

# Danny Thom

## A Man for All Seasons

Newton County high school basketball coach Ron Bradley is an extraordinary man—not so much from his super-success as a basketball coach, but for his attitude as a human being.



THOM

If one were to try to name the most successful Georgia prep basketball coach, surely one of the names that would have to be mentioned would be that of Ron Bradley.

His record speaks for itself. At 399-50 for 16 years at the Covington high school, about the only thing that Bradley has left to accomplish is winning his 400th game. That is almost certain to come the first game next season.

Never has Bradley coached at another school other than Newton. Since leaving the University of Georgia in the mid 50's, he has handled the boys Varsity basketball team

at Newton, where he is revered and loved. An attestation to the respect he has earned is shown in his being named the high school coach of the year in the Southeastern United States in 1972.

His Rams hold various records. About the most notable of these is the 129 straight homecourt victories that Newton County compiled over an eight-year span. Another less-known fact about the Bradley teams is the startling revelation that all but three of his starters in the past 10 years have gone to college on basketball grants-in-aid. Amazing.

Consequently, when Bradley took the podium as guest speaker at the Norcross high school basketball banquet Monday, he was more than worthy of an attentive ear.

## Man Is Only His Philosophy

Behind the coach, Ron Bradley, is the philosophy of the man. He credits, in no vague terms, that philosophy with the success he and his teams have achieved.

"There are certain qualities a young man must have to excel at the game of basketball," Bradley said. "First of all he must have desire. The desire to win, to learn, to improve and to excel.

"Man is mostly spirit. That is why it is so important that our players have desire.

"We will sacrifice ability for desire," Bradley stressed. "If a boy has a great deal of natural ability and no desire, he is not a winner. We will pass this boy by to use the one with less athletic ability but who has that burning desire to win."

Bradley said a player must also have speed, hustle, confidence in himself and spirit. In addition, he pointed out a player must be able to take criticism and be willing to work hard. Also, a successful player must have rhythm and good "team" sense.

"He must also have moral character—be regular in church attendance and worship. All these things I mention can not only help a basketball player perform to his potential, but they will also help the person later on in life after he has left the court."

## Bradley for the Young People

That is precisely what the philosophy of Bradley is meant for: to prepare a young person to face life's problems and to recognize his opportunities. Winning ball games the way Newton County does seems like an incidental benefit.

"We want to win and to place in our young people the importance of winning," Bradley stressed. We kind of look at basketball like a giant chess game. The side that makes most intelligent moves usually wins. This is the winning attitude we want our boys to have."

"Look at it this way. Suppose you went to a surgeon or a lawyer. You wouldn't say, 'Okay, go ahead and fight my case or operate but it doesn't really matter if you're successful. Just as long as you make an effort. No. You want him to succeed for you. And we want our young people equipped with that kind of attitude when they take on the problem of life on their own.'"

It takes a lot of craving for a young person to be on a high school team and compete on the varsity level, Bradley said. No more can he take an abbreviated academic load, like the "tramp athletes" who played seven or eight years ago in many high schools.

"Part of our philosophy at Newton County high school is the simple equation: athletics plus academics equals success. We also have some quotes we refer to that you have probably heard many times. Like, 'if it's worth doing, then it's worth doing well.' And, 'winning isn't everything, but it beats anything that comes second.'"

Trite phrases. Shopworn and perhaps out of date in our modern and plastic society. But coming from the mouth of Ron Bradley, they seemed like the Beatitudes.