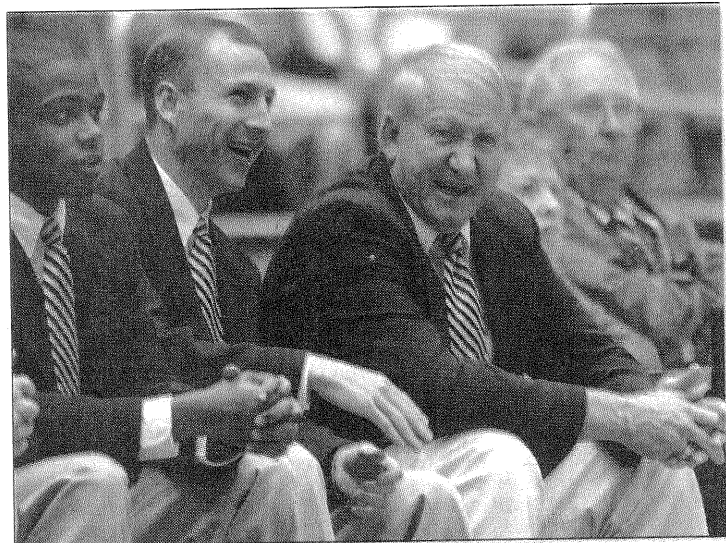
"He pretty much said, 'You're ready,'" Rasmussen said.

Praise from Caesar, indeed, but Rasmussen does not enter into this daunting task lightly. In addition to replacing the successful Bradley, any attempt to replicate last season's success will have to be done by an almost completely revamped starting five.

The next episode

The Rams lost four members of their Final Four team to graduation, but are returning six players overall, some of whom may move into starting positions.

Rasmussen said Newton's run last year, however, could



Mandi Singer/The Covington News

Rick Rasmussen, center, sits with former Newton High head coach Ron Bradley, right, during the state playoffs in Macon. Rasmussen helped guide the Rams to the 2005 Final Four.

compel other basketball players to come to Newton County.

"I hope so, I hope they

would think [good things about Newton's basketball

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New: One returning starter

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program]," he said. We have a great tradition, going back to coach Bradley's championship in 1964."

Rasmussen said he feels no extra pressure, however, other than the job itself.

"I think there's a certain pressure that comes from being a head coach, period," he said, "if you have expectations for yourself. I have expectations for myself ... and we will do the best we can.

"I wouldn't say we're rebuilding or anything," he continued. "I think we intend to pick up where we left off. We have high expectations for ourselves."

The Rams' lone returning starter, however, was last season's greatest offensive threat. Guard Jerrell Boswell — who averaged 21.9 points per game for the Rams last year — will anchor the Newton back court, with Rasmussen using summer camps and practices to determine how to complement his senior scorer.

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head coach, Newton boys'
basketball team

ing us will recognize him," Rasmussen said. "It's not a shock to anyone that he's the centerpiece of our offense. Hopefully we'll have players step up and take some of the pressure off him."

Rasmussen's faith is infectious, his enthusiasm sincere. For the 2005-2006 Rams, the coaching adjustment will be a challenge, he said, but believed it would be its own reward.

"It's not so much the end result that you're looking at," he continued. "Really, the journey to get there is just as important. However far our journey takes us, I think we'll get better along the way."