

The Legend

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"Yes, he was in the business of building a basketball team and a winning program, but the way he went about it had nothing to do with basketball," said Hunter. "He built character. It sounds corny, but that was his philosophy. Not his coaching philosophy."

Hunter, who is 53, says to this day he has a difficult time referring to Coach and Mrs. Bradley as Ron and Jan.

"They're Coach and Mrs. Bradley," he said.

CHARACTER building aside, the man knew a thing or two about building a basketball power as well. On the court and off, his players were tunnel-visioned, a big, orange round ball perpetually on the horizon. During one 10-year span, all but three of his starters received college scholarships.

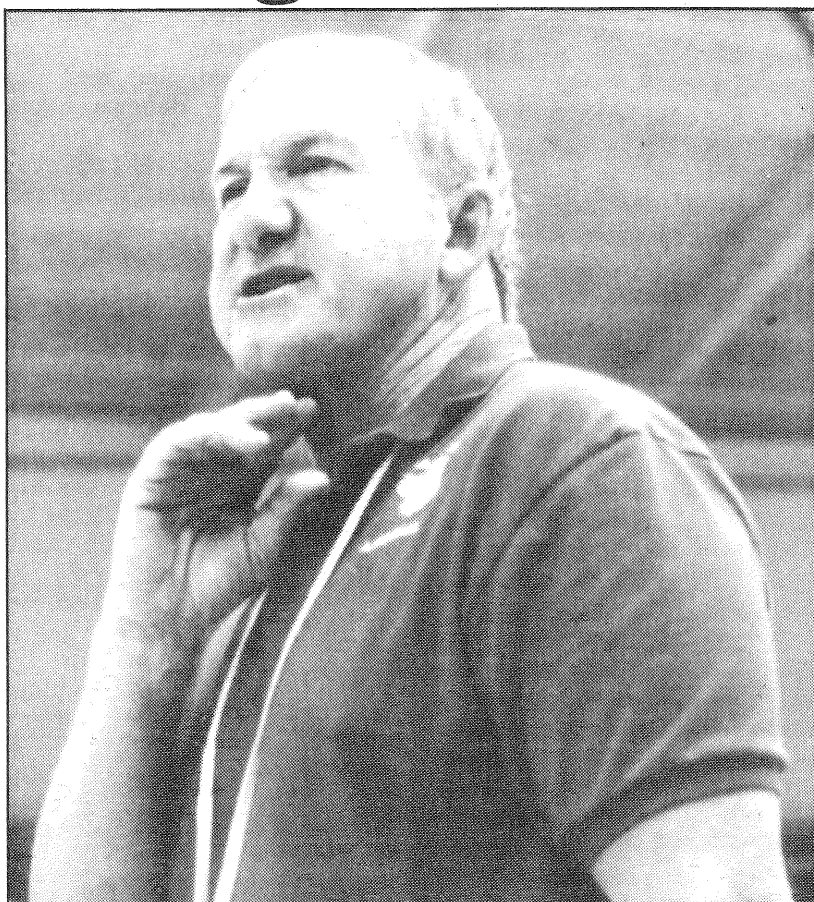
"We were actually scholars of the game," Hunter said. "I'd venture to say that at any given time, he had five players on the court who were equally schooled, or better schooled, than the opposing coach."

And the Rams lacked nothing in the way of conditioning, either. It is rumored that Bradley used to turn up the heat in the gym during practice, so his players would be used to it when the heat was turned up as a special feature for visiting teams.

Come game time, the hot little gym -- the same one still in use at Sharp Middle School -- would become more crowded than a pack of sardines on a subway train at rush hour.

"**THE NOISE** in that gym was unbelievable," said Bradley. "People would spend the night in front of the school to buy tickets the next day. We'd lock the gym a few hours before game time. It got to where we had to put bars up on the windows."

No doubt, most of the visiting teams felt like they were behind



CITIZENphoto by Jerry Grillo

RON BRADLEY'S TEAMS Have Won 1,079 Games, And His Loganville Red Devils Are Off To A 11-1 Record

bars. People standing in the aisles, five and six deep around the court. Deafening ovations during the fourth quarter of the girls games as the Rams strutted to the locker room in their blue blazers, to prepare for the victim de jour.

"It could be pretty intimidating for opposing teams," Hunter said. "The only open area in the gym was the playing surface. The fire marshall must have left town on game days."

But, as Bradley pointed out, Newton didn't play all of its games at home. During one three-season stretch, 1963-64 to 1965-66, the Rams had a record of 102-6. Bradley's teams never won fewer than 21 games from 1958 through 1972. They won a state championship (1963-64), finished as the state runner-up on two other occasions, won five straight region titles. And that just scratches the surface at Newton.

IN HIS first year at George Walton, he brought home a state championship -- the first of two with that program.

The man has a habit of winning, period, whether it's boys or girls, basketball, baseball or football -- he's coached them all with amazing success.

His players are his legacy, so many of them having become prominent, productive citizens away from the court -- lawmen, doctors, attorneys, businessmen. Standing tallest among them, perhaps, is Tim Christian, Newton's only all-American, from that 1963-64 state championship team. He went on to an All-SEC football career and is a prosperous businessman who played an integral part in the Atlanta Olympic movement.

In addition, Bradley has taught or coached more than 20 second-generation players. Also,

his three sons all played basketball for him. Two of them are coaches.

"That's what makes this job all the more important to me," Bradley said. "The youngsters you work with are just starting on their path in life. Then years later, you see how they've done, and what wonderful people they've become, and you remember these happy times, and the frustrating times. There's sadness, but it's better than not having any feeling or emotion at all."

"One of the things you learn is, winning isn't everything, and losing is the next best thing to winning."

DURING THAT 9-year run of success at home, which started, ironically enough, with a win over Loganville, winning was the only thing.

Stroud was there the night the streak was broken, and he may have been a little surprised by the reaction of the fierce competitor Bradley after the coveted streak ended.

"I expected Coach Bradley to be real upset," Stroud said. "But he wasn't. He was a gentleman, he went over and shook hands with the opposing coach. I have the utmost respect for him as a coach. That's the thing about old coaches. Most have been successful, because if they're not, they'll get run out. His record speaks for itself."

More than anything else, what illustrates Bradley's stature in high school basketball is the reaction of his fellow coaches when they are asked about him. Typically, this involves a sly smile, a shaking of the head, and the words.

"The living legend," says longtime Henry County coach Chuck Miller, the same man who insists the sheriff story is true. "One of the best anywhere. You won't find many people who know more about basketball than Ron Bradley. Have you heard what he's done up at Loganville?"

There is a sharp sense of irony to Bradley's arrival at Loganville, which brings his career full circle. His first basketball