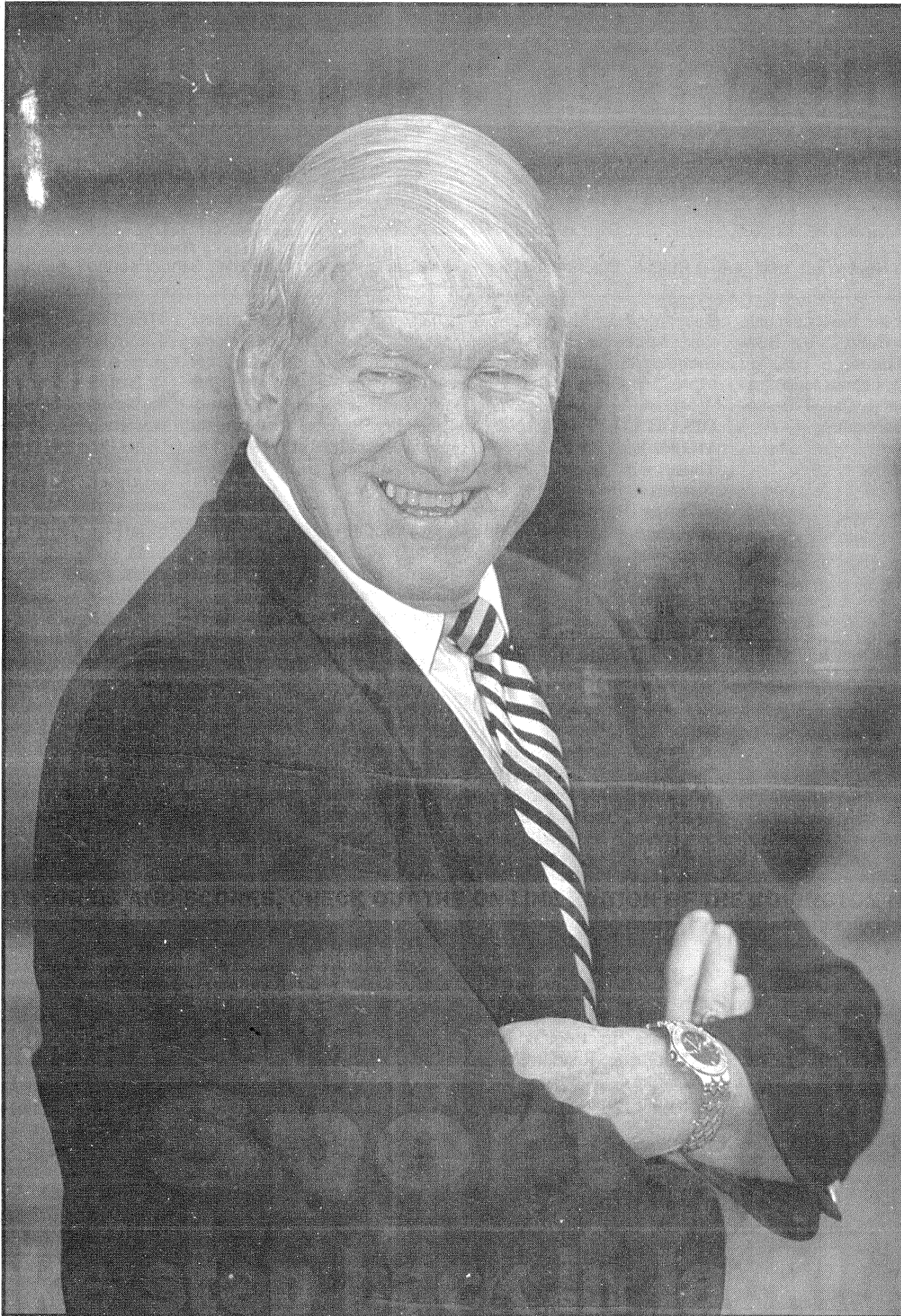


Still on the sideline



Mandi Singer/The Covington News

Living legend: Ron Bradley, head coach of the Newton High School boys' basketball team, will open the 2003-04 season with 1,280 career victories. He has won games in six different decades.

■ **COMING TUESDAY:** A magical look back at Newton's 1964 state championship basketball team

Bradley elects to come back for 45th season

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The rumor mill can rest easy for now. Ron Bradley is staying put.

Bradley, calming public concern about his possible retirement, announced Thursday that he would be returning for his 45th season on the sidelines and would continue on as head coach of the Newton High School boys' basketball team.

The living legend will enter the 2004-05 campaign with 1,280 career victories, first all-time on the state's prep basketball coaching list.

"I'd love to coach another year," Bradley said. "It's going to be a year in which we're really going to have to go to work in order to be competitive."

Newton relocates to Region 2-AAAAA next season, a region that features traditional Class AAAAA powers like Lithonia, Stephenson, Riverdale and Redan.

"There's a great challenge here right now, and that's exciting," Bradley said. "I didn't feel like it was the right time to walk away and drop someone else in the middle of this. We're going to be playing the best there is in the best region in the state."

Bradley, who owns a 1,280-343 career record, led the Rams to their second consecutive 20-win season and state playoff appearance last year. He has posted 38 20-win seasons and has won state championships at three different schools since debuting at Newton back in 1958.

"I haven't lost the enthusiasm to coach," Bradley said. "As long as you can find young people who love to share the game, it's fun to coach."

A 1997 inductee into the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame, Bradley is one of only nine men in United States history to win 900 games as a boys' basketball coach.

Bradley became the state's all-time winningest boys' basketball coach in February, supplanting the late Eric Staples with his 925th victory. Staples' record of 924 wins as a boys' coach stood for more than 40 years.

See Bradley page 13

Bradley: Coach returning with 1,280 wins

From page 12

The National Federation of State High School Associations named Bradley as its 2003 National Boys' Basketball Coach of the Year in March. His 927 wins as a boys' coach rank him seventh nationally and establish him as the winningest coach in any varsity sport in state history.



Ron Bradley is the state's all-time winningest basketball coach.

Newton is graduating three of its five starters — Justin Herring, Vincent Scott and

Darius White — from its 2003-04 team, but there is an abundance of young talent in the program. The freshman team went undefeated (13-0) and could supply Bradley with some welcomed reinforcements soon.

"We're going to find out if these guys are willing to work," Bradley said. "I want to find out if they're on fire to

play basketball."

In the twilight of his storied and unparalleled career, Bradley has not put a timetable on when he plans to walk away from the game for good. The timing is not yet right.

"I wanted to make the right decision," Bradley said. "I wasn't the only one I had to consider here."